



THE WITCHES OF CASTLE CLAIR



DESTINY OF  
THE WITCH

SHARON BOOTH

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“And the new sun rose bringing the new year.”

~ Idylls of the King. The Passing of Arthur.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

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## Part 1: Before Wulfram





# Chapter 1

## *Romy*

I suppose my part of the story really begins around lunchtime, that day in early July. I was sitting in the living room of our little house in Bartonbrook, on the edge of the Lake District. My boyfriend Johnnie and I were being grudgingly polite to his old friend, Simon, who'd turned up on our doorstep not five minutes after we'd arrived home, after a week away at a hotel in the Scottish Borders.

We hadn't even had time to make a cup of tea before he'd arrived, and since we'd spent several hours during our time away discussing his increasing intrusion upon our lives, I don't think either of us was best pleased about it. Still, I made him tea and we sat with him and told him about our break.

We exchanged several puzzled looks, though, realising that he wasn't his usual self. He seemed distracted, as if there was something far more important on his mind than our little holiday in Scotland. Which begged the question, why had he even bothered to come round?

As I caught John's eye and saw the apologetic look on his face, I thought the time had come for us to be firmer with Simon. Yes, he'd been helpful to Johnnie in his studies, and yes, they'd been friends for many years, but we needed time alone as a couple. Simon was becoming the third wheel in our relationship, and we needed to make it clear that certain days were going to be just for us.

The question was, which of us would have the nerve to do the deed?

It seems funny now that, at the time, that was the biggest dilemma facing me. I had no idea what was to come. No idea

that, at any moment, my life was going to be thrown into chaos.

There was a knock on the front door.

We all looked at each other.

‘Were you expecting company?’ Simon asked politely.

‘No, not at all.’ Johnnie raised an eyebrow at me, and I shook my head, confirming I had no idea who it was.

‘I’ll go,’ he said, and got to his feet.

I heard him opening the front door. I heard a jumble of voices. I recognised a note of panic in them, even as I realised who our unexpected arrivals were.

Then Keely and Harley, my younger sisters, barged into the living room, wide-eyed and red-faced.

And that was the moment my life changed forever.

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‘What are you doing here?’ I asked, startled to see their anxious expressions. ‘What’s happened?’

As a thought occurred to me I held out my hand to Harley.

‘Is it Killian? His family...’

In my anxiety I’d quite forgotten that Johnnie and Simon were sitting there, listening to every word. I blushed. ‘I mean —’

‘Romy, you’ve got to come with us now,’ Keely said, grasping my arm.

‘What for?’ I shrugged her off and gave my boyfriend a nervous look before turning to the twins, my eyes flashing a warning. ‘I can’t just drop everything and go with you. Go with you where, anyway? Have you lost the plot?’

What were they thinking?

John cleared his throat. ‘Why don’t you sit down, both of you? Would you like a cup of tea? I’m sure whatever it is you need Romy for can wait a while.’

‘I’m sure it can’t,’ Keely said, giving him a filthy look which made him rear back in astonishment. She turned to me and said, ‘Either you come with us now or we’ll just take you!’

‘Keely!’

What the hell had got into her? Honestly, she’d always been a bit of a handful but right now I could throttle her. She knew I had to be careful where John was concerned, since he had no idea my sisters were witches, and here she was causing such a scene that he was clearly on alert.

‘I’m sorry,’ John said, hitching up his glasses and trying, bless his heart, to be all masterful and manly, ‘I know you’re her sister but please don’t speak to Romy like that. And what do you mean, you’ll just take her? Have you lost your minds?’

‘Don’t push us,’ Harley warned him. She glared at Simon. ‘You here again? Can’t keep away, can you?’

Simon gave her an appraising look, while John’s mouth fell open in horror.

‘Harley! You can’t speak to my friend like that. He’s—’

‘A liar,’ Harley said. ‘That’s what he is.’

John dropped onto the sofa and we both stared up at them incredulously.

‘What are you doing?’ I demanded, deciding I’d be falling out with my sisters unless they issued a full apology and left our house immediately.

‘Saving your bacon,’ Keely said grimly. She turned back to Simon. ‘You’ve lied to Romy ever since you met her, haven’t you? All this stuff about you and John being friends for years. We both know that’s not true, don’t we? It can’t be true.’

John and I exchanged stunned glances.

‘Romy, have you any idea what they’re talking about?’ he asked weakly.

I wished I could say I did but they'd lost me. I mean, I've lived with those two for most of my life, and I'm used to their odd ways and stubborn natures, but this was on another level. They'd barged into my home, been rude and obnoxious to both me and Johnnie, and were now being incredibly rude to our guest.

'I think you should leave,' I said. 'We'll discuss this another time.'

'We're going nowhere,' Keely said. 'So go on, Simon, if that's your real name. Tell us just how come you've managed to be friends for years with someone who's only existed for less than four?'

'What is she talking about?' John asked me anxiously. 'Has she been drinking? Does she do drugs?'

Simon sighed. 'Well, I can see you've realised the truth. However, I would ask that you leave here now and forget all about this. I can fix it for John. This will be all forgotten, and we can continue as we were.'

'And leave him with our sister?' Harley demanded. 'You've got a bloody nerve. Who are you anyway?'

'As I told you, my name's Simon,' he said. 'There's no need for you to know anything else. Now, I must insist you go home to Castle Lodge right away. Leave this to me.'

How did he know they lived at Castle Lodge? This was getting more surreal by the minute. And what did he mean, he could fix it for John?'

'Sorry, but you can insist until the cows come home,' Keely said. 'It's not happening. Harley!'

Before I could begin to formulate what they planned to do, I found my arm firmly grasped by Harley, even as I heard John give an indignant cry, as Keely dragged him to his feet and hooked her arm through his.

I heard Simon shout, 'No, wait, you don't understand!'

Then he, and our entire house, were gone.



## Chapter 2

### *Lowen*

As I sat in the living room of Castle Lodge talking to Jethro, Iliana, Castor, and Killian, I wondered—not for the first time—how my life had come to this. It was only a few months ago that I was an ordinary solicitor, albeit not a very good one, working for Carpenter, Carpenter & Fitch in the little Cornish town of Gerrenporth.

Now, here I was in an Elizabethan manor house, in a North Yorkshire town renowned for its magical legends, chatting to a bestselling fantasy novelist, two witches, and a descendant of old Irish gods. Not to mention the fact that I was apparently not Lowen Ericson after all, but Wulfram Pendragon, descendant of Arthur. The Great Guardian. And to top it all, lying at my feet was a Norwegian Forest cat called Frey, who could communicate with me telepathically.

It had to be a weird dream, right?

But no, it was real enough, and as I listened to Killian explaining to the others Trinity's reasons for being in Whitby, I thought surely life couldn't get any more bizarre than this.

I really should have known better.

No sooner had Killian finished than there was a commotion on the stairs and the living room door burst open to reveal a breathless Sky and Celeste. They looked terrified, and my heart sank. Now what?

'It's Blaise! He's back! I mean, he never went away, obviously—well, he did, but only to another county.' Sky shook her head, impatient with herself. 'We know where Blaise is!'

'Well, really,' Iliana said, wrinkling her nose in distaste, 'that's all we need, isn't it? I'm not sure I want to know.'

Celeste, are you all right?’

Celeste looked pale and tearful, most unlike her. She was usually so calm and serene that it was upsetting to see her in such a state, even given her recent outburst of guilt as she blamed herself for Trinity’s excursion to Whitby.

‘Of course she’s not all right,’ Sky said. ‘How can she be? Did you not hear what I just said? Blaise is back!’

‘Do you mean here?’ Jethro sounded nervous. He glanced up at the ceiling, as if expecting to hear the infamous Blaise St Clair striding across the landing above him. I followed his gaze and noticed Celeste’s and Hector’s ravens, Belasko and Branwen, sitting on a beam, their heads tilted, clearly listening to this conversation with keen interest.

‘Of course not! He’s—’

Sky broke off as Hector arrived at that moment. He quickly glanced around, saw the state of Celeste, and went straight over to her.

‘What is it? What’s happened?’

Celeste gave a strangled sob and rested her head on his chest, while we all looked on in alarm.

This was clearly a massive deal to her, and who could blame her? I’d been told the story of Blaise St Clair and his arrival in Castle Clair some three-and-a-half years ago. He’d broken all the rules by travelling through time from 1669 and had arrived in the River Hrafn on Christmas Eve night. Jethro had pulled him from the water and nearly drowned in the process.

Unknown to the St Clairs, Hector—who they later discovered was a Guardian—had removed Blaise’s magic and gone back to 1669 himself to clear up the mess Blaise had left behind. Blaise had lost his memory as well as his magic, and after an enquiry by the High Council of Witches, he’d been allowed to live at Castle Lodge with the family.

What they hadn’t realised was that he had gradually recovered his memory and had been plotting to time travel again, using Celeste, an extremely powerful and gifted witch

who, unfortunately for her, was in love with him at the time, to help him. If it hadn't been for Hector, and—astonishingly—Star's non-magical husband Benedict, he might well have succeeded in his mission and done untold damage.

After some consultation, Hector had removed Blaise's memories of his old life and replaced them with false memories, giving him another identity. He'd then been handed to the care of another Guardian and taken away to start a whole new life. Even so, it seemed Celeste still blamed herself for her part in events, even though it was clearly not her fault.

Anyway, it seemed that something had gone badly wrong. Something else to worry about. Perfect.

'Hector, we know where Blaise is,' Sky said urgently.

He looked round at us all and nodded. 'So do I.'

Sky deflated, disappointed that her big news was no surprise to him. 'Oh, really? That sucks,' she said glumly, bending to pick up her black cat, Belle, who was clearly in need of a cuddle.

'Would someone please explain what's going on?' Iliana asked. 'Does Blaise have something to do with what happened to Zephyr? Or Trinity?' She closed her eyes. 'Please don't say he's the one who's got Trinity.'

'Blaise hasn't got anyone,' Hector said reassuringly. 'He's nothing to do with either of those events—well, not directly anyway—and he still has no idea who he really is. He's no threat to anyone.'

'You know Trinity's missing then?' Jethro asked, and I realised he was right to ask. Hector had, after all, already gone off to meet some of the other Guardians before Sirius and I got back from Whitby, after our failed attempt to find Trinity.

Except she wasn't Trinity, was she? Not really. She was Linnet, and she was my twin sister. The twin sister I'd only learned about recently, and whose identity had only been revealed less than a week ago at Killian and Harley's wedding.

I rubbed my forehead, exhausted. How had it only been less than a week? It felt as if I'd known her all my life, and the



thought of what she might be going through right now terrified me.

‘Do you know where she is then?’ I begged. ‘Is she safe?’

Hector steered Celeste over to the sofa and they both sat down.

‘We don’t know where Trinity is,’ he admitted. ‘We do know she was definitely last seen in Whitby, at the foot of the hundred and ninety-nine steps.’ He gave us a bleak look. ‘I’m sorry, but we have every reason to believe she was taken by the fae.’

I saw the horror and despair on the others’ faces that I knew was reflected in mine. If Trinity was in the hands of the fae then she had no chance. Look what they’d done to Zephyr! If they could murder the leader of the High Council of Witches so easily then how could Trinity, who had no magic, possibly defend herself against them?

‘You say you have every reason to believe the fae took her,’ Castor said grimly. ‘What reasons? What makes you think it?’

‘Hang on,’ I said, suddenly noticing Keely’s familiar and Frey’s half-sister, Runa, sitting in a corner of the room with Harley’s guinea pig, Sid, close beside her. ‘Where’s Keely and Harley? Why haven’t they come galloping down the stairs with you two? Not like Keely to miss out on some big news like you figuring out where Blaise is.’

‘Er, that’s what we were about to tell you before Hector arrived,’ Sky admitted sheepishly. ‘They’ve gone to Cumbria to tell Romy the news and to confront Blaise if necessary.’

Hector groaned. ‘That’s all we need! Why can’t they leave well alone?’

‘Wait,’ Iliana said, ‘what has Romy got to do with Blaise?’

‘You’ll never believe this,’ Celeste said wearily. ‘Blaise—he’s—’

‘Here!’ Sky let out a squeal and we all jumped as we realised Keely and Harley had arrived. Harley was arm in arm with Romy, and John was being gripped tightly by a grim-faced Keely. He looked absolutely petrified and no wonder. I’ve seen that expression on Keely’s face before and it’s enough to make the bravest man tremble, trust me.

‘Are you okay, Johnnie?’ I asked him, recognising the fear in his eyes all too well.

I was about to go to him to reassure him, but I was stopped by Iliana’s cry of, ‘Blaise St Clair! I hoped I’d never set eyes on you again.’

I think my mouth dropped open in shock as I stared at the mild-mannered John Ford, Romy’s pleasant and kind-hearted boyfriend. I’d had some interesting chats with him when we stayed at his and Romy’s cottage in Bartonbrook, and I’d really liked him. Were they seriously telling me that this man was the arrogant and devious Blaise St Clair?

‘Will someone please explain what’s going on?’ he begged, as Keely dragged him into a chair and stood, hands on hips, glaring at him. ‘How did I get here? Am I dreaming?’ He gazed up at Romy. ‘What’s happening?’

Romy seemed unable to speak. She was staring at him as if she didn’t recognise him.

‘Well, would you look at that?’ Killian breathed. ‘The man himself.’

At that moment another man appeared in the room.

Sky let out a cry of alarm, but we all turned to Hector in astonishment as he said, ‘Simon, I’m so sorry about this.’

‘Well, this is a bit of a mess, isn’t it?’ Simon, John’s best friend, shook his head and put his hand on an even more terrified looking Blaise’s shoulder. ‘Are you okay?’ he asked him gently. ‘You’ve had a terrible shock. Isn’t someone going to offer him a brandy?’ he added, giving us all accusing stares. ‘Even a cup of sugary tea would be something.’

‘I’m afraid the twins have behaved a bit impulsively,’ Hector told him, as Harley’s and Keely’s eyes widened with

indignation.

‘Impulsively?’ Keely shook her head in disbelief. ‘What did you expect us to do? We just found out that our sister’s oh-so-perfect boyfriend is nothing of the sort. He’s an evil witch who’s caused nothing but trouble for centuries, and you expect us to just leave Romy there with him?’

‘Evil—evil witch?’ John’s voice was barely a whisper. ‘You’re all mad! Or I’m mad. Hell, I don’t know which would be worse.’

Oh, how well I understood his bewilderment and fear. Hadn’t I felt the exact same way when I first met the St Clairs and heard them blithely discussing witches and magic? This man might once have been the mighty Blaise St Clair, but right now he was John Ford, and he clearly had no idea what was going on and no point of reference to help him cope with it all. Despite everything I felt sorry for him.

‘You should have talked to me before you did anything,’ Hector said. ‘I could have explained all this to you.’

‘Wait,’ Harley said. ‘You knew? You knew Romy’s boyfriend was Blaise?’

We all turned as a smothered cry came from Celeste. We’d been so busy looking at the newcomers that we hadn’t noticed how distraught she was to be confronted by the man who’d caused her so much pain and misery.

‘Darling, I’m so sorry,’ Hector said, but Celeste leapt to her feet away from his grasp. Her eyes never left Blaise as she edged her way around the room towards the door, keeping as far away from him as she could possibly be.

‘I—I can’t,’ she gasped, wrenching open the door and running upstairs.

Belasko gave an angry cry and followed her, hopefully to bring her some comfort.

We all stared at the open door for a moment, then back at Blaise. He was deathly pale, and his dark eyes looked enormous behind his glasses. It was hard to believe someone who looked so inoffensive had caused so much trouble.

‘Simon’s right. Someone had better get him some sugary tea,’ Harley said, her tone softening a little as she clearly recognised the distress our visitor was in. ‘Then perhaps you, Hector, can explain to us just what’s been going on.’

‘And,’ Keely added angrily, ‘why you’ve allowed this monster to worm his way into our sister’s life!’



## Chapter 3

### *Lowen*

Rather than have to explain things multiple times, Hector decided that the best thing would be to summon the family back so they could all hear his explanation at once.

We agreed it was only fair, so while Castor conjured up some lunch for us all—even though no one was particularly hungry—Iliana and Sky duly went off to fetch Star and Raiden. Evidently, when they returned just moments later, they'd already been warned who they'd find in Castle Lodge, because there was no great cry of surprise from either of them. Their eyes, however, went straight to John, and Star's hand flew to her mouth, proving, as if I needed proof, that he was indeed Blaise St Clair.

'I don't believe this,' Star murmured. 'What the hell are you doing back?'

John, or Blaise as I supposed he really was, seemed too dazed to reply, although he let out a cry of alarm when Paypacket, Star's Egyptian Mau familiar, prowled menacingly towards him and gave him a ferocious hiss.

Harley gave John a cup of sugary tea and urged him to drink it, obviously seeing the state he was in. Romy, I noticed, said nothing. She looked almost as shocked as he was and sat, deathly pale, simply staring at him as if she was wondering who on earth he was and how this nightmare could possibly be real.

'Where's Celeste?' Raiden asked, glancing round. 'She should be here, surely? And what about Sirius?'

'I think we should leave Sirius alone for now,' Hector said gently. 'He has enough on his mind, don't you think? As for

Celeste...' He shook his head. 'She's not ready to see him, and I'm not going to force her. In her own time.'

Raiden nodded. 'I expect you're right.' He gave Simon a curious look. 'And who are you?'

'That's a good question,' Keely said, folding her arms and glaring at John's unfortunate friend. 'And we'd better get the answer or else.'

Simon—brave man that he was— gave her a lopsided smile. 'Feisty little witch, aren't you?'

'Why are you so calm?' John seemed to have found his voice and he glared at Simon. 'What's wrong with you? Why do you accept what's happened so easily? And who the hell is Blaise St Clair?'

'You are,' Castor said bluntly, helping himself to a sandwich as he glared at him. 'And a right pain in the backside you've been from start to finish. I were glad to get rid of you, and here you are again like a bad penny. Well, I'll have no truck with your shenanigans this time round, I promise you that, so if you think you're going to cause havoc round here again you can think on.'

John blinked, clearly unable to find any sort of response to this little outburst, and no wonder.

'Look,' I said, deciding the family needed to cool down, 'it's no good having a go at John. He obviously has no idea what you're talking about. Hector erased his memories, right? It's not fair to be so cruel to him when, right now, he's not the man you're angry with. He's got a whole new identity, and John Ford can't be held responsible for anything Blaise St Clair did.'

'That's easy for you to say,' Star retorted, her eyes flashing in anger, 'you weren't here when he caused merry hell in Castle Clair. Do you know he could have killed Benedict? If I hadn't had that witch bottle in place I'd be a widow right now. Not to mention how he lied to Celeste and broke her heart.' She leaned towards a startled John and jabbed her finger at him. 'Sirius, Benedict, and Jethro nearly drowned

saving your life! We took you in! We gave you a home and made you welcome, and that's how you repaid us.'

'But he doesn't remember any of it,' I said, trying to appeal to her softer side, which I knew she possessed, even if she kept it buried quite successfully most of the time.

'That's what he says,' Sky said. 'We've been here before with him. He reckoned he had no memory of his life in 1669 but he was lying. His memories had come back, and he was stringing us along, using us. He planned to get Celeste to help him travel back through time. He had a knife to her throat at one point! That's who you're talking about, so don't ask us to feel any sympathy for him whatsoever.'

John's eyes were like saucers. '1669? What the hell is this? Are you some sort of cult? No wonder you didn't want me to have much to do with your family, Romy. Will you please just explain to me what's going on?'

Romy lowered her gaze. 'I'm—I'm sorry. I don't know what I can say. I thought they'd made a mistake but clearly they all know you. Maybe I never did.'

Simon cleared his throat. 'Right, before we go any further I think John should take a nap, don't you? He's clearly traumatised and what I have to say to you will only confuse him even more.'

'Well, he's not sleeping in my room,' Castor said firmly, 'I can tell you that much.'

'I'm not tired,' John protested. 'I don't want a nap! I want you to let me go home.' He gazed round at us all, an appeal in his frightened eyes. 'Please, just let me go and I promise I won't call the police. I won't tell anyone what happened. Just let Romy and me go and we won't bother you again.'

'Fat chance,' Sky said. 'What about Celeste's study?' she suggested. 'He could lie down on the chaise longue in there.'

'But I'm not tired, I've told you—' John's cry ended abruptly as he slumped in his chair, unconscious.

'What have you done to him?' Romy gasped.



‘It’s all right,’ Hector assured her. ‘He’s just asleep, that’s all. And he’ll stay asleep until we decide to wake him up. I’ll just take him to the study and make him comfortable and then we’ll explain what’s happened.’

He gathered the unconscious John into his arms and vanished.

‘Couldn’t he have walked, like a normal person?’ Romy asked bitterly.

‘The study door’s kept locked,’ Iliana explained. ‘And I’m not going to pester Celeste for the key right now, are you?’

Romy burst into tears.

‘There, there,’ Iliana soothed. ‘This must be an awful shock for you. I’m so sorry, dear. Fancy you getting involved with Blaise St Clair, of all people. What a coincidence.’

‘You think?’ Star finally sat down, looking drained. ‘It’s never a coincidence where he’s concerned. I reckon he’s engineered a meeting with her and—’

‘That’s where you’re wrong,’ Simon interrupted. ‘Blaise and Romy meeting was never supposed to happen. It was an unfortunate coincidence, whether you believe it or not, and the two of them falling in love—well, that was an event none of us foresaw.’

‘Are you saying that man genuinely loves Romy?’ Keely asked scornfully. ‘Pull the other one, it’s got bells on. He doesn’t know what love is.’

‘That’s just not true.’ Simon gave Romy a kindly look. ‘I promise you, John’s feelings for you are entirely genuine. He loves you very much.’

Romy didn’t look as if that gave her any comfort at all, and who could blame her? I wished I could think of something to say to her that would make her feel better, but I had nothing. This was all still so new to me, and I must admit, a part of me was too busy worrying about my twin sister and what was happening to her right now. It seemed to me that all this business with Blaise St Clair was just an inconvenient distraction from more important matters.

Hector returned at that moment. ‘He’s sleeping peacefully,’ he told us, taking his seat on the sofa. ‘So, where shall we start?’

‘How about telling us why you allowed that man to move in and make a life with our sister,’ Keely said. ‘And while you’re at it, you can also explain who he is.’

She jerked her thumb in Simon’s direction, and he raised an eyebrow in response.

‘You really don’t like me, do you?’ he said, amusement in his eyes.

‘Do you think this is funny?’

We all turned to look at Romy who had gone from deathly pale to red-faced in seconds. Her green eyes shone with tears as she faced Simon in obvious distress.

‘Romy—’

‘No! Don’t try to get out of this. You’ve been hanging around us for ages now, butting in, interfering in our lives, intruding on our privacy. I made allowances for you because you insisted you were Johnnie’s friend, and he backed you up on that. I thought you were helping him in his psychology work. What were you really doing? What was your real plan? Why were you hanging around us, and why did you lie about knowing John for so long?’

Simon sighed. ‘I promise you, there was nothing sinister about any of it.’

‘Where have I heard that before?’ Castor rolled his eyes. ‘It’s always the ones you can’t trust who tell you that. Go on, tell us who you are.’

Hector clearly thought it was time to stop everyone having a go at Simon. ‘If you must know, he’s a Guardian, although don’t expect to remember that when all this is done.’

There was a distinct change in the St Clairs’ attitude then. They shifted uncomfortably and eyed Simon with some embarrassment.

‘I’m—I’m right sorry for what I said then,’ Castor mumbled. ‘Mind, you have to understand, I only want to protect my family.’

‘I do understand that, Castor,’ Simon assured him, which made Castor look at him in alarm.

‘How do you know my name?’

‘I know all about you and your family,’ Simon said with a shrug. ‘You’re of great interest to us, especially now. You’ve caused us quite a few headaches over the years.’

There was an immediate chorus of protests, and he held up his hands.

‘No need to take offence. I was merely stating facts not making a criticism. You can’t deny that your family has been at the centre of some astonishing events.’

‘That’s true,’ Iliana said reluctantly. ‘But it’s hardly our fault. These things just seem to happen to us.’

‘Reckon it all started with Blaise St Clair,’ Castor grumbled. ‘It’s him what’s to blame, not us. He messed everything up.’

‘He did,’ Simon agreed. ‘You won’t get any arguments from me about that. Nevertheless, you can hardly hate the man now known as John Ford for the crimes of Blaise St Clair. Right now they’re practically two different people.’

‘Are you really saying John has no memory of Blaise?’ I asked curiously.

‘None. Hector did a thorough job,’ Simon said.

‘So it was you who created John Ford?’ Star asked Hector in surprise.

‘I did. Well, partly.’ Hector sounded almost apologetic. ‘I gave him the building blocks for a new life. What he chose to do with them was down to him.’

‘Then why didn’t you warn us that Romy’s boyfriend was Blaise?’ Keely demanded.

‘I didn’t know,’ Hector said honestly. ‘Once I’d wiped his memory and passed him over to Simon’s care that was my part done. Of course, I knew Romy’s boyfriend was called John, but I didn’t know his surname, and how many Johns do you think there are in the world? Seriously, I had no reason to believe he could possibly be Blaise. In fact, I had every reason to believe he wasn’t.’

‘Oh?’ Raiden frowned. ‘What do you mean by that?’

‘What he means,’ Simon said, ‘is that Blaise St Clair, or John Ford as he’d become, wasn’t supposed to attract the attention or interest of any St Clair. Hector put—well, let’s call it a sort of shield around him, specifically designed to make him almost invisible to anyone in your family. Not literally invisible of course, but it would make him sort of melt into the background, be of so little interest to them that they wouldn’t even bother to find out his name.’

‘Which is pretty much how we felt about him,’ Harley admitted guiltily. ‘Sorry, Romy.’

‘That makes sense,’ Killian said, nodding. He looked at me. ‘Remember when we met him, and we couldn’t understand why the girls found him so unattractive and boring? Sure, we got on with him well, didn’t we? Thought he was a fascinating person. That explains why.’

‘But it doesn’t explain Romy’s attraction to him,’ I said. ‘So what went wrong?’

‘I have no idea,’ Simon admitted. ‘John fell in love with you almost from the moment he met you,’ he told Romy. ‘I suppose his persistence and charm won you over.’

‘How do you know?’ she asked shakily. ‘You weren’t around then.’

‘Oh, I was around,’ he corrected her. ‘Just because you didn’t notice me, don’t think I wasn’t keeping an eye on things. John was my charge, and I’ve taken care of him and watched over him ever since he stopped being Blaise St Clair. Hector made sure that he’d planted the memory of our friendship in Blaise’s mind, so when I made myself known to

you both, John, as he was by then, had every reason to believe we'd been friends for years. He didn't deceive you, Romy. It was what he genuinely believed.'

'Poor Johnnie,' she said tearfully.

'Poor Johnnie?' Keely gasped. 'Romy, you can't seriously be feeling sorry for him, after everything he's done?'

'But that wasn't him, was it?' Romy pointed out. 'It's like Simon said earlier, Blaise and John are two different people to all intents and purposes.'

'And you honestly believe he hasn't got his memory back?' Sky asked suspiciously.

'Absolutely.' Simon sounded quite certain of it. 'He has no recollection of his previous life. I must admit, I've watched him in admiration. He's an incredibly intelligent person and could have used his abilities to make a lot of money and a name for himself. Instead, he appears to have a heartfelt desire to make life better for other people. Hence his career as a family support worker. I don't know. Perhaps, somewhere deep down, he's been trying to make amends for his past behaviour. Who knows?'

I rubbed the back of my neck, thinking. 'I understand that you're all deeply concerned about Blaise,' I told them, 'but honestly, don't you think we have more important things to worry about right now? In case you'd forgotten, Trinity is missing. My twin sister, Linnet. We need to find her before something terrible happens to her.'

I heard Romy gasp but turned to Hector. 'You said you had every reason to believe she'd been taken by the fae. If that's the case we should be out there trying to get her back, not arguing about a man who's no longer a threat and, quite frankly, seems irrelevant right now.'

'Blaise St Clair is hardly irrelevant,' Raiden pointed out, 'given that if not for his little jaunt through time the fae wouldn't be trying to start another war with us.'

'The fae are not trying to start another war with you,' Killian said testily. 'It's the Pendragons and their hangers-on.'

Don't label all fae as warmongers.'

'Sorry,' Raiden said. 'I didn't mean to offend. It was a slip of the tongue.'

'The point is,' I said, 'whether Blaise's time travelling started all this or not, he's no longer the issue. The issue is that the fae—the Pendragons—have taken Trinity, and we need to find her before it's too late.'

It seemed weird to me, knowing that the Pendragons were our enemies, when they were my kin. Trinity's kin. Did they realise that they'd kidnapped one of their own? Would that help her if they did?

My blood ran cold. Of course it wouldn't. Not if they realised she was really Linnet Pendragon, because then they'd know she was one of Ashen and Laragh Pendragon's children, and they'd want to kill her, just as they'd killed our parents. Just as they wanted to kill me, and would no doubt make every effort to when I reclaimed my magic, and they finally realised who I was.

'What exactly happened to Trinity?' Romy asked nervously. 'Did I hear right? She's Lowen's twin sister?'

Keely gave an impatient wave of the hand. 'Oh! You don't even know about that, do you? Yes. Quite a turn up for the books. It turns out Trinity is really Linnet Pendragon. She was in Whitby, trying to find someone called Sister Agnes who might know something about their parentage.'

'And now she's missing?'

'Kidnapped by the fae,' Keely said gloomily. 'And Lowen's right. All this with Blaise is a distraction and nothing to do with the main issue.'

'Except, maybe Simon can be of use to you in that respect,' Hector said.

'Simon?' I narrowed my eyes. 'In what way?'

'Well,' Hector explained, 'in the way that he was in Whitby that day. Simon saw it happen.'



## Chapter 4

### *Lowen*

All eyes turned to Simon who nodded. ‘I was asked to follow Trinity to keep an eye on her. Hector knew of course that she was intending to travel to Whitby in search of this Sister Agnes, so he wanted me to make sure she was safe.’

‘Hector!’ Star said, shocked. ‘You grassed us up! No one was supposed to know where she was going.’

‘I certainly didn’t know,’ Iliana said crossly. ‘You could have told me.’

‘I didn’t want to stop her going,’ Hector said reasonably, ‘but there was no way I could let her put herself in danger without having someone there to help her. Since you and John were away I knew Simon was free for a few days, so he agreed to follow Trinity to Middlesbrough, where she was meeting some clients, and then board the same train as her down to Whitby. Which he did.’

‘So what happened?’ Sky asked Simon. ‘How come you couldn’t stop her being taken?’

Simon shook his head, looking for the first time at a loss. ‘Honestly, it all happened so fast I can’t explain it. But if Zephyr hadn’t got in the way maybe she’d still be here with us. Then again he might well have saved her life. Who knows?’

‘Zephyr? So Zephyr was in Whitby with Trinity? But why? How?’ Star frowned. ‘No one told him she was going to look for Sister Agnes did they?’

‘It’s possible he heard us, though,’ Harley said thoughtfully. ‘He, Kendrew, Amlodd, and Bob were sitting quite near us, remember? They kept looking over at us, too.’



They might have heard enough to tip them off about her plans.’

‘All I know,’ Simon told us, ‘is that when I got off the train at Whitby I spotted Zephyr Ambrose straightaway. Naturally he didn’t notice me. He had no idea who I was, after all. Besides, his eyes were fixed on Trinity. I’m amazed she didn’t notice him but evidently she didn’t. I suppose she was too preoccupied.’

‘So what happened after that?’ I asked, desperate for any information that would help us rescue my sister.

‘I followed Trinity—and Zephyr—around all day. She was traipsing up and down the harbourside, all over West Cliff, calling at the amusements, shops, and pubs. She headed over the bridge and began to explore the East Cliff. Quite honestly I was beginning to tire myself, and I think Zephyr must have been exhausted.’

‘Poor Zephyr,’ Sky said tearfully. ‘He did all that to keep her safe, and she didn’t even know.’

‘We headed down Church Street,’ Simon continued. ‘She went into just about every business down there and then...’ He shook his head. ‘It was so quick! Honestly, I still can’t get over it. She’d reached the bottom of the hundred and ninety-nine steps, and I think she was deciding whether to climb them. I was leaning against the wall of a building nearby, pretending to scroll on my phone. I saw Zephyr out of the corner of my eye, and then suddenly there was this flash and I looked up. I caught a glimpse of someone bending over Zephyr, and then they were both gone. And that’s when I realised Trinity wasn’t there either.’

‘What did this someone look like?’ Iliana urged.

Simon shrugged helplessly. ‘I’m sorry. It was just too fast for me to see.’ He looked at Hector. ‘I couldn’t make it out. They were like quicksilver.’

Killian gave a bitter laugh. ‘Like quicksilver? Sounds like Malliss. He’s one of the Pendragon minions and he can move fast.’

‘And could he do what was done to Zephyr?’ Raiden asked.

Killian nodded. ‘Of course.’

My heart sank. ‘So does this mean that Malliss definitely took Trinity?’

Simon looked doubtful. ‘Honestly? I can’t be certain of that. I saw Zephyr’s body and I saw him whisked away by whatever this creature was, but Trinity had already gone. Unless this Malliss—if that’s who it was—is lightning fast I don’t see how he can have taken Trinity then come back and done all that to Zephyr in the blink of an eye.’

‘Couldn’t you have gone back?’ Keely asked.

‘Gone back where?’ Simon questioned.

‘Gone back in time,’ Keely said impatiently. ‘At the very least you could have watched what happened a few times until you saw who did it.’

‘Time isn’t our personal film show,’ Simon said, somewhat testily. ‘We can’t just keep rewinding and forwarding to our satisfaction. We have responsibilities.’

‘But you’re Guardians!’ Sky cried in frustration. ‘Surely you can go back in time and stop Trinity from going to Whitby? You could stop Zephyr from being killed, too!’

Hector shook his head. ‘It doesn’t work like that, Sky. We must interfere in time as little as possible. It could be that it’s crucial for Trinity to be in Whitby for all we know. Suppose whatever’s happened to her is a vital part of events, and we stopped it from happening? How much damage might we do?’

‘But you saved Mother Clipson,’ Star pointed out. ‘You went back and found her dying in the dungeon, and you and Jennet saved her life. Why couldn’t you save Zephyr’s? Just go back in time and get him out of there before he dies.’

Hector gave a heavy sigh. ‘Believe me, I wish I could. Mother Clipson was dying, not dead. When a person has died, and the soul has departed, they’re no longer anything to do with us. They belong to the reapers and another place. We

can't make the dead live again. I'm sorry. It's just not how it works.'

'Well, that's pretty rubbish if you ask me,' Star said, folding her arms, while I tried to absorb the fact that there were evidently such things as reapers, something else I'd assumed to be a myth. 'Only Guardians can travel in time and change events and you won't even do it. What's the point of you then?'

'Star!' Castor said, shocked. 'Show some respect.'

'You're not being fair,' Simon said. 'As Hector explained, we can't know if a specific event will have major repercussions in the future, and therefore we can't interfere unless it's absolutely essential.'

'Are you saying Trinity isn't essential?' I asked coldly.

'In the scheme of things? Who knows?'

'Wow,' I said. 'You're all heart. Is this what being a Guardian does to you? Because if it is I don't think I want to reclaim my powers after all.'

'I think we should move on,' Killian said hastily. 'This is getting us nowhere. I'm going to head back to Ballydraiocht and see if they've heard anything there. They need to be informed of everything that's happened if they don't already know. Then I'll go on to Whitby and see if I can pick up anything. I might be able to sense fae magic and tell you for definite who was in that area.'

'Really?' I asked hopefully. 'You can do that?'

'I can try,' he said. 'I can't promise but I'll do my best. I might be able to persuade Suibhne to come with me. He's better at tracking than I am.'

'Brilliant,' Hector said. 'You do that, Killian. In the meantime, I suggest Simon removes John's memories of today and we return the poor chap to Bartonbrook.'

There was a chorus of protests.

'No way! You can't leave Romy with that man! He could be dangerous!'

‘You can’t trust Blaise St Clair. I don’t care what he’s calling himself these days.’

‘Romy, what do you think?’

All eyes turned to Romy who wiped away a tear and shrugged helplessly. ‘I don’t know what to think. Is he still the man I loved? I don’t know. I can’t think—’

‘Don’t trust him.’

Celeste was standing in the doorway, a watchful Belasko on her shoulder. She was watching Romy with sympathy in her eyes, but there was a determined look in them too.

‘He’s—he’s not your Blaise,’ Romy stammered. ‘Not any more.’

‘He was never my Blaise,’ Celeste corrected her. ‘He just pretended to be. He made me believe he loved me, wanted to marry me. It was all lies. He has no compunction about telling people anything they want to hear. You can’t be alone with him any longer. It’s not safe.’

‘Well that settles that then,’ Keely said triumphantly. ‘So what are you going to do with him?’

Hector looked at Simon for a long time, their gaze intense.

Then Hector nodded. ‘We’ll take him to the island. It’s the safest place for him right now, and he’ll be well looked after.’

‘The island! But that’s Trinity’s happy place,’ I protested. ‘And what about Sirius? The last thing he needs is Blaise St Clair turning up.’

‘Sirius has other things to worry about,’ Hector reminded me. ‘Ewella and Emrick are more than capable of keeping John secure while caring for him. He’ll have the freedom of the house and garden but won’t be able to venture beyond the grounds.’

‘It seems a shame to me,’ Simon admitted. ‘I still think it would be kinder to let him go home and continue his life as if today never happened.’ He looked at Romy sadly. ‘Are you sure you can’t give him another chance?’

‘It’s—it’s not about that,’ she said. ‘I just don’t know who he is any longer. Everything I thought I knew about him is a lie.’

‘No it’s not, Romy,’ Simon promised her. ‘What you know about John is who he is. The layers of him that are Blaise are buried deep, out of his reach. You can trust John Ford.’

She hesitated but shook her head. ‘I’m sorry. It’s all too much for me to deal with. Maybe later, when I’ve had the chance to understand all this, but right now I can’t go back to pretending I don’t know the truth. He might not know who he is, but I do. I—I’m a little afraid of him now.’ She hung her head. ‘I know, it’s stupid and pathetic.’

‘You have every reason to be afraid of him,’ Celeste told her. ‘You’re doing the right thing.’ She gave Hector a weak smile. ‘Thank you. I think the island’s the best place for him until we figure out what’s next.’

He nodded and got to his feet. ‘Then I guess I’d better visit Emrick and Ewella and explain the situation to them.’

‘Tell Sirius that whenever he’s ready to start searching again I’ll go with him,’ I told him, and Killian added, ‘Me, too. As soon as I’ve spoken to the folks back home I’ll be in Whitby, so if he wants to join me he’s welcome.’

‘Will do. Simon?’

‘I’d better head back to Bartonbrook,’ Simon said. ‘I need to make sure their house is secure and give a reason for John’s absence from work.’ He gave us all a meaningful look. ‘I don’t want him to be in any trouble when he goes home finally.’

With that he was gone.

Hector told us not to disturb John and that he would sleep for a good while yet so not to worry, then he headed to Peloryon Island.

Killian took Harley’s hand. ‘Well, mo ghrá, it seems our honeymoon is well and truly over. It was good while it lasted, though, wasn’t it?’

Harley smiled. 'It was.'

'I'm so sorry,' Iliana said. 'I'd quite forgotten we dragged you back from your honeymoon. I haven't even asked you how it went.'

'That will have to wait,' Killian said. 'I'm away to Ballydraiocht, but I'll keep in touch and let you know as soon as I hear anything.'

He kissed Harley tenderly then he vanished, leaving the rest of us staring at each other.

'I suppose Zephyr did have a point about us,' Sky said sadly. 'We're always in bother, one way or the other, aren't we?'

'I shall miss him so much,' Iliana admitted, wiping away a tear. 'How's poor Aurora, Raiden?'

'In bits,' he said briefly. 'Aither's keeping her going right now. If she didn't have him to care for I think she'd be in bed, crying her heart out. She didn't even want any lunch.'

That was bad news indeed, but not surprising.

Aurora was going to take a long time to get over the death of her father. We all were. And whoever had killed him and taken Trinity—well, they were going to pay for it. I'd already made up my mind about that.



# Chapter 5

## *Trinity*

Well, I thought bitterly, this wasn't how my trip to Whitby was supposed to go. Where the hell was I?

I'd thought at first that I'd gone blind, and I'll admit I panicked a bit. Shaming, I know. Sirius wouldn't have panicked, and I don't think his sisters would either. Well, maybe Sky, a little bit. But, you know, I'd just woken up from being asleep and it took me a while to adjust, like when you've had a weird and involved dream and you can't quite figure out if you're still dreaming or this is real.

It took me a moment or two to realise that I was blindfolded, and almost at the same time as I realised that I realised a couple of other things.

Firstly, I wasn't gagged, which was a blessing because, honestly, the thought of that terrified me. I mean, what if you're sick? Or you choke? Doesn't bear thinking about.

Secondly, my hands were free, so I wasn't tied up. Great, so I could just remove the blindfold, right? My captors, whoever they were, clearly weren't the brightest.

Unfortunately, when I lifted my hands to pull the blindfold away, it quickly became clear that it wasn't shifting. I had another moment of panic then because I couldn't find a strap and I wondered if they'd glued the damn thing over my eyes.

I tried to get to my feet, but something banged against my ankle bone, and I heard the distinct rattle of chains. They'd chained me up? Okay, so now the panic was rising again, fast. I was blind and couldn't run away, even if I'd dared attempt it with no sight and no idea where I was.



It dawned on me that my back was against a wall, and I huddled into it, trying to control my fear. The wall was damp and rough. My nose twitched and I realised I could smell the sea. What's more, as I focused on that smell and the panic subsided a little, I became aware of the sound of waves.

Think, Trinity! What the hell happened to you?

Well, I'd been in Whitby, I remembered that much. I'd been standing in that cute little street, Church Street. Although I have to say, it might be cute, but it's murder when you're wearing heels, which I was stupid enough to do. I'd got into the habit years ago and it was hard to get out of it, especially as I'm not that tall and barely reach Sirius's shoulder without them.

Cobbles really aren't a girl's best friend when you're wearing them, though, and what with that, and the crowds of tourists who were thronging the street, it had been tricky to get from one end to the other, especially as I'd had to call into nearly every shop and business down there, asking if anyone had heard of Sister Agnes.

It wouldn't have been so bad if anyone had, but all I'd got for my efforts were blank looks and puzzled shrugs.

So I'd reached the end of Church Street and what? I tried to picture it in my mind. I'd been debating whether to head down Henrietta Street, or to go up the hundred and ninety-nine steps and see if anyone who worked at the abbey or church had heard of her. I mean, abbey, church, Sister Agnes. Makes sense, right?

But then...

Then nothing. I had no recollection of what had happened to me after that. Zilch. So how had I ended up blindfolded and chained in some cold, damp hovel, with the sound of the sea echoing around me?

Was I in a cave?

I wished I hadn't thought of that because the panic started to bubble up again. Bad enough to be in a cave at the best of times, but to be chained up in one, unable to see, and with the

possibility that it could be flooded at any moment if the tide came in...

I shivered and tried to be rational. Whoever had taken me obviously didn't want me dead or they'd have killed me there and then. Why bother to kidnap someone just to let them drown? I had to believe they weren't just sadistic fiends who'd take great pleasure watching that fate befall me.

Watching... Were they here, with me? Were they watching me right now?

'Hello?' I called. My voice was croaky, and I cleared it and tried again. 'Hello? Is anyone here?'

Silence. Well, apart from the sound of the sea and the distant cry of a seagull or twelve. There sure are a lot of seagulls in Whitby.

'I'm not afraid of you,' I lied. 'Why don't you just show yourself and tell me what the hell it is you want?'

Nothing.

I wondered how long I'd been there and if anyone knew I was missing. Probably not. I wasn't due back in Castle Clair until tomorrow so why would anyone look for me? Unless it was tomorrow already. I had no way of knowing how long I'd been asleep after all.

Asleep? Unconscious more like. I tentatively patted my skull, feeling for any cuts or lumps, but it seemed to be okay. So I hadn't been hit over the head then. Drugged? But how? I hadn't had anything to eat or drink, apart from a bottle of water that I'd been carrying with me as I walked. I can't deny I'd been tempted, especially when I went into a couple of the cafés with their delicious smells and tempting choice of beverages, but I'd been determined to press on with my mission. I couldn't possibly have been drugged.

Which only left one option. Magic.

At the thought my blood ran cold. The only people I could think of who'd want to kidnap me were the Pendragons. But if they'd done that they must know who I really was, and if they

knew who I was then who knew what they had in store for me?

*You know, Trinity, I don't think you're cut out for this magical life. I think you should stick to being an editor in future.*

‘Ah, you’re awake!’

I jumped in fright and my heart thudded as a woman’s voice cut into my thoughts. It was a hoarse voice, as if the speaker had a sore throat. So I had company at last. A Pendragon?

‘Why are you sitting on the floor?’

Was she for real?

‘Why do you think? Where else am I supposed to sit? This is where I woke up.’

‘But I sent you a nice comfy sofa for when you woke up. It seems a pity to waste it. Don’t you like it? Or is it some sort of meditation you’re doing?’

The woman, whoever she was, was either crazy or she was taunting me. Either way it didn’t make me feel any more optimistic about my chances of getting out of here.

‘How would I know if I like it,’ I pointed out, deciding to go along with her, ‘seeing as I’m blindfolded and didn’t even know it was here. Wherever here is.’

‘Oh my word, I completely forgot about that! I’m so sorry. Let me get that for you.’

Immediately I felt the blindfold disappear, and I blinked before looking around me. It was pitch black.

‘I can’t see a thing,’ I said. ‘I think I’ve gone blind.’

‘Oh! How stupid am I?’ The woman tutted and suddenly my prison was flooded with light. It wasn’t a cave. It was a room. By the looks of it, a basement. It was pretty dingy, the light coming from a single bulb in the centre of the ceiling, and, apart from an incongruous plush sofa, it contained nothing but an old chest and some barrels. There was a flight

of wooden steps leading up to a door above and another narrow wooden door in the far wall. I wondered where that led to.

‘There. So what do you think of the sofa?’

‘It’s, er, very nice.’ I eyed my captor with some astonishment, it had to be said. She certainly didn’t look like the sort of person who’d go around kidnapping people for the hell of it. She was quite small—maybe around my height or even shorter—and had white hair and a wizened old face. Her eyes were extraordinary. Huge and round and such a pale blue they were almost silver. She was hunched over, as if she had something wrong with her bones, and she was wearing a navy-blue skirt, a white blouse, and a grey cardigan. Her appearance hardly rang alarm bells.

She was definitely not what I’d expected to find.

‘What was the point of blindfolding me if all you had to do was turn off the light?’

She considered me for a moment then shrugged. ‘It’s the done thing, isn’t it? In books and films.’

Well, she clearly wasn’t an expert in taking people prisoner, so that was something.

I gingerly got to my feet and hauled the chain over to the sofa. Luckily it just about reached, allowing me to sit down in comfort at last. My back ached.

‘How long have I been here?’ I asked.

‘Oh, I couldn’t really say,’ she said. ‘Does it matter?’

I frowned. ‘Well, yeah, it kinda does.’

‘You’re not from around here are you?’ she said suspiciously. ‘Your accent—it’s most peculiar.’

‘I’m American,’ I explained. Well, it wasn’t exactly a lie. I’d grown up there, after all, and I’d honestly believed I’d been born there until recently.

She folded her arms. ‘Hmm. So perhaps you’ll be good enough to explain to me what you’re doing in Streaneshalch,

and why you've been going around asking all and sundry who Sister Agnes is and where you can find her?

*Streon what now?* I had no idea what she was talking about, but I seized on the fact that she was familiar with Sister Agnes's name.

'Are you Sister Agnes?' I asked eagerly.

'Certainly not!' She drew herself up as best she could manage and glared at me. 'And I'm the one asking the questions. I want to know who you are. What's your name and why are you here? What do you want with Sister Agnes?'

'So you do know who she is?'

'What did I just say? I'm the one asking the questions.' She rolled her eyes and sat next to me on the sofa. 'I'll ask you again, what's your name?'

'If I tell you my name you have to tell me something,' I said. 'Do you know Sister Agnes?'

'I don't make bargains with prisoners,' she said haughtily.

'Was that a line from a movie too?' I asked.

'Are you going to tell me who you are?'

'I don't think so,' I said, feeling more confident by the second. 'So if I were you I'd cut my losses and let me go. I've got things to do.'

I really wasn't prepared for what happened next. She lunged at me, her face just inches from mine, and hissed. Her face changed, just for a second. The wrinkles smoothed away, the eyes grew even bigger, even rounder, and her pupils grew so large her pale eyes suddenly looked completely black.

I reared back, alarmed. Okay, so maybe she wasn't the harmless old lady I'd assumed her to be. I should have known better. She'd managed to put me to sleep and bring me here after all. I shouldn't antagonise her when I knew nothing about her.

*Dumb move, Trinity!*

‘Tell me why you are looking for Sister Agnes,’ she said, thankfully returning to her former state almost immediately, and smoothing down her skirt as if she hadn’t just transformed into some hideous creature.

She was fae. There was no doubt about it in my mind, and given the way she’d treated me, I doubted very much that she was on my side.

I shivered as I wondered what she might do to me if she knew who I really was. Bad enough that I’d dared to ask around for this mysterious nun, or nurse, or whatever she was, but if this creature knew I was a Pendragon...

I swallowed. I couldn’t tell her. Telling her might lead her to Lowen, and he had to be protected at all costs. The future of peace between the fae and witches depended on him.

She watched me closely then sighed. ‘I won’t hurt you,’ she said. ‘You don’t have to be afraid of me.’

It was a bit too late to tell me that. I was already petrified.

‘Are you hungry?’

I wanted to say no, but as soon as she said the word I realised I was. Very much so. I’d had nothing to eat since I left Middlesbrough, however long ago that was.

‘If you tell me who you are and why you’re looking for Sister Agnes I’ll bring you some lunch,’ she said, giving me a warm smile that I didn’t believe for an instant.

I folded my arms. ‘Then I guess I’ll just have to go hungry a bit longer,’ I said defiantly.

I don’t know if she realised I was shaking like a leaf as I said it, but she gave an exasperated sigh and got to her feet.

‘Very well, if that’s the way you want it.’

She hobbled to the staircase and somehow climbed the steps to the door. As she grasped the handle she said, ‘Let’s see who gives in first, shall we?’

With that she left the basement, and I sank back in the sofa, overwhelmed with despair. It was all right acting all

tough and brave, but the truth was I was scared. Real scared. For all I knew she was a Pendragon, or worked for them. What if she brought them to me? What if she decided that if I wasn't going to talk to her, maybe I'd talk to someone who was more used to taking prisoners?

My eyes fell on the door in the far end of the room, and I got to my feet and headed towards it. The chain yanked me to a halt, and I strained to reach the handle, wanting to see what was on the other side. There might be an escape route, and if I could just persuade my captor to unchain me for a while... But it was no use. Besides, it was probably locked.

I sat down and wrapped my arms around myself. At least she'd left the light on for me, which was a comfort. I wondered if she'd meant to or if she'd just forgotten.

I'm not sure how long I sat there, shivering with cold, my stomach growling with hunger. I had no sense of time and realised that, somewhere along the way, I'd lost my cell phone. I'd grown too reliant on it, I thought dully. I used to wear a wristwatch, but I'd stopped bothering because it was just as easy to look at my cell. Without it I was lost.

Well, I'd better get used to this. I could be here days, weeks, months even. I tried not to panic at the thought that I could be here for the rest of my life—nor that the rest of my life might not be a very long time at all.

Even so, I was determined. I was doing this for Lowen and for my family. My brother—wow, it still sounded so amazing to say that word—my brother had to be protected until he was ready to take up the mantle of the Great Guardian. This weird woman wasn't going to get any information out of me.

I resigned myself to a long, cold, hungry spell in my prison and decided I might as well lie down and get some sleep if possible. At least asleep I wouldn't be hungry.

I turned to make myself comfortable and gasped. On the sofa beside me was a blanket, a cup of tea, a bowl of tomato soup, some thick, crusty bread, and a slice of chocolate cake.

It seemed my captor had a heart after all. Either that or she was playing a weird game with me. Right now I didn't care. I wrapped the blanket around me and began to eat as if it was the first meal I'd had in days.

Who knew when I'd be fed again.





## Chapter 6

### *Romy*

While Killian was away at Ballydraiocht, Hector returned from Peloryon Island and told us Ewella and Emrick were willing to take Johnnie into “informal custody”.

I honestly didn’t know what to think about that, unsure whether it was the right or fair thing. I was certain John had no recollection of Blaise St Clair, but it had thrown me, knowing my dear, sweet boyfriend wasn’t really the man I thought he was—or the man he thought he was, come to that.

And Simon, a Guardian! I couldn’t get my head around it all, and every time I tried I just felt sick and desperately sad.

It seemed clear to me that any future I’d planned with John wouldn’t happen now. And where did that leave me? Where, more importantly, did it leave him? He couldn’t languish on the island forever.

I tried not to blame Keely and Harley, but there was a part of me that did, no matter how I tried to reason that they’d only acted the way they had because they were afraid for me. It had been an act of love, but dragging John to Castle Clair and telling him bluntly that he wasn’t really John Ford at all, but a witch from 1669, was not only downright cruel, but it meant the Guardians now had only one option: wipe his memory a second time.

That would mean yet another identity that would take him well away from the St Clairs, as had been originally intended. Whoever he became, I knew that the man I’d promised to spend the rest of my life with would be taken from me forever.

‘I’m so sorry, Romy.’ Celeste had clearly seen the despairing look on my face as she gave my arm a sympathetic squeeze. ‘I know how you feel, believe me.’

‘But you don’t. Not really.’ I didn’t mean to sound ungracious, but her circumstances had been very different from mine. ‘You’d already fallen out of love with Blaise. You loved Hector by the time you realised what had been going on. I still love Johnnie! He’s my world.’ Tears ran down my cheeks. ‘What am I supposed to do without him?’

‘You’ll find a way,’ she said gently.

I knew she was trying to be kind and reassuring, because there wasn’t a bad bone in Celeste’s body, but she wasn’t helping.

‘Don’t tell me there are plenty more fish in the sea,’ I said, wiping my face. ‘And do you really think this is fair?’ I asked her desperately. ‘Johnnie has no idea about Blaise. How do you think he’s going to feel when he wakes up and finds himself a prisoner on an island?’

‘He won’t exactly be a prisoner,’ she said uncomfortably.

‘So he can leave any time he likes then?’

She looked down, clearly embarrassed. ‘Well, no...’

‘There you go then! It’s not fair. He’s being punished for something someone else did.’

‘I know you believe that,’ she said, a note of urgency in her voice, ‘but trust me on this. Blaise St Clair is only just beneath the surface of John Ford. You never know if or when he’ll emerge. If he does you’re not safe. You can’t trust that man, believe me.’

‘Romy! Celeste! Are you listening?’

We both spun round to see that Hector was talking to the others. Celeste gave me a quick hug and we walked over to where they were all gathered around the dining room table.

‘How did Sirius take it?’ Aunt Iliana asked nervously.

‘He wasn’t there,’ Hector admitted. ‘Emrick said he was only back on the island for an hour, but he couldn’t settle. He’s out there searching. It’s a waste of time because he’ll never find her without help, that much is obvious.’

‘Killian should be in Whitby by now,’ Harley said hopefully. ‘Maybe he’s got Sweeney with him, and if he has they might be able to track Trinity.’

Sweeney—who Keely had explained allowed us to call him by that name because they’d all struggled with his real name, Suibhne, when they met him in Ballydraiocht—was a leprechaun. Even thinking about that made my head explode.

Apparently he’d played the harp at my sister’s wedding. I doubted I’d be showing any of my friends Harley’s wedding photos.

‘It’s all maybes and might, isn’t it?’ Sky said dolefully. ‘I feel so helpless.’

‘We can’t think like that,’ Star told her. ‘We’ll find Trinity, and we’ll find whoever did that to Zephyr, and then we’ll make sure they never harm another witch again.’

‘Fighting talk,’ Jethro said, ‘but how exactly are you going to do that?’

‘I don’t understand why the Guardians can’t find her.’ Sky’s tone sounded almost accusing as she looked at Hector. ‘I thought you lot knew everything.’

‘Guardians can’t track fae magic,’ Hector said. ‘It’s a different kind of magic to witches’ magic entirely.’

‘But so is yours!’

‘It is.’ Hector sighed. ‘I wish I knew how to explain it. Let’s just say Guardians have their own strengths, drawn from the earth. Witches’ power is genetic and since they’re human, but with a witch gene, and since Guardians are human or, occasionally, witches, we’re all connected.’ He shook his head. ‘The fae are different entirely. They came from old gods, and where those gods originated is not known. But whatever runs through their blood isn’t connected to ours. Our best chance is the O’Briens and Sweeney. If anyone can find them it will be them.’

‘Aye, if they choose to help us,’ Castor said darkly.

‘What do you mean by that?’ Harley demanded. ‘Why wouldn’t they? They’re good people.’

‘They’re fae though,’ Sky said nervously.

‘They’re more than that,’ Harley reminded her. ‘They’re Tuatha Dé Danann. They’re the gods that Hector was just talking about! The fae are descended from them.’

‘Aye,’ Castor said, ‘and therefore the fae carry the blood of the Tuatha Dé Danaan inside them. They might have devolved into lower life forms, but inside they’re related, connected. The O’Briens’ first loyalty is always going to be to the fae, no matter what. And the Pendragons are fae, there’s no getting away from it.’

‘That’s not true!’ Harley said angrily. ‘The Pendragons might be fae but they’re outside decent fae society. They’re rebels, revolutionaries. Nothing but trouble! You can’t trust one of them and the O’Briens have nothing to do with them.’

‘Do you mind?’ Keely snapped. ‘That’s my boyfriend you’re talking about.’

‘And that’s my husband Castor’s slandering,’ Harley snapped back.

They glared at each other, and my heart sank. With Keely involved with Lowen and Harley married to Killian, might my sisters end up on opposite sides of a war? The way things were going, who knew?

‘This isn’t helping anyone,’ Lowen said. ‘Hector, you need to get Blaise or John or whoever he is to the island and get him settled and in place before Sirius gets back—if he goes back there. He might come straight back here.’

‘Oh, I do hope so,’ Aunt Iliana said anxiously. ‘He needs to be with his family at a time like this.’

Harley gave Keely an angry look and turned away from her. ‘I’ll come with you, Hector,’ she said. ‘I want to see Mum anyway. I haven’t seen her since I got back from our honeymoon.’

‘Oh, and I’m sure she’ll be thrilled to hear all the details of that,’ Keely muttered. ‘Not like we’ve got anything more important going on, is there?’

‘Stop it!’ I couldn’t stand it any longer. ‘If you two can’t even stay civil what chance have the rest of us got? You’re twins! You’ve always been on each other’s side, no matter what. You can’t let this break you apart. Whatever’s coming—and heaven forbid but it might well be a war—it’s not even started yet, and you’re already fighting between yourselves. How are you going to get through it when your families are on opposite sides? And if you two can’t stick together, what chance have the fae and witch communities got?’

‘Romy’s absolutely right,’ Lowen said, glaring at the twins. ‘We’re supposed to be bringing our people together, not taking sides and tearing lumps out of each other. The O’Briens can be trusted, I’m sure of that. They want peace as much as any of us. As for the Pendragons—well, I may be one, but that doesn’t mean that everything Harley said isn’t true. They can’t be trusted. Let’s face it, when I’ve had my magic restored and I’m Wulfram Pendragon again, you might not be able to trust me either.’

‘No, it’s no good denying it,’ he said quickly, as several people cried out in protest. ‘It’s true. We just don’t know. You’re all going to have to watch me carefully, because until I wield that sword we won’t know if I’m truly trustworthy. If I never find it—well, then we’ll know the sword has judged me unfit to take it, and you’ve got a whole new problem to deal with. Same with Trinity, I’m afraid to say. She’s my twin sister and I already love her, but when or if she has her magic restored...’

We all looked at each other uncomfortably, realising he was right.

‘All that’s for another day,’ Hector said firmly. ‘Right now —’

He broke off as Emrick arrived in our midst. We gathered around him, and I thought everyone seemed as pleased to see

him as I was. It was quite odd, really, but there was something comforting about his presence.

‘Sorry to intrude upon you,’ he said, his lilting Welsh tones music to my ears, ‘but I thought I’d keep you up to date. Now, don’t get your hopes up, but when Hector here told me why Trinity was in Whitby, I realised the best bet would be for me to go to Sister Agnes and see if she knew anything. I can’t promise she does, mind, but it’s worth a shot.’

‘Who is Sister Agnes?’ Lowen asked. ‘Don’t I deserve to know that much at least? Especially since she seems to know about Trinity and me and clearly has something to do with our birth.’

‘You’ll know, all in good time,’ Emrick assured him, running a hand through his somewhat wild, silvery curls. ‘For now though, I need to go there alone. She’s not one for strangers, and I need to tread carefully. Besides, isn’t the most important thing right now picking up clues about Trinity?’

‘I’m hardly a stranger if she was at my birth,’ Lowen protested.

‘You’re right in a way, lad,’ Emrick said. ‘And I promise you’ll meet her soon. Right now, though, we have other things to think about.’ He glanced at Hector. ‘Are you taking Blaise back to the island?’

‘Just about to,’ Hector confirmed.

Emrick nodded. ‘Ewella’s got everything prepared for him. I expect Sirius is still in Whitby?’

‘Well, he hasn’t come back here,’ Lowen said. ‘I’m just about to go to him actually.’

‘Excellent. I’ll go with you and while you keep Sirius occupied I’ll nip away to find Sister Agnes. Fingers crossed we can get Trinity back today.’

‘You really think she’ll know where Trinity is?’ Sky asked hopefully.

‘Well, given what I’ve been told about her disappearance, it’s just possible yes. But like I say, I don’t want you to get

your hopes up, because nothing's certain just now.' He looked round at us all, his dark eyes warm with sympathy and understanding. 'Don't fret now. We'll find her. Are you ready, Lowen?'

'I'm coming to Whitby with you,' Keely said at once.

'Are you sure? Obviously I needed you to take me there, but Emrick can take me now. If you'd rather stay here—'

'As if!' she said scornfully.

'I'll come too,' Sky said. 'Sirius needs me. He's my big brother and I want to be with him.'

'Very well,' Emrick said. 'Looks like it's a family trip. Shall we?'

Keely took Lowen's hand and within the blink of an eye all four of them had gone.

'Right,' Hector said, clapping his hands together, 'I'm going to take John to the island. Is anyone coming with me apart from Harley?'

'I'll stay here,' Aunt Iliana decided 'Just in case there's any more news.'

'The High Council's going to let us know about the funeral,' Castor reminded her. 'Reckon we'd all be better off here, waiting to hear about that.'

'I'm going with you, Hector,' I said firmly. 'I don't care what any of you say or think. I'm not leaving Johnnie in a strange place with people he doesn't know. I'm going with him and that's that. If you don't like it you'll have to make me a prisoner too.'

'Romy, you can't!' Harley protested.

'You haven't listened to a word I said, have you?' Celeste said sadly.

'I heard every word,' I told her, 'and you may well be right. But until I see signs of Blaise St Clair resurfacing I'll continue to treat him as John Ford. And John Ford loves me, as I love him. I'm not abandoning him.'



Celeste shrugged before handing a key over to Hector.  
'Okay. Just don't say I didn't warn you.'

'Let's collect him from the study then,' Hector said. 'Then we'll all travel to the island together.'

I refused to let the mutterings of protests and warnings from the others cloud my mind. I'd made a decision, and I was sticking to it. I didn't know how long I had left with Johnnie. I was going to make the most of every moment.



## Chapter 7

### *Lowen*

By focusing on Sirius, Keely, Emrick, Sky and I found ourselves in the churchyard of St Mary's on the cliff top at Whitby.

As Keely and Sky hurried towards the church, I gazed down on the jumble of red-roofed cottages below us, the River Esk, and the sea beyond, and for an unaccountable reason I found myself shivering. I could sense such sadness here that I was almost suffocating in it.

'Lowen?'

Emrick's voice was gentle in my ear, and I forced myself to turn away from the view below me and focus on him.

'Are you all right, my boy?'

'I—I don't know,' I admitted. 'I had such a funny feeling come over me. I felt such despair.'

He eyed me compassionately for a moment and nodded, placing his hand on my shoulder. 'Come away now, Lowen. We have work to do.'

I glanced over his shoulder and stared up at the church. 'What are we doing here?'

'I expect Sirius is inside, asking people if they've seen Trinity,' Emrick said with a sigh. 'It's fruitless, of course, but if it gives him something to do...'

'You don't think he'll find her?'

'Not that way, no. But then, neither do you, do you?'

I hesitated, but what was the point of lying? 'No,' I said heavily. 'I don't.'

‘Yet here you are, determined to help him.’

‘What else can I do?’ I asked helplessly. ‘It’s not as if I have my magic to help him, is it?’

‘But I do, and I have connections,’ he said, suddenly smiling. ‘Come on now, don’t give up hope. We’re not done yet, and the longer there’s no news the more optimistic I feel.’

‘You do?’

‘Of course. Look what they did to Zephyr. Now, he would have been a superb bargaining chip, but for some reason they didn’t use him. We’ve heard nothing about Trinity. No blackmail demands and—most importantly—no body. I believe if someone had taken her with bad intentions we would have had one or the other long before now.’

‘Then where is she?’

‘I’m not sure,’ he admitted, ‘but I’m hoping Sister Agnes will have an idea. And on that note I shall find her. Stick with Sirius. Make sure he doesn’t do anything reckless.’

I nodded and he squeezed my shoulder.

‘I’m very proud of you, Lowen. I hope you know that.’

‘I don’t see why,’ I said. ‘I haven’t done anything.’

‘Remember the frightened solicitor who was so terrified when he heard the word witches that he spilled his tea? That wasn’t so very long ago, was it, and look at you now. You’re going to be amazing.’

I didn’t feel amazing, or anywhere near it, but before I could voice my doubts Emrick had moved off, striding purposefully towards the hundred and ninety-nine steps. At least he was travelling the normal way for once.

I shook my head then turned back to the church. Time to find Sirius and see if he’d made any progress, as doubtful as that was.

He was, as Emrick had predicted, inside the building, asking visitors if they’d spotted Trinity on their travels and

showing them her photograph. Judging by the desperate look on his face he was getting nowhere fast.

My heart sank as I saw how tired and scared he looked. He'd been at this for hours and I doubted very much that he'd stopped to eat something, or even have a drink. The July sunshine was hot, and he needed to take care of himself. How much longer could he keep doing this? I just hoped Emrick had some news for us at the end of the day.

Keely and Sky were standing beside him, looking sympathetic but ultimately as helpless as I felt. I couldn't stand watching the scene any longer and returned to the graveyard, drawing to a halt beside a huge, stone, Celtic cross.

I studied it curiously. It was elaborately decorated. There were carvings of a harp at the foot of the tree of life, squirrels and birds in its branches, an apple tree, a dove, a rose, a multitude of symbols, elaborate knotwork, and figures. I peered at the four that were carved into one side of the cross and read the words engraved below each of them. Christ, David, Hild, Caedmon.

An inscription read, "To the glory of God, and in memory of Caedmon, Father of English sacred song. Fell asleep hard by AD 680."

To my shame, I'd never heard of Caedmon, though clearly he was a big deal. I'd never heard of Hild either, but she was obviously of some standing, as the only woman among such important names. In the carving she was standing on what appeared to be ammonites. She carried a staff, and behind her were the faces of five men, while standing beside her were what looked like two seagulls.

Odd.

'Lowen!'

I glanced up and smiled, seeing Killian hurrying towards me. He wasn't alone, but had Aidan, his older brother, with him.

'I wasn't expecting to see you here,' I said, addressing Aidan.

Aidan, who unlike Killian didn't seem inclined to change his hair and eye colouring every time his mood altered, was dark haired and green-eyed. I had it on good authority (from Keely actually) that he was good looking. I tried not to take that personally.

'I thought I'd give you a hand,' he said with a shrug. 'My parents have decided that working in a pub is no longer a suitable job for a man who's about to be married off to one of the most important witches in the world.' He gave a short laugh. 'Not that they ever thought it was suitable, you understand, but now things are on a whole different level.' He glanced around. 'Where's your man, Sirius?'

'Inside the church, asking people if they've seen Trinity,' I said with a sigh.

'Any luck?'

I met his gaze steadily. 'What do you think?'

'We've been at the foot of the steps trying to get a scent,' Killian told us. 'I'd hoped Suibhne would come with us but he's visiting his mammy, and I wouldn't dare drag him away from her.'

'His mammy?' I couldn't hide my surprise. Sweeney just didn't seem the type to be anyone's son, which was ridiculous, obviously. He was quite elderly himself, though, and besides, I couldn't imagine leprechauns having a normal family life. It seemed absurd.

'You're doing it again,' Killian warned me. 'Making assumptions about the fair folk. Be careful, Lowen.'

'Sorry.' I shook my head. 'Anyway, did you find anything?'

'I sensed Trinity,' he confirmed. 'Not a strong trace, but she was certainly there. The bad news is, we sensed Malliss. Possibly the good news is that Aidan thinks he sensed something else, didn't you, Aid?'

Aidan frowned, looking puzzled. 'Something,' he said. 'But to be honest, it's confusing. I sensed magic—fae magic—but I can't quite pinpoint a scent of anyone else at the scene.'

‘If you sensed Malliss what does it matter?’ I said heavily. ‘The Pendragons have taken Trinity.’

‘Not necessarily,’ Aidan told him. ‘The fact that I can’t detect what this scent is might be a positive thing. Now, Havok, his henchmen, and his kin are easily tracked. The other scent was different, so maybe whoever took Trinity it wasn’t them.’

‘Which is great news, is it not?’ Killian said, smiling broadly.

‘I suppose that depends on who took her,’ I replied, finding it hard to feel optimistic.

His brow furrowed. ‘Are you okay, Lowen? You’ve got a look in your eyes that worries me.’

‘It’s this place,’ I said, glancing around the churchyard. ‘I don’t know. It just makes me feel so sad, as if there’s no hope left.’

‘Then let’s away from this place and go over to West Cliff,’ Killian suggested.

‘Sirius has already covered there,’ I told him dully.

‘So let’s cover it again,’ he said. ‘There are bound to be new people to ask. It’s a busy town. Sirius can’t possibly have spoken to everyone.’

He had a point, but I couldn’t help feeling we were wasting our time. Even Emrick had said as much. Then again, what else were we going to do? Go back to Castle Lodge and admit we’d given up before we’d even started?

‘Okay,’ I said. ‘What about Sirius, Keely, and Sky? They’re in the church.’

‘We’ll leave them to work their way back along East Cliff,’ Aidan said. ‘Come on, let’s get going.’

We made our way down the hundred and ninety-nine steps, Aidan running ahead of us, deftly dodging people who were coming up them, while Killian and I walked more sedately behind.

‘You don’t mind me bringing Aidan?’ Killian asked.

‘Of course not. Why should I?’

‘Ah, I’m glad of that. He needs a distraction. Now that the wedding’s all arranged and it’s just a matter of time until he’s forced to marry Derwa, he really could use something to take his mind off things.’

‘I’m so glad my sister was kidnapped then,’ I said.

Killian stopped dead and stared at me. ‘I didn’t mean that, and well you know it. What’s up with you, anyway?’

I ran a hand across my forehead, feeling dazed. ‘I’m sorry. I know you didn’t. I can’t explain it. My mood’s just dipped so badly, ever since we landed there...’

I looked up to the churchyard and Killian took my arm, turning me back towards the foot of the steps.

‘Forget that,’ he advised. ‘Let’s get you out of here and focused on finding your sister. That’ll lift your mood.’

He was right. Well, about getting away from the churchyard anyway. As soon as I headed down Church Street I started to feel much better. We caught up with Aidan and made our way through the throng of tourists, heading over the bridge and crossing the River Esk to West Cliff.

‘We haven’t got a photo of her,’ I groaned, realising my error.

Aidan and Killian looked at each other and laughed.

‘Sure, that’s a huge problem,’ Killian said, rolling his eyes. Instantly a photograph of Trinity appeared in his hand. ‘There you go. Now, let’s get investigating shall we?’

I laughed, too. When was I ever going to learn?

We decided we’d make our way along the harbour side first, and when we’d explored all that we’d head back and make our way to the harbour and the railway station.

It was a hot, sunny day, and with the throngs of people jostling for pavement space I was feeling exhausted, not to mention hungry. Only the thought of saving Trinity kept me



going, and I was so grateful to the O'Brien brothers who, after all, had no obligation to help in the search, but were doing so out of the kindness of their hearts.

After a couple of hours, during which time we must have asked hundreds of people with no joy whatsoever, we took a five-minute break to buy ice creams, because I didn't think I could take another step unless I cooled down a bit.

Seagulls swooped around us, clearly hoping to make off with our cornets. I leaned against the railings, tilting my head back in the hope of catching a breeze. Behind me boats bobbed on the river, and noises from amusement rides and machines boomed through the air. West Cliff was so much louder than the East Cliff.

'Well, at this rate we could be here forever,' Aidan said, quickly catching a stream of his vanilla ice cream that was melting down the side of his cornet. He nudged Killian and grinned. 'Would you look at that?'

I followed their gaze and saw they were eyeing a seaside attraction based on the Bram Stoker story, Dracula.

Killian chuckled. 'Bless them, aren't they funny?'

'What's funny about it?' I asked.

'Ah, humans. They make an attraction out of a vampire tale. They pay money to go in there and be scared.' Aidan shook his head in amazement. 'Now, if they bumped into a real vampire they'd definitely not be so cheerful about it.'

I stared at him. 'Pardon?'

'Ah, come on. Don't be going all human on us again,' Killian urged.

'Vampires?' I gasped. 'You can't be serious. They're not real!' Then again, hadn't Hector spoken of reapers not so long ago? Did I know anything?

The brothers exchanged amused glances.

'Can they not?' Aidan said, stroking his chin. 'Well, well. My mistake.'

‘Are you having me on?’ I asked suspiciously.

‘Oh, Lowen,’ Killian said, sounding exasperated. ‘After everything you’ve seen and learned lately, how can you doubt it when we tell you vampires are real?’

‘But—but vampires!’

‘But—but faeries!’ Killian burst out laughing. ‘Come on, we’ve work to do.’

Still feeling dazed I finished my cornet and followed them as they headed along Pier Road. There was a long queue outside a fish restaurant, and Killian took the photo from me and began asking the people on the pavement and the steps up to the door if they recognised Trinity.

I leaned against the wall and listened as one after the other they denied having seen her. And then...

‘Let me have another look at that.’ A woman with two small children at her side peered over Killian’s shoulder. ‘Yeah, I remember her. Can’t forget that gorgeous red hair. I should be so lucky,’ she said, tugging gloomily at her own frizzy brown locks.

I ran up the steps to join the O’Briens as they asked her eagerly where she’d seen Trinity.

‘It was yesterday in the amusements. Well, little Tyson here wanted to go on the ride outside—do you know it’s a pound a ride now, can you believe it? Anyway, me and Tiffany were waiting for the flipping thing to finish, and this redhead stops and asks me if I’d heard of some nun or other.’ She tilted her head, thinking. ‘Now, what was her name again?’

I opened my mouth to tell her, but Killian put a restraining hand on my arm. Clearly he thought it better that the woman remember herself.

‘Sister Abigail, was it? Something like that, any road. I said to her, “No good asking me, love. I’m a tourist here.” If you ask me she had no chance of finding this woman. Agnes!’ She gave a triumphant cry. ‘That was it. Sister Agnes. Well, I reckon she’d never find her. Streets were full of tourists, you

see. Same as today. What do any of us know about who lives here? She was on a hiding to nothing if you ask me.'

'Strange that you remember her so clearly,' Aidan said curiously. 'No one else seems to.'

'Oh, I remember her all right. Could have killed her, that's why.'

'I'm sorry?' I said, my eyes widening.

'Well, the bloody ride ended, didn't it, thank the lord. And I was just about to move off when Tyson starts crying cos he wants another ride. So I said to him, "No good crying to me. I ant got no more money." I mean, obviously, it was a fib, but I couldn't make our Tiffany wait while he had another go. It goes on forever and I'll never get that time back. So what does this redhead go and do? Only gives him a pound coin! He'd shoved it in the slot before I could stop him, and she smiles at me all sweet like, and she says, "You're welcome." Welcome? I could have wrung her neck. Although,' she added hastily, seeing my shocked expression, 'it was very kind of her really.'

'I see,' I said. 'I don't suppose you heard her ask anyone else about Sister Agnes? No one gave her any information?'

She shook her head. 'No. To be honest, she looked tired and fed up. God knows how many people she'd already asked.'

'Okay,' I said, my heart heavy with disappointment. 'Well, thanks anyway.'

We headed back down the steps but before we reached the pavement she called, 'There was summat else you ought to know, though.'

'Oh?' Ignoring the grumbles from the other people on the steps we ran back to her.

She looked around her as if checking no one was listening, which was utterly pointless because everyone within earshot clearly was.

'There was a man following her,' she murmured. 'I saw him, plain as day, and I'm not daft. He was leaning on a wall

watching her while she was talking to me. I keep an eye out for these things, you know. I watch true crime programmes on the telly and I'm always on alert. Anyway, he were watching her all right, and when she walked away from me he waited a few moments, then he followed her. And I kept watching her an' all, right until our Tyson's ride ended. Well, what else was I supposed to do the way it went on? And he did the same the next time she stopped to ask someone. Leaned on the railings and waited, then followed her again.' She wrinkled her nose. 'Nasty old pervert. He was getting on, you know. White hair. Tall fella but wrinkly as owt. Should have known better at his age.' Her eyes widened suddenly. 'You're not saying he did something to her? I wouldn't have thought he was still capable.'

'No,' I said sadly. 'He was her friend. He was just protecting her.'

'Oh. Oh, I see. Funny old stick. Still, I'm glad he wasn't going to hurt her. I did think about going after her and warning her she was being followed, but Tiffany wanted a candy floss, and since Tyson had had two goes on the ride I could hardly say no, could I?'

'Thank you,' I mumbled, about to head disconsolately back down the steps.

'So was the old woman her friend, too?'

We all exchanged puzzled glances. 'Sorry?'

She bent down and warned her restless children to be quiet or they wouldn't get any chips, then straightened again.

'Well, I did wonder you see. I thought maybe he had a reputation for following young women, cos he was definitely being followed himself, and I thought maybe she was his wife, keeping an eye on him like. Mind, she looked even older than him, if I'm honest,' she considered.

'You're sure she was following him?' I asked. 'Certain?'

'Well... ' She paused. 'I can't be a hundred per cent certain, obviously, but it looked that way to me. I thought it was quite funny that the stalker was being stalked himself. I

like to people watch, you see. When you're as skint as I am it's the only bloody form of entertainment you can afford, let's face it.'

'What did this woman look like?' Aidan enquired.

'Well, like I said, old. Very old. And sort of bent over a bit. That's why I noticed her, because she was so hunched and I thought, "Cassie, that poor old stick's got osteoporosis for sure. Bet she never took her HRT." I know, because my Auntie Beryl had terrible bones after she went through the change, bless her. Anyway, she had long white hair, which could have done with a trim if you ask me, or at least tying up somehow. She was wearing a dark skirt and a grey cardigan, and that's about all I can tell you. Sorry.'

'You've been really helpful,' I assured her. 'Thank you so much.'

We ran back down the steps and away from the restaurant's queue then huddled to discuss this revelation.

'Do you think we should take this seriously?' Aidan asked doubtfully. 'After all, she spotted Zephyr, and claims to have seen this woman, but failed to notice the Guardian trailing them both.'

'And surely,' Killian added, 'Simon would have noticed if an old woman was on the trail, too?'

'Possibly,' I said. 'But if he was focused on Trinity and Zephyr, would he have noticed another person? Especially a harmless-looking old lady.'

'Well, it's something new to work on anyway,' Killian said with a sigh. 'We should let the others know.'

'I think we should tell Sirius, Keely and Sky to meet us here,' I said. 'Then we should go home, because it's teatime, and since I hardly ate any of the lunch Castor made us I, for one, am famished. Besides, Sirius needs a break and a meal whether he likes it or not. Emrick will hopefully be back soon, and he might recognise the description. Who knows,' I added excitedly as the thought occurred to me, 'maybe this old lady was Sister Agnes?'

‘Good point. And maybe she took exception to someone drawing attention to her. Do you want me to flit up there and tell them?’ Killian offered, nodding across the water to where St Mary’s church stood.

I managed a smile. ‘No need. Keely and I have this other way of communicating.’

‘Oh?’ he raised an eyebrow. ‘And how do you manage that?’

I dug around in my jeans pocket and held up my hand.

‘It’s called a mobile phone.’



## Chapter 8

### *Lowen*

As predicted, Sirius didn't want to return with us, but our combined pleas finally persuaded him he was doing Trinity no favours if he ended up too tired and hungry to help her.

We arrived back in Castle Clair to find Raiden had returned home to be with Aurora, and Star had headed back to Lily Cottage to eat tea with Benedict and her children.

'Where's Harley?' Killian asked immediately.

'She's gone to see her mother on the island,' Iliana explained briefly, 'and Romy has gone with her.'

She made no mention of Blaise, so we didn't either. Hector had returned, I noticed, and I thought we'd question him about what had happened on the island later. Right now, there was food to eat, and I couldn't wait to get started. Iliana had laid out a huge buffet tea for the rest of us and had just been about to zap to Whitby to haul us all home.

'Darling boy,' she told Sirius kindly, cradling his face in her hands, 'I know you're scared and desperate to find Trinity, but you need to be strong. Skipping meals and walking yourself into the ground isn't going to help her. Now, get a plate and start eating. Mother's orders.'

I think Sirius was too exhausted to argue, so instead he did as he was told, which gave the rest of us permission to do the same. We filled our plates and ate hungrily, even though I'm sure I wasn't the only one to feel guilty, worried that Trinity might be lying hungry somewhere.

We'd almost eaten our fill when Emrick arrived, and we urged him to sit down at once, food forgotten as we clamoured for answers.



He held up his hands. ‘Please, please, just wait a moment. I can’t talk over you all, can I?’

‘Shut yer traps!’ Castor roared, which seemed to do the trick.

‘Thank you,’ Emrick said. He eyed what was left of the buffet and asked, ‘Would you mind?’

‘Help yourself,’ Iliana said immediately. ‘Would you care for a cup of tea?’

Impatiently, we waited while Emrick filled a plate and sipped from his mug of tea. He picked up a sandwich and looked round at us all.

‘The bad news,’ he said, ‘is that Sister Agnes is away right now. She’s gone, er, home, for some rest and relaxation. The good news is she’ll only be away for a few more days and I’ve left a message for her to contact me as soon as she’s back.’

‘When did she go away?’ I asked immediately.

‘A week ago,’ he said. ‘Why? Does it matter?’

‘Yes it does.’ I glanced at Killian and Aidan. ‘It can’t have been her then.’

‘Who can’t have been her?’ Emrick demanded.

Briefly, I explained what the woman on the restaurant steps had told us about the old woman who may, or may not, have been following Zephyr. Everyone listened with keen interest, and there were several, “Oohs,” and gasps as I related her story.

‘But if not Sister Agnes,’ Jethro said, ‘who was she?’

Emrick shrugged. ‘Probably just a tourist, or maybe a resident of Whitby. I expect this woman you were talking to just got carried away with everything and decided it made a good addition to her story. I certainly don’t recognise the description anyway.’

Frey wound his way through my legs and nudged me with his nose.

*He's lying.*

I peered down at my silvery Norwegian Forest cat in surprise.

*Emrick is?*

*Absolutely. Ask him who the Daughters are.*

I stared at Emrick suspiciously. Why would he lie to us, after everything we'd been through? I had no reason not to believe Frey, though. Our familiars had never steered us wrong before.

I was about to speak when Harley suddenly burst out, 'Sid says you're lying, and who are the Daughters?'

Keely glared at Emrick. 'Runa's just told me the same,' she said. She looked at me. 'Frey?'

I nodded grimly.

'And Belle,' Sky added accusingly.

'Oh dear,' Emrick said. 'It seems the familiars have ganged up on me.'

'If it's any consolation,' Celeste said with a sigh, 'Belasko's just told me he thinks the rest of them are a disgrace, and I should have patience and faith in you.'

Emrick smiled. 'Tell Belasko I appreciate his kind words. However, it seems I'm rumbled, and since we're obviously outnumbered, perhaps it's time I explained some things to you.'

'That would be very kind of you,' I said, unable to keep the sarcasm from my voice.

He gave me a pleading look. 'I'm doing the best I can, Lowen. Please believe me. You have no idea what a tricky balancing act this all is.'

'I'm sure Emrick has his reasons for behaving the way he does,' Iliana said firmly. 'After all, surely none of you can doubt that he's on our side? I think you should be a bit more understanding.'

‘Thank you, Iliana.’

‘Having said that, I’m dying to know what you have to tell us, so perhaps you’d get on with it?’

Emrick’s mouth twitched in amusement. ‘I suppose that delicious cheese and onion quiche can wait a little longer.’

He gave it a longing look but pushed his plate away, settled his elbows on the table and looked round at us all. ‘Very well. Let me begin.’

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‘The Daughters,’ Emrick said, ‘as I expect you’ve guessed, are based in Whitby. Their story goes back to the fifth century, when Merlin arrived in Streatonshalch, as it was then known.’

I almost groaned but managed to stop myself in time. No one else seemed at all surprised by the mention of the legendary wizard of Arthurian legend, and given I’d just that day learned of the existence of reapers and vampires, why should Merlin’s existence faze me?

*You’re learning*, Frey said approvingly, leaping onto my lap—not the most comfortable experience, given his size.

‘What was Merlin doing in Whitby?’ Sky asked eagerly, which seemed to be the only question the rest of them had at that point.

‘Merlin travelled the country,’ Emrick explained. ‘This was before he met Arthur, or Uther, or Igraine, remember. He wandered the British Isles, gathering wisdom and knowledge, meeting with other magical beings, storing in his mind all the information that would one day help Arthur bring peace to the land.’

‘And who exactly *was* Merlin?’ I asked, because it seemed to me that was a question I could reasonably ask without looking a complete idiot. I hadn’t cast any doubt on his existence, after all, so I figured I’d earned some brownie points.

‘Merlin...’ Emrick paused, stroking his beard as he considered the question. ‘Merlin was born to a mortal woman

and a father who was, shall we say, rather different. So many legends and myths have sprung up around him. He was a madman, a prophet, the son of a Roman general, a Roman general himself, the son of a sea god, an incubus, a demon... On and on it goes.'

'And which of those stories is true?' Killian asked curiously, and I thought if even the Tuatha Dé Danaan didn't know then Merlin really was a mystery.

'Merlin never knew his father and his mother never told him who he was. I think we can rule out the Roman general bit. Unless the Roman general was an incredibly powerful sorcerer. Merlin got his powers from somewhere, but whether that was from a sea god, an incubus, a demon, a sorcerer, or something else entirely who can say? He never knew, but he did know that he didn't fit in with anyone in his world. That's what drove him to travel the length and breadth of the country, seeking the companionship and wisdom of people who were, if not entirely like him, then at least a little similar.'

'Sounds a very lonely existence,' Sky said wistfully.

'No doubt,' Emrick said. 'And perhaps he did go a little mad for a time, so maybe there's some truth in that legend after all. A solitary life can do that to a person I'm sure. Coming to terms with his powers and trying to work out who or what he was must have taken its toll.'

He sighed and ate a piece of quiche, clearly unable to resist a moment longer. We waited patiently until he was ready to resume his story.

'Eventually,' he said a few moments later, brushing crumbs from his beard, he found himself in Streaneshalch which, as I explained earlier, was the name for Whitby back then. He lived simply and alone for a time, until one day when he found companionship in the most unexpected form.'

'Ooh,' Sky said, her eyes like saucers. 'Who was that?'

'Walking along the shore one night he found a young woman, washed up and exhausted on the sand. He spoke to

her, but she was unable to reply, and fearing she would die if he left her there, he took her back to his hut to care for her.’

He took another bite of quiche at that point which was frustrating. A few of us took the opportunity to grab more food while we waited. Even Sirius seemed to have been hooked on Emrick’s story.

‘She seemed unable to speak his language at first, but she was a quick learner, and bit by bit she managed to explain what had happened to her. Her story was quite extraordinary. The closest he could pronounce her name as was Aerwyna, and she was a mermaid who’d been driven out of her home by her family, after they’d discovered her friendship with a member of a rival mer family.’

‘A mermaid?’ Keely asked, puzzled. ‘Didn’t he spot her fish tail?’

‘When a mermaid arrives on dry land she reverts back to having two legs,’ Killian explained. ‘It’s only when she enters the water that she needs a fish tail after all. Don’t forget, the merfolk devolved from the Tuatha Dé Danaan, and started life with legs like ours. It’s only when our people were driven from the land by the humans and witches that they began to take other forms. The ones who became the merfolk, and retreated to underwater caverns, developed the fish tail and gills that helped them swim and breathe. When they’re not under the sea they don’t need those things, so they revert to having legs and breathing through their noses and mouths. Simple.’

‘Yeah,’ Keely said, clearly stunned. ‘Simple.’

‘To get back to Aerwyna,’ Merlin said, ‘when she’d tried to join her friend’s tribe, she was sent away, unwelcome. She couldn’t stay under the sea with no family to support her. A lone mermaid is vulnerable to all sorts of dangers. So she kept swimming, afraid to stop, until she washed up exhausted on Whitby’s beach.’

‘The merfolk were terrible fighters in those days,’ Aidan agreed. ‘Always falling out among themselves. It took them a long time to realise that, with all the other dangers around

them, it made more sense to band together and present a united front.’

‘How do you know that?’ Sky gasped.

Killian frowned. ‘Have you not listened to anything I just said? The fae are descended from the Tuatha Dé Danaan. They’re our people. We know our history.’

‘Sorry,’ Sky said, and Jethro gave her a reassuring squeeze to make her feel better.

‘Anyway,’ Emrick said, having swallowed the last piece of quiche, ‘about six months after her arrival, a second mermaid arrived on the shore. She was Morvoren, Aerwyna’s friend from the other family, and she’d been trying to track Aerwyna all that time. She was on the point of death, but Merlin and Aerwyna took her in and cared for her until she was well again. Neither of them could return to the sea, so they decided to make their home in Streaneshalch and devote their lives to helping other magical creatures who might need help. Other mermaids and sea creatures, various other forms of fae, witches, shifters, werewolves, whoever and whatever they were, there was always a place of sanctuary for them with Morvoren and Aerwyna.’

‘Shifters and werewolves?’ Sky asked nervously.

‘Not vampires?’ I asked, unable to suppress the sarcasm.

Emrick laughed. ‘Vampires?’

‘I knew you were having me on!’ I said, giving the O’Briens an accusing stare.

‘They exist,’ Aidan said, calmly spearing a tomato on his fork.

‘Of course they do,’ Emrick said. ‘I just meant you wouldn’t find vampires seeking out sanctuary with fae, or anyone else for that matter. Vampires tend to stick to their own kind. Even if they didn’t, can you imagine two vulnerable mermaids taking a vampire into their care? There are boundaries, even for a place of sanctuary.’

‘Sanctuary,’ Keely said thoughtfully. ‘That’s where you said Laragh went after Ashen died.’ She sat up, excitement in her eyes. ‘A sanctuary in the north of England that’s been there for over fifteen hundred years! Is that where you meant? Is that where you sent Laragh?’

‘Was it?’ I asked hopefully. Finally I might be getting some more answers.

‘Sort of,’ he said. ‘But it’s very different now. You see, Merlin stayed with Aerwyna and Morvoren for a few years, helping them to establish their new life, and aiding them in welcoming those magical beings who needed refuge. But he couldn’t stay there forever. He had to move on because fate had other plans for him. Sadly, that meant Aerwyna and Morvoren were left to fend themselves. Then, many years later, something wonderful and amazing happened.’

‘What?’ Iliana asked eagerly.

‘Aye, go on. Surprise us,’ said Castor.

‘In 657AD, a monastery was founded on the headland at Whitby by Hild, the daughter of a Northumbrian nobleman,’ Emrick said.

‘Hild?’ I said eagerly. ‘I just saw her name and image on Caedmon’s cross in St Mary’s churchyard.’

‘That’s right. Caedmon was a protégé of Hild and is credited with being the first English poet.’

‘There were five faces around her,’ I said, remembering. ‘She carried a staff, and there were gulls by her side. And,’ I added, puzzled, ‘she was standing on ammonites. What’s that all about?’

‘Hild is reputed to have driven snakes from Whitby and turned them to stone. People believed that ammonites were the headless stone snakes,’ Emrick explained. ‘It’s rumoured that seagulls either refuse to fly over Whitby Abbey at all or dip their wings in honour of the memory of St Hilda, as she’s also known. As for the five faces—they’re her most famous scholars. Hild was a great teacher, as well as being extremely kind and tolerant. Which is why,’ he added, ‘Aerwyna and

Morvoren went to her for help, and she took them under her wing, helping them to establish the well-run sanctuary it still is today.’

‘What?’ There were gasps of astonishment around the table. ‘An abbess? She cared for magical beings?’

‘As far as Hild was concerned, magical beings were God’s creatures, and all God’s creatures were welcome,’ he explained. ‘Aerwyna and Morvoren were devoted to her, and called her Mother, as did almost everyone who knew her. They therefore became her “Daughters”. The Daughters of Hild. Under her patronage two Daughters became seven, and the sanctuary flourished.

‘Naturally, Hilda’s lifespan was a fraction of the merfolk’s, and she died in November 680AD. But the Daughters of Hild continued in her honour, and the sanctuary is still helping those in need, even though the abbey itself has been rebuilt and destroyed, and seen some terrible times and shocking adversity—Viking raids, the dissolution of the monasteries, damage during the war... Needless to say, as time passed and people changed, there was no place for the sanctuary or magical beings near the abbey building, so the Daughters found other places to live and continue their work, while staying as close to both the sea and the abbey as they could.’

‘And Morvoren and Aerwyna are still running the place?’ I asked, astounded.

‘Don’t be an eejit.’ Killian laughed. ‘The merfolk might have long lives, but not that long.’

‘As I said, there are seven Daughters of Hild now,’ Emrick explained. ‘As one passes away another mermaid sister replaces her, each taking the name of her predecessor. The merfolk adore and revere Hild, and are loyal to her memory, considering it an honour to serve as a Daughter at the sanctuary. There’s always a Sister Agnes in charge. It’s she I went to visit today, and when I said she had gone home, I meant to the sea. The Daughters each take a week or so away each year to refresh themselves in their natural environment



and visit their families. Naturally, I wasn't inclined to try to follow her there.'

'Well,' said Iliana, 'I can't blame you for that. That's an amazing story.'

'And so Laragh was given sanctuary with the Daughters of Hild, and Trinity and Lowen were born there,' Keely said. 'And that's why Celeste saw that vision of you and Mum talking about Sister Agnes, and how she'd be able to tell them something about their birth. But what I don't understand is why you didn't explain this to Lowen ages ago. He could have gone to Whitby himself and seen Sister Agnes, and then there'd have been no need for Trinity to go there undercover and unprotected.'

She was right, and we all turned to Emrick, accusations on our faces. Sirius's eyes were dark with anger.

'So go on. What excuse can you possibly have for not telling Lowen?' he demanded.

Emrick sighed. 'I know it looks bad, but there were reasons. We weren't ready... There are things you don't yet understand.'

'Who's we?' I demanded. 'What don't we understand?'

'If I could tell you I would,' he said. 'I gave my word. But believe me, the truth will be revealed to you very soon now. Just have a little more patience.' He looked round at us all. 'And when that truth is revealed, please be kind.'

'To you?' Sirius asked scornfully.

'No, not to me. Just, try to have some empathy and understanding.'

'Well,' Aidan leaned back in his chair and blew out his cheeks, 'I can't believe the sanctuary has been there all that time and even we weren't aware of it. How do people find sanctuary there if it's so secret?'

'For those who need it, the sanctuary will be revealed to them,' Emrick said. 'And for those who don't, they'll never find it no matter how hard they look. The place has faced

many dangers over the centuries. The Daughters have learned to adapt and protect. Their special fae magic guards them even from Guardian detection.'

'It certainly does,' Hector said. 'I'd no idea it existed. Well, let's just hope Sister Agnes knows what happened to Trinity, or at least can give us some ideas about where she might be.'

'In the meantime,' Celeste said gloomily, 'we're still left with the problem of Blaise St Clair, who right now is languishing on Peloryon Island.'

Sirius's eyebrows lifted in shock. 'What did you say?'

Celeste looked aghast. 'Oh my word, Sirius, I'm so sorry! I completely forgot you didn't know.'

'Well, someone had better fill me in then,' he said, through gritted teeth.

Briefly, Iliana explained what had happened earlier that day, and how Hector, Harley, and Romy had escorted John back to the island for safe keeping.

'You're letting him stay there?' Sirius demanded incredulously. 'Have you forgotten that we've been living there? Me and Trinity. We've been so happy, and it finally felt as if we were starting to heal, and now—now all this! He doesn't get to contaminate our special place. If it weren't for him none of this would have happened!'

'Sirius, calm down, please,' his mother urged him, but it was too late.

Sirius had already gone.

Emrick gave a heavy sigh. 'I'd better go after him. The last thing Ewella needs right now is a scene, and I'm sure Romy could do without it, too.' He turned to Killian. 'Are you and Harley staying on the island or are you going to remain here at Castle Lodge for now?'

'I'll come with you,' Killian said. 'Make sure Sirius is okay and ask Harley what she wants to do. Will you be okay, Aidan, or do you want to come with us?'

Aidan gave him a resigned look. ‘I’d better be getting home,’ he said, a note of regret in his voice. ‘You know what they’re like, and it’s even worse now. They’re keeping close tabs on me until this wedding is done.’

He got to his feet and bowed to Iliana. ‘Thank you so much for your hospitality, Mrs St Clair. It was a delicious feast, worthy of Mammy Ryan. Not,’ he added with a grin, ‘that I’ll be telling her that. Now I’ll bid you a good evening. Killian, if you need my help again, just holler. I’ll be glad of an excuse to leave Ballydraiocht.’

With that, he also vanished.

Emrick and Killian quickly followed, and the rest of us sat at the table, trying to digest not only all that food, but the facts we’d just been given. Eventually, Iliana and Castor cleared the table in their usual fashion, and Celeste and Hector said goodnight and went upstairs, while Sky and Jethro headed back to 22 Hornbeam Close, their large, modern house on the edge of town.

Keely took my hand.

‘Come on,’ she said softly. ‘You’ve had an awful shock, and it’s been a heck of a long day. Time for bed.’

I wanted to argue, as there still seemed so much to do and say, and I couldn’t help feeling I should still be out there, searching for Trinity.

But Keely was right. It had been a long day. Frankly, I was shattered. I squeezed her hand in agreement, and together we headed up the stairs to our bedroom, Frey and Runa galloping ahead of us as usual.



## Chapter 9

### *Trinity*

What I wished, more than anything, was that I knew what time it was. There were no windows in this room, and no way of telling if it was day or night outside. As I had no idea how long I'd been unconscious I couldn't possibly judge how many hours or days had passed since I'd arrived here, but I thought that, surely, someone had noticed I was missing by now?

The only way I could keep track of time passing was by the arrival of meals. I'd been gifted another two meals since that first surprise one, but since both consisted of cheese sandwiches, chocolate cake, and bottles of water, I had no idea if they were supposed to be lunch, dinner, or breakfast. Come to that, I had no idea if I was only being fed once a day. I could have been here ages.

'Good job I'm not dairy or gluten intolerant,' I muttered, hoping the cheese and cake were vegetarian. There was no one to ask, and I was too hungry to leave them.

When I'd last been outside it had been a hot sunny day, but it was chilly and damp in this room, and there was no way of knowing if the sun still shone or if it was pouring down with rain.

Having the light on constantly was a comfort, in a way, but made it even harder to sleep.

What I was most grateful for—even more grateful than for the food to be honest—was that, not long after the old woman had left me, a small cubicle had appeared against the wall, within my reach. Of course I'd investigated and had been beside myself with joy to find she'd provided me with toilet facilities. I mean, she was a vile kidnapper, but she was a

considerate vile kidnapper. I wouldn't be leaving her five stars on Trip Advisor, but I had to admit it could have been worse.

I thought about Sirius, wondering if he'd realised someone had taken me yet, or if he thought I was still having a snoop around Whitby, looking for the mysterious Sister Agnes.

My heart ached for him, and I wondered if I'd ever see him again. Who knew how long this madwoman intended to keep me here? Maybe, if I didn't tell her who I was and why I wanted to see Sister Agnes, she'd never let me go. Maybe she'd just leave me here to rot.

But surely, if you intended to leave someone to rot, you didn't give them chocolate cake and good quality quilted toilet paper?

I sighed, realising this could go on for a long time and I had to find a way of keeping myself occupied. I thought about the book I was currently working on with a client and tried to busy my brain with structural edits—not easy when the only copy of the story you have is in your memory.

I heard a rattling sound from the top of the stairs and looked up to see the old woman rushing in. She closed the door behind her and hobbled down the stairs, looking flustered and worried.

'Oh dear,' she said. 'Oh dear, oh dear. This was never supposed to happen.'

She dropped onto the sofa beside me and put her head in her hands. I sat quite still, not sure what to think about this unexpected development.

'Thanks for the toilet,' I said, hoping it would cheer her up.

To my astonishment she looked up at me and tears were rolling down her cheeks.

'What's happened?' I asked, dread unfurling in the pit of my stomach. All I could think was something had happened to Sirius. Had he come looking for me? Had she tried to stop him? Had she killed him?

‘You must be brave,’ she said, taking my hand in hers. Her skin felt cold and clammy. Not pleasant at all. It took all my willpower not to wrench my hand free. The last thing I needed was for her to storm out of here without telling me what I should be brave about.

‘Who... Is someone hurt?’

She nodded, then shook her head, which was extremely confusing.

‘Not hurt, no. Oh my dear,’ she said sadly. ‘Zephyr Ambrose is dead.’

‘What?’ The world seemed to rock on its axis. Zephyr? How could he possibly be dead? He was the leader of the High Council of Witches, for goodness’ sake. What would we all do without him? And how come this mad old fae woman was sad about it? I’d have thought she’d have been glad. Perhaps she would be on my side after all if I just told her who I was? I grabbed hold of those crumbs of comfort and held onto them tightly.

‘How did it happen?’ I whispered, thinking I was sure he hadn’t been ill. We’d have noticed that, wouldn’t we? Maybe it was a heart attack?

‘Murdered,’ she said, squeezing my hand tighter. ‘By the Pendragons.’

I couldn’t prevent myself from wrenching my hand away from hers. ‘No!’

‘I’m so sorry. What a tragedy this is, not only for Zephyr but for his family, too. But even worse than that, can you imagine what effect this is going to have? The witches will be clamouring for revenge. They’ll declare war on the fae if we’re not careful. Of course, that’s just what the Pendragons want. Oh, what to do, what to do?’

‘I need to go home,’ I said tearfully. ‘I need to be with my family. There’s something I should tell you. I’m Trinity St Clair.’ The Linnet Pendragon bit could definitely wait. I wasn’t going to risk that until I knew how the land lay.

‘I know,’ she said sorrowfully. ‘I know who you are. What a terrible mess this is.’

‘You know?’ I asked, bewildered. ‘But if you knew... Look, I don’t understand what the hell is going on here, but you must let me go. You can’t keep me here forever.’

‘That was never my intention,’ she assured me, and my heart lifted. ‘It was just bad timing all round, and I can’t let you go just yet. Can I? Oh dear, this has all gone terribly wrong. I’ve made a dreadful mistake, and I never meant to, you know. I thought I was helping. I thought I was protecting her... Well, there’s only one thing I can do.’

‘Let me go?’ I asked hopefully.

She stared at me for a moment. ‘But what if you tell?’

‘I won’t tell anyone,’ I reassured her hastily. ‘I promise, I won’t say a word about you kidnapping me.’

‘Kidnapping you? I haven’t kidnapped you! I’m just keeping you safe until she returns.’

‘Until who returns?’ I asked, baffled.

‘Sister Agnes, of course.’

‘So you do know her?’ I said crossly. ‘Why all the cloak and dagger stuff then? What the heck’s going on here?’

‘I’ll get into awful trouble,’ she said, rocking backwards and forwards. ‘If they knew they’d be here right now. I might get thrown out, sent back. The shame of it. I couldn’t stand it. What should I do?’

I shook my head helplessly, not having the faintest idea what she was talking about so unable to offer any solutions.

Suddenly she stood up and nodded determinedly. ‘I must go to her right now. That’s the only answer,’ she said. ‘I’ll bring her here and she can decide what happens—to you and to me.’

I swallowed nervously. ‘What happens?’

‘It’s all I can do,’ she said sadly. ‘Our fate is in her hands.’



‘Whose hands?’ I asked desperately. ‘Who are you talking about?’

She looked down at me in surprise. ‘Why, Sister Agnes, of course. I must go to her and bring her back here. She can decide what to do next. Yes, that’s what I’ll do.’

I expected she’d head back up the stairs, but to my surprise she walked to the far wall and opened the heavy wooden door. So it wasn’t locked then.

A strong smell of ozone hit me, and I heard the sea much louder now. Where on earth was I?

‘I don’t know how long I’ll be,’ she admitted, ‘but I promise I’ll be back. Try not to worry.’

With that she closed the door behind her, and I was alone in the room again. I kicked out angrily, hearing the chain rattle and feeling the heavy iron against my leg.

Now what?



# Chapter 10

## *Romy*

Warm sunlight rippling across my face woke me the next morning, and I smiled and stretched contentedly.

‘Good morning, darling. How are you feeling?’

My eyes snapped open as the memories of all the awful things that had happened yesterday flooded back. I was in my old bedroom at Peloryon House, with Keely’s and Harley’s empty beds a reminder of how alone I was feeling. Mum was standing by the window, having just opened the curtains. There was a sympathetic look in her eyes as she surveyed me.

I sat up in bed, horrified that I’d managed to sleep. It felt disloyal. I should have been tossing and turning all night, worrying about Johnnie, and I’d honestly thought I would be. It seemed, however, that I’d fallen asleep the minute my head touched the pillow.

‘How is he?’ I asked, dreading the response.

‘Still asleep,’ she reassured me. ‘Don’t worry about him. I wouldn’t wake him until you were ready. I think he’ll need to see you this morning, don’t you?’

I nodded, tears filling my eyes at the thought of him waking up to this nightmare.

‘What am I going to say to him, Mum? How do I explain?’

She sat on the bed beside me and took my hand. ‘You’ll find the right words,’ she promised me. ‘I know this seems like the end of the world right now, Romy, but things will get better. They always do.’

‘You know as well as I do,’ I said, ‘that the only possible outcome to this is Hector stripping Johnnie’s memory again. They’ll give him a whole new identity, won’t they? And I’ll lose him. I’ll lose him forever. He won’t be allowed anywhere near the St Clair family. Mum,’ I gazed up at her, my eyes blurry with tears, ‘I can’t do it. I can’t let him go. I love him so much.’

‘I know, darling, I know.’ She gently wiped my tears away. ‘But he’s not John Ford, and that’s what you’ve got to understand. He’s Blaise St Clair. John Ford is just a suit of clothes he’s wearing right now. You know what Blaise did. The trouble he caused.’

‘But he doesn’t remember!’

She sighed. ‘Now’s not the time to go into this. Go downstairs and eat some breakfast. We have two more guests. Killian and Sirius got here last night after you’d gone to bed.’

I frowned. ‘I didn’t hear them arrive.’

‘No, well.’ She gave me a guilty smile. ‘I might have given you something to help you sleep. Good job I did really. Sirius was in a foul mood, gunning for John. He’s blaming him for everything that’s gone wrong, and especially for Trinity’s disappearance.’

‘That had nothing to do with John!’

‘Well...’ She shrugged. ‘In a way it did, because if Blaise hadn’t travelled through time and stirred up all the old resentments and fears, maybe the Pendragons wouldn’t have felt bold enough to make their move. I don’t know where this is going to end, I really don’t. Anyway, I managed to calm Sirius down, and then Emrick got back, thank goodness, and he persuaded Sirius to go to bed and get some sleep. He was exhausted, poor boy. I’m afraid he’ll want to see John today, though. I just hope his mood’s improved.’

‘He’ll have to get through me first,’ I muttered. I gave her a hopeful look. ‘Did Emrick manage to get any information about Trinity from Sister Agnes?’

‘I’m afraid not. Sister Agnes is away right now,’ she said briefly, getting to her feet. ‘Go downstairs now, Romy. Breakfast is nearly ready. Harley’s making it. Ooh, and some good news at last. Harley and Killian have decided to stay on the island for the foreseeable, rather than move into Castle Lodge. Isn’t that marvellous?’

Frankly, I couldn’t have cared less if Harley and Killian had decided to move into Buckingham Palace and evict the King and Queen in the process. I had bigger things on my mind.

Sirius, Harley, and Killian were already eating breakfast when I got downstairs. There was toast, accompanied by dishes of jam, marmalade, and butter, soft boiled eggs, yoghurt, fruit, and croissants to choose from. Harley and Killian smiled at me and said good morning, but Sirius glared at me as if I’d committed some terrible crime.

‘Is it true?’ he demanded.

I slipped into my place at the table and took the plate of toast Harley offered me.

‘Good morning to you, too, Sirius. Is what true?’ I asked, tilting my chin in defiance, preparing for a fight.

‘Is it true that you’re standing by Blaise St Clair, even though you know full well what he did and all the trouble he caused?’

‘Sirius,’ Killian said heavily, ‘this isn’t Romy’s fault. Don’t be bringing your issues to the table now.’

‘My issues?’ Sirius asked. ‘You mean Trinity?’ He leaned towards me. ‘You do realise that if not for Blaise’s actions the Pendragons wouldn’t have felt emboldened enough to stir up trouble again? Zephyr would probably still be alive, and Trinity would be here, right now, with me.’

‘And you do realise,’ Killian said to him, ‘that if Blaise hadn’t broken the time travelling clause in the peace treaty, there’d probably have been no need for another Great Guardian, so Lowen and Trinity might never have been born in the first place?’

Sirius looked as startled as I felt, and Harley looked puzzled, too.

‘What do you mean?’ she asked.

‘Well, isn’t it obvious? The Great Guardian is born when we have need of him. If Blaise hadn’t crossed time and threatened the peace between fae and witches there’d have been no need for him. Events unfolded that ensured Laragh and Ashen met and fell in love, purely to ensure the arrival of the Great Guardian. You wouldn’t have Trinity if not for Blaise St Clair’s actions, so think on that.’

Sirius gaped at him. ‘So you’re telling me I should be grateful to him?’

Killian waved his hand impatiently. ‘Did I say that? What I’m saying is, life unfolds as it’s meant to. In a way, Blaise is as much a victim of fate as the rest of us. What he did, he was destined to do. It’s the way it is. Kicking against it is pointless—like trying to plait sand.’

‘You can think like that if you wish,’ Sirius said. ‘Personally, I want to get hold of him and throttle him.’

‘I really don’t think that would be such a good idea.’ Emrick strolled into the kitchen, shaking his head slightly. ‘How are you feeling this morning, Sirius? Did you sleep well?’

‘I took some time to fall asleep,’ Sirius told him. ‘I managed it in the end by counting all the ways I could kill Blaise St Clair.’

‘No one will harm a head on that man’s hair,’ Emrick said calmly. ‘He is our guest here, and we will take good care of him.’

‘Guest? You mean prisoner,’ I said bitterly.

Emrick sat at the table and gave me a look of compassion. ‘Right now, he’s staying here for his own protection, and until the Guardians decide what must be done with him. But he’s free to move around the house and garden, and I promise you, he’ll be treated with kindness and respect.’

‘Respect?’ Sirius spluttered.

‘With kindness and respect,’ Emrick repeated firmly. ‘Sirius, there are bigger things at play here than you can possibly imagine. You must control yourself when Blaise comes down to breakfast.’

‘You’re letting him come down to breakfast?’ Harley asked, giving Sirius a nervous look.

‘Ewella has gone to fetch him. Might I suggest we are civil towards him? He’s had a terrible shock and, since he has no memory of his former life, it would be cruel to continue flinging accusations at him when he has no means to defend himself.’

‘And can you please all call him John?’ I pleaded. ‘He doesn’t know who Blaise is, and to keep insisting he’s another person is only going to frighten him even more.’

‘Quite right, Romy.’ Emrick smiled and offered me the teapot. ‘Have a drink and steady your nerves. I promise you, everything will be all right.’

It was odd but somehow I believed him. He had that way about him. Dark eyes that seemed full of mischief and fun one minute, and wisdom beyond his years the next. And that lovely, deep Welsh accent helped. There was something incredibly reassuring about him.

I poured myself a cup of tea then buttered my toast. We all ate in silence until the kitchen door opened and Mum walked in, trailing a terrified looking Johnnie behind her.

Emrick got to his feet immediately and put his arm around John’s shoulders. ‘There you are! Take a seat and help yourself to breakfast.’

He directed Johnnie into the chair opposite mine, and my heart broke all over again as my lovely boyfriend raised his eyes to mine and I saw the fear and confusion in them. How could anyone think this kind, gentle, caring man would be capable of such destruction and selfishness? It didn’t make sense to me.

‘Are you all right?’ I whispered, mindful of the poisonous looks Sirius was shooting him.

He didn’t reply. He merely stared at me, as if silently begging me for some explanation—or, better yet, to make me take all this away.

‘Cup of tea?’ Emrick said, kindly pouring it for him and placing it in front of him. ‘Would you like something to eat? You were asleep a long time. You must be hungry.’

‘I expect Trinity’s very hungry, too,’ Sirius said bitterly. ‘If she’s still alive, that is.’

Emrick ignored him. ‘Toast, John? Croissant? How about an egg?’

John swallowed. ‘I’m not hungry.’

‘I don’t believe that,’ Emrick said heartily.

‘You must eat, John,’ Mum said softly. ‘You don’t want to make yourself ill.’

He looked up at her. ‘I think I already am ill. I think I’m at home in our cottage in Bartonbrook in some sort of fever. None of this can be real, can it? It’s an illusion. A dream. I’m delirious, aren’t I?’

He turned back to me. ‘Tell me this isn’t real, Romy. Please.’

‘I wish I could,’ I said. ‘Unfortunately, it’s all too real. I’m so sorry, Johnnie.’

‘Who are you people?’ he asked, staring round at us all. His eyes fixed back on me. ‘Who are you? I thought you were Romy, my Romy. A counsellor. A daughter. A sister. A normal, lovely, kind, gentle person who I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. I asked you to marry me! We had plans. I don’t even know you at all, do I?’

Sirius spluttered with laughter as Harley reached over and gave my hand a sympathetic squeeze.

‘*You* don’t know *her*? That’s rich.’

‘Sirius!’ Emrick said sharply. ‘Enough.’



‘Enough? Are you honestly telling me you believe there isn’t a part of him that remembers? That the sly, devious, deceitful, conniving Blaise St Clair isn’t lying in wait, ready to pounce?’

‘Who is this Blaise St Clair you keep talking about?’ John cried in despair. ‘You keep telling me I’m him, but I’m not. You’ve got this all wrong. I don’t know who you people are or what you want, but you’ve got the wrong man. I’m just John Ford, a family support worker from Cumbria. Why do you keep persisting in this crazy story?’

‘John, dear,’ Mum said, sitting down next to me, ‘forget all this for now and eat something. Please. You need to keep up your strength.’

‘For what? Torture?’

Sirius gave him a humourless smile. ‘It’s an idea.’

‘No one is going to hurt you, John,’ Emrick promised.

‘Then what am I doing here?’ John demanded. ‘Wherever here is...’

‘Here is Peloryon Island,’ Harley explained. ‘It’s off the south coast of Cornwall, and it belongs to Mum.’

‘You never told me your mum owned an island,’ he said to me, an accusation in his tone.

‘Well, she didn’t,’ I said uncomfortably.

‘Until it was left to her in a witch’s will, and we learned Ewella was actually the Queen of Lyonesse,’ Sirius said smugly.

John clearly had no words for this. He closed his eyes for a moment and murmured something under his breath. I had a feeling he was praying that when he opened his eyes again we’d all have vanished, and he’d be back in our cottage in Cumbria.

‘Sirius, I really think if you can’t be kind to him you should leave the table,’ Mum said crossly. ‘I know you’re worried sick about Trinity, but there’s no reason to take out your anxieties and frustrations on John.’

‘But he’s—’

‘An innocent man,’ she said. ‘John Ford is an innocent man. Blaise St Clair was not so innocent, but he’s not here right now, whatever you’d like to believe. And unless or until he returns, I suggest you treat this man here with compassion and kindness. I thought better of you than this, I really did.’

Sirius hesitated, then snatched up a croissant and headed out of the kitchen.

‘Well,’ Mum said brightly, ‘that’s that sorted. Now, eat your breakfasts. We don’t want all this lovely food that Harley’s prepared to go to waste.’



# Chapter 11

## *Romy*

After breakfast I asked if John and I could have some time alone.

‘Of course,’ Emrick said. ‘Why don’t you go for a stroll around the garden? It’s a bright, sunny day out there, and I’m sure you could both do with some fresh air.’

Johnnie didn’t say anything, but I agreed it was a good idea, and I led my poor bewildered boyfriend out into the garden, hoping we wouldn’t encounter Sirius.

The garden at Peloryon House seemed to be bursting with life. There were roses of all colours, flowering shrubs, and so many things to eat that we would never have gone hungry if we’d been stranded here in July instead of April.

Mum had already picked and dried some of the herbs, and she was planning a massive harvest of other crops later today. I’d never known her so excited about a garden. When she lived at our house in Northumberland she rarely stepped outside the door, and our garden had been little more than a lawn with a paved seating area. Then again, she’d been scared of her own shadow in those days. I suppose she’d felt safer indoors.

Dry-mouthed with nerves, I led John to a bench at the far end of the garden, away from the house, and we sat down. He looked so depressed it broke my heart, but I knew I was going to have to tell him the truth about my family, and why it was he’d been brought here.

‘Was it all a lie?’

His question took me by surprise.

‘Was what a lie?’

‘You, me, us.’ He spoke in a flat tone, as if he had no fight left in him.

‘Why on earth would you think that?’

‘Why?’ He turned to me and gave a bitter laugh. ‘I don’t know who you are. I don’t know what your family is, but it’s not normal, is it? And worse than any of that, I can’t seem to get through to you all that you’ve got the wrong man. Whoever this Blaise is that you keep going on about, I’m not him! But you obviously don’t believe me, and all this time you’ve been keeping an eye on me, guarding me, planning to take me prisoner and do who knows what to me.’

‘Johnnie...’ I reached for his hand, but he snatched it away from me.

‘Johnnie? Is that who I am, Romy? Make up your mind because, quite honestly, I don’t know who’s more confused here—you or me.’

He looked so anguished that my eyes filled with tears.

‘I’m so sorry,’ I whispered. ‘This is horrible.’

‘Then why did you do it?’ he asked. ‘Why did you lie to me all this time, build this fake relationship, let me believe we had a future?’

‘I thought we did!’ The tears spilled down my cheeks as I begged him to believe me. ‘I never lied to you. I loved you. I still do. I had no idea you were Blaise St Clair. I found out the moment you did, please believe that.’

‘But you’re not who you say you are,’ he said sadly. ‘Are you?’

I hesitated. ‘I am,’ I said at last. ‘But my family—they’re different.’

‘So I gathered. But are you telling me you’re not like them?’

‘I’m not! I’m really not!’ At least I could be truthful about that. ‘The thing is...’ I paused, taking a deep breath. Could I really tell him all this? Was he ready to hear it? But then again,

hadn't we got past the point of no return now? He deserved the truth after everything he'd been through recently.

'The thing is,' I said, not daring to look at him, 'my family are witches, but I have no magic. The witch gene skipped me, for some reason. I'm the only one. Harley and Keely are witches. Dad was a powerful St Clair witch; Mum came from a long and distinguished line of witches...' I hesitated but ploughed on. 'She's descended from Olwen, sister of Gwynnever who was the wife of Arthur, and she's the Queen of Lyonesse.'

John laughed. 'Of course she is! Why are you telling me all this rubbish? Arthur! Gwynnever! Is this a joke?'

'I wish it were,' I said fervently. 'I'd give anything to be living a normal life with no complications, back home in our cottage in Bartonbrook.' I turned to find him watching me closely. 'We were happy there, weren't we? Believe me, all that was real. True. Our life together meant everything to me. I love you so much, whoever you are and whatever you did in the past. I wouldn't lie to you, Johnnie.'

'But by your own admission you've been lying to me the entire time we've been together,' he pointed out.

'I wanted to tell you,' I said sadly. 'I really did. But how do you tell the man you love that your family are witches? Where do you even start? Would you have believed me? And if you did believe me I was so afraid that you'd leave me once you knew the truth. I've been in agony over this ever since we met.'

He was silent for a few moments, staring at the garden gate and the land beyond. I wondered if he was planning to escape. He'd have a shock if he tried.

'What's Lyonesse?' he asked suddenly. 'It rings a bell, but I can't think where from.'

'It's what I once believed was a mythical island between Penzance and the Scilly Isles. Legend says that unicorns grazed there, the faery folk lived there happily alongside witches, the skies and landscape were full of glorious colours

that we have no names for. It was a paradise of peace and unity and harmony. Then Mordred and Arthur brought their battle there and both died on its shores. Mordred was buried on Lyonesse by his aunt, Morgan le Fae, while Arthur was taken away and laid to rest on the Isle of Avalon. Then Lyonesse sank beneath the waves. Except it didn't. It simply returned to the Otherworld.'

He was looking at me as if I'd gone mad. 'And you say your mother is the Queen of this place? You can't seriously believe it ever existed?'

'But it did,' I said softly. 'It still does, and part of it's returned to our world.'

'Rubbish!'

'It's true, Johnnie,' I assured him. 'You're sitting here right now, and here is Lyonesse. And all those things I've just told you about—I've seen them for myself, when the veil lifted on Beltane.'

He clearly didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He shook his head slowly.

'You told me this place was Peloryon Island,' he said accusingly.

'It is. Peloryon Island's the name it has now anyway,' I said. 'But this small island is a part of what was once the mighty land of Lyonesse. I'm not lying to you, I swear.'

He put his head in his hands. 'I don't know whether you're insane or trying to drive *me* insane,' he said at last. 'And this Blaise St Clair man? Is he another relative of yours? Because that's awkward, given we've been living together for months.'

'Blaise is my twelve times great uncle,' I said, realising that sounded so ridiculous that I had no chance of making him believe it. Even so, I had to tell him the truth.

'So by your reckoning, *I'm* your twelve times great uncle,' he pointed out.

I felt quite nauseated at the thought and stared at him in dumb misery.

‘Well, this is one messed up fantasy you’re having here,’ he said bitterly. ‘What is this, Game of Thrones? Please, do continue. I can’t wait to hear what you’ve dreamed up next.’

I hated to hear that tone in his voice. He didn’t sound like John when he spoke like that. Then again, who could blame him?

‘He lived in a town called Castle Clair in North Yorkshire, and in 1669 he travelled forwards in time by three hundred and fifty years, where he lied and betrayed my cousins—especially Celeste—and almost killed her brother-in-law, while attempting to kill her now husband, Hector.’

I watched him closely as I told him the facts, but there wasn’t a flicker of recognition in his eyes. I knew he’d fooled my cousins about losing his memory before, but I would have put money on him not remembering a single detail of this.

‘A Guardian removed his memories of Blaise St Clair and gave him a new life, a new identity. They made him John Ford and placed him under the care of another Guardian.’ I paused. ‘Simon.’

‘Which makes no sense whatsoever, because I’ve known Simon since we were at school together,’ John said triumphantly.

‘False memories,’ I said, hating to burst his bubble. ‘They were planted in your mind by the Guardian to enable you to live a whole new life. And you did, Johnnie, you really did! You turned it around completely. You’ve spent so many years working to help other people, because deep down inside you’re good. I know you are. Blaise did a lot of bad things, but that’s not you. I know it isn’t.’

‘I’m not Blaise,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘If I was, there’d be something. Some memory. All the stuff you’ve just told me—it’s like you’re telling me the plot of a book or a film or something. It means nothing to me. You’ve either got the



wrong man, or you're all completely mad. Either way, I suppose you and I are finished.'

I wanted to tell him we weren't finished, and that as far as I was concerned we never would be, but I couldn't. The truth was, any time now the Guardians would arrive to remove all his memories of John Ford, and then I'd never see him again.

I gulped down the tears as the man I loved with all my heart got to his feet and walked away from me. Clearly, he had nothing else to say, and the truth was, neither did I.

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I don't know how long I sat there crying, but eventually I was aware of a low murmur of voices and then a cry of sympathy. Before I had time to wipe my tears away Harley and Keely were either side of me on the bench, their arms around me as they hugged me tightly.

'What are you doing here?' I asked Keely when they eventually let me go. 'Is Lowen with you?' I sat up straight, suddenly afraid. 'Hector's not here, is he? He hasn't—'

'It's just me, don't worry. I left Lowen at Castle Lodge. Oh, Romy, I'm so sorry,' Keely said guiltily. 'If it's any consolation, we've just seen John, and he looks as heartbroken as you.'

'Don't give up, Romy,' Harley said fiercely. 'If you love each other you can make this work. Look at me and Killian! Don't let them take him away from you.'

'She's right,' Keely said. 'We're so sorry we brought him here. We should have thought what would happen. We should have thought about what it would do to you. But we were scared, Romy. We were terrified he'd hurt you. We'd heard so many bad things about him. We just wanted to protect you. You do believe that, don't you?'

Even though I wished with all my heart that they'd left well alone, I did believe that they'd acted out of love for me. I could hardly hate them for that.

'I know,' I managed. 'But to me he's just Johnnie, and this is breaking my heart.'

‘Maybe if we all stick up for him,’ Harley mused. ‘Maybe if we can get Emrick and Mum to stick up for him, too. I mean, they seemed to be on his side at breakfast, didn’t they? Emrick seemed to feel sorry for him. Surely, Hector will listen to us if we all gang together?’

‘Given Celeste’s history with Blaise?’ I asked doubtfully.

We sat, the three of us, mulling the problem over.

‘Hector does seem to listen to Emrick, though,’ Keely said thoughtfully. ‘And I’m sure I could get Lowen to put in a word, too.’

‘And Killian,’ Harley added.

‘But what if it’s not just down to Hector?’ I asked. ‘What if this involves a whole bunch of Guardians, and they make the decision to send John away to another new life? Could Hector disobey them? Somehow, I doubt it.’

‘Well, we have to try,’ Keely said firmly. ‘If Harley can defy the gods to marry the man she loves, you can defy a few old Guardians!’

I spluttered with laughter and hurriedly wiped my face on a piece of tissue Harley handed to me.

‘Don’t let them hear you talk about them like that,’ I warned. ‘Who knows where we’d all end up?’ I looked from one to the other of them. ‘Anyway,’ I said, ‘it’s lovely to see you two are friends again. I was worried about you.’

‘Oh...’ Keely looked shamefaced. ‘I’m so sorry about that ridiculous scene. I’ve already apologised to Harley. The truth is, I’m scared, and when I’m scared I lash out. I suppose I was so quick to defend Lowen because...’

Her voice trailed off and she nibbled her thumbnail.

‘Go on,’ I encouraged gently. ‘You can tell us anything. No judgement.’

‘Well, the fact is, I suppose I defended him because I felt guilty. You see, I’m having my doubts about him. Not who he is now,’ she added hastily. ‘And don’t think for one moment that I don’t love him to pieces, because I really do. But it’s

when he gets his magic back. I'm afraid he won't be Lowen any longer. And the thing we can't get away from is that he's a Pendragon, and Pendragons go one way or the other. What if he's more Mordred than Arthur? What then?

'That's a reasonable fear to have,' Harley said. 'But Excalibur was given to Lowen for a reason. And when he finds the Sword of Feidhlim—'

'*If* he finds the sword,' Keely reminded her. 'If it doesn't think he's worthy he won't find it, and then we'll know he's more Mordred, won't we?'

'But he won't reclaim his magic until he's found his sword,' I pointed out. 'So either way, you're safe. If the sword doesn't trust him it will remain hidden from him and Lowen will remain Lowen.'

'But,' Harley added, 'I really don't think that will happen. Emrick said Excalibur wouldn't have been given to him if whoever had it didn't believe in Lowen one hundred per cent. And besides, we know he finds the sword and becomes the Great Guardian because Killian's parents met him all those years ago, remember?'

'But can destiny be changed?' Keely asked with a shiver. 'What if something goes wrong? What if something happens to turn him to the dark side? What if—'

'Oh, Keely.' I sighed. 'You could tie yourself up in knots thinking like that. We have to trust in something, don't we? Everything's such a mess right now and I feel lost and confused and heartbroken. I must keep the faith in someone, and it seems to me that Wulfram Pendragon is my best option. He's going to make everything okay; I just know it.'

Keely's blue eyes glittered with tears. 'Oh, thank you, Romy,' she murmured, squeezing my hand. 'That's just what I wanted to hear.'

'I want to say sorry to you, too, Keely,' Harley said, sounding slightly embarrassed. 'I never meant to lump Lowen in with the other Pendragons, you know. You do know I have every faith in him really, don't you?'

Keely smiled. ‘Yeah, I know. Thank you.’

‘I guess the truth is, I’ve got my own worries about Killian,’ Harley confessed.

We both looked at her in surprise.

‘But you’ve just got back from your honeymoon,’ I said. ‘Shouldn’t it be all sweetness and light right now?’

Keely wrinkled her nose. ‘Don’t tell me he was a letdown in bed? That would be such a disappointment, especially given who he is. What he is. I mean, if a god can’t satisfy you between the sheets, who can?’

‘Oh, Keely!’ Harley laughed, and I nudged our youngest sister, thinking only Keely would say something like that. ‘It wasn’t that! No, that was perfect, trust me. It’s the other stuff. I think I’m only just starting to realise how different life as the wife of a Shining One is going to be.’

‘What do you mean? Did something happen?’ I asked.

Harley plucked nervously at a thread on her jeans. ‘We had a wonderful time,’ she said. ‘We were in a stunning hotel in Bermuda, can you believe? Honestly, it was gorgeous, and we had an amazing five days there.’

‘Lucky you,’ Keely said enviously. ‘So what went wrong?’

‘It didn’t go wrong exactly...’ Harley looked deeply uncomfortable. ‘It turned out that Killian hadn’t paid for any of it. Not a penny.’

‘You mean his parents paid for it?’ I asked, frowning. ‘Well, does it matter?’

‘Nobody paid for it,’ she said. ‘That’s the problem. He took us there with magic. We had full use of this incredible suite and all the hotel facilities and helped ourselves to the most delicious food you’ve ever tasted, and on the last day we were there I discovered he’d swindled the lot out of the hotel owners by using magic for everything.’

‘Oh.’ Keely and I exchanged glances. ‘Not good.’

‘Not good at all, but when I tried to explain that to him he got quite flustered and annoyed. He said I’d known who he was when I married him, and if I’d wanted an obedient little drone sitting in an office all day I’d married the wrong man.’

‘Oh gosh,’ I said. ‘How awful.’

‘He has got a point, though,’ Keely said.

As our eyes widened she added hastily, ‘Well, what I mean is, when I got together with Lowen I had no idea he would one day be Wulfram Pendragon, and poor Romy here definitely didn’t know John Ford was really the infamous Blaise St Clair. But you, Harley, you knew exactly what you were getting into.’

‘You were told repeatedly that Killian shouldn’t be with you because he was a Shining One, descended from the old gods, and that life with him would be very different to anything you’d ever known before. But you loved him enough to ignore all those warnings and marry him anyway. You can’t turn round now and say that you want him to change. It’s never going to happen, and if you try to force him to change he’ll end up very unhappy and resentful, and that will be the end of that.’

I gave Harley a nervous sideways glance, wondering if the argument was going to kick off again between them.

Fortunately, she gave a reluctant nod. ‘You’re right, of course. I just don’t know how to deal with it. And we never gave enough thought to what happens next, that’s the trouble. I mean, we were so focused on sneaking off to get married before anyone could stop us that we never gave a thought to our life beyond the wedding.’

‘What do you mean?’ Keely asked.

‘Well, even where we’re going to live. I assumed we’d be going back to Castle Lodge, but Killian had already decided we were going to stay on the island. I mean, I know he loves it here, but what about going forward? This is Mum’s home, and we can’t just freeload forever.’

‘Mum wouldn’t mind,’ I said. ‘I think she’d love it if we all moved here to be honest.’

‘That’s not the point, though,’ Harley said glumly. ‘Right now, I know all our energy must be focused on sorting out this mess with the fae and getting Wulfram in place. I get that, I really do. But after this is dealt with—and it will be dealt with at some point—what then? What’s our future?’

‘I could say the same,’ Keely said, sounding equally glum. ‘All I can think of right now is getting through whatever’s coming our way and making sure a war is averted. But after that... Jeez, I feel depressed now. What will Lowen and I do with ourselves?’

‘I haven’t even got the library any more,’ Harley said. ‘And I did love that job. I miss being there so much.’

‘Well, I don’t miss being a children’s entertainer,’ Keely said firmly. ‘But what will I do with myself? And Lowen’s never going back to being a solicitor, so what will he do? What do you do after saving the world? Take a job frying chips? Work on a building site? We haven’t even got a place to live, because we can’t stay at Castle Lodge once all this is done, and there’s no way I’m going back to the wilds of Northumberland. You are lucky, Romy. You’ve got your own little cottage and a thriving business of your own.’

I could hardly believe she’d just said that. ‘Lucky? Don’t you think I’d give anything I had to have John back for good? You two might be worried about money and careers and where you’re going to live, but you’ve got Lowen and Killian. Do you realise how fortunate you are?’

They both looked sheepish, then linked arms with me.

‘Sorry, Romy.’

‘You’re absolutely right.’

They each rested their head on my shoulders, and we all sighed.

‘Life is very complicated since we got those invitations from Meri, isn’t it?’ Keely said softly.

‘Very,’ I agreed.

‘But we’re going to be okay, aren’t we?’ Harley asked. ‘I mean, whatever happens, we’ll always have each other, won’t we?’

‘Of course,’ I said.

‘The three of us against the world,’ Keely said.

We all fell silent, and I wondered if, like me, they were remembering Lyrica’s chilling words that day in The Fool’s Journey pub, what seemed like years ago.

“Three will become two.”

I put my arms around my sisters, and we held each other tightly.

I guess they remembered.





# Chapter 12

## *Lowen*

We had a late breakfast that morning at Castle Lodge. Many of us had slept late after the exhausting events of the previous day. Hector was subdued and Celeste was far from her usual cheerful self. I had a feeling words had been exchanged between them but had no intention of prying.

Besides, I had enough to worry about, not least Keely's odd behaviour. We'd had a bit of a discussion last night about her argument with Harley, and she'd been strangely evasive about why she'd been so rude to her. After breakfast she decided to zap to Peloryon Island and make it up with her, which was a relief.

Hector headed to the study and locked the door behind him. Celeste helped her mother do the breakfast dishes in the kitchen. They were doing them the "normal" way, so I guess they had a lot to talk about. I suspected the cause of the tension was Blaise St Clair, and that was confirmed moments later by a gloomy looking Castor.

'Right performance this is,' he told me. 'Always was trouble, that bloke, and now look. Even when he's someone else he's a pain in the backside. Never seen Celeste and Hector so distant from each other but is it any wonder? Hector feels responsible for him coming back into our lives, and Celeste just wants him gone, while of course Hector has to look at the bigger picture and figure out what's best to do with him. And that poor lass is still missing, and who knows what's happening to her? And where's the High Council in all this, eh? Where are they? They want to be careful. They should be seen to be doing something. There's rumblings...'

'Rumblings?' I asked nervously. 'Rumblings about what?'

‘What do you think? You reckon that Pendragon lot can murder the leader of the High Council of Witches and nowt will be done in response? If the High Council don’t start a formal investigation some of the witch families will plan their own revenge. I know what they’re like. Now, what do you reckon will happen if they do that, eh? Escalation, that’s what. Before you know it we’re in a full-blown war.’ He shook his head and sighed. ‘I’m too old for all this malarkey. It’s you young ‘uns I fear for. You’ve got too much on your shoulders.’ He patted my shoulder as if to emphasise the point. ‘You especially, lad. By heck, I wouldn’t be in your shoes for owt.’

As if I needed to hear that!

Sirius returned to Castle Lodge, evidently unable to handle being around John, who he blamed almost entirely for Trinity’s kidnapping.

Despite our appeals to him to wait until we knew who the real culprits were he insisted that, until “Blaise”, as he kept calling him, was “dealt with” he wouldn’t be returning to Peloryon Island. I could see Iliana was worried about him and I didn’t blame her. I was worried about him, too. Sirius was usually so level-headed and reasonable, and it was a shock to see him behaving so irrationally and giving way to outbursts of temper.

I understood that he was terrified for Trinity. I was terrified for her, too. She was, after all, my twin sister. But we had to be rational about all this. If we couldn’t keep clear heads we’d never be able to deal with whatever was coming our way.

Though, as I sought refuge in my bedroom away from the weird atmosphere in the house, I couldn’t help wondering how we were going to deal with it anyway, clear heads or not.

Every time I thought about what might lie ahead I felt as if my brain was going to burst. The responsibility for keeping the peace between witches and fae weighed heavily on me, and I felt useless. I knew that I needed to reclaim my magic so I could start to make a difference, but without the Sword of

Feidhlim I had no proof of who I was, and I was no closer to finding that than I had been the moment I accepted Excalibur.

The truth was, I had no idea where to start looking, and no idea what I'd actually do when I found it.

So I'd get my magic back. Then what? The Pendragons would be alerted to my presence, and I'd be a target. But since I had no experience in wielding magic, how could I possibly fight them?

I couldn't see a way forward, and though I hated to admit it, I was scared. Scared of being hurt or killed by the Pendragons, yes. But even worse, scared of failing in my duty, and being unable to prevent war from breaking out. So many lives could be lost—fae, witch, and human. And it would all be my fault. My failing.

My stomach churned with fear at the thought of it. Feidhlim and Arthur had risen to the challenge of being the Great Guardian magnificently. What good could I, a useless, ordinary ex-solicitor do? Who did I think I was fooling?

'Lowen? Can you come down please?'

It was Raiden's voice calling up the stairs. I hadn't even heard him arrive. I wondered if Aurora was with him, and what I'd say to her if she was. What did anyone say to someone who'd just lost their father in such a brutal fashion? And I wasn't just anyone, was I? Like it or not, it was my family who'd killed Zephyr. My blood.

I ran my hands through my hair and struggled wearily to my feet. I had to stay strong. Everyone was counting on me.

The living room was packed with new arrivals. Iliana, Raiden, Castor, Hector, Celeste, Sirius and I had been joined by Emrick, Killian, Ewella, Keely, Harley, Romy, and the four remaining members of the High Council of Witches. Evidently the summons had reached Peloryon Island, too.

'Sit down, Lowen,' Emrick said. 'The Council are here to tell us about the funeral, among other things.'

There were multiple sofas now, so finding a space to sit wasn't difficult. Even so, I chose to sit alone in an armchair.

Keely pouted.

‘Come and sit with me,’ she said, patting the space next to her which she’d clearly saved for me.

I loved Keely, heart and soul, but I didn’t want to sit next to her right now. I didn’t want to sit near anyone. My thoughts were a jumbled mess and I needed to untangle them.

To be honest, I could have done without this meeting. Right now, I felt like locking myself in my bedroom and sobbing my heart out, but how could I ever admit that to anyone? The Great Guardian didn’t cry. The Great Guardian took control and saved everyone else. I couldn’t imagine Arthur ever cried because he didn’t know what to do. I felt such a failure.

Even so, I could hardly reject her offer, so I reluctantly squeezed onto the sofa between Keely and Romy and waited for the meeting to begin.

We all felt the absence of Zephyr keenly as Aveta got to her feet and assumed control.

‘It’s been an incredibly difficult time,’ she said sadly. ‘Really, it feels impossible to believe that we’re standing here without our beloved leader. Zephyr Ambrose was an example to us all, loved and respected by the entire witch community. His loss will be felt deeply by us all for many years to come.’

‘So what are you going to do about it?’ Castor asked.

Aveta blinked. ‘I’m sorry?’

‘What are you doing about his murder? Cos I’m telling you now, you’d better do summat. People are making their own plans, and you wouldn’t want that now, would you?’

‘What people?’ Amlodd asked nervously.

‘There’s mutterings. The Crossleys and the Golightlys for a start. They’re telling folk we should start preparing for battle. Woden Crossley is adamant the Pendragons can’t be allowed to get away with it, and he’s stoking up bad feeling among the ranks.’

‘Really, Castor,’ Iliana said in amazement, ‘how do you discover these things? No one ever tells me anything.’

‘You ought to zap to The Pig and Whistle now and then,’ he said blithely. ‘You’d be surprised what you can hear when you keep your lugholes open.’

‘Where on earth is The Pig and Whistle?’ she asked, but Aveta had evidently decided the conversation had gone off on a tangent and she needed to reclaim control.

‘We’ll have no talk of retribution,’ she said sternly. ‘If what you’re saying is true we’ll be speaking to the Golightlys and the Crossleys as soon as we leave here. The last thing we need are vigilante groups springing into action and making things ten times worse.’

‘Could they be much worse?’ Sirius asked coolly. ‘I mean, Zephyr’s dead and my wife is still missing. When exactly should we act? When they’ve murdered the lot of us? Bit late then.’

‘I assure you, Sirius, investigations are underway into Zephyr’s death, and as for Trinity—please believe me when I tell you that we have witches scouring the country for her. We will find her.’

‘But will you find her alive?’ he asked, and I saw the gleam of tears in his eyes and heard the wobble in his voice. I hung my head in shame. She was my sister, and I was worse than useless. I should never have let her go off to Whitby on her own. I should have insisted on going with her. No, I should have gone instead of her. I’d let my sister do my dirty work, and I’d never forgive myself for that.

‘Can we get back to the reason we’re here?’ Kendrew pleaded. ‘I know feelings are running high but let’s take things one step at a time. As Aveta said, we have agents in place. Our task today is to inform people of the arrangements for Zephyr’s funeral, and that’s been hard enough to sort out as it is, what with one thing and another.’

‘I heard *Titania* Ambrose wants a grand ceremony in Glastonbury,’ Castor said slyly, emphasising the word *Titania*,

probably to remind us that she was really called Susie.

‘How did you—?’ Iliana shook her head. ‘Never mind.’

‘Well,’ Aveta said uncomfortably, ‘that’s true.’

The four members of the High Council looked at each other, and I thought they’d probably love to say a great deal more on that subject but were determined to be discreet.

‘So is that what’s happening?’ Hector said, frowning. ‘I wouldn’t have thought that was such a good idea.’

There was a stony silence as the Council members stared at him. It occurred to me suddenly that, as far as they were concerned, Hector was nothing more than Celeste’s non-magical husband, and had no right to contribute to this discussion. They probably didn’t even think he should be at the meeting. Although they’d met him in his capacity as Guardian before, they had no memory of that. Witches weren’t supposed to know who Guardians were. It was odd, then, that they all knew I was destined to be the Great Guardian. I wondered if that knowledge would be removed from them when I found the Sword of Feidhlim. If I found it.

Hector evidently realised his mistake. He gave them an appealing smile and said, ‘Sorry. Just my thoughts, but hey, what do I know?’

‘Exactly,’ Kendrew said coldly. ‘I don’t even know why you’re here.’

‘Should I leave?’ Hector asked politely, half getting to his feet.

Aveta waved a hand. ‘Oh, sit down. It doesn’t matter. Just keep quiet and refrain from further interruptions please.’

If they only knew!

‘We’ve had a right palaver,’ Bob said angrily. ‘It’s been proper undignified if you ask me. Zephyr deserves the best. Westminster Abbey wouldn’t be too good for him. You’d think his own family would have a bit of dignity and stop arguing about it.’

‘His family?’ Raiden frowned. ‘As far as I’m aware, Aurora hasn’t even been consulted.’

‘No, well...’ Aveta looked uncomfortable. ‘The way things are...’

‘Makes no odds anyway,’ Amlodd said. ‘We’ve had to overrule them.’

‘Overrule them?’

‘As Castor said,’ Aveta explained, ‘Titania wanted a large ceremony before laying Zephyr to rest in Glastonbury. His daughter, Elvira, and son, Easton, argued that he should be buried in St Ives. He did, after all, live there and work there for many years, and he was very fond of the place.’

‘But you disagreed with both?’ Raiden asked.

‘We have to be cautious,’ Aveta explained. ‘The fact is, the Pendragons will be all too aware that a funeral will take place very soon and will be watching for it. We must face the possibility that the congregation could come under attack. A couple of days ago I’d have said the idea was preposterous, but now they’ve murdered the leader of the High Council, no one is safe.’

‘It does seem extraordinary that they killed Zephyr,’ Raiden mused. ‘It would be like a witch going after an O’Brien. It would be a declaration of all-out war.’

‘Which is what the Pendragons want,’ Iliana pointed out. ‘And if people like the Golightlys and Crossleys get their way that’s exactly what will happen. It simply can’t be allowed to escalate in that way.’

‘You’re not wrong there,’ Killian said fervently. ‘My family won’t be happy if innocent fae are killed because of the actions of that family.’

‘Witches aren’t too chuffed that an innocent man was killed either,’ Castor growled. ‘Not to mention that our Trinity’s been kidnapped.’

‘We don’t yet know who took Trinity,’ Kendrew pointed out. ‘Until we do, no point in casting aspersions. Anyway, we

need to keep a lid on this simmering pot of tension. The last thing we need is another Pendragon attack, because if that happens I don't think we'll be able to control our own people. There'll be a war, no doubt about it.'

'Therefore,' Aveta said, 'it seems to us that the best place to hold Zephyr's funeral is on Peloryon Island, where we'll all be safe from a fae attack.' She turned to Ewella. 'For that, of course, we'll need your permission, Your Majesty. Would you allow us to hold the ceremony in the chapel and bury our dear leader in the graveyard?'

I wondered fleetingly how Aveta knew so much about the island. Had she visited before? Had she known Meri? Did she know Emrick? There was so much about the magical world that I didn't understand, and yet I was supposed to be its eventual leader. How could I ever do this?

Despair washed over me again and I had to force myself to remain seated. The urge to get up and walk out of this was almost overwhelming. I longed to get the first train back to Cornwall, throw myself on Mr Carpenter's mercy and get my old job back, and return to a life of blissful ignorance. If only.

Keely turned to me, and I saw her hesitant smile as she took my hand in hers.

She had so much faith in me, but what if I let her down? What if my actions—or lack of action—led to her being injured or killed? Look what had happened to my sister. I couldn't bear it if something happened to Keely, too. I squeezed her hand and held onto it tightly, as if by keeping a grip on her I could somehow keep a grip on myself. I felt I was in danger of spiralling into blind panic otherwise.

'Of course,' I heard Ewella say, as if from a distance. 'It will be our honour. The island will make sure the chapel is prepared and I'll be glad to welcome the guests to Peloryon House afterwards.'

'Zephyr's already at the chapel, isn't he?' Iliana asked.

Aveta nodded. 'Safe and sound in the crypt.'



‘The crypt?’ Celeste asked, surprised. ‘I don’t think we saw that, did we?’

We all agreed that we hadn’t noticed any crypt on our previous visits to the chapel, but Ewella assured us there was one, and it was always ready for when it was needed, which wasn’t a cheery thought. I imagined my cold, dead body lying there one day—the result of my complete inability to cope with magic—and shivered.

Keely’s eyes filled with concern, and I gave her a half-hearted smile, hoping she would be reassured that I was okay. Hoping she couldn’t hear the scream of terror and despair that was reverberating around my head so loudly that it was a wonder the whole house didn’t shake with it.

‘Well then,’ Amlodd said, getting to his feet. ‘If that’s everything...’

‘Are you joking?’ Sirius glared at him. ‘You can’t be leaving? What about Trinity?’

‘Sirius, dear, as we’ve already explained we have agents looking for her all across the country,’ Aveta said.

‘And what if she’s not in this country?’ he demanded.

She frowned. ‘Have you any reason to believe she’s been taken abroad?’

‘I’m not talking about abroad. I’m talking about the Otherworld,’ he snapped. ‘What if the fae have taken her to their world? How would we ever get her back?’

‘You don’t have to worry about that,’ Killian promised him. ‘We’d have heard if she was there. We’ve got our people watching out for her and she’s not there, Sirius. Have no fear of that.’

‘You see!’ Sirius shook his head. ‘Even the fae are helping more than you are! What’s the point of you if all you do is make idle promises and waste your time discussing funeral arrangements for somebody who’s already gone? You should be making sure that a second body doesn’t turn up! Trinity should be your priority. You’re a total waste of space.’

‘Now just a minute,’ Amlodd blustered. ‘There’s no call for that sort of attitude.’

‘I know you’re scared, Sirius,’ Raiden said gently, ‘but you’re attacking the wrong people.’

‘I’ve never heard anything like it,’ Kendrew said. ‘Disgraceful.’

‘What’s disgraceful,’ Sirius told him, ‘is you lot doing nothing. I want answers! I want—’

‘Oh, I know what you want,’ Bob yelled suddenly. ‘Always stirring up trouble you St Clairs. Always in bother, causing problems for the rest of us. Zephyr spent the last few years of his life cleaning up your messes, and what did he get for his trouble, eh? Death. Death in a Whitby street, far from home and his loved ones. Do you think he deserved that?’

There was a stunned silence for a moment. Then Killian said curiously, ‘And how do you know where he died? I don’t believe anyone’s got round to telling the High Council that information yet, have they?’

We all looked at each other. No one spoke. The other High Council members looked deeply shocked. ‘We only knew Zephyr’s body was found here, on your doorstep,’ Aveta said. ‘Is it true he was killed in Whitby?’

‘It’s true all right,’ Castor said. ‘So explain that one if you can, Bob.’

Bob waved a hand. ‘Don’t be having a go at me. I see you all, looking at me like I’ve done something wrong. It’s not my fault he was in Whitby. It’s yours! It’s all because of you St Clairs.’

‘Us?’ Sirius demanded. ‘How is this our fault?’

‘Isn’t everything your fault?’ Bob yelled. ‘You want to know how I know he was in Whitby? Because he told me he was going there, that’s why. And the reason he was going was to keep an eye on your bloody wife!’

‘He was what?’ Kendrew gasped. ‘What on earth for?’

‘And why didn’t you tell us?’ Amlodd blustered.

Bob rubbed his face. Cos he told me not to. We heard what she was planning when you were all discussing it at that wedding,’ he admitted. ‘Zephyr was worried. He told me she shouldn’t be out there looking for this woman on her own. Well, this nun or whoever she is—she could be a madwoman for all we know. And Trinity St Clair had no background in magic. She’d only just found out who she was, after all. So Zephyr decided he’d follow her, make sure this Sister whatever-her-name-is could be trusted.’ He glared at Sirius. ‘So if she hadn’t decided to go off and play Hercule Poirot on her own Zephyr would still be here! Think on that.’

‘Bob!’ Aveta cried.

‘No, it has to be said,’ he replied. ‘This lot needs to stop stirring up trouble. Isn’t one death enough? You don’t mess with the Pendragons, and if they keep banging on about Trinity it’s going to fire up people like the Crossleys and then we’ve all had it. Just leave it, will you? Let’s face it, she’s probably already dead anyway.’

Sirius leapt to his feet, and I honestly thought he was about to kill Bob. Luckily, Hector stepped in front of him and grabbed hold of his shoulders, murmuring something to him. I don’t know what he said but it worked.

Sirius sat down as if in a trance and Bob, who looked visibly shaken, said, ‘I’ve had enough of this. I’m going home to mourn our leader in peace.’

With that he was gone, leaving the other three Council members looking dazed, and as if they were at a loss what to do or say next.

‘I’m so sorry,’ Aveta said at last. ‘I really don’t know what’s come over Bob. He’s taken this very badly. He was very fond of Zephyr.’

‘We were all fond of Zephyr,’ Iliana said. ‘That doesn’t mean we should give up on Trinity.’

‘Of course it doesn’t.’ Aveta took Iliana’s hands. ‘We’re old friends, and I hope you know that I would never give up

on finding her. Everything possible is being done to find her, I promise you that. We will bring her home, safe and sound.'

'We should leave,' Amlodd said, standing up, a distinctly uneasy expression on his face. 'We have a lot to arrange before the funeral.'

'I suppose it's up to me to tell Aurora what's happening with that then,' Raiden said crossly.

'I'm sorry,' Amlodd said. 'Honestly, his wife said she'd let his children know. We just assumed—'

'When it comes to Titania Ambrose, one should never assume anything,' Raiden said grimly. 'Don't worry, I'll tell my wife. It's probably better coming from me anyway.'

The three remaining members of the High Council of Witches took their leave, much to our relief. Raiden said he'd go home and break the news to Aurora. Hector checked Sirius was okay—he still seemed dazed and not quite himself so I had a feeling that Hector had done something to him to calm him down—then asked Emrick if they could have a word in private.

I saw Romy giving them alarmed looks as they headed out of the living room together, and I knew she was worried they were going to discuss the future of Blaise St Clair.

'Are you okay?' Keely asked.

I merely smiled in response. Honestly, I was so far from okay that I simply had no words.



# Chapter 13

## *Trinity*

I had no way of knowing how long the strange woman had been gone, but what I did know was that I was hungry as hell. My stomach growled, and I figured she must have been gone hours. I wondered what day it was and how long I'd been missing. I felt as if I'd been gone weeks, but since I'd only had three meals and I hadn't yet passed out I guessed I was way off the mark.

It was the boredom, that was the trouble. Once I'd realised there was no way of escaping this prison I'd had no choice but to accept my fate. I occupied myself by walking up and down a bit, but as the chain wasn't very long I didn't get very far, and to be honest, it all felt a bit too repetitive to hold my interest for long, even if I did sing as I walked to cheer myself up.

I tried to sleep, thinking that would make the time pass faster, but sleep evaded me now. Maybe it was broad daylight outside, and my body clock rejected my attempts to sleep at this time. Or maybe I'd slept all day, and it was now midnight. Who knew?

I'd finished the last of my bottled water, too. There was a basin in the cubicle, and I supposed at a push I could drink from the faucet there, but I didn't really fancy the idea of that.

I sat back on the sofa and huddled the blanket then tried to remember some of the poetry I'd read, back in my college days. It was a shock to realise how little I remembered, and I resolved to reread it if I ever got out of here.

I'd just resorted to a game of What's the theme tune? where I challenged myself to hum the tune to any television show that popped into my head, when I heard something.

I sat up straight, straining to hear better. I was sure there were voices, and if I wasn't mistaken...

The handle on the door in the far wall turned and I held my breath, wondering if this was friend or foe. Two old ladies entered the room, and I wasn't sure whether to be sorry or relieved that one of them was my captor.

The second one looked, if it were possible, even older than the first. They were dressed identically, and this newcomer had the same long, white hair, but hers was neatly tied up in a bun.

She took one look at me and shook her head before hurrying over to me.

'The state of you! My dear girl, I can't apologise enough!'

She turned to my captor, who was hovering beside her looking pretty glum, and said, 'Well, what are you waiting for? Set her free immediately.'

'Yes, Sister Agnes,' the woman mumbled, and my chain vanished instantly.

I heaved a sigh of relief and rubbed my ankle.

'You're not hurt, are you?' Sister Agnes asked anxiously.

'No, just a bit sore,' I said. 'And hungry,' I added, giving the other woman a harsh stare.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'It took me a bit longer than I expected to find her.'

'Is that what you're sorry for?' Sister Agnes shook her head. 'My dear Trinity, I can't apologise enough for what's been done to you. You must understand, Sister Gertrude is very young, and still getting used to our ways.'

Very young? Was she joking?

I stared incredulously at Sister Gertrude, who hung her head miserably and said, 'I'm sorry for kidnapping you. I was just trying to help.'

'You should have confided in your sisters,' Sister Agnes said crossly. 'They would have advised you to release her

immediately. Fancy keeping her here, of all places! You could, at the very least, have taken her to our home.'

'I wanted to please you, Sister Agnes,' Sister Gertrude explained, her eyes beseeching.

'You wanted the glory you mean.' The older woman was clearly having none of it. 'You thought you'd hooked yourself a fine fish and you didn't want your sisters to get any of the credit. But you should know, you're still learning this job, and look at the mess you've made! Really, Sister Gertrude, I can't tell you how disappointed I am in you.'

Sister Gertrude sniffed, and Sister Agnes rolled her eyes. 'Here come the waterworks.' She leaned over and asked me kindly, 'Did she treat you well? Have you been cared for?'

'Well,' I said dubiously, 'there was a lot of chocolate cake. And she made sure I had a supply of quilted toilet roll.'

Sister Agnes held my gaze for a moment, then she burst out laughing. 'Ah, as long as she got her priorities straight.'

To my astonishment, she threw her arms around me and said, 'Oh my dear child, it's so lovely to see you again after all this time. And how beautiful you look!' She stepped back and dabbed her eyes, then said, 'No time for sentiment. Come now, let's get you out of here.'

She held out her arm and I tentatively took it, wondering about our history. She obviously knew who I was, while I had no recollection of meeting her before, and let's face it, I was pretty sure I'd remember her.

'You need some fresh air after being locked up in here,' she said. 'I think we'll take the scenic route home, don't you, Sister Gertrude?'

She smiled at me. 'Don't worry. We'll be shielded. They won't spot you this time.'

'Who won't?' I asked, confused.

She raised her eyebrows in surprise. 'Why, the Pendragons of course. Who else?'



‘The Pendragons?’ I squeaked in fear. ‘Why would they be in Whitby? We are still in Whitby, aren’t we?’

‘Oh my dear, you have no idea what’s been going on, have you?’

‘I know the Pendragons killed Zephyr Ambrose,’ I said, as we headed towards the staircase. ‘Sister Gertrude told me that much.’

She sighed and shook her head. ‘Terrible business. Terrible. I couldn’t believe it when I heard. Come now, let’s get you home and fed, the rest can wait for now.’

Sister Gertrude unlocked the door at the top of the staircase and switched off the light as we entered another room.

I blinked at the bright sunshine that flooded through the windows, then looked round me in amazement. We were in a small room with white, wooden walls. There was a small sofa, a tiny kitchenette, and a table with two chairs. Other than that the room was empty. Net curtains hung at the windows, but I could see we were close to the sea. Very close.

Sister Agnes turned to me, and her hands hovered over my head for a moment.

‘You’re safe for now,’ she said. ‘Of course, it won’t last long, but long enough to get you back to our home.’

She opened the door, and we stepped outside. I gasped in astonishment.

‘A beach hut!’

It was true. It seemed my prison had been beneath a beach hut. A beach hut that sat at the end of a row of other beach huts, all painted bright and cheerful colours of yellow, red, green, and blue. We were on Whitby’s West Cliff, and the beach was right in front of us.

‘But—but how?’

‘Just start walking, dear. I’m not sure how busy the town will be, and we don’t want the glamour to wear off before we get back home.’

‘Glamour?’

‘It hides you from others,’ she explained. ‘Oh, they’ll be aware of you, but they won’t be able to focus on you. Won’t notice you. I doubt the Pendragons are still in town, but one never knows, and it’s always better to be safe than sorry.’

I shivered and she put her arm around me, clucking sympathetically. ‘Poor girl. Not far to walk, don’t worry.’

We headed back over the bridge towards East Cliff, and my heart began to thud as memories of the last time I was here returned. Walking down Church Street I gazed around me apprehensively. Were the Pendragons here? How would I know? I had no idea what they even looked like.

Like me?

Like Lowen?

It was an odd thought, and rather unwelcome, that the people I were so afraid of meeting were my own relatives. One thing I could say with confidence; since I met Sirius life had sure never been dull.

I thought we were maybe going to climb the hundred and ninety-nine steps up to the abbey or the church, but to my surprise, the two women led me past them and down a cobbled street. Henrietta Street.

I remembered thinking, before I’d been kidnapped, that I’d have to go down there next to look for Sister Agnes, but I’d never got that far.

It was a long street, lined either side with attractive houses, some painted in pretty pastel shades. We passed Fortune’s, famous for its smoked kippers, something Sirius had told me I ought to try while I was here but which I hadn’t got round to.

The view opened up after that, and we were treated to the stunning sight of the sea, with the pier stretching its two arms wide as if to embrace the rolling waves.

‘There we are,’ Sister Agnes said cheerfully. ‘There’s home.’

I dragged my gaze away from the view and turned to see her standing in front of a small, cobbled area at the end of the street.

‘There’s nothing here,’ I said blankly.

‘You’d think so, wouldn’t you?’ she said cheerfully.

‘You have to look beyond that,’ Sister Gertrude said. ‘Open your eyes, Trinity.’

My eyes were fully open, but I swear all I could see was a small, cobbled area and a sign warning that there was strictly no parking allowed. Beyond that was a path with benches facing the sea, and behind it a grassy cliff where the churchyard perched at the top.

‘Okay,’ I said, ‘I give up. What kind of game...’ My voice trailed off and I stared in astonishment as a house materialised right in front of me. It wasn’t anything like the other houses in this street, being very narrow, and five storeys high. It was painted a dazzling white and looked immaculate. It even had window boxes full of cheerful flowers attached to each of its tall, sash windows.

‘This is... Impossible!’ Even as I breathed the word I wondered why I was so surprised. After everything I’d seen and heard lately why should an invisible house flummox me? It was just another thing to chalk up to marrying a St Clair. Or being a Pendragon, as I supposed I was now.

Had always been.

Boy, was I confused!

‘Is that even safe?’ I asked doubtfully. ‘I mean, it’s very tall, and in an exposed position, and teetering on the side of a cliff...’

‘Oh, Trinity.’ Sister Agnes shook her head. ‘It’s not of this world. Surely your experiences on Lyonesse taught you that?’

‘You mean it’s part of the Otherworld?’ I asked nervously. ‘I’m not sure about that. What if the Pendragons—’

‘You’ll be perfectly safe with us,’ she assured me. ‘This is sanctuary. Only those who we permit can even see it, and only

those in need of sanctuary ever know of its existence. The Pendragons have no idea it's here, and they'll never find it. Come on, let's go indoors and warm you up.'

We headed along the path, and just as I prepared myself for a scramble up the cliffside, the house seemed suddenly to lower itself to our level. We all stepped onto the large, wide, doorstep and the house resumed its previous position, so we were looking down at the path which was now a good few feet below us. I felt a bit sick.

The door opened and yet another old lady stood there, a welcoming smile on her face. She wore the same sort of clothes as the other two, and I thought it must be a kind of uniform.

'Sister Agnes! We weren't expecting you back until tomorrow,' she said, before turning a frown on my kidnapper. 'Sister Gertrude, where have you been? We've been worried about you. Always disappearing lately, aren't you?'

Sister Agnes ushered me inside and the third woman closed the door behind us. I found myself in a perfectly ordinary looking hallway with several doors off each side, and thought there was no way the house was wide enough to accommodate all those rooms. Then I realised what I was thinking and mentally shook my head. Anything was possible. All the rules of physics I'd lived by and understood all my life were of no use now. We were in fae territory.

'Sister Gertrude came to find me,' Sister Agnes explained. 'Sister Dorothy, this is Trinity St Clair, also known as Linnet Pendragon.'

My heart thudded. 'How did you—?'

'It doesn't matter right now, dear,' Sister Agnes said. 'Sister Dorothy, please take Trinity to the kitchen, give her something to eat and let her warm up. She's had quite an ordeal these past twenty-four hours.'

'Twenty-four hours? Is that all it's been?' I blew out my cheeks. 'It felt way longer than that.'

‘I’m sure it did, dear. You run along and Sister Dorothy will take care of you. Sister Gertrude, please ask Sister Cecelia to come to my study immediately. We must send word to the St Clairs that Trinity is alive and well and they may come and collect her.’

‘I can do that, Sister Agnes,’ Sister Gertrude said hopefully.

Sister Agnes fixed her with a stern look. ‘You will go to your room and wait for me,’ she said. ‘You and I are going to have a long talk when this business is done.’



# Chapter 14

## *Lowen*

Sirius and Celeste had gone for a walk, which, to be honest was a relief. They weren't themselves, and while they were in Castle Lodge the atmosphere felt even more strained, if that were possible.

Keely, Harley, and Romy had gone into the garden, and I decided I'd take the opportunity to do some more reading on witchcraft in my bedroom.

As I headed into the hallway, though, Frey sprang in front of me, almost tripping me up as I neared the stairs.

*The study's just down there*, he reminded me, his gaze turning to the door just behind me on my right.

'I know,' I told him. 'So what? My book's upstairs.'

*But Hector and Emrick aren't. They're in there. Talking.* He fixed me with a determined stare. *What are you waiting for?*

'You want me to eavesdrop?' I whispered incredulously. 'On Emrick and a Guardian?'

*He might be a Guardian*, Frey reminded me coolly, *but you're the Great Guardian. You should be informed. They have no business keeping anything from you. Get your act together and find out what they're talking about.*

I hesitated for a moment, then reluctantly I went to the study door and, feeling like an idiot, I put my head against it, listening as hard as I could. The door was solid oak, though, and it seemed Emrick and Hector were talking quietly. I could barely make out a word.

I sighed. 'It's no use,' I whispered to Frey. 'I might as well go upstairs.'

He actually hissed at me! *You're the Great Guardian!*  
*Start acting like it!*

I stared at him for a moment, wondering if he'd lost the plot. Then, as I looked into his eyes which were filled with fire and determination, I realised he was right. If they wanted me to be their saviour, their mighty leader, they needed to start treating me that way. I needed to start treating me that way.

I pushed open the study door without even knocking, and even though I was nervous I entered the room with my head held high.

They both turned to me, clearly taken aback by my unexpected arrival.

'Lowen,' Emrick said, giving me an uncertain smile, 'what can we do for you? We were just in the middle of something but—'

'That's why I'm here,' I said. 'I want to know what you're talking about.'

They shifted uncomfortably and Hector said, 'It's private, Lowen.'

'Why don't you find something to do, and I'll come and find you when we're finished here,' Emrick said kindly.

'No!' As they stared at me in astonishment I ploughed on before I could change my mind. 'You expect me to be Wulfram Pendragon, the Great Guardian, the man who's going to bring peace to the magical world, yet you're still treating me like Lowen Ericson, the solicitor from Gerrenporth.'

They exchanged surprised looks.

'You're not Wulfram yet,' Emrick reminded me gently. 'And until then—'

'I'm aware of that,' I said coolly, 'but that doesn't mean you can treat me as if I'm insignificant. Whoever Wulfram is, whatever he becomes, a large part of him will be Lowen, and his actions will, in no small part, be framed by what he's learned and absorbed before he claims the sword. I'm sick of



being left in the dark. If you want me to step up then it's time you started treating me with some respect.'

'Lowen,' Hector said gently, 'believe me, we have every respect for you. We're just trying to protect you for now.'

'What good is protecting me going to do?' I demanded. 'Have you any idea how terrified I am? Do you know that I can't sleep at night for worrying about letting everyone down? Imagining the worst over and over. Fearing that the people I love will be killed, and the world plunged into a magical war, all because I didn't know what to do? My failure will be everyone's failure. I need to start learning. It's no good leaving me on the sidelines because I haven't taken Wulfram's mantle yet. I need to be included now!'

Thankfully they didn't tell me to stop being a diva and demand that I leave the room. I had nothing left, so if they had I'd have probably slunk away and gone to my bedroom, feeling even worse than I did right now.

As it was, Emrick nodded. 'He's right. We've been a bit foolish here. We can't just expect him to carry on as normal and then suddenly transform when he finds the sword. He should be part of all our decisions and plans.'

'Fair enough,' Hector said. He smiled at me. 'But if you think you'll miraculously know all the answers you can think again. Right now, Emrick and I are having a rather heated debate about the future of Blaise St Clair. Sit down, Lowen. Perhaps you can tell us your opinion on this subject.'

I really hadn't expected them to listen to me, so this was a bit of a shock. I could hardly back out now, though, after my great speech. Sinking into an armchair, I noticed Frey lying by Hector's chair. He gave me an encouraging look. I swallowed.

'Very well,' I said, with as much dignity as I could muster. 'Let me hear your thoughts on the matter.'

I was sure I saw Emrick's lips twitch in amusement, but I ignored him. This was serious stuff. Time to start earning my stripes.

‘As you know,’ Hector said, ‘Blaise became my responsibility when he turned up in Castle Clair, having travelled from 1669 to the present day. Once we discovered what he was up to and, thankfully, stopped him, I had a decision to make about his future. Blaise,’ he said with a rueful smile, ‘believed he would be executed. I should imagine it came as quite a relief when he discovered Guardians don’t do that sort of thing. Even so, he was a problem.’

‘Why didn’t you send him back to his own time?’ I asked curiously. ‘Surely that would have solved the problem?’

‘Far from it. You see, the timeline had closed around Blaise’s disappearance. It was an established historical fact that he never returned to 1669. A whole legend had sprung up around his apparent death. Plus, Jennet and Mary Clipson would have been in danger from him. Even without his magic he had the intelligence and cunning to make them pay somehow. And then, of course, there was the possibility that he’d marry and have children, which would mean Bevil’s descendants were no longer the St Clairs in charge of Castle Clair. They might not even exist. The possible repercussions were far too great to risk.’

‘Of course.’ I felt stupid and naïve. Listening to Hector it was obvious that Blaise couldn’t go back to his own time. What a ridiculous question!

‘I had two options,’ Hector continued. ‘I could let Blaise hold onto his memories but keep him prisoner for the rest of his life, or I could remove his memories, give him a whole new identity, and let him live a fulfilling life as someone else. The latter seemed kinder, and Celeste certainly preferred it. Despite how afraid and angry she seems right now, she has a kind heart, and couldn’t bear the thought of him wasting all that potential. I therefore removed all traces of Blaise and gave him the identity of John Ford, with new memories of a life he’d never really lived, and a friend he’d never really known. Simon. His new Guardian.’

‘If Simon was his Guardian,’ I said slowly, ‘how come he let him get involved with Romy?’

Hector sighed. ‘It should never have happened. Simon stayed with him for a year, guiding him into finding a job that would help him think about other people for a change. He got him a home, which “John” believed he’d lived in for years, and generally smoothed the path for him into his new life. When John was settled and happy, Simon eased off and took on another charge. He kept popping back without John knowing to make sure he was all right, of course, but there was no cause for alarm. His visits became less frequent, and it seemed his work was done.’

‘But clearly something went badly wrong,’ I said. ‘How did Romy manage to get so close to him without anyone stopping it from happening?’

‘They met at a psychology conference, where Romy was giving a talk,’ Hector explained. ‘John was a prospective student. Now, normally that shouldn’t have been a problem. We’d made sure—or we thought we had—that John would be of no interest to any St Clair. Romy shouldn’t have paid him any attention.’ He frowned. ‘Emrick here thinks it’s a matter of charm and good looks.’

‘Well,’ Emrick said with a laugh, ‘how can a woman resist someone as handsome as Blaise St Clair? And let’s face it, he does have a way about him.’

‘He does,’ I admitted. ‘I thought he was a really interesting man when I met him and enjoyed being in his company. He has something... Call it charm if you like. Charisma. That’s it. He’s a very charismatic man. I was amazed Harley and Keely didn’t warm to him more. They seemed to find him boring and quite unappealing.’

‘Which was down to me,’ Hector said. ‘And that’s how Romy should have found him, too. I still don’t understand how he got through to her.’

‘Blaise St Clair wrapped even his brother’s fiancée around his little finger,’ Emrick reminded him. ‘He persuaded her to practise forbidden magic. He had Celeste fooled for a long time. Don’t underestimate that so-called charisma.’

‘Even so...’ Hector frowned and shook his head. ‘Anyway, the point is, by the time Simon checked back on him, Romy and John were in love, and planning to set up home together. All he could do was keep a close eye on them and make sure Romy was okay. Bear in mind that, at the time, it didn’t seem too much of a problem, because she and her sisters had no connection to their Castle Clair family. They didn’t even know they existed. We thought it wouldn’t matter. Until that invitation from Meri Kittow changed everything, bringing the two branches of the family together and John back into the world of Castle Clair.’

‘And now we’re stuck with him,’ I mused. I was silent for a while, thinking.

‘What’s on your mind, Lowen?’ Emrick asked, after a long pause.

I shook my head. ‘Nothing. It doesn’t matter.’

‘But we want to hear your opinion,’ he said. ‘And not too long ago you said you wanted to be treated like the Great Guardian you are. So what are your thoughts?’

I wished I hadn’t opened my big mouth. The only thoughts I’d had were stupid. Clearly, though, they were waiting.

‘I was just wondering,’ I said reluctantly, ‘how much of Blaise St Clair is still there inside his head? You said, Hector, that you’d removed his memories of that man, but what do you mean by that? Do you mean permanently removed them, as if Blaise never existed? Or is he still there somewhere?’

‘It’s a good question,’ Hector said. ‘In theory, the memory of Blaise should never resurface. But yes, he’s still in there somewhere, buried deep below the false memories of John Ford.’

‘So if bits of Blaise started to come through,’ I asked, ‘would they snuff out John Ford? Or would John Ford have an influence on Blaise?’

‘That’s an interesting thought,’ Emrick mused. ‘You’re asking if John could make Blaise a better person, I presume?’

‘I’m just thinking that, since he’s spent the last four years or so working to help families in need, living an ordinary life, building a warm and loving relationship with Romy, no reliance on magic, surely that must influence the man he used to be? I suppose,’ I admitted, ‘I’m kind of interested because I’m wondering how much of an effect Wulfram will have on Lowen. Will whoever this Great Guardian is drown out the me I am now? It’s a scary thought, and I can relate to Blaise in a way. Or to John. Whichever.’

Hector nodded. ‘I take your point. I suppose it’s possible that, if his memories of Blaise were ever to resurface, they would be tempered by what he’s learned as John.’

‘So it’s quite possible he could redeem himself?’ I asked.

‘Well...’ Hector sounded uncertain. ‘It’s a possibility, but a heck of a risk. If you’re asking me to return Blaise’s memories—’

‘I’m not,’ I said quickly. ‘At least, I don’t think I am. So what do you plan to do?’

‘I suppose the only option I have left is to remove all traces of John Ford and give him yet another identity,’ Hector said with a sigh. ‘It’s really not something I want to do, but I don’t see another way.’

‘And break Romy’s heart?’ I asked. ‘Anyway, don’t you think it’s risky, giving the poor man three identities? Who knows what will be going on inside his mind, or what damage it could do?’

‘I agree with Lowen,’ Emrick said.

I turned to him. ‘So what was the debate about? You clearly don’t agree with the idea Hector’s proposed, so what’s your suggestion?’

Emrick shrugged. ‘Leave John alone. Let him be with Romy. They’ll find their way.’

‘I’m not sure that’s even an option now,’ I said cautiously. ‘The way Keely tells it, John’s told Romy that, whatever happens, they’re over. Too much has happened.’

‘Oh!’ Emrick waved his hand dismissively. ‘Of course he said that. He’s in shock. He doesn’t understand half of what’s going on, and he’s no idea about Blaise, or what he did in the past—not to mention the distant past. It’s going to take time for him to come to terms with this new reality, but he’ll get there.’

‘You sound very sure of that,’ Hector said suspiciously. ‘Something you’re not telling me?’

‘You know as well as I do,’ Emrick said with a sigh, ‘that whatever I know about events right now I can’t tell you anything. I made a promise, and I intend to keep it.’

‘A promise to who?’ I asked. ‘Meri?’

He shook his head. ‘Meri understood even less than you,’ he said sadly. ‘I couldn’t tell her either.’

I leaned forward, curiosity burning within me. ‘You seem to know so much,’ I said. ‘What are you? Some sort of seer? A prophet? What?’

‘I’m neither of those things,’ he said. ‘The events we’re living through now were told to me, with the strict instructions that I tell no one what’s to come. I can’t influence them in any way, you must understand that?’

‘So you know if there’s a battle between fae and witches?’ I asked, with some trepidation. ‘And you know the outcome of it?’

He shook his head. ‘I swear to you, I know nothing of that. By the end of this year you’ll all know as much as I do. My informants gave me no information beyond that point.’

‘You’re a very frustrating person,’ I said.

Hector grinned. ‘Isn’t that the truth?’

‘What about you?’ I asked. ‘Can Guardians go forward in time to see what’s going to happen?’

He looked appalled. ‘Certainly not! And risk causing even more mayhem than Blaise St Clair did? We only travel in time when it’s for an urgent cause, and only ever backwards. Even then, we try to interfere as little as possible. It’s not a super

power, Lowen. It's not some fun parlour trick. There's a huge responsibility attached to our abilities. You'll learn that for yourself one day.'

'I already feel it,' I admitted gloomily. 'So, Hector, you feel John should take on a third identity. Emrick, you believe he should be left here to live a life with Romy. But a third identity could cause him mental problems and would mean he'd have to start all over again, giving up a life he's grown to love and is happy in, which seems desperately unfair to me. And leaving him here as he is wouldn't be much better, would it? He knows we all think he's Blaise St Clair, but he has no recollection of the man and thinks he's either mad or we all are. As for Romy, he's ended it with her because he no longer trusts her, and who can blame him? As far as I can see, neither solution is ideal.'

'Then what do you suggest?' Hector asked curiously.

'I have no idea,' I admitted, feeling incredibly foolish. 'I'm sorry. I know I should come up with something brilliant, but—'

'Why should you?' Emrick asked. 'If Hector and I can't decide what's best to do with him, why would we expect you to?'

'I suppose you think I'm an idiot, bursting into this meeting and demanding to know what's going on, when I haven't made the slightest contribution to it,' I mumbled. 'I'm sorry.'

'Don't be sorry,' Hector said kindly. 'It's been good to have you here, Lowen. We might not have made any decisions yet, but you're right. You should be involved in this. One day, we'll all look to you for answers, and it will be us asking if we may be present in your meetings. Remember that.'

I couldn't imagine, for a single moment, that would ever happen. Frankly, I was kind of hoping he was exaggerating.

'So,' Emrick said, settling back in his chair, 'can we at least agree that, for now, we do nothing. Let John stay on the island where he's safe, and give him and Romy time to come

to terms with things? Hopefully they'll rebuild their relationship.'

'And if I have to give him a new identity, what then?' Hector asked doubtfully. 'Surely it will be even harder on Romy if we do things your way?'

'What do you think, Lowen?' Emrick's eyes bored into mine, and I swallowed.

'I think—I think you're right. Leave them for now,' I said, giving Hector an apologetic look. 'We don't want to rush into doing something we may regret. Let's see how things pan out and—'

The door burst open, and Iliana hurried in, her face bright with excitement.

We all got to our feet.

'Come quickly,' she gasped. 'There's an old woman here, and she says she knows where Trinity is!'





# Chapter 15

## *Trinity*

I was having a perfectly lovely time in this weird house in Whitby. Now I was no longer a prisoner, and knew help was on its way, I relaxed, tucking into a delicious ploughman's lunch that Sister Dorothy had prepared for me in their cosy kitchen, which had more than a touch of shabby chic about it.

'Are you warm enough, dear?' she asked me kindly, and I nodded.

'Quite warm enough, thank you. It's so warm and toasty in here compared to—' I paused, '—to wherever the heck I was before anyway.'

She pursed her lips and shook her head. 'I can't believe Sister Gertrude behaved in such a fashion! Really, youth and inexperience are no excuse for such cruelty.'

Youth and inexperience? Well, inexperience I could buy, but youth? Jeez.

'I know how damp and cold that basement is,' she continued. 'You poor thing.'

'To be fair,' I said, 'she did leave me a blanket, and a comfy sofa to lie on.'

'Well, that's something I suppose,' she said grudgingly. 'Although I expect your family will have something to say about it when they arrive, and who can blame them? Poor Sister Agnes. I hope they don't hold her responsible. It's such a shame, because she was desperately in need of a break, as she hasn't been home for ages. To be dragged back because of Sister Gertrude's foolish actions!'

'I'm sure my family will understand,' I said, feeling a sudden warmth at the word family. After Dad left it had just

been Mom and me for years. When Mom died I'd been alone in the world for so long. But now I had Sirius, and all his extended family, which seemed to have doubled in size recently. And I had a twin brother! I could hardly believe it.

It almost made up for the fact that "Dad" never existed, and "Mom" was really my Aunt Keresen, and that I'd never got the chance to meet my real parents, Laragh and Ashen Pendragon. I vowed to hang onto the family I had left and cherish them every single moment of every day.

Well, not the other Pendragons, obviously. I'd be very happy never to meet them at all.

I was so lost in my thoughts that I didn't hear the kitchen door open, and was unaware that another of the old ladies had popped her head around the door until she said, 'Trinity? Can you come with me, please? Sister Agnes wants to see you.'

Sister Dorothy smiled and nodded encouragingly, so I followed this other woman down the corridor and to a room at the front of the house.

'In you go,' the woman said, smiling brightly.

I pushed open the door and stepped inside, my heart lifting at the sight that greeted me. Sirius, Lowen, and Killian were all sitting on a sofa, while Sister Agnes was on a chair opposite them. They all raised their heads to look at me as I walked in, and Sirius was on his feet immediately.

'Trinity!'

His arms went around me, and he held me so tightly I could barely breathe.

'Thank the goddess you're all right,' he whispered, and I pulled back, emotion overwhelming me as I saw the relief in his tear-filled eyes.

'I'm fine,' I promised him. 'You look tired.'

'Well,' he said with a short laugh, 'I've been kind of busy, looking for you.'

'Oh, honey.' I hugged him tightly, then we kissed—the kiss of two people who'd been desperately afraid they might

never see each other again.

‘Ahem.’ Sister Agnes cleared her throat and we pulled apart, laughing.

‘Sorry, Sister Agnes,’ I said. ‘I’ve kinda missed him, you know?’

‘Oh, that’s quite apparent,’ she said, smiling. ‘And it’s equally apparent he’s missed you, too.’

‘It’s so good to see you, Trinity,’ Lowen said, smiling at me. ‘We were really worried. I’m so sorry I sent you here instead of coming myself. I should never have let you go off alone like that.’

‘Don’t be silly,’ I told him, sitting next to him on the sofa. ‘You tried to warn me, as did Sirius. You’ll soon find out how stubborn I can be. Anyway, I’ll think twice next time.’

‘I was just about to explain to your family what happened,’ Sister Agnes said. ‘They are naturally, ahem, curious as to why you were kidnapped by Sister Gertrude.’

‘I’m kinda curious about that myself,’ I said with feeling. ‘What on earth was she playing at?’

‘To be fair to her,’ Sister Agnes said, ‘she thought she was doing the right thing. She’d seen you walking up Church Street, asking passers-by if they’d heard of me. She was afraid. What you have to understand is that she’s very young, and only joined the Daughters of Hild a few short months ago.’

‘The what?’ I asked, confused.

‘It’s a long story,’ Sirius told me, squeezing my hand. ‘I’ll tell you when we get home, but basically, this is an order of, well, let’s call them nuns for want of a better word, who are dedicated to the memory of Abbess Hilda of Whitby Abbey. They provide sanctuary for magical beings in need.’

‘This is the sanctuary our mother came to before she had us,’ Lowen said, his voice thick with emotion. ‘This is where we were born, Trinity.’

I swallowed. ‘It is?’ It was a lot to take in, knowing our mother had been here, in this very house. I’d give anything to

have her walk through that door right now. ‘So, if you’re on our side, why did Sister Gertrude kidnap me?’

‘She didn’t know who you were,’ Sister Agnes explained. ‘She thought you were a threat, and decided to put you somewhere safe until I could question you. Unfortunately I was home visiting family, which was why you had to remain there so long. If I’d been here I could have sorted this mess out immediately. I’m so sorry, Trinity.’

‘It’s not your fault,’ I said. ‘But why put me in that dungeon? Why not bring me here?’

Sister Agnes rolled her eyes. ‘She thought she’d done a clever and remarkable thing that would impress me. She was very eager to impress me. Sadly, her eagerness rather got in the way of common sense. She decided to keep you away from the other Daughters, so she’d get all the credit. If her Sisters had known about you I can assure you that you’d have been released immediately. Thank goodness Sister Gertrude finally had the sense to fetch me, that’s all I can say.’

‘She got into a bit of a panic,’ I said. ‘She told me Zephyr Ambrose had been killed.’ I turned to Sirius. ‘Is that true?’

‘I’m afraid it is,’ he confirmed. ‘It’s been an horrendous twenty-four hours.’

‘Poor Zephyr,’ I said. ‘What happened?’

‘I’d quite like to know myself,’ Sister Agnes admitted. ‘Emrick came here looking for you,’ she told me, ‘but of course the Sisters knew nothing about you. He told them what had happened to Zephyr, but Sister Gertrude was in such a panic by then, realising she’d made a terrible mistake, that she barely listened. All she could tell me was that it was a Pendragon attack, and it took place right here in Whitby. Perhaps you have more information?’ she asked my family.

‘It seems Zephyr Ambrose was trailing Trinity to make sure she was safe,’ Killian explained. ‘While he was busy watching her, he didn’t notice a fae creeping up on him. Well, he wouldn’t.’ His jaw tightened. ‘We believe it was Malliss, Havok Pendragon’s henchman.’

‘Oh dear,’ Sister Agnes said. ‘Zephyr would have stood no chance. He’s lightning fast that one.’

‘You know about them?’ I asked. ‘You’re fae, aren’t you? Sister Gertrude lost her temper with me and transformed into something quite—’ I’d been about to say hideous, but stopped when I realised how insulting that would sound. After all, for all I knew, Sister Gertrude might be the pretty one. ‘Different,’ I said lamely.

‘The Daughters of Hild are mermaids,’ Killian explained.

‘Mermaids?’ I gaped at Sister Agnes in shock. I thought of the mermaid we’d seen off the coast of Peloryon Island on Beltane. ‘But—but you don’t look like mermaids.’

She laughed. ‘Well, we’re not in the water, are we? I can assure you, being on land takes its toll. That’s why it’s important we go home every year to refresh. Fresh air can have a damaging effect on our complexion,’ she added mischievously.

‘Then why do it?’ I asked. ‘Why stay here?’

‘It’s our work, in memory of our beloved Mother Hild,’ she said solemnly. ‘It’s an honour for us to continue her mission.’

‘I’ll tell you more later,’ Sirius promised me.

‘What baffles me,’ Lowen said, ‘is why the Pendragons sent Malliss after Zephyr. Surely he was far too big and important to be a target? They must have known that would risk a war.’

‘But that’s what they want, I’ve told you,’ Killian said. ‘And what better way to draw out the Great Guardian than to start the next great fae/witch war, forcing him to take back his magic and reveal his identity to them?’

‘It seems Sister Gertrude might well have saved Trinity’s life then,’ Sister Agnes said thoughtfully. ‘If she hadn’t, er, removed Trinity from the scene at that exact moment, Malliss would probably have killed her as well as Zephyr, always supposing they knew who Trinity was. If they did, was she the intended victim all along, rather than Zephyr himself? And

who told the Pendragons that either of them would be in Whitby?’

We all sat in dumb silence, absorbing this. It was a chilling thought. But how would they know who I was? I had no magic, no way of them tracking me.

‘Which suggests,’ Sister Agnes said, when I voiced my thoughts, ‘that if you *were* the intended victim, someone betrayed your identity to the Pendragons. It seems to me, whether their target was you or Zephyr, someone in your ranks is a traitor. You must be very careful in future.’

‘Don’t worry,’ I said. ‘Next time I’ll be on my guard. I should have thought.’

‘There won’t be a next time,’ Sirius said with a shudder. ‘I’m keeping you well away from the magical world.’

‘Do you really think that’s possible?’ Sister Agnes asked gently. ‘Given her heritage?’

‘Sister Agnes,’ I said eagerly, ‘it was you I came to Whitby to find. My sister-in-law—she has this ability to walk in other people’s memories, and she saw the memory of a conversation between Ewella St Clair and Emrick—’ I paused, suddenly realising I had no idea what Emrick’s surname was. When no one volunteered the information I continued. ‘Between Ewella and Emrick. They were discussing our births—mine and Lowen’s—and they were saying that you’d have more information and that you’d tell us the truth if we asked you.’

Sister Agnes nodded. ‘So you came here looking for me, hoping I’d tell you the truth about your birth?’

‘We’d be very grateful,’ Lowen assured her. ‘I know it was a long time ago, but—’

‘Thirty years or thereabouts, as I recall,’ she said thoughtfully. ‘Three decades. Well, that seems fitting.’

We looked at each other, wondering what she meant.

‘So, is there anything you remember about that day?’ Lowen asked hopefully.

Sister Agnes laughed. ‘My dear boy, I remember it as if it were yesterday. It’s not every day you get to deliver the future Great Guardian into the world.’

‘So you do remember!’ I said, relieved. ‘You remember our mother?’

‘I’ll never forget dear Laragh,’ she said, her eyes softening. ‘She was so lost when she came to us. So broken. She was only expected to stay with us a few short months, but months turned into years. She simply couldn’t get past the loss of your father, you see. And after she gave birth she got worse, rather than better. She started to believe her babies were going to kill her. We thought she was going to harm you, so we had to summon Emrick to take you to safety. It was a difficult decision, but we had no choice. We had a lot of difficult decisions to make back then,’ she said with a sigh.

We were all quiet, and I thought about my mother and how she’d grieved the loss of her beloved Ashen. I could imagine how I’d feel if Sirius had been killed in that way, and I couldn’t imagine ever getting over it. Automatically, my hand crept into Sirius’s hand, and he held it tightly as if he knew all too well what I was thinking.

‘We didn’t want to do it you know,’ Sister Agnes said suddenly.

‘Do what?’ I asked, startled.

‘Summon the High Council to remove her magic.’ She shook her head. ‘We had no choice. We’d tried to talk her out of it for a long time, but she was adamant that magic was the cause of all her troubles, and that if she could just be rid of it she, and her children, would be safe. We did all we could to dissuade her, but...’ She broke off and I was touched to see her wiping away tears. ‘That night. That awful night. It was terrifying. We had to do as she asked, you see. After that.’

‘After what?’ Lowen asked nervously. ‘What happened?’

Her eyes took on a faraway expression, as if she were reliving every moment of whatever had gone on that night.



‘It was raining,’ she said, her voice a whisper so I had to strain to hear her. ‘We couldn’t find her. Somehow, she’d got out of the house and—well, we hunted high and low for her. It was me who found her in the end. She was soaking wet and covered in mud. It was her despair,’ she told us, looking round at us all tearfully. ‘I felt her despair. It drew me to her.’

‘Where was she?’ I asked fearfully.

‘She was standing in the churchyard,’ she said. ‘I say in the churchyard; she was actually teetering on the brink of the cliff, looking down as if she...’ She shook her head. ‘I’m sorry to have to tell you this about your own mother,’ she said sadly, ‘but I honestly think—no, I know—that she intended to take her life. She was planning to hurl herself from that cliff, I know it. I’ve never felt such sadness. Such overwhelming hopelessness.’

‘I know,’ Lowen said quietly. ‘I felt it, too.’

‘You did,’ Killian said, surprised. ‘I remember. When we were up there you were not yourself, not at all. It was only when we headed down Church Street that you managed to shrug it off. How is that possible?’

‘How was it possible for *me* to feel Laragh’s despair?’ Sister Agnes asked. ‘Who knows? I know what Mother Hild would have said about it, and who can say she’d be wrong? Anyway, I managed to coax her back to this house, and that was it. We all decided we had no choice but to do what Laragh wanted. I contacted the High Council through Emrick, and they came to Whitby to perform the ceremony. They removed Laragh’s magic, just as she’d wanted.’

‘So the High Council know about you?’ I asked.

‘No. Everything was done through Emrick. We had no personal contact with them, and her magic was removed in the abbey grounds late at night with only Emrick and the High Council there. After it was done, Emrick brought her back to us. Eventually, she recovered enough to decide it was time to make a life for herself again. She wanted a fresh start. Her sister, Keresen, wanted to help her. They planned to take care

of the children together, somewhere the Pendragons would never find them. Sadly, it wasn't to be.'

'It must have been awful for you,' I said sympathetically. 'I'm so sorry.'

She gave me a smile that quite transformed her face. She looked suddenly rather beautiful.

'Thank you,' she said. 'It was an extremely sad time, and we still mourn her passing. And Keresen's, too, of course. We were sorry to hear from Emrick that she had also passed away.'

I appreciated her kindness towards the woman who'd brought me up as her own. She'd been a wonderful mother, but even I hadn't appreciated at the time all she'd done and sacrificed for my sake. I wished she was still here so I could hold her one last time, and tell her how grateful I was, and how much I loved her.

'At least now,' Sister Agnes said, her gaze understanding, 'you have found your brother. That's something, isn't it?'

'It is,' I said. 'We're so glad to have found each other, aren't we, Lowen?'

'Linnet and Wulfram,' she said. 'You were the eldest, Wulfram,' she said, nodding at him. 'And a fine pair of lungs you had on you, too. It caused quite a stir when we realised you were a boy. A boy child, born to one of the Nine Sisters! It had never happened before. We knew immediately it meant something, and that you had to be special. Your mother named you after the wolf and the raven. Magical leaders both, as will you be.'

Lowen blushed and shrugged, as modest as ever.

'And you, dear Linnet,' Sister Agnes continued. 'Named after your grandmother.'

'My grandmother?' I asked nervously. 'Which one?'

'Linnet Pendragon, Ashen's mother. She died when Ashen and Havok were young boys, but Ashen had always told Laragh that she would have spoken up for them. I believe their

father didn't give her the best life. Well, one can imagine.' She sighed and shook her head. 'You were the youngest. What a shock of bright red hair you had. You and Wren were both blessed with that.' She chuckled. 'You were a fierce baby from the start, making sure you got the attention. Poor Wren was always quieter, waiting her turn. Ah, I hope she's safe and well, wherever she is.'

Lowen and I stared at each other, then at her.

'Who's—who's Wren?' I asked tentatively.

Her eyes widened in astonishment. 'Why, the middle child of course. Named after the wife of Phoenix Tremayne, who I believe was the first ever leader of the High Council of Witches. Laragh had great respect for her.' She glanced round at us all, seeming to finally realise we were in shock. 'Wren was your sister. Did you not know?'

'Our sister?' Lowen managed at last. 'You mean there were three of us?'

Sister Agnes looked amazed. 'Well of course there were! What did you think?'

'We thought we were twins,' I confessed, feeling dazed. I was still getting my head around the fact that I had a brother. Now she was telling me I had a sister, too?

'But surely you realised,' she said, sounding puzzled. 'Your mother was one of the Nine Sisters. They only ever have triplets.'

Lowen groaned. 'Of course they do! Cycles of three! How could I have been so stupid?'

'I'm sorry to have broken it to you so bluntly,' Sister Agnes said. 'I just assumed you knew that there were three children born to Laragh that night. I rather think your adopted mother, Trinity, left a clue in the name she chose for you, didn't she? Trinity. Meaning "threeness" or "three-in-one". Dear me, what a shock for you all.'

'So somewhere out there, we have another sister,' I said, hardly able to take it in. I turned to Lowen who seemed deep

in thought, his face pale. 'We have to find her,' I said. 'She needs to be with us. But where do we even start?'

He looked straight at me, and I saw the strangest look in his eyes.

'It's okay,' he said quietly. 'I think I know exactly where she is.'



# Chapter 16

## *Romy*

Mum and I had returned to Peloryon Island after the High Council left Castle Lodge, having had enough of the busy house with so many people gathered in it.

She and I had always sought solitude, I realised. While Keely and Harley had happily moved out and mixed with other people, I'd been quite happy to stay at home in Northumberland. Only my desire to study psychology had prised me away from our remote house in the country, and even then I'd been a day commuter to university, returning home each night, no desire to socialise with other students.

Keely had blamed Mum for that, saying she kept me tied to her apron strings, but it was me really. I liked being at home. I liked being with Mum. I suppose it was because she and I had always had the closest bond. The twins had each other, and never really seemed to have need of us. Plus, of course, they had magic, whereas Mum and I...

Well, at least that was what I'd thought at the time. I knew better now, and it had shaken me to the core to discover that Mum was a witch herself. Having come to terms with that, though, I think I felt even closer to her, because I knew now how much she'd sacrificed for us.

Only meeting John at a psychology conference had persuaded me to leave Northumberland behind and move to Cumbria, where he worked as a family support worker. The fact that I was willing to move so far from home was testament to how much I loved Johnnie.

Now it seemed, even he was to be taken from me. I was determined to spend as much time with him as I could before

that happened, and Mum was happy to take me back to the island so I could be with him.

‘Do you mind the funeral being held here?’ I asked her, as we prepared a late lunch for the three of us. ‘It’s going to be pretty crowded with everyone here. There are bound to be a lot of mourners. Zephyr was so important.’

She shook her head. ‘It’s the least I can do for him,’ she said. ‘Zephyr Ambrose dedicated his life to the service of witches everywhere and lost it trying to protect Trinity. I’ll forever be in his debt for that, and besides, Aveta was right. This is the safest place for everyone to gather. The Pendragons can’t touch us here.’

‘Do you think Trinity’s okay?’

Her eyes clouded. ‘Who knows? I can only pray that she is.’

‘She means a lot to you, doesn’t she? They both do—Trinity and Lowen. I can see it in your face when you’re with them, or when you talk about them.’

She smiled and cupped my face with her hand. ‘I took care of them for four years, sweetheart. They were just tiny babies when they came to us, and I loved them from the moment I saw them. It broke my heart to give them up, even though I knew it was the only way they would be safe. I’m so glad they’re back in my life, and so glad they found each other again.’

I nodded, understanding. It was pointless to be jealous of them. I may have had to share my mother with her two foster babies, but I had no recollection of that time, so what did it matter? Besides, I was used to sharing her. Keely and Harley had certainly taken up most of her attention once they arrived—Keely especially. I smiled to myself, remembering her antics. She’d been such a handful! Poor Mum deserved a medal.

‘Do you want to take this up to John’s room?’ Mum asked, nodding at the ham salad we’d prepared. ‘Or do you

think he'll be happy to eat down here with us, since it's just you and me?'

'I'll go upstairs and ask him,' I said. 'If he wants to eat it up there I'll see if he'd allow me to eat with him. Would you mind?'

'Of course not. He needs you, whether he realises it or not. He shouldn't be left alone to wallow in misery.'

I gave her a grateful smile and headed upstairs. As I padded along the thickly carpeted landing towards John's room, I stopped dead, hearing a sudden commotion in Lowen's room. So they were back then. I sighed inwardly. *Peace is over.*

What on earth was all the excitement about? There was a loud chattering of voices, and I couldn't resist pausing to listen.

'But are you sure about this, Lowen?' That was Killian's voice.

'If you're wrong and you upset her for nothing...'  
Sounded like Sirius.

'I'm not wrong. I'm certain of it.' Lowen's voice was more determined than I'd ever heard it before. 'Think about it. Red hair—'

'Lots of people have red hair!'

'She's nearly thirty, same as us, Trinity! We should have thought of that before, though of course why would we? We weren't looking for another sister, were we? But Ewella even told me I was here on the island with her. We used to play together.'

'But that's because Ewella gave birth to her around the same time our mother gave birth to us! It proves nothing.'

I froze. What were they on about? Were they talking about me?

'Okay,' Lowen said. 'So what about this? Why did Romy fall for Blaise St Clair when Hector had done something to him to ensure that no St Clair so much as gave him a second



look? He told us himself that he couldn't understand how Romy had fallen in love with him. It was never supposed to happen. Well, if she's not a St Clair it makes perfect sense, doesn't it? Keely and Harley couldn't understand what she saw in him because the magic worked on them. They're blood St Clairs. I'd bet my last pound that Romy isn't.'

'I suppose you've got a point,' Sirius said, sounding cautious.

'I think he makes an excellent point,' Killian said.

'Question is,' Trinity said breathlessly, 'how do we tell her?'

I opened the door and stared at them all, seeing the shock in their faces as they realised I'd heard what they were saying.

'Don't worry,' I said. 'I think you already did.'



# Chapter 17

## *Romy*

Lowen was clearly mortified.

‘Romy, I’m so sorry. You weren’t supposed to hear any of that.’

‘Clearly,’ I said, trying not to sound too emotional. ‘You seem to be under the impression that I’m not a St Clair. May I ask why?’

I saw them all exchange worried looks, and knew I sounded weird, even to my own ears. I was desperately trying to keep a lid on my feelings. Fear was attacking me from every angle.

I’d heard what he’d said. I understood the implications. I just refused to accept that it could possibly be true. I’d never had witchcraft, never been part of Keely’s and Harley’s world. Mum had been my life raft. Then I found out she had magic, too, and all I had left to cling to was my family name. I was a St Clair. I had to be. Now they were trying to take even that away from me.

‘I think we’d better fetch Ewella,’ Trinity said. She gave my hand a quick squeeze. ‘I’ll be back in a minute, Romy.’

She hurried downstairs, leaving me staring at three awkward-looking young men, who clearly didn’t know what to do or say next.

‘You said I wasn’t a St Clair,’ I began, but Sirius shook his head.

‘Wait for your mum to get here,’ he said gently. ‘We can’t really talk about this without her. Only she can clear up this mystery.’

‘There is no mystery,’ I said angrily. ‘Whatever you think you know you’re wrong! I don’t know where you’ve got this weird idea from but—’

‘From Sister Agnes,’ Lowen said. ‘From the woman who delivered us.’

‘Us?’ I backed away from him. ‘What are you talking about?’

He couldn’t stop staring at me and it was unnerving me.

‘I’m going to see John,’ I said, turning to leave. ‘I was going to ask him about lunch. He hasn’t eaten yet. He’ll be hungry.’

‘Wait, Romy,’ Lowen begged me. ‘Don’t leave just yet. We need to sort this out.’

‘There’s nothing to sort out,’ I insisted. ‘You’ve made a mistake. That’s all.’

‘If you really believe that,’ he said, ‘you won’t mind waiting for your mum, will you? She can straighten things out once and for all, and if I’m wrong then I’ll apologise wholeheartedly to both of you. But if I’m right...’ He shook his head slightly. ‘If I’m right then this is huge. This is—amazing.’

‘You’re not right!’ I cried. ‘I’m a St Clair, and that’s all there is to it.’

I turned to leave but collided with Mum and Trinity who were coming through the door. Mum looked absolutely panic stricken. She pulled me into a fierce hug.

‘Romy! What have they said to you?’

‘They haven’t actually said very much to me,’ I told her tearfully, ‘but they were saying quite a bit when they didn’t know I could hear them.’

‘We’re so sorry,’ Sirius told Mum sorrowfully. ‘We came straight to this room because we thought we’d be away from you both, and we wanted to talk it over before we said anything to you. We had no idea she was upstairs. It was just bad timing.’

Mum let me go and sank onto Lowen and Keely's bed, her head in her hands.

My heart jumped into my throat. 'Mum, has Trinity told you what they said? Tell them they're wrong! Explain to them.'

She rubbed her face then gazed up at me, her eyes beseeching.

'I'm so sorry, Romy.'

'What?' My voice came out in a whisper. 'What are you saying?'

'I think,' Lowen said gently, 'that what she's saying is that we're right. You're not a St Clair, Romy. You're a Pendragon. You're Wren Pendragon, and you're my sister. Trinity's sister. We're triplets.'

'Don't be...' My voice trailed off as I saw the look on Mum's face. Without her saying a word I knew she was confirming Lowen's outrageous claim. She wasn't my mum at all. Harley and Keely weren't my siblings. Trinity and Lowen were.

'Three will become two,' I murmured. Lyrica's words had haunted me for months, ever since she told us her prophecy at The Fool's Journey back in April. I'd been so afraid for a long time that it meant something awful was going to happen to either me or one of the twins. Now I realised those words had a different meaning entirely.

'I'm sorry?' Trinity asked.

'It was a prophecy,' I said, feeling dazed. 'One will become three, three will become two, two will become three. I never knew what it meant. It was about us. Lowen discovering who he was—the three in one. Fae, witch, Great Guardian. Keely and Harley losing me, so the three sisters become two. You and Trinity finding me, so two becomes three. It was all about us. Lyrica knew. The three hares! That was the card she pulled. She said, "He is returning". She meant you, Lowen! She knew all that time. It was all about us.'

'I think she's getting hysterical,' Mum said worriedly.

Except, she wasn't Mum, was she? Laragh Pendragon was my mother. I was the daughter of one of the Nine Sisters and a Pendragon. A Pendragon! I sank onto the floor, too weak with confusion and grief to stand any longer.

Trinity immediately sat next to me and, after a moment's hesitation, Lowen joined us. We sat there together, our backs against the wall, the three of us with me in the middle.

'This is amazing,' Killian breathed. 'The three Pendragon children reunited after all this time.'

Sirius dropped onto the bed beside Mum. 'I just can't take all this in,' he confessed.

I lifted my gaze to my mother and said, 'Why didn't you tell me?'

She gave me an anguished look. 'Why do you think? To keep you safe! When Emrick, Keresen, and I agreed to separate you and each take one of you to raise, we swore an oath that we wouldn't tell you, or anyone else, who you really were, and that we wouldn't reveal where we were taking you, even to each other. I left Peloryon Island with you and the twins, and found our house in Northumberland, miles away from anyone. I've done all I can to protect you, and that meant you could never know. You're Romy St Clair, and that's all that matters.'

'Except she's not, is she?' Killian asked reasonably. 'She's Wren Pendragon.'

'Wren Pendragon would be a target,' Mum cried. 'Can't you see that? I never wanted any of this to come out—not just for Romy, but for you, Lowen, and you, Trinity. I hoped none of you would ever discover who you truly were. I wanted you to have happy, normal lives, away from magic. Magic killed your real parents, and it killed my husband. Do you think I wanted that for any of you? I loved you all so much, and I couldn't bear to put you at risk.'

'But it wasn't your decision to make,' Lowen said gently. 'You must have known, once those invitations were sent from Meri Kittow, that I was going to be called? And that if my

identity was revealed, it was only a matter of time before I discovered I had sisters?’

‘And when Lowen and I found each other,’ Trinity said, ‘you must have seen how happy we were to be reunited, yet you still said nothing to Romy.’

‘Romy already had two sisters,’ Mum said stubbornly. ‘I was happy for you and Lowen, of course I was, but Romy didn’t need you. She had a family already.’

I just didn’t know what to think. I felt completely torn in two. Part of me clung to her, and to the sisters I’d loved all my life and had grown up with. But there was a part of me that knew I could never feel the same again now I’d learned the truth. I wasn’t a St Clair, I was a Pendragon. It changed everything. How could it not?

A prickle of excitement ran through me as I realised something else.

‘So I do have magic!’ I gasped. ‘I wasn’t born non-magical. It was just suppressed by this island to protect me!’

‘Half witch, half fae,’ Trinity said ruefully. ‘Blows your mind, doesn’t it?’

‘Oh, Romy, please...’ Mum shook her head. ‘Please try to understand. Forget all this about the magical world. Go back to Cumbria. Go back to work. Live your life out of harm’s way, please.’

If she’d known how much not having magic had tormented me all my life she would never have said that. Growing up with two younger sisters who took great pleasure in using their powers, even when—especially when—they weren’t supposed to, had made me feel inadequate, as much as I tried to hide it. How I’d envied them their abilities! And all the time my own magic was lying dormant inside me. All that time!

‘Did Emrick know?’ I asked, then shook my head. ‘Of course he knew! He lied to me too.’

‘Emrick did that for me,’ she said dully. ‘Don’t blame him. He wanted to tell you from the moment Lowen took

Excalibur from the sea, but I wouldn't let him. I begged him. He warned me Sister Agnes wouldn't cover up the truth, but I never thought you'd work it out. I thought—I don't know what I thought. I suppose I just clung to the hope that you'd never find out, and that Lowen and Trinity would give up searching.'

'As if we'd ever have done that!' Trinity said incredulously. 'You think we'd have just given up on our sister? Never.'

'I understand why you did it, Ewella,' Lowen said kindly. 'I really do. But the truth is out there now, and Romy knows who she is. You can't keep her wrapped up in cotton wool any longer. You have to set her free to fulfil her destiny, whatever that may be.'

'It's easy for you to say,' Mum said tearfully. 'What about the prophecy? One of you girls will make a great sacrifice for the sake of peace. That's what it said. That's why I didn't want either of you to know. I wanted you to stay hidden away forever. It's bad enough for Lowen, but what great sacrifice are you going to have to make, eh?'

'I remember Emrick telling us that,' Lowen said thoughtfully. 'He said my sister would make a great sacrifice to ensure the war between fae and witches is stopped.' He looked from me to Trinity and back again. 'And there's no way of knowing which one of them that will be?'

'I don't even know where the prophecy came from,' she said miserably. 'It was just something Emrick told me about.'

'I don't blame you for wanting to protect Romy from that,' Sirius said fervently. 'I'd do anything to protect Trinity from it, so I understand.'

She gave him a grateful smile. 'Thank you.'

I got to my feet.

'Where are you going?' she asked, alarmed.

'I never gave John his lunch,' I said. 'I'm going to fetch his tray now and eat in his room with him, whether he wants me there or not. I need—I need to be with someone familiar'



right now. I need things to be normal, just for a little while longer. Being with Johnnie is where I feel safest. I'm sorry.'

As I left the room, I heard Sirius say, 'Being with Blaise St Clair is where she feels safest? Well, there's irony for you.'



# Chapter 18

## *Romy*

‘So,’ John said, prodding listlessly at his ham salad, ‘another secret comes to light. You’re not Romy St Clair at all.’

I almost dropped my fork as I stared at him in horror. ‘How did you know?’

‘You were having a particularly loud and heated discussion just along the landing from me,’ he said. ‘How could I not overhear that? Were you ever going to tell me or was that another thing you intended to keep from me?’

Was that why he’d agreed to have lunch with me? I’d been sure he’d tell me to go away, but he’d been surprisingly agreeable when I asked if I could join him in his room to eat with him. Maybe he’d just wanted to get information from me.

‘Anyway,’ he added, making a half-hearted attempt at a smile, ‘at least that means I’m not your twelve times great uncle. I was feeling a bit icky about all that to be honest.’

Despite his efforts I could hear the sadness in his voice and knew he was heartbroken at the way things were going. He wasn’t the only one.

‘It’s all such a mess,’ I said, stabbing a tomato as if all my troubles were its fault. ‘I had no idea about any of this. You must believe me.’

‘The way you believe me, you mean?’ He shook his head. ‘Shouldn’t trust work both ways?’

‘I do trust you, Johnnie,’ I said sadly. ‘If you overheard our conversation you should have heard me saying just that. You’re the only person I feel safe with right now.’

He raised an eyebrow. ‘Is that the truth?’

‘Of course it is! I was scared at first, naturally. But the thing is, you believe yourself to be John Ford, and have no memory of Blaise St Clair. Well, I believed myself to be Romy St Clair for the whole of my life and had no memory of Wren Pendragon. Yet here I am. Oh, I know I was a small child when my magic was suppressed and my memories tampered with, but even so. I know how it feels.’

‘At least you knew about magic,’ he said dully. ‘I had no idea.’

‘No.’ I sighed. ‘You’re right. It’s not the same. Not exactly. But I know you. The real you. If you look me in the eye and tell me you have no memory of being Blaise, I swear I’ll believe you.’

He put his plate on the bed, then leaned towards me, his expression earnest.

‘I swear to you, Romy, I don’t know anything about Blaise St Clair. The name means nothing to me. None of this makes sense. I don’t care who they say I really am, and I don’t care who you really are. I’m John and you’re Romy, and I just want us to go home and get on with our lives.’

I took his hand and squeezed it tearfully. ‘I feel the same,’ I told him. ‘I still love you, Johnnie.’

‘You mean it?’

‘Of course I mean it. You’re the love of my life. Nothing changes that.’

‘I love you, too,’ he said fiercely. ‘We’re not going to let them part us, are we?’

‘Not if I can help it,’ I promised him. ‘Somehow, we’re going to—’

The door flew open, and John dropped my hand as Keely and Harley entered the room. I saw immediately that they knew what had happened. Harley’s eyes were red and swollen with crying, and Keely—always more stoic—looked on the verge of tears herself.

‘I think you’d better go with them,’ John said, leaning back against the headboard and picking up his plate. ‘You three obviously have a lot to talk about.’

I gave him a grateful smile and followed the twins back to the room I was currently sleeping in—the room the three of us had shared when we first arrived on this island a whole lifetime ago.

We each sat on our respective beds and stared at each other.

‘It can’t be true, can it?’ Keely asked at last. ‘You’re Romy. You’ve always been Romy. But Lowen says...’ She broke off and stared out of the window, and knowing Keely I guessed she was desperately trying to conceal the fact that she was crying.

Harley didn’t even attempt to hide it. ‘I can’t believe this!’ she burst out, tears streaming down her face. ‘You’re our big sister. We can’t lose you!’

‘Except she’s not our sister,’ Keely said flatly, still staring out of the window. ‘She’s Lowen’s sister, and Trinity’s sister. She’s a Pendragon, just like them.’

‘We can’t lose you!’ Harley repeated, sounding even more desperate this time. She jumped up and wrapped her arms around me as if she never wanted to let me go.

‘One will become three, three will become two, two will become three,’ Keely intoned. She turned to face me at last and I saw her cheeks were wet with tears. ‘That’s what Lyrica meant, wasn’t it? Our loss is the Pendragons’ gain.’

‘That’s what she meant?’ Harley stared at her. ‘She knew, all that time!’

‘Three will be reunited, remember? The Pendragon children. It was always going to happen,’ Keely said bitterly. ‘And Emrick and Mum knew it. I’ll never forgive them for this.’

‘Don’t say that,’ I said gently. ‘If it hadn’t been for Emrick and Mum’s actions I might not be here at all. We could all be dead—me, Lowen, and Trinity. If they hadn’t given up

so much to protect us the Pendragons would have killed us. I owe them my life.'

I didn't know where this sudden need to defend them came from. It surprised me, and Keely and Harley looked stunned.

'Well,' Harley said at last, 'I suppose that's one way of looking at it.'

'It's the only way of looking at it,' I told her. 'What do you want me to do? Rant and rave about it? Block them from my life? For what? For sacrificing everything to make sure the three of us survived to adulthood?'

'Look, I was angry too at first. I was devastated. But the fact is, Mum could have had a normal life. She could have walked away from me, taken you two back to Castle Clair and lived comfortably under the protection of her in-laws. Instead, she risked everything, lost everything, to raise me as your sister and make sure I had a chance of the sort of life she'd given up.'

The twins exchanged glances.

'She's right,' Harley said. 'Look how scared Mum was all those years, and now we know why. She's lived with a terrible burden. How can we be angry with her?'

Keely sank onto the bed and rested her head on my shoulder. 'I know,' she said wretchedly. 'I just want someone to be angry with, because I've lost my sister and it's breaking my heart.'

'You haven't lost me,' I promised her. 'We've grown up together. We'll always be sisters, no matter what. I've just got two more siblings now, that's all. And a chance to find out who I really am, and where I fit in this world.'

'You're a Pendragon,' Harley said. 'Half fae! You must have magic, just like Killian. Well, not exactly like Killian because he's—'

'A god!' Keely finished for her, rolling her eyes. 'We know. Even so, you're right. You will have fae magic as well as our sort of magic. Look who your parents are! Oh my word,

Romy, you're the daughter of one of the Nine Sisters. Should we curtsy?'

I laughed. 'You two princesses of Lyonesse? Never!'

Harley managed a smile at last. 'What a crazy few months this has been. Just look at us! A counsellor, a librarian, and a children's entertainer one minute, and the next a descendant of Arthur and magical royalty. My head's blown.'

'And look at our partners, too,' Keely said with a grin. 'An old god, the Great Guardian, and a fugitive witch from the seventeenth century. Which reminds me,' she added, her face suddenly becoming serious once again, 'what's happening with you two? You looked very close when we walked in.'

'We were,' I said, my heart lifting at the memory. 'John knows I believe in him. He swore he doesn't know who Blaise is and that's enough for me. And he knows who I really am, but he still loves me. I'm not going to let them take him away from me,' I added fiercely. 'Just let them try!'

'Ooh, Romy, I like this feisty new you,' Keely said admiringly. 'You were always far too nice and accepting. Seems finding out who you are is having a positive effect on you, even before you reclaim your magic.'

She was right, I realised. I felt different already. Stronger. More capable. I supposed being the only member of the family without magic had weighed on me far more than I'd acknowledged. Suddenly I had a new confidence. No one was going to take John away from me. I might not know much about what lay ahead of me, but I knew that much at least.





# Chapter 19

## *Trinity*

It was a long and emotional night—not least for Romy and Ewella, who were together in Romy’s room for a couple of hours. No one disturbed them. We all realised they must have a heck of a lot to talk about.

While they were up there, Sirius persuaded me to stay on the island, rather than going back to Castle Clair. He was worried I’d been the Pendragons’ intended target, not Zephyr, and if that was true it meant they knew who I really was. This island was the only place I’d be safe from them, and he wanted me here until we had a clearer picture of what happened. I didn’t raise too much of an objection. After all, I had a new sister here, and I wanted to spend time with her.

Between us, Lowen and I managed to get Sirius to agree to easing off on Blaise, too. Whether he knew who he really was or not, Romy believed in him. Until we had proof to the contrary I didn’t want to risk upsetting her any more than we had already. She had enough to deal with.

Harley and Keely wanted to be on the island, too, which wasn’t surprising. It was only natural they needed to spend time with Romy. It must have been an awful shock to them when they learned she wasn’t their blood sister after all. I felt sad for them, even while I was still reeling with the amazing news that I had a brother and a sister. I just wished Mom could have been with us to celebrate the fact that we were all together again.

Killian and Harley zapped over to Castle Clair to tell everyone what had happened, and that the Pendragon triplets were reunited. They also explained why so many of us would be at Peloryon House for the foreseeable.

They returned with Emrick, who was clearly anxious. His face crumpled when he saw Romy, who hesitated when she first set eyes on him. Then she gave him a big hug, and wow, the look on his face! That was relief and delight and more relief, right there.

We all spent the evening talking and listening, explaining and forgiving, and it was lovely. It really was. Even so, none of us brought up the future. It was all about the past and resolving those issues. No one ventured to ask the question, what next? And Romy and I—although we didn't say so out loud—were probably both thinking the same thing. Which of us was going to have to make a sacrifice? And what would that sacrifice be?

We had a great dinner, all of us sitting around the table together. Even John joined us, and Sirius kept his promise to cut him some slack. He didn't speak much to him, but at least when he did he was civil.

Ewella proposed a toast to the three of us and shed a few tears as she did so.

Lowen then got to his feet and said, 'And a toast to you, Ewella, and to you, Emrick, and to Aunt Keresen, who kept us safe all those years. None of us would be here without the three of you. We'll be forever in your debt.'

Glasses clinked together, and I murmured, 'Thank you, Mom.' She might have been my aunt, but she'd always be Mom to me. She was, after all, the only mother I'd ever known.

We slept in late and ate a hearty breakfast while we discussed our plans for the day. Before we could reach any firm conclusions, however, Aveta arrived to inform us that Zephyr's funeral was to take place on the island the following day.

'Tomorrow?' Ewella frowned. 'That's a bit quick, isn't it?'

'The sooner the better really,' Aveta said. 'We need closure, at least in one area. Some of the voices of dissent are

growing louder. Last night, Woden Crossley was arrested by the High Council. He was inciting violence against the fae, urging all good and loyal witches to seek vengeance. We need to draw the focus back to Zephyr and make sure the community unites in mourning him and laying him to rest. Then we can move on to other matters.'

'What other matters?' Sirius asked suspiciously.

'For a start, making sure everyone knows the fae haven't kidnapped Trinity,' she said, smiling warmly at me. 'I'm very glad to see you back safe and sound, my dear. What a relief for everyone.'

'You know what happened?' I asked.

'I went to Castle Clair first thing this morning,' she said. 'Iliana told me what had gone on.' She turned to Romy. 'Well, another Pendragon child! Incredible. This, of course, changes everything.'

'It does?' Lowen asked. 'Why?'

'If the Pendragons discover that the three children of Laragh and Ashen Pendragon have been reunited, they will also realise that the prophecies surrounding them will start to play out. The Great Guardian will restore peace to the magical community, and his sister will play her part to help. They'll be desperate to find out your identities. Naturally, that can't be allowed to happen until you have your magic and are able to defend yourselves. In the meantime, the witch community grows ever more restless. Some of them are out for revenge. We need to move forward on this as fast as possible.'

She glanced round at us all, the faint smile on her face fading and her eyes widening suddenly as she caught sight of John, sitting next to Romy.

'You! What are you doing here?'

John shifted uncomfortably under her gaze and looked at Romy for help.

'Oh yes,' Emrick said lightly. 'We forgot to mention that we have a visitor.'

‘You forgot to mention...’ Aveta’s eyes narrowed. ‘Does Iliana know about this?’

‘She does, and it was as much of a shock to her as it was to the rest of us,’ Sirius said. He glanced at Romy and his expression softened. ‘But he’s here now, and we’re dealing with it.’

‘Really?’ Aveta’s tone was icy. ‘And perhaps you’d care to explain how you’re doing that?’

‘With the help of a couple of Guardians,’ Emrick said firmly.

Aveta’s stance changed. ‘The Guardians are aware of this?’

‘They most certainly are. They’re discussing the situation as we speak. It’s all under control, Aveta. No need for the High Council to worry. You’ve got enough to think about, don’t you agree?’

‘Well...’ Aveta sighed. ‘I suppose if the Guardians are involved... You’re right, of course. We do have other things to deal with, not least the funeral tomorrow, and then waiting for the Guardians to elect a new leader of the High Council, while trying to quell the rebellion in the ranks. He’s no threat?’

‘None whatsoever,’ Emrick promised her. ‘He has no magic, remember? Plus he doesn’t even know who he was, so there’s nothing to worry about.’

‘Very well.’ She shook her head. ‘Honestly, it’s one thing after another these days. Anyway, I’d better get off to St Ives and pacify the Ambroses, who are still miffed that the funeral’s going to be here. Eleven o’clock. I trust everything will be ready?’

‘Everything will be ready,’ Emrick confirmed.

She nodded and left, muttering something about ingratitude and thankless tasks.

‘Well,’ Ewella said, looking round at us all. ‘It seems we have another busy day ahead of us. A big day tomorrow.’

The funeral of the leader of the High Council of Witches on a magical island in the sea off Cornwall, no less. What the hell had my life become?



## Chapter 20

### *Lowen*

The following day Peloryon House played host to dozens of people. John was safely tucked out of the way in his bedroom, as it was clear that today wasn't the day to announce the return of Blaise St Clair.

All the family from Castle Clair had returned, minus Aither, Seren, and Astra. Mrs Greenwood was staying at home to babysit them all, as she'd decided she wasn't up to coming face to face with her estranged daughter. Too much water, it seemed, had passed under that particular bridge.

The High Council members gathered in the study to privately greet the O'Briens—or at least, some of them. Orlagh, Ailill, Aidan, and Aisling were present, although judging by Aisling's face she'd rather be anywhere else. Obviously the fact that her brother had married a witch hadn't softened her dislike for witches in general, which was tough for her, because apart from the St Clairs, the living room was now crowded with various high-ranking witches from across the country. Most of those witches naively believed that the O'Briens were also witches, albeit ones of such great stature that no one was allowed to touch them.

The Ambroses arrived just as we were on the point of wondering if they weren't going to bother. Titania Ambrose was dressed head to toe in black, with a heavy, black veil covering her face.

Star muttered something about it being an improvement, while Sky whispered to us that it was probably to hide her shame when she saw Benedict, though Star was quite certain that Titania didn't know what shame was. Benedict said nothing, and although he greeted both Elvira and Easton with

hugs, he pointedly didn't even look in his so-called mother's direction.

We all felt huge compassion for Elvira and Easton. Like Aurora they were clearly devastated. The witch community might have lost its leader, and the wider magical community a reassuring and imposing presence, but when it came right down to it, those three had lost their dad. At that moment everything else seemed to pale into insignificance.

We left Peloryon House a little behind schedule, but there was no sense of urgency among us. I think we were all too sad for that, and it seemed the sky was in mourning for the leader of the High Council of Witches, too. It hung low, swollen with heavy, grey clouds for most of the morning, and as the long procession snaked its way along the island track towards the chapel, the rain began to fall.

No one made any attempt to protect themselves from getting wet. Somehow it seemed fitting. The mood was as mournful as the weather, and we all entered the chapel with hearts as heavy as the pewter skies.

The island had decorated the chapel beautifully. Its walls gleamed white, the scent of incense hung in the air, and fresh, white flowers adorned the long table that stood beneath the triple stained-glass window, which depicted the moments the three Great Guardians, me included, received Excalibur, and which took up most of the front wall.

Another long table, which faced the window, was bare but for a white cloth, and it was here that Bob, Kendrew, Amlodd, and Easton gently set down the coffin.

Easton was clearly upset but was doing his best to be brave. White-faced and trembling, he tilted his chin and blinked his eyes a few times, and I saw his Adam's apple bobbing up and down in his throat as he fought to control his emotions. He gently patted the coffin then joined his mother, Aurora, and Elvira on the front bench.

Amlodd and Kendrew bowed briefly to the coffin and returned to their seats, grim-faced, their eyes bleak.



Bob, however, was openly crying. I thought for a moment that he was going to throw himself on the coffin and weep, but luckily he managed to restrain himself at the last moment. He stroked the oak lid and whispered something before returning to his own seat, where Aveta gently patted his knee and murmured something to him. If they were words of comfort they didn't seem to work, as his shoulders shook, and he buried his face in a large, white handkerchief.

'He was very fond of Zephyr,' Iliana explained from the bench in front of me, dabbing at her own eyes with a lace hanky. 'This is all very upsetting.'

With that, the soaring, melancholy music of the merfolk began, just as it had at Meri's funeral. Keely squeezed my hand and I put my arm around her, seeing the distress in her face. Anyone who hadn't been moved before that moment couldn't fail to be now. There was something so completely gut-wrenching, and yet so stunningly beautiful about that song, no one could remain untouched. People openly wept. Even the mighty O'Briens were clearly overcome with emotion.

It had only been a couple of weeks since we were all here celebrating the wedding of Harley and Killian. It had been such a joyous occasion. None of us could have foreseen what lay ahead.

I hastily wiped my own eyes, thinking of Zephyr, and the price he'd paid to protect my sister. I couldn't cry. The Great Guardian had to be strong. A leader. I forced myself to remain stony-faced. I had to get through this and prove I was fit to wield the Sword of Feidhlim. So much depended on me.

The song of the merfolk finally died away and all around me people struggled to compose themselves. Well, all except Bob, who blew his nose with such force it's a wonder he didn't put a hole in his handkerchief.

Aveta seemed to have been elected to say a few words, which she did. She spoke movingly of Zephyr's dedication and loyalty to the High Council, and of his bravery in making difficult choices that many would shy away from.

She told of his courage and selflessness in his final act.

‘Despite knowing he could be in danger, he chose to put himself in harm’s way to protect the Pendragon child,’ she said, her tone a mixture of grief and pride. ‘His final great act was one of sacrifice, and the magical community will be forever grateful.’

She reached out and gently stroked the coffin lid. ‘My old friend, the world is a poorer place without you, but we will strive to continue the good work you made it your life’s mission to carry out. Rest well.’

She turned back to face us all and managed a faint smile. ‘And now I invite Zephyr’s widow, Titania Ambrose, to say a few words.’

My gaze slid towards Benedict, who swallowed hard but kept his face impassive. I had to admire him. Maybe he could teach me a thing or two about hiding emotion.

Titania rose from her seat with dignity and moved purposefully to stand at the spot Aveta had just vacated. It crossed my mind fleetingly that she was shorter than I’d realised, which I supposed she got from Mrs Greenwood. Titania, however, had none of her mother’s nervous, fluttery gestures. She seemed cool and confident.

She gave the coffin a long, hard stare, then turned slowly to face us all. I had no idea who she was looking at, because the veil was too thick to see her face. It didn’t prevent her from speaking loudly and clearly enough for us all to hear her, though.

‘I would like to say thank you to Her Majesty for allowing us to use this chapel and island for the burial of my husband,’ she said, nodding vaguely in the direction of Ewella, who inclined her head in return.

Titania cleared her throat and paused a moment before continuing. ‘I can’t pretend it was my first choice. I believe Zephyr deserves the sort of funeral that previous leaders of the High Council were given. He should have been buried with honours in Glastonbury with them. However, circumstances

dictate that tradition must be ignored. Aveta tells me that the very first leader of the High Council, Phoenix Tremayne, was buried here on this island. I take comfort from knowing that the two greatest leaders the High Council has ever had will now lie in the same graveyard.'

There was some shuffling, and meaningful looks were exchanged between the elder witches, who clearly thought that Zephyr's level of greatness was up for debate.

'Zephyr was a good man, a dutiful husband, and a loving father,' Titania continued. 'I was lucky to meet him, after an exceptionally traumatic childhood which could have emotionally scarred me for life.'

'What?' I heard Star gasp indignantly and saw Benedict's knuckles whiten as he gripped her hand.

'Zephyr gave me the chance to heal and recover, to make a new life for myself with someone who saw the real me and loved me for who I was, rather than with people who tried to force me into their own small, sad little world, and did their best to crush my spirit.'

'Is she talking about Nan?' Star said fiercely.

'Shh, darling,' Iliana urged. 'Let her say what she likes. No one will believe a word of it.'

'They will,' Star said, nodding at the younger witches who were clearly hanging on every word.

'Hush,' Raiden said. 'Please, Star, don't make a scene. For Aurora's sake at least.'

Star bit her lip but said nothing more, as Titania continued to discuss her wonderful marriage and the happiness the arrival of hers and Zephyr's two children, Elvira and Easton, had given them both. She made little mention of Aurora and none at all of Benedict, which didn't surprise us, but still infuriated us all on their behalf.

'Aveta spoke of my husband's final act of bravery and sacrifice,' Titania said. 'She said the magical community would be forever grateful.'

She finally lifted her veil and stared round at us all. She had dyed red hair, scraped back from her face which was pale and pinched looking. Her lips were thin and her eyes like flint, and I thought she had none of Mrs Greenwood's softness and roundness, and that Benedict must have got his good looks from his father.

'Well,' she continued at last, 'I'm not grateful. I'm not proud. I'm not going to stand here today and tell you how wonderful Zephyr was to throw his life away for that Pendragon child.'

Her eyes scanned the chapel, clearly looking for Trinity. She had no idea who Trinity was, but since she knew the O'Briens, most of the St Clairs, and probably most of the other witches, that only left me, Trinity, Romy, Keely, and Harley as candidates for Pendragon children. No doubt she knew that the child in question was a woman, and it was possible she'd heard she was a redhead. That narrowed it down to Trinity and Romy. I guess she quickly figured out that we three were the Pendragons in the chapel.

Her lip curled. 'No Pendragon was worth that sacrifice,' she said coldly. 'We all know what that particular family is capable of.'

'We do, both for good and evil,' Kendrew said, getting to his feet. Clearly, he could see the way this was going and had no stomach for it. 'The Pendragons who killed Zephyr were monsters, no doubt about it, but remember Feidhlim! Remember Arthur! They were Pendragons too, and we owe them everything. You know what the prophecy says about these children.'

'Does our so-called Great Guardian wield the sword then?' she asked, raising one eyebrow mockingly.

Kendrew glanced round at me, and I shrank back in my seat, feeling ashamed.

A fair-haired witch, probably in her early forties, got to her feet. 'Now is surely not the time to be discussing this matter, Titania,' she said. 'We're here to lay Zephyr to rest, not stir up bad feeling.'

‘Stir up bad feeling?’ Titania snapped. ‘You think I’m the one to do that, Elinora Harbottle? Have you any idea how many witches feel the same way as I do? And meanwhile the High Council does nothing! Their leader was murdered by fae scum, and they sit there—’

We couldn’t hear how she finished that sentence because the murmurings from the congregation grew so loud. It was hard to tell whether they agreed with her or not.

‘Please, please, may we have quiet?’ Aveta called.

As the conversation dropped to a loud hum, she said, ‘I understand your concerns, but now isn’t the time for impetuous actions. We need to take our time and consider this.’

‘And let the fae murder another witch?’ someone called.

‘She’s right,’ said another, rising from his seat. ‘Who knows who’ll be next? Could be any one of us. Meanwhile you lot arrest Woden Crossley, the one man who demands that the fae pay for their crimes.’

‘Shut your cakehole, Sylvester Crake, or you’ll end up the same way,’ Castor called, making Iliana cringe.

I groaned inwardly as Aisling leapt up. ‘I think you’re forgetting that the Pendragons don’t speak for the fae any more than you speak for all witches,’ she said angrily. ‘Don’t blame the fae for what happened to Zephyr Ambrose!’

‘Oh yes, and who should we blame then?’ the man demanded, glaring at her. ‘Are you telling us the O’Briens are fae sympathisers now?’

‘Oh, lord,’ Sky said. ‘This is going to end in tears.’

‘At the very least,’ Sirius agreed, hooking his arm around Trinity’s shoulders as if to protect her.

‘Aisling, sit down,’ Ailill commanded, but Aisling didn’t appear to be listening. Or if she was, she’d decided to ignore her father.

‘I refuse to sit here and let you blame all fae for the actions of Havok Pendragon and his cronies,’ she said. ‘Most

fae want peace more than any of you witches do.’

‘You witches?’ demanded someone else. ‘What’s that supposed to mean?’

‘You’re an O’Brien,’ a tall, male witch with steel grey hair said, eyeing her accusingly. ‘You’re supposed to be on our side.’

‘Aisling,’ Orlagh urged.

Aisling shook off her restraining arm and stepped into the aisle to stand beside a surprised looking Titania.

‘Aw no,’ Killian groaned. ‘Now we’ve had it!’

‘We speak for the fae,’ Aisling said, her eyes flashing a warning. ‘And you’d do well to listen to us.’

‘You do what?’ the male witch asked incredulously. ‘You’re on their side? Since when?’

‘Since always.’ Aisling closed her eyes and there was a weird shimmering sensation suddenly. I knew what that meant. I’d seen this before at Ballydraiocht.

‘Aisling, no!’

Aidan had leapt into the aisle, but it was too late. His sister now stood before us all in her true form, and most of the congregation were in clear shock.

‘What—what?’ I heard a few exclamations of fear, and heads turned to the rest of the O’Briens who, thankfully, had retained their human façade.

‘What is this?’ Titania demanded. ‘What are you?’

‘Zephyr never told you?’ Aisling’s voice was strange and echoey.

Aveta, Kendrew, and Amlodd rushed to the front of the church and faced the congregation, their frantic pleas for silence largely unheard.

‘What are they? What’s going on?’

‘Are they fae?’

The male witch with grey hair headed towards Aisling but was halted midway, much to his obvious annoyance. I guessed, by her intense expression, that Kendrew had put some sort of boundary between him and them.

‘Sit down, Marco Golightly!’ Amlodd bellowed. ‘Haven’t you caused enough trouble lately?’

‘You’re entertaining fae scum at our leader’s funeral?’ Golightly yelled. ‘And you think I’m the one causing trouble?’ He turned to face us all. ‘This is what we’re up against. All these years the O’Briens have mingled with our community, attending our annual convention in Glastonbury, treated as special guests. Now do you see? Do you see why we weren’t allowed to touch them? Because we’d have known instantly they weren’t witches. And the High Council has been complicit in this deceit! We’ve been fooled, used. There are enemies within, my friends. The Council has betrayed us all, and it’s time to fight back. We must take matters into our own hands and destroy Havok Pendragon and his like for good.’

Orlagh rushed to Aisling’s side and transformed into her true self, which only caused more panic. Not surprising really. They were an imposing sight—around seven feet tall if not more, with white hair, white skin, and silvery almond shaped eyes. And that shimmery aura around them both... I’d seen it before, and it still awed me.

Orlagh held up her hands. ‘Witches, please listen to me. We are not fae.’ She took a deep breath and squared her shoulders. ‘We are the Tuatha Dé Danaan. The Shining Ones. The Gentry. We are descendants of the old gods.’

There was a stunned silence.

‘There are no Shining Ones any more,’ a witch called suspiciously. ‘They died out thousands of years ago. We got rid of them—us witches and humans. Drove them underground and underwater where they devolved into the fae.’

‘Do you deny the evidence of your own eyes?’ Orlagh demanded. ‘Not all our people were driven out, and those of us who remain are the bridge between your world and the fae.’

‘So you *are* on their side then?’ Golightly demanded, while around him most of the other witches eyed Orlagh with a mixture of awe and uncertainty.

Elinora Harbottle, who was sitting close to him, reached over, and tugged at his arm. ‘Sit down,’ she said crossly. ‘Show some respect.’

Golightly sneered, his eyes scanning the room for support. He clearly noticed a shift in mood because he suddenly did as he was told. It was quite clear that the witches believed Orlagh and were no longer feeling so brave or belligerent.

Orlagh waited a moment then transformed back into her usual, genial self. After a moment’s hesitation, Aisling did the same.

‘Listen to me,’ Orlagh said. ‘I promise you, most of the fae community wants peace. There’s no appetite for war with witches. Didn’t our people suffer enough in the last great wars? Don’t let the Pendragons stir you into acts of retaliation that could lead to all-out destruction. That’s exactly what they want. They don’t speak for the fae.’

‘And what about those three?’

Golightly nodded over to where I was sitting with my sisters. Evidently he’d quickly worked out our identity too.

‘They’re Pendragons, aren’t they? How do we know we can trust them?’

‘You know the prophecy,’ Aveta said firmly. ‘Wulfram Pendragon is destined to be our next Great Guardian. The new Arthur.’

‘He doesn’t look much like a Great Guardian to me,’ someone called. ‘Looks like a frightened kid, scared of his own shadow.’

My face burned with embarrassment, and I looked across at Emrick. He’d been surprisingly silent throughout all this, making no attempt to interfere with events or appease anyone. He caught my eye and gave me an understanding smile but didn’t offer me any advice or try to defend me.



Keely squeezed my hand even tighter, and I saw the concern in her face. Trinity and Romy were sitting on my other side and looked anxious. They were even newer to all this than I was. They were my kid sisters, and it was up to me to protect them. It was up to me to protect everyone in this room, even if they thought I was a “frightened kid”.

Standing, I regretfully released myself from Keely’s grip.

‘I’m hardly a kid,’ I said, wondering how I managed to sound quite so calm when my heart was racing, and my stomach seemed to be on spin cycle. ‘I’m almost thirty years old. Okay, so I haven’t got the Sword of Feidhlim yet, but that will find me when it’s ready. My sisters and I were reunited for a purpose. The prophecy’s unfolding. It’s my job to ensure peace between fae and witches, and that’s what I intend to do.’

*Please don’t ask me how.*

‘Fighting among ourselves will get us nowhere,’ I continued, ignoring that inner frightened voice. ‘All it does is play into Havok Pendragon’s hands. If we’re to succeed in our mission to avert war we must be smarter than that. We must work together. We have to trust each other.’

As everyone began to murmur amongst themselves, I headed to the front of the church to stand beside Kendrew and a dazed looking Titania, as well as Aisling and Orlagh.

‘Here we are,’ I said. ‘Two witches, two Shining Ones, and me in the middle. Symbolic, if you like. I’m the bridge between two old enemies who are at a dangerous crossroads. Do you really want another war after what happened the last two times? How many more lives must we lose? Zephyr Ambrose is gone. Let his be the last soul we grieve for.’

‘But the Pendragons want war,’ someone called. ‘You know they do. They’re not going to stop until that’s what they get.’

‘If you seek revenge for Zephyr’s death you’re playing directly into their hands,’ I said. ‘Harm the fae and they’ll retaliate, and on it will go, escalating into scenes not known since the death of Arthur. But we have the chance to stop that

now. By listening to reason, by refusing to be provoked, we can keep peace.'

'And let the fae walk all over us?'

'No,' I said, addressing Golightly, who had almost spat out the question. 'Not by doing that. Most of the fae don't want war any more than the witches do. Don't make them change their minds! You're conflating the fae with Havok Pendragon and his minions. They're not the same. What you've got to ask yourselves is this: how did Havok Pendragon know that Zephyr was in Whitby that day? Did he know who Trinity was? Was she the target, or was it Zephyr all along? Either way, someone informed Havok where Zephyr would be. Someone within our circle. We were betrayed, and we should be concentrating on finding out who the traitor is.'

'We will find them,' Kendrew assured me grimly. 'And,' he called to Golightly, 'we'll also find a way to make the Pendragons pay for what happened to Zephyr.'

'Of course you will.' Titania folded her arms and shook her head. 'I'll believe it when I see it.'

'Please, Mum,' Easton begged. 'Dad wouldn't want this.'

'Be quiet and sit down,' Titania snapped.

'Oh, Titania, will you just do us all a favour and shut up!'

We all turned, astounded, as Aurora got to her feet and yelled at her stepmother.

'How dare you?' Titania spluttered.

'I jolly well dare!' Aurora clearly had her dander up. 'You're a vile, loathsome, selfish, spiteful, malicious, self-centred woman, who used my father and drove a wedge between us, and I'll never forgive you for that.'

'Hear, hear!' Star called, while Sky gave a gleeful cry and clapped loudly in support. I noticed Elvira was trying to suppress a grin, not entirely successfully.

'I have no idea how you somehow managed to produce three rather wonderful children,' Aurora continued. 'Yes,' she added, as Titania's face reddened. 'I do mean three. Two

marvellous sons and a simply splendid daughter, all of whom I'm privileged to call family. You kept my father away from me and away from his grandson because you were too afraid to face your past transgressions. Well, you jolly well don't fool anyone, so if you don't mind I'd quite like it if you'd put a sock in it and sit down so we can get on with the funeral my father truly deserves.'

'You don't know what you're talking about,' Titania said, her eyes flashing with fury. She clutched the pearls around her neck and for the first time I saw Mrs Greenwood in her. 'I've never been spoken to in such a fashion!'

'Then you've been very lucky, haven't you, Mother? Someone should have said this to you years ago. I'm only sorry it was Aurora, rather than me.'

'Benedict!' Star squealed in delight and threw her arms around him. 'You superstar!'

Benedict folded his arms and met his mother's icy stare with defiance. She crumpled, clearly unable to deal with everyone's excited murmurings.

'I think,' Aveta said, thankfully taking charge again, 'that we've forgotten why we're here. Let us bury Zephyr in the graveyard outside and I will bless him as we lay him to rest.'

There were no more arguments. I think everyone had realised she was right. This day was supposed to be about Zephyr Ambrose, and it had got way out of hand. I, along with the rest of them, returned to my seat, feeling as if dozens of pairs of eyes were upon me.

Keely gave me a hug and told me I was a hero, but I brushed it off, not sure I'd done anything at all.

I risked a sideways glance along the row and saw Emrick and Hector watching me. Emrick's face was beaming with obvious pride, and Hector grinned and gave me a sneaky wink. I settled back in my seat feeling suddenly more certain of myself. Whatever happened after this, I felt I'd done something right at last, and I had to admit it felt good.



# Chapter 21

## *Romy*

It was still raining when we all left the chapel. Everyone had been invited back to Peloryon House after the burial, but I wasn't sure how many people would take up the invitation. There was a lot of confusion and clear anxiety, and I thought many of the guests would leave, either to head home to their families, or to gather in small groups to discuss the events of the day, perhaps to consider what should happen next. It wasn't a cheering thought.

As the burial service began I decided to leave the gathering at the graveside and head back to see John. He'd been left alone long enough, and besides, it would be good to have a few moments alone in the house. I could probably get some of the food Mum had prepared for the wake and sneak it upstairs for us to eat before the crowd arrived.

It would be a long and dismal trek back to the house in this weather and I wasn't looking forward to it, but I set off alone, knowing that if I told the twins where I was going they'd insist on accompanying me. Resigned, I began to follow the muddy track back across the island.

'Going somewhere?'

I glanced round, startled to find Celeste just behind me.

'I—er—decided to go back to the house.'

'To spend time with Blaise?'

I groaned inwardly. The last thing I needed now was another argument with Celeste about her feelings towards John. She'd made her point. I wasn't asking her to like him or forgive him. Just leaving him alone would be enough.

‘With John,’ I corrected her. ‘And yes. That’s the plan. I’ve had enough of today, and to be honest, I don’t think we Pendragon children are particularly popular right now.’

To my amazement she linked arms with me, and we continued our walk back to the house.

‘That will pass,’ she said. ‘It’s a shock, and feelings are running high. Everyone’s feeling sad about Zephyr and scared of the future. When things have calmed down they’ll start to see things more clearly and realise that the return of the Pendragon triplets is a good thing.’

‘You think?’ I asked doubtfully.

‘Of course.’ She ducked slightly as wet branches brushed against her head. ‘Can I ask you a favour?’

I wasn’t sure. I mean, she could ask, naturally, but whether I’d want to grant her that favour was debatable. The way she felt about Johnnie I couldn’t take anything for granted.

‘It depends,’ I said cautiously.

‘Would you mind if I talked to—John?’

I pulled her to a halt. ‘Are you serious?’

She gave a heavy sigh and hauled me on. ‘Come on, it’s too wet to hang around here. Yes, I’m absolutely serious. I—well the truth is, Romy, I haven’t been sleeping too well lately. Bad dreams keep waking me up. Dreams mixed in with memories. I’m exhausted if you want the truth, and it finally dawned on me that the only way I’m going to have any hope of peace is if I face this challenge head on.’

‘What challenge?’

‘Seeing that man face to face. Sitting down and talking to him. I need to find out for myself. I need to be sure that he is who he claims to be, and who you’re so certain he is.’

‘And you think just talking to him will achieve that?’

‘I don’t know,’ she admitted. ‘Thing is, it’s all I’ve got right now. It’s a start, though, and I need to start somewhere.’

Do you understand?’

I tried hard to put myself in Celeste’s position. I knew everything that Blaise St Clair had put her through, and I could imagine how traumatised she felt by the whole thing. She deserved closure. Even so, knowing John had no memory of her or of Blaise’s actions, I couldn’t help but feel hesitant. I didn’t want her to upset him. Yet even as I thought that I knew I was being selfish. Celeste needed this. How could I refuse?

‘Okay,’ I said slowly. ‘But do you mind if I sit with you? I don’t think it would be fair to leave you alone with him.’

‘To be honest,’ she said, ‘I’d prefer it if you did sit with us. I don’t fancy being alone with him, thanks very much.’

I wiped rainwater from my eyes. ‘You’re really scared of him, aren’t you?’ I asked her, feeling desperately sorry for her.

She sighed. ‘For a long time Blaise St Clair was the most important person in my life. I was obsessed with him. I—I thought I was in love with him. I know now that it was all part of a great plan to allow him to focus on me and pull himself through time to a certain date, but back then... Look, I trusted him, one hundred per cent. I was the only one who was fully on his side. And then he—well, it turned out he’d used me and lied to me.’

We paused at the garden gate, and she gripped the wet gatepost as she gave me an impassioned look. ‘He wanted to kill Hector! And he almost succeeded in killing Benedict, too. I can’t get past that, Romy. I know you say he’s a different person now. Hector says the same. But somewhere deep inside I can’t quite believe that. I need to face him, talk to him, look into his eyes. I’ll never be free of him if I don’t deal with my fear.’

‘I understand that,’ I said gently. I’d dealt with enough traumatised people in my counselling sessions to know that she had to do what she felt was best for her. I was sure that, once she’d actually sat with Johnnie for a little while, she’d understand that he was no threat to her any longer.

We entered Peloryon House soaking wet and cold. It didn't, however, take Celeste more than a moment to make herself warm and dry, and she very kindly did the same for me. That sorted, we took out a large plate and loaded it with some of the tasty sandwiches and snacks that Mum had prepared, then carried it upstairs.

'Do you want me to go first?' I asked her, as we approached John's bedroom door.

She hesitated, then nodded. 'If you wouldn't mind. I just need a moment.'

'I'll explain what's going to happen,' I said. 'Don't worry. You have nothing to be afraid of, I promise you.'

John was lying on his bed, reading. It was his favourite pastime, so it didn't surprise me. He glanced up as I entered the room and smiled.

'Back so soon? I thought it would be ages.'

'I brought you some food,' I told him, settling myself on the bed beside him. He laughed.

'Some food? That would feed an army!'

'Well, it's for both of us,' I amended, my heart thumping. 'And...'

He'd been reaching for a sandwich, but he paused and eyed me nervously. 'And?'

I swallowed. 'Celeste is outside. She wants to speak to you.'

'Celeste?' He frowned. 'Which one is that again?'

'The one who Blaise St Clair was involved with,' I said, not sure whether to be glad or sorry that her name obviously meant nothing to him. 'I did tell you, remember? You—he—was going to marry her. Or at least, that's what he told her.'

'Oh. That one. I remember.' He bit into a sandwich and chewed thoughtfully. 'When I say I remember, I mean I remember you telling me. Why does she want to talk to me all of a sudden?'



‘She needs closure,’ I said, hoping he’d understand and be kind, although I did feel it was a lot to ask considering he didn’t even believe he was Blaise. ‘She’s trying to face her fears.’

He sighed. ‘This is all bonkers, you know that? What am I supposed to say to a woman who honestly believes I’m a witch from the seventeenth century? Am I supposed to indulge her in her fantasies? Should I try to persuade her she’s wrong? What do I do? What do I say?’

‘Maybe,’ I said gently, ‘you should say nothing. Just let her talk, and if she asks you a question answer her as honestly as you can. There’s nothing else you can do really, is there?’

‘I guess not. Well, I suppose you’d better tell her to come up then,’ he said resignedly.

‘She’s just outside the door,’ I said. ‘Ready?’

He pulled a face and shrugged. ‘Not really, but it seems I have no choice. Will you stay with me? She could be a madwoman. She might attack me.’

How ironic that he had the same fear as Celeste. I nodded and reached over to kiss him.

‘Don’t worry,’ I said. ‘I’ll be right here.’

I got up and opened the door, beckoning to Celeste to come in. She moved forward hesitantly, and I gave her arm a reassuring squeeze as she passed me and entered the room. I shut the door behind us and sat on the bed, while Celeste perched uncomfortably on a tub chair in the corner.

John eyed her nervously then reached for another sandwich.

‘Would you like something to eat?’ he asked her politely.

She shook her head but didn’t reply. She simply continued to stare at him. Even I felt unnerved, so goodness knows how he felt.

He glanced at me, clearly anxious. I wasn’t sure what to say or do in response. I wanted to put them both at their ease

but how was I supposed to do that? There was so much tension in the room the air was positively crackling.

Maybe this hadn't been such a good idea. Maybe I should have asked Hector to join us?

'Blaise St Clair.' Celeste's voice was shaky but determined. 'Blaise Vincent Elias St Clair. Born on the ninth of November 1640, in Castle Clair.'

John replaced the sandwich and sat back, leaning against the headboard, his arms folded.

'John David Ford, born on the fourth of October 1989, in Workington,' he informed her. 'I'm sorry. I know that's not what you want to hear, but—'

'You may believe that,' she said. 'On the other hand, you might already know that it's a made-up story. A false memory that a Guardian implanted in your mind. How am I supposed to know?'

He sighed. 'Look, Celeste—may I call you Celeste? Look, I don't know what I can tell you. What do you want from me?'

'I want you to tell me the truth.' Celeste picked up the tub chair and moved it closer to the bed. She glanced at me as if reassuring herself that I wasn't going anywhere, then leaned towards him. 'Look at me and tell me who you really are.'

He shook his head and gave me a look of bewilderment.

'Just do it,' I said, trying to sound as kind as I possibly could.

He rolled his eyes. 'This is crazy, but fine, if that's what you want.' He leaned towards her and stared at her intently. 'I am John Ford, not Blaise St Clair.'

Their eyes locked and they were both still and silent.

'Right,' I said after a moment, 'does that satisfy you, Celeste?' I picked up a sandwich and took a hearty bite, watching them as I chewed. My eyes narrowed and I slowly lowered the sandwich. Neither of them was moving. They weren't even blinking.

‘John? Celeste?’

I dropped the sandwich and shoved the plate on the floor, leaning towards them both. They were clearly oblivious to my presence. Something was going on. They seemed to be in a trance.

John’s eyes were wide, his pupils enormous. Celeste, though... I gasped as I realised her eyes had rolled back in her head, and she was deathly pale.

At that moment I heard voices from downstairs, and I jumped up and ran onto the landing.

I needed Hector.



## Chapter 22

### *Romy*

The mourners had arrived back from the chapel. Some were still in the process of drying off—by magical means, naturally. Mum was already busying herself in the kitchen, with help from Iliana and Aurora. I hurried into the living room, noticing that there was no sign of Titania or Easton, although Elvira had returned to the house and was currently talking to Star and Benedict.

Trinity, Sirius, Sky and Jethro were huddled in a corner chatting. Harley and Keely were deep in conversation on the sofa. I noticed Killian wasn't there, and neither were the other O'Briens. I wondered if they'd gone home, and if Killian had gone with them to discuss what had happened in the chapel.

Only a few of the visiting witches had returned with the family. I imagined most of them would be having their own gatherings and mulling over their feelings on the Pendragons and the O'Briens. They had a lot to digest, after all.

The members of the High Council sat stiffly on another sofa at the far end of the room. Elinora Harbottle had given them sherry, but it didn't seem to have loosened them up. They looked tense and worried.

I left the living room and headed back into the hallway. Relieved, I caught sight of Hector. He was heading towards the study with Lowen and Emrick, no doubt for an in-depth discussion on what to do next. Well, that would have to wait.

'May I have a word?' I asked him, taking his arm with some force.

He looked startled. 'I was just—'

'I really need your help,' I told him urgently.

‘Is there something I can assist you with?’ Emrick enquired, raising his eyebrows in surprise.

‘No, it’s fine thanks. I just need Hector.’ I gave him an appealing look. ‘*Celeste* needs you.’

His expression changed. ‘Lead the way.’

Leaving Emrick and Lowen behind we rushed up the stairs and along the landing to John’s room.

Hector gave me a worried look. ‘She’s in there? With him?’

I nodded. ‘Something’s wrong. It’s like they’re locked in a trance.’

He quietly opened the door, and I followed him into the bedroom. Celeste and John were exactly as I’d left them. It was horrible to see, and I felt a bit sick. What was happening to them?

Hector motioned to me to stay quiet as he gently sat on the bed and checked John’s eyes, then gazed at Celeste.

‘What is it?’ I whispered, my heart hammering with fear. What if they remained stuck like this forever? What if someone had put a spell on them?

He shook his head slightly and got up, joining me by the door.

‘I believe Celeste is memory-walking again,’ he said quietly. ‘But this time it seems to have gone deeper. I’ve never known her lock onto someone like this when it happens. Usually, the subject of her memory-walking is unaware it’s even happening. Something different is going on this time.’

‘Why is she doing this?’ I hissed, fearful of whatever Johnnie was going through.

He shook his head. ‘She has no choice. Right now she has no control over this power. It just happens out of the blue. I doubt very much that she’d want to be moving around inside Blaise St Clair’s memories if she could help it, don’t you?’

‘But they’re not his memories,’ I pointed out. ‘They’re John’s. And what if she does some damage to him? What then?’

‘I think she’s in as much danger as he is,’ he said grimly, which didn’t exactly fill me with confidence.

‘Can’t you wake her up?’ I asked desperately.

‘It’s too risky, even if I could,’ he said. ‘I don’t know where she is right now, or what’s happening to her. If I pulled her from a particular memory it could have a lasting impact on her. I’m not prepared to take that chance.’

‘So what do we do?’ I felt helpless, watching them both staring unseeingly at each other in this creepy way.

‘We wait.’ Hector settled himself on the end of the bed and motioned to me to join him. ‘There’s nothing else we can do right now. We wait and see what happens, and we’re there for them when this finally breaks.’

He glanced at the plate of sandwiches on the floor then reached down to place it gently between us on the bed.

‘Celeste will need to eat something when she comes back,’ he said. ‘It saps her energy when this happens.’

‘Does it happen often?’ I asked curiously.

‘Not too often, thank goodness. She hates it. It would help if she could choose when and where it happens, but she can’t. It does seem to be getting stronger, though.’ He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. ‘I wonder...’

‘What?’ I asked eagerly. ‘What do you wonder?’ Had he figured out a way to break the trance?

‘I’m just thinking that it’s a heck of a coincidence that it’s Blaise she’s connected to right now. I wonder if she’s—’ He shook his head. ‘No. She wouldn’t.’

‘Wouldn’t what?’ I narrowed my eyes. ‘Wait, are you saying you think she might have done this deliberately?’

‘I’m not saying that exactly,’ he said. ‘Like I already explained, she can’t pick and choose when this happens. But I

can't help wondering if she at least tried to make it happen. She wanted to know if he was telling the truth about how much he remembered. Well, this is the way to find out. Usually, she's trying very hard not to have these experiences as she feels they're intrusive. If this time she tried very hard to have one, well who knows?'

I glanced at Celeste. She looked dreadful. I couldn't imagine anyone wanting to experience whatever it was she was experiencing.

'How long has it been?' Hector whispered.

I shrugged. 'I'm not sure. Maybe ten minutes or so?'

He frowned. 'That's a long time. They should be back by now.' He took Celeste's wrist, feeling for her pulse. 'She's weakening. I need to get her back.'

'But how? You said it would be dangerous to wake her up,' I said, alarmed.

'I can't wake her up, but I can go to her and lead her out of there,' he said.

I gasped. 'You can join her? In John's memories?'

He gave me a grim look. 'I've done it before. Whatever you do, Romy, don't touch us. Any of us. Just keep still and wait.'

'What if you don't come back either?' I asked, my voice shrill with fear. 'What do I do? How long do I wait before I get help? Who would be able to help me?'

He gave me a compassionate but firm look. 'I will come back,' he promised. 'And I'll bring Celeste back with me. Once she's home, John will be fine. Don't worry.'

I nodded. There was something so calm and reassuring about him that I had to believe him.

He placed his hands either side of Celeste's face and closed his eyes, then his head tilted forward. I leaned across and peered up at him, but I knew already that he'd gone to wherever Celeste was. It was amazing to witness.



I watched John's face anxiously to see if any of this was affecting him, but he remained frozen, his pupils dilated and his breathing shallow.

I wanted to reach for his hand, but Hector had warned me not to touch any of them and I wasn't going to disobey the orders of a Guardian.

One day, I realised, even Hector would obey the orders of my brother. Lowen would become Wulfram, the Great Guardian. If Hector could do things like this, what might Wulfram be capable of?

I shivered, remembering the hostilities from some of the congregation in the chapel when the subject of the Pendragon triplets came up. There hadn't been the respect for Lowen that I'd anticipated. Well, most of the people seemed to have some for him, but there were definitely a few who poured scorn on the idea of him becoming the next Arthur.

All this talk of finding the Sword of Feidhlim was, I realised, more than just idle speculation. Without it, many in the magical community wouldn't accept him. I had a sudden strong conviction that this was exactly what Lowen and Emrick were discussing right now. Finding the sword had become a priority. But where could it be? And what was mine and Trinity's role in all this?

There was a sudden moan and I snapped out of my thoughts as I realised the sound had come from John.

'Johnnie? Johnnie?'

I gasped as he slumped suddenly, his head lolling against the headboard. The trance had been broken.

I heaved a silent sigh of relief when Hector's head jerked up and his eyes opened. He gently massaged Celeste's temples and murmured her name, urging her to open her eyes.

I could have wept when she finally did. She looked exhausted, but at least her eyes were normal again, and she wasn't as pale as she'd been a moment ago.

'I'm sorry,' she murmured, but Hector shook his head.

‘You need to eat. Here, have a sandwich,’ he said, offering her the plate.

She refused at first, but he insisted, and she took a cheese sandwich and nibbled at it, eyeing John warily.

‘Is he okay?’

‘I don’t know. He groaned and then he just slumped,’ I said. ‘What should we do? Why hasn’t he woken up?’

‘Let him sleep for a while,’ Hector advised. ‘I’ll make him more comfortable.’

He managed to slide John further down the bed, rearranging the pillow so his head was settled in a position that wouldn’t cause him neck pain.

‘What happened?’ I asked Celeste. Now that she was back and well enough to eat a sandwich, I felt it was time she gave me some answers. ‘What did you do to him?’

‘I travelled into his memories,’ she admitted. ‘I wondered if it was possible for me to go inside there and figure out exactly how much he really remembered.’

‘And did you find what you were expecting?’ I asked, curious despite my dread.

She hesitated. ‘You were right. He didn’t know who he was. His memories were all of John Ford, and of you.’ She gave me a faint smile. ‘He really adores you, you know. Genuinely. I’m sorry I doubted that.’

My heart lifted. ‘Thank you. So does that mean we can go back to Cumbria, and he can pick up where he left off? His job —’

She looked at Hector, her eyes troubled. Hector eyed her curiously, then his expression changed.

‘Ah, I see. I’m sorry, Romy. Things have—changed somewhat.’

‘What do you mean?’ I whispered, dread unfurling in the pit of my stomach. ‘What have you done to him? Please don’t tell me he’s brain damaged.’

‘No, nothing like that,’ Hector said. ‘It’s just... Perhaps you’d better explain what happened in there, Celeste. How did I find you at Glastonbury Abbey?’

‘Glastonbury Abbey?’ I frowned. ‘What do you mean?’

She chewed her sandwich, and I was pleased to see the colour in her cheeks was almost back to normal.

‘That came at the end,’ she said at last. ‘Perhaps I should start at the beginning when I entered his memories... I mean, no one could have been more surprised than me to find that I’d done that because I didn’t think I could control it. It seems I’m getting better at this. Either that, or—’ She shivered. ‘Or it’s this weird bond that I always had with Blaise. I don’t know. Anyway, they were benign enough. Memories of your recent weekend in the Scottish Borders, his job, his friendship with Simon...’ She gave a wistful smile. ‘They were quite nice. You gave him a lovely life, Hector. He’s been very happy. But then...’

‘Go on,’ Hector said gently, while I bit my lip, too anxious to speak.

‘Then it was like a fog rolled in. I couldn’t see anything. I thought I was lost. I wandered around for what felt like hours, looking for something, anything. I was so scared.’

‘You were only gone about ten minutes,’ I assured her.

‘Yes, but time loses all meaning in there,’ she said with a shudder. ‘It was horrible. Cold. Like a no-mans-land. And all the time I had an awful, creeping fear that someone was following me in the fog. I was beginning to wonder if I was going to be stuck there forever. And then I heard voices.’

‘Go on,’ Hector said gently as she fell silent a moment, her gaze troubled.

‘It was that day in Castle Lodge,’ she said hesitantly. ‘I saw Blaise standing there with the knife at my throat. I saw Benedict hurl himself in front of you to save you. I saw that flash of light and heard the rumble of thunder...’

Her voice trailed off and Hector put his hand on her shoulder. ‘Do you want to leave it for now?’ he suggested.

‘Maybe we should do this when you’ve had the chance to recover.’

To my relief she shook her head. ‘No. You know how quickly these memories fade. It’s like waking from a dream. I need to tell you while it’s still fresh in my mind.’

She swallowed. ‘I walked with him through those months at Castle Clair. I watched him slowly recovering his memories from 1669. I saw him arrive in our time, and beyond that, I saw him leaving his own. The argument with Jennet, the fall from the castle wall. Then—then beyond that. Through his relationship with Bevil and Jennet.’

For the first time she smiled. ‘Oh, he really loved Bevil. What a wonderful time they had together. His father was so proud of them. Of both of them.’ Her smile dimmed. ‘They moved to Cornwall to be safer from Cromwell’s army. I watched him cry when they told him his mother had passed away.’

I turned to look at John, sleeping so peacefully. It hardly seemed real. This was the life he’d known? This was who he really was?

‘I saw his mother. She was lovely. So kind to him. I saw Mother Clipson giving him a cuff round the ear for being cheeky. I felt the dread in the family’s hearts when Rafe was away fighting. I saw Titus.’ She looked at Hector, her eyes twinkling suddenly. ‘He looked so much like Castor, you know. It was quite a shock to see him there. I thought for one minute... He and Rafe were very close. And Titus obviously adored Blaise. I saw Blaise sitting on Titus’s knee. His uncle was telling him a story of some sort. I couldn’t really hear what he was saying.’

She frowned. ‘And then suddenly I was there, in the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey. Fog was swirling around me again. I knew I was completely alone. No one was with me this time. The air felt thick, like the fog was suffocating me. It was weird—like it was a memory but not a real memory, you know? Like it had been planted there. Or I was seeing it second hand. I can’t explain it. All I know is I didn’t know what I was doing

there and had no idea how I was going to get out, and then you were there, Hector. I felt your presence before I saw you, and then you took my hand and—well, here I am. Thank you.’

‘You’re very welcome,’ he said, smiling.

She smiled back and took another sandwich. ‘I’m so hungry,’ she complained. ‘Is everyone back from the chapel yet?’

I shrugged listlessly.

‘Romy?’ Celeste’s voice was all concern. ‘I’m so sorry. I can only imagine how you must be feeling.’

‘It’s all true, isn’t it?’ I said dully. ‘I mean, somewhere at the back of my mind I knew it was, but hearing it from you like this... He really is Blaise St Clair.’ I lifted my head to meet Hector’s compassionate gaze. ‘We’re never going back to Bartonbrook are we?’

It was weird, but even as I asked the question I somehow knew the answer. John and I would never see our pretty cottage again. That life was over.

‘He wasn’t lying,’ Celeste said, clearly trying to console me. ‘He really didn’t remember. That bank of fog—it separated John Ford from Blaise St Clair. I had to really focus to cross from one block of memories to the other.’

‘How do I ever make him believe it?’ I asked sadly.

There was that look again. That strange look between them that signified something.

‘What is it?’ I demanded, suddenly scared. ‘What aren’t you telling me?’

‘Go on, Celeste,’ Hector said kindly. ‘You’d better explain.’

She reached for my hand and held it tightly. ‘I’m so sorry, Romy, but when I walked through the fog I realised I wasn’t alone. As I reached that memory of Castle Lodge—the night Blaise tried to kill Hector...’

‘Go on,’ I said, my pulse racing in dread. ‘What happened?’

‘I turned around,’ she said sadly. ‘I was right. I wasn’t alone. Emerging from the fog was John Ford. He’d followed me, Romy. He’d followed me into the earlier memories, and he saw Blaise for himself. Relived those memories with me. I think when he wakes up, he’ll know exactly who he really is.’



## Chapter 23

### *Romy*

I sat with John for hours while he slept. Celeste and Hector left me to go downstairs, promising to say nothing of what had happened to anyone but Emrick. I thought vaguely how odd it was that we all seemed to defer to Emrick, when we knew so little about him. I supposed it was because he'd been so close to Meri, and here on the island she never felt far away from us.

Strange how she crowded my thoughts now. I'd liked her from the moment I saw her, even though I had every reason not to trust her. She had, after all, been the person who'd invited us to this island and the instigator of everything that had happened to us since. If she hadn't sent those invitations our lives might never have been turned upside down the way they had.

Yet, even knowing that, I didn't regret meeting her. She'd been very kind to me—a wren in a world of witches. And she'd left me her fede ring in her will. I'd not dared wear it yet, too afraid of losing it. It was an antique ring, with two hands clasped together, and a Latin inscription which meant, “From love and truth comes peace”.

I gazed at John's sleeping form. Now I knew the truth about who he was—and in all probability so did he. Would he still love me, now he had those memories of Blaise St Clair? Would I still love him—this strange man who'd done so much harm to so many people, and whose reckless and selfish actions had brought the magical world to the brink of war?

And I knew the truth about me, too. Not Romy St Clair but Wren Pendragon. Named after Meri's ancestor, no less. Half witch, half fae. Daughter of a descendant of Arthur and one of the Nine Sisters of Avalon. Sister of a future Great Guardian.



So now we both knew more about our true selves. Would knowing that truth bring us peace?

It was growing dark. The hum of conversation downstairs had dulled, and I suspected most, if not all, of our guests had left. I realised I was hungry and helped myself to the last of the sandwiches and snacks on the plate. The bread was drying and starting to curl at the edges, but I didn't care. I barely tasted any of it anyway.

I finished the last bite then got up to draw the curtains. It was still raining. The garden looked gloomy. I shut the curtains against the miserable view and switched on the bedside lamp.

As I sat back on the tub chair John stirred.

My throat tightened with fear. This could be the moment of truth. The moment when everything changed. What if he didn't even remember who I was? What if Celeste's memory-walking had somehow removed all traces of John and all that was left was Blaise? What would I do then?

His eyes flickered open a couple of times before his gaze fixed on the ceiling. He stared at it for a long moment, a frown on his forehead as if he couldn't quite make out where he was.

Then, slowly, he turned his head to face me.

My heart thudded and my mouth was dry with fear. Already I could see that he looked different. It was hard to make sense of what I was seeing, but there was something new about this face. How could the exact same features look so different?

I considered running out of this room and getting as far away from him as I possibly could. I probably would have done, to be honest, but sadly for me I seemed to be rooted to the spot.

'Romy?'

Relief flooded through me. That was Johnnie's voice. And he knew who I was.

I leaned forward and tentatively laid my hand on his arm. He stared down at it for a moment and I wondered if he was going to reject me after all. Then his hand settled on top of mine and his fingers entwined with my fingers and my heart lifted.

‘You’re still here,’ he said, a note of incredulity in his voice. ‘I thought...’

‘That I’d leave you?’ I asked. ‘I thought you’d leave me, now you’ve remembered who you are.’

He closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them again they were full of the compassionate uncertainty that was so characteristic of the man I loved. It broke my heart to see they were shimmering with tears.

‘Blaise St Clair,’ he said quietly. ‘It was all true, Romy. I saw him. I know who I am. I know what I did.’

‘I know.’ I couldn’t bear to see the pain in his eyes. ‘Celeste told me your memory would probably have returned when you woke up. I’m so sorry.’

He sat up and ran a hand through his black hair. ‘No wonder she was so scared of me. Do you know everything? I mean about what I did back then.’

I nodded bleakly.

‘It’s all back now,’ he said brokenly. ‘All that pain. All that grief for Bevil and my parents. All the guilt over Celeste and Jennet. You know I nearly killed Hector? I would have killed Benedict if Star hadn’t made a witch bottle to protect him.’

‘That was in the past,’ I said gently. ‘You’ve been a different man these past few years. I love you.’

‘You love a monster,’ he told me. ‘Don’t you understand? He’s back, Romy. I’m back. It’s like the clouds have rolled away and taken John Ford with them, and here I am again. Blaise St Clair. The man who practised forbidden magic behind his brother’s back, who coaxed his brother’s fiancée to do the same, who—’ He broke off with a strangled sob.

‘Shh,’ I soothed. ‘Don’t talk about all that now.’

‘I tried to murder Mary Clipson!’ The anguish in his voice was heartbreaking. ‘That’s who I am, Romy. You deserve so much more than that.’

‘And that’s why I know you’re not the same person any longer,’ I cried. ‘Don’t you see? These years of living as John Ford have changed you. You carry all this guilt, shame and pain, whereas the old Blaise didn’t feel those things. He was only interested in power. You’ve spent all this time doing good for people! You’ve made a life for yourself helping others. Those experiences have shaped you. You’re not the man you used to be. You’re so much better than that.’

He shook his head, clearly dazed. ‘How can you have so much faith in me after what I did?’

‘Because I love you,’ I told him fiercely. ‘Because I know you. The real you. I can see it in your face and hear it in your voice. When you woke up there was a moment... I thought maybe John had gone forever. But it passed. He’s still there inside you. He’s part of who you are now. We can still be together. It will be a different life to the one we had before, because I’m not the same person any more than you are. But different doesn’t necessarily mean worse, does it? Whatever happens,’ I added, squeezing his hand tightly, ‘we’re together, and it’s going to stay that way. If...’ I broke off as the thought occurred to me. ‘I mean, if you still want me.’

‘Want you? Oh, Romy.’ He covered his face with his hands, and I realised he was crying. This was no act. Blaise might be back, but the years of living as John had changed him. He was still the man I loved. I hadn’t lost him after all.



# Chapter 24

## *Trinity*

It was a relief when all the funeral guests left, leaving only family members behind. And by family, naturally I included Emrick in that, because frankly he was kind of like the lynchpin of us all. I couldn't figure out how that had happened, but Sirius told me he'd been Meri's rock, and Hector sure seemed to look up to him, so that was good enough for me.

The wake had been tense and uneasy. Titania Ambrose hadn't showed, which was kind of a relief if I'm honest. She must have taken Easton back home with her, though Elvira stayed a while. There was some anxiety that Marco Golightly and some of the other witches had gone back to Titania's with her to discuss what had happened. It was obvious that the High Council was worried they were thinking about forming some kind of vigilante group. I noticed Lowen head off with Hector and Emrick, and figured they were worried about the same thing.

Aurora and Elvira were being real brave, considering what they'd been through. I wanted to hug Aurora for having the guts to stand up to her stepmother, but figured it wouldn't be too tactful, given Titania was, after all, Elvira's mom.

I'd always gotten along with Aurora, but now I looked at her with new eyes, and I was glad to see that Benedict had joined them, and that the three of them were talking together in an easy fashion, like real family. It was good for Benedict to have his half-sister and stepsister around him. His own mom might want nothing to do with him, but at least he had those two on his side.

Sirius was restless. I knew he was longing to be in that study with Lowen, Hector, and Emrick.

‘Why don’t you just go in there and ask if you can join them?’ I asked, sensing his anxiety was growing.

‘How can I? They’ve made it perfectly clear that they call all the shots,’ he said bitterly. ‘Does anyone even know how that happened? I don’t recall us ever voting on it. I mean, Hector I can understand. Naturally we all defer to him. But Emrick? And why Lowen? He hasn’t even got any magic.’

‘But he’ll one day be the Great Guardian,’ I reminded him. I sipped the wine someone had given me. ‘If you ask me, the day’s fast approaching when he’ll reclaim that magic. Things are moving. I can feel it, can’t you?’

He turned to me, his expression grave. ‘And where does that leave you?’

I frowned. ‘Meaning what?’

‘Well, when Lowen reclaims his magic, will you do the same?’

I couldn’t deny I’d thought about it. It hardly seemed real, but I knew I had the opportunity to reclaim both my witchcraft and my fae magic. I couldn’t begin to imagine what that would feel like. It made me nervous, but I can’t deny it gave me a tingle of excitement too.

‘I guess...’ I said, not sure how he’d feel about that. ‘Thing is, once I get it back there’s nothing to stop us trying for a baby, is there? Sweeney said all those pregnancies failed because any fae blood in my body was suppressed. Since our babies would have been part fae they never stood a chance.’ My voice cracked with emotion, thinking of all the lives we’d lost. It was hard to accept that, if I’d only known who I really was, none of that need ever have happened.

I saw the doubt on Sirius’s face and realised we hadn’t really talked about resuming our plans to start a family. I’d just assumed it was a given, but his expression was making me think that, just maybe, I’d assumed wrong. ‘You do still want to start a family, don’t you?’

He rubbed his forehead. ‘Of course. One day.’

‘But not now?’

‘Look at us all, Trinity!’ He waved his hands around, encompassing the entire room. ‘This is such a mess. Who knows what’s coming? Do you really think now’s the time to bring a baby into the world? Besides, you being pregnant would make you more vulnerable. I’d be terrified every moment. And then there’s the other problem.’

He didn’t have to say it out loud. It was in the back of my mind the whole time. If I reclaimed my magic the Pendragons would sense it. I’d be a target.

‘Maybe they already know,’ I said quietly, knowing he’d guess who I meant. ‘If I was the one they were coming for when they got Zephyr instead...’ It still choked me up, thinking that Zephyr might have lost his life because of me. It should have been me being mourned today, not the leader of the High Council of Witches.

‘We don’t know that,’ he said hastily. ‘And I’m not prepared to take that risk. I don’t want you to reclaim your powers.’

‘But Sirius...’ I paused, not wanting to hurt him, but unable to leave it at that. ‘It’s not your decision to make.’

He stared at me. ‘I see.’

‘I know you’re used to taking care of me and that your powers have always given you the edge on me—’

‘What do you mean by that? Have I ever tried to make you feel inferior in any way?’ he demanded.

‘Of course not, honey. That’s not what I meant. I just meant that, with you being a St Clair witch, naturally you’ve been the defender, the protector. But now I know who I am, and if I reclaimed my magic I could fight my own battles. I have magical heritage, too, right? I’m a Pendragon for goodness’ sake! And look who my birth mother was! And my real mom, too,’ I added wistfully. ‘It doesn’t get much better than that. Look, I’ve told my clients that I’m done with editing, and I’ve recommended new editors to them. That part of my life is over. Maybe it’s time I took my place alongside you all. Whatever’s coming—why shouldn’t I be a part of it?’

It's my fight, too. The Pendragons killed my parents, remember?'

He seemed about to speak but clearly thought better of it. Instead he just sighed and took a sip of wine. 'I don't know where this is going,' he admitted. 'I want to keep you safe, that's all.'

'I know you do. But I want to keep you safe, too. I want to help. Maybe if I reclaim my powers I can be an asset to you, instead of a hindrance.'

He smiled. 'You're never a hindrance, my darling. I promise you that.'

There was a sudden call for silence, and I realised Jethro was tapping a spoon on the side of his glass.

That wasn't like Jethro at all, so we all paid attention. I noticed Hector, Emrick, and Lowen were back in the room, and were in a huddle with Celeste. They all looked up and stared expectantly at Jethro, too.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said formally, and Sky rolled her eyes.

'For heaven's sake, Jethro, don't be so formal,' she told him.

'But it's a formal announcement,' he protested.

'How old are you? You sound positively middle-aged.' Sky stood up beside him and beamed round at us all. 'Listen, gang. Jethro and I have decided—'

'I thought you were going to let me make the announcement,' he said indignantly.

'Oh, I was, but you're taking far too long about it,' she said lightly. 'Jethro and I have decided to get married.'

'Well, we know that, darling,' Iliana said, looking perplexed.

'Oh yes, I know, but I mean we've—'

'Decided on the date,' Jethro butted in, giving her a triumphant look. 'We're getting married in December, because



that's when we met. The day we both came home to Castle Clair.'

Everyone whooped with delight. It was about time we had some good news.

'We were on the same train,' Sky informed us, as if we didn't already know. 'Jethro fell in love at first sight, of course. I didn't because I was too busy thinking how awful it was that I'd been forced back to that weird little town!' She giggled. 'Seems like a lifetime ago.'

Jethro put his arm around her then turned to face us. 'We want to get married quite soon, because, well...'

There was a sudden subdued silence. I guess he and Sky had been thinking along the same lines as Sirius and me. Who knew what lay ahead of us?

'I think that's wonderful news,' Emrick said firmly. 'Something for us all to look forward to. A toast. To Sky and Jethro, and love in all its forms.'

We raised our glasses. 'To Sky and Jethro, and love in all its forms.'

Over the rim of my glass I saw Romy and John enter the room, and something about them made me frown. She looked different. Edgy. He looked even more nervous than she did, but I could understand that. I mean, look what he'd been thrown into, with no idea what any of us were talking about. I glanced over at Celeste, worried she'd get upset again, but to my surprise she smiled and walked over to them both.

'Oh, lord,' Sirius muttered. 'Now what?'

They seemed to be discussing something quite serious, judging by the expressions on their faces. We all tried to act like we hadn't noticed, but I knew everyone else was just as interested in their conversation as I was.

Eventually they turned to face us, and Celeste held up her hands and called for quiet.

'What, again?' Star tutted. 'What's your big news, Celeste?' Her eyes widened. 'Oh! You're not pregnant, are

you?’

‘It’s not my news,’ Celeste said. ‘Romy?’

You know, it’s weird, because I’d only just learned that Romy was my sister, but I already felt protective of her. I could tell she was scared, and I wanted to comfort her. I looked over at Lowen and I just knew he was feeling the same. It made me feel bonded to them. These were my siblings. I still couldn’t quite believe it.

I wondered if it was different for Romy. Lowen and I had been brought up thinking we were only children, but she’d grown up with two people she believed to be her sisters. I guess discovering she wasn’t related to them must have been one heck of a wrench.

Sure enough, even though Lowen and I were anxious for her, it was Keely and Harley who headed over to stand beside her.

‘Are you okay, Romy?’ Keely asked, while Harley put her arm around her. John, meanwhile, stood awkwardly a little apart from them. I couldn’t help but feel sorry for him.

‘I—I have an announcement to make,’ Romy said nervously. She looked over to John and held out her hand.

‘Oh crikey, you’re not getting married too, are you?’ Sky squeaked. ‘Because, honestly, I’d think again. I really would.’

‘Hush, Sky,’ Celeste said gently. She nodded at Romy. ‘Go on.’

John took Romy’s hand and moved to her side.

She cleared her throat. ‘I just want you all to know that, well, John recovered his memory earlier. He’s now fully aware of who he was. Is. That he’s Blaise I mean. And it’s all okay,’ she added with a rush. ‘He’s still got memories of John, and he’s not like the old Blaise. And, well, we love each other, and we’re sticking together, no matter what.’

There was a stunned silence. I looked at Sirius who shook his head slightly.

‘Celeste?’ he asked, clearly as confused as I was by her apparent calm.

‘It’s okay,’ she told him. ‘The thing is, I’m the one responsible for this. I memory-walked again, and by venturing through Blaise’s mind I’m afraid I unearthed all those memories that had been hidden from him.’

‘So he’s back,’ Raiden said heavily.

‘And you’re sticking with him?’ Ewella sounded worried, which I couldn’t blame her for.

‘You surely can’t trust him now?’ Sirius asked incredulously.

‘But that’s just it,’ Romy said firmly. She smiled at John, who gave her a nervous smile back. ‘I do. Completely.’

‘You know,’ Sky said cautiously, ‘you don’t look like Blaise. I mean, obviously, you do, but you seem different, too. I can’t really explain it. Are you sure you’ve got your memories back?’

John lifted his head and looked round at everyone.

‘I know what you’re all thinking,’ he said. ‘I don’t blame you at all. After everything I did... Look, I know I can never make it up to you, but I want you to know that I’m so sorry for everything that I put you through back then. You must understand that, even though I’m still that man, I’m different now.’

‘Where have we heard that before?’ Star folded her arms. ‘In case you’d forgotten, you tried to kill my husband.’

‘To be fair,’ Benedict said, ‘he was aiming for Hector. I just got in the way.’

‘Oh well, that’s all right then,’ she said, giving him a withering look. ‘Honestly, Benedict, stop defending him.’

‘I’m not defending him,’ he said stubbornly. ‘Just getting the facts right, that’s all.’

‘Well, I for one will never believe a word you say,’ Iliana said firmly. ‘Romy, if you have any sense at all you’ll walk

away while he gives you the chance. In fact, forget walking. Run. The man's toxic.'

'Please,' John said, holding up his hands as various shouts of agreement began. 'If you'll just give me a chance—'

'Why should we?' Aurora said tearfully. 'You were an absolute rotter back then. Why would we risk letting you into the family again? Haven't we been through enough lately?'

Raiden handed her a handkerchief and she blew her nose with startling force.

'I'm sorry, Aurora,' Celeste said, 'but I promise you, he's changed. If you won't listen to him, then at least listen to me. I trust him.'

That quietened everyone down.

'Are you sure about this?' Sirius's eyes widened in shock. 'Celeste, after everything he did to you!'

'But out of all the people here I'm the one best placed to judge him,' she told him. 'I've walked inside his mind. I've lived through his memories and seen the difference in him. I know how good and kind and gentle John Ford is.'

'But he's not John Ford any longer, is he?' Sirius pointed out. 'He's Blaise St Clair.'

'He's both! The memories he has of John haven't disappeared,' Celeste insisted. 'If they had he wouldn't still be in love with Romy, would he?'

'How do we know he is?' Keely asked. 'It could be an act.'

'Exactly,' Sky said. 'Like loving you was an act, remember?'

Celeste reddened, and for a moment her eyes met John's. He looked away.

'It's not an act,' she said. 'The part of him that was John fell in love with Romy, and he's still there. For the last few years everything John saw and experienced impacted on

Blaise's subconscious. You don't have to try to make him feel bad about all that's happened, because he already does.'

'Boo hoo,' Star said, pouting.

'I don't expect you to believe me or trust me straight away,' John—or Blaise, or whoever the heck he now was—told us all. 'In fact, I'd be amazed and probably a bit suspicious if you said you did. But all I can say is, I love Romy, heart and soul. I know everything I did back then was horrific, and I'm so very sorry. All I want is the chance to prove I'm not that same man, and to try somehow to put it all right.'

'I really think,' Hector said, 'that he can't say fairer than that.'

'You agree with this then?' Castor asked, shaking his head. 'You, of all people, think he should be given another chance?'

'I do,' Hector said. 'And Emrick agrees with me.'

I glanced at Sirius, suspecting that, like me, he was probably wondering why Emrick's opinion mattered so much to even a Guardian.

'Well,' Iliana said, after a long moment, 'I think the final decision must be Celeste's. It was she who Blaise wounded more than anyone after all. Darling?'

Celeste hesitated, then she turned and took Blaise's hand. 'I say we give him another chance,' she said quietly. 'I believe he's a changed man. And I know for certain that he loves Romy.'

'He'd better,' Harley said, through gritted teeth.

'Thank you, Celeste.' John gave her a genuine smile, and I saw a look of humility in his eyes that I suspected the old Blaise rarely had. 'Of all the people in this room, your opinion matters more to me than anyone's. After all I did to you...' He shook his head, overcome with emotion. 'I promise I won't let you down.'

‘Oh, you’d better not,’ she said lightly. ‘I suspect you’ll be under observation anyway.’

‘Too right he will,’ Castor said.

Celeste looked at Sirius, a plea in her eyes. ‘Sirius?’

He hesitated. ‘It’s your call,’ he said at last. ‘I might not trust him, but I trust you.’

‘Well,’ Iliana sounded rather nonplussed by everything. ‘I suppose you’d better come back to Castle Clair with us then. Time for you to face up to your past. Funnily enough, Romy uses your old room at Castle Lodge. I daresay it will be strange for you to be back there, but I for one would feel a lot happier knowing you were under my roof where I can keep an eye on you.’

‘But maybe the island—’ Ewella began.

‘It’s okay, Mum,’ Romy said quickly. ‘Castle Clair’s the place we want to be right now. Blaise wants to face what happened head on. He can’t run from it. We have to learn to live with it—together. We’ll be all right, don’t worry.’

‘He’s going by Blaise again?’ Star asked, a curl on her lip.

‘I have to own who I am,’ he said simply. ‘No more hiding behind John Ford.’

‘And I’m very proud of him for doing so,’ Romy said firmly.

‘Well,’ Iliana said again, ‘what a day for announcements!’

‘Before we go our separate ways,’ Lowen said hurriedly, ‘there’s another announcement I want to make.’

Castor groaned. ‘Blimey, we’re going to be here all day at this rate.’

I took Sirius’s hand. Something told me this was going to be a doozy.

Lowen looked round at us all. ‘After talking with Emrick and then Hector, we’ve all agreed that it’s time.’

‘Time for what?’ Harley asked.

Keely had paled. ‘Lowen, what are you saying?’

I knew what he was saying. I glanced at Romy, only to find her looking straight back at me. It was like, in that moment, we knew. The three of us. We both turned to Lowen, and he nodded at us in turn.

‘Things are moving fast. Trouble’s growing. We need to be prepared. I’m taking back my magic and—’

We never found out what else he’d been about to say, because Keely gave a strangled sob and ran out of the room.

Castor shook his head. ‘By heck, the fun never ends with you lot, does it? Fancy making an announcement like that without talking it over with your girlfriend first! I’d go after her if I were you, lad. I reckon you’ve got a hell of a lot of grovelling to do.’





# Chapter 25

## *Lowen*

Okay, so I'm an idiot.

Castor was right. I should have spoken to Keely about this first. Fancy just blundering in and announcing it like it was a done deal!

Although... It *was* a done deal, wasn't it? No matter what Keely thought, I knew the time had come. I had work to do, and for that I needed my magic.

But Keely's face...

I headed upstairs with a heavy heart, and my footsteps slowed as I neared our bedroom. I steeled myself. The door was open, and I hated seeing Keely cry. Knowing I was the one who'd hurt her so badly made me feel like an absolute—

'Ratbag!'

I ducked as our alarm clock went flying past my head and hit the landing with a thud. I wasn't sure whether to feel sorry or relieved that she wasn't crying. Far from it. She was standing by our bed, her face red with anger as she glared at me like she wanted to kill me.

Runa, who had been lying on the bed, gave me a disdainful look and leapt onto the carpet, slapping my leg indignantly with her tail as she stalked past me. She headed downstairs where Frey was lying low, having clearly decided he wasn't going to get involved in any domestic incident.

'Keely, I can explain.'

'Can you? Go on then, genius. Explain how you thought it was a good idea to make such a massive decision about our future without so much as mentioning it to me first.'

I rubbed the back of my neck. Put like that...

‘I was talking to Hector and Emrick,’ I admitted woefully. ‘I guess I just got carried away.’

‘You reckon?’ She folded her arms. ‘So when’s it happening then? This stupendous event? When do I get to say goodbye to my boyfriend and hello to some stranger?’

I stared at her. ‘Is that what you think’s going to happen?’

‘Can you tell me it won’t?’ Her chin tilted defiantly but it was too late. I’d heard the wobble in her voice, seen the tears pricking her eyes. My heart sank.

‘Keely, you do know this has got to happen, no matter what the cost? We haven’t got a choice any longer.’

‘As soon as you reclaim your magic you’re a target,’ she said. ‘You know that, right? Our life together, such as it is now, will be over. You’ll forever be looking over your shoulder, worrying about the Pendragons.’

‘Which is why we have to finish them.’ I cautiously edged towards her, managing to sit on the edge of the bed without her throwing anything else at me.

‘Finish them?’ She shook her head. ‘Have you heard yourself? What’s happened to you? Lowen—my Lowen—would never talk about finishing people, like this was some Xbox game.’

‘I didn’t mean... Look, I meant finish the threat. I’m not — Hell, Keely, what do you want me to say? You knew this was coming. You’ve known since the moment I took Excalibur from the sea. This is my destiny. I have to stop the Pendragons before the other witches decide to take matters into their own hands, because if I don’t it will be all-out war. I can’t let that happen. You wouldn’t want me to! Would you?’

She hesitated, then sank onto the bed beside me. ‘Of course I wouldn’t.’

‘Well then,’ I said gently. ‘What do you want me to do?’

‘I want you to make it all go away,’ she said tearfully. ‘I want all this to never have happened. I want to wake up and

find my boyfriend is Lowen Ericson, a pretty crap solicitor from Gerrenporth who nearly passes out when he hears the word witches.'

'Don't,' I said, embarrassed. 'What an idiot I was.'

'I loved that idiot,' she said indignantly. 'I loved how innocent and afraid you were. I wish you were still that innocent.'

'If it helps,' I said, nudging her, 'I'm still afraid.'

She sighed then took my hand. 'Are you?'

'I'm petrified,' I said, surprised. 'Don't tell me you didn't know that. I'm not that good an actor, surely?'

'You've changed a lot lately,' she said. 'There's something about you. You seem more determined, somehow, and you've taken on the responsibility for us all. Look how you stood up in the chapel earlier. The old Lowen could never have done that.'

'It's my job to do that,' I reminded her. 'Peacekeeping is what I was born for.'

'Ironic, considering you've just been talking about finishing the Pendragons.'

I couldn't answer that. She had a point, after all.

'Will you?' She asked, after a long silence.

'Will I what?'

She looked straight at me, her gaze steady and unblinking. 'Finish them? The Pendragons.'

A hundred different answers whizzed through my mind, but there was only really one I could give her.

'If I have to.'

'Oh, wow.'

'If it's us or them, what would you rather I did? I don't like it any more than you do, but if it's the only way to protect the world from another witch/fae war...'

She rubbed her face, saying nothing.

‘If I can end this without hurting anyone I’ll gladly do that,’ I said, meaning it. ‘I’m not a fighter, Keely. You know that. You know me.’

‘I know Lowen,’ she said flatly. ‘Who knows what I’ll think to Wulfram?’

‘I’ll still be me,’ I said, wondering even as I uttered the words if it was true. Wasn’t that what I’d been worrying about myself, after all? That Wulfram would somehow drown out the part of me that was Lowen, the way John Ford had drowned out Blaise St Clair?

‘You don’t know that for sure,’ she said, and I couldn’t deny it.

‘Why now?’ she whispered.

‘Because the unease is growing, and so are the voices of men like Golightly and Crossley. You saw how they reacted to the O’Briens in the chapel.’ I narrowed my eyes, thinking I’d like to say a few choice words to Aisling. ‘I can’t believe what happened there,’ I muttered. ‘If Aisling had just kept quiet... Now some of the witches are talking about fae spies in the witch community, and accusing the High Council of treason, can you believe? I mean, all they were doing was keeping relations cordial with the Shining Ones. And that’s another problem.’

‘What is?’

‘Well, Aisling. We know she’s not a fan of witches, and one day she’ll be the leader of the Shining Ones. Can you imagine how relations could deteriorate when that happens? We’ve got to win her over somehow. Convince her that witches aren’t the enemy.’

‘We’ve got ages to worry about that,’ she reassured me. ‘You know how long Killian’s people live.’

‘I also know they can be killed. So yes, in theory Orlagh could live for another century or two, but equally she could be killed tomorrow. I’ve got to think ahead about all these things. Don’t you see?’

She frowned. 'I think I see a lot more than you realise. You're taking too much on, Lowen. You're not equipped to deal with all this stress.'

'Which is why I have to prepare,' I burst out. 'That's what I'm saying! I have to take my magic back and begin training as soon as possible.'

'Training?'

I nodded. 'We've been discussing it. Hector's going to guide me through Guardianship, and Killian and Aidan are going to help me deal with the fae part of me, and they're going to ask Sweeney to help, too.'

'That's—'

But I hadn't finished yet. 'Emrick says I'll need to learn the disciplines of witchcraft. He's going to ask Star to teach me about fire magic. Celeste can teach me about water magic. Sky is apparently an air witch, so he's suggested I learn from her, while Sirius is an earth witch. What are you, by the way?'

Keely blinked. 'I have no idea what you're talking about. I didn't exactly get private tuition on being a witch, remember? I just did what came naturally.'

'That's great,' I said excitedly.

'Is it?'

'Yes! Because maybe you and I can train together, and you'll find your discipline. Harley, too. We all need to be prepared. As much as I wish this could be just about me, I need to know you're all able to defend yourselves. Emrick's suggesting a bootcamp, here on the island. I'll get my magic back then I'll hunker down here for the next few months, training.'

'So that's what life's going to be like from now on?' she said miserably. 'Stuck on this island for months, spending every day in some grim bootcamp, and steeling ourselves for a Pendragon attack the minute we get away from this place.'

She sounded full of despair, and looking at it from her point of view there was no wonder. Keely had always disliked

living in her family home in Northumberland, as she craved signs of life and society. This island was hardly her idea of fun. And she'd never really been one for discipline, that was certain. I'd bet if I got Ewella started on that subject she'd never shut up.

I was asking a lot of her. It was quite clear to me now. What had I been thinking?

'Look,' I said hesitantly, 'this is something I've got to do. I haven't got a choice. But you do.'

She frowned. 'Meaning what?'

'Well...' I forced myself to go on, even though it broke my heart to even contemplate a future without her in it. 'You could go back to Castle Clair with the others. You don't have to put yourself through any of this. This is my fight and—'

'Are you serious?'

'I just want what's best for you, Keely.'

'You're breaking up with me?'

'No! Of course not! When—when all this is over, I'll come and find you. I promise.'

'You will not!'

I didn't know how to reply to that, so I just stared at her in dumb misery.

'Lowen Ericson, you really are still an idiot after all,' she said affectionately, and threw her arms around my neck. 'How could you ever think I'd let you face any of this on your own? I'm going to be by your side every step of the way. You just try and stop me.'

'But you don't like the island,' I mumbled. 'And you don't like bootcamps either.'

'Yeah, well, that's absolutely true,' she admitted. 'Tough, isn't it? Look, Lowen, I may not like this, and I may be furious with you for not discussing this with me first, but you're right. The time's come. I know it, deep down. You need some time to train, and for that you need your magic.'

‘It’s going to be tough,’ I warned her, while a little voice in my head asked me what I thought I was doing, and did I want to put her off or something?

‘I know it is. It’s going to be a nightmare.’ She shrugged. ‘The way I see it, you can’t be training twenty-four hours a day, and when the working day’s through it will be my job to make sure you switch off and have a bit of fun.’

She wagged her eyebrows suggestively and I laughed.

‘Oh, you do, do you?’

‘I definitely do.’

‘I suppose,’ I said doubtfully, ‘there’s no way we could start some of that training now, is there?’

She kissed me. ‘Close the door and I’ll see what I can do.’

I closed the bedroom door after retrieving the alarm clock from the landing.

‘Sorry about that,’ Keely said, as I set it back on our bedside table. ‘You do know I wasn’t aiming for you, don’t you?’

‘I know,’ I said, smiling. ‘If you had been there’d be no way you’d have missed.’

I put my arms around her, and we lay back on the bed, lost for a few blissful moments in a world of kisses and love and all good things, where no horrible thoughts could intrude.

‘I love you, Lowen,’ she whispered. ‘You do know that, don’t you?’

‘I know. And I love you.’

‘And Wulfram?’

I closed my eyes briefly. So much for putting the future out of our minds.

‘I’ll still be me, Keely.’

‘You promise?’

We stared at each other. She was waiting and I wanted to tell her that, of course I promised, and she had nothing to fear.

But how could I? The truth was, I simply didn't know.

The silence stretched on interminably, then she sighed.

'Thank you,' she said at last.

'For what?'

'For not lying to me. I hope, at least, that never changes,' she said. 'Lowen, do you mind if we just cuddle?'

'A cuddle sounds perfect,' I told her. I held her in my arms and kissed the top of her head, my thoughts a chaotic jumble. I wondered if she knew, as we lay there together, how scared I really was.

Keely meant everything to me, and if I couldn't fight for anything else, I could fight for her. But if I failed, if I let her down... One day, maybe she and I would have a family of our own. I wanted them to live in a world of peace and unity, not one of suspicion and fear. It was down to me to make that happen. It was all down to me. I'd risk anything and everything to keep Keely and my friends safe.

I just hoped Wulfram felt the same.





# Chapter 26

## *Trinity*

‘Looks like Lowen will have his work cut out.’ Sirius wrinkled his nose in sympathy as we watched my brother heading upstairs, a pensive look on his face.

‘She’ll have to come to terms with it,’ Hector said. ‘She’s always known this had to happen, after all.’

‘But it’s one thing knowing it’s going to happen at some point in the future. Quite another to accept it’s going to happen very soon.’ Celeste sighed. ‘They have such a lot on their shoulders. I really feel for them.’

‘Fate can be very unfair,’ I said, wondering why it was that Lowen, of all people, should have to carry such a heavy burden. ‘He’s such a mild, unassuming young man. Hardly a born leader. This role he’s about to assume isn’t one he’ll take to easily.’

‘But you’re forgetting,’ Hector said, as the four of us strolled outside into the garden, ‘he was born to it. He’s not adopting some fake persona. He’s reclaiming the person he really is. I think he might surprise you.’

‘I really hope he’s up to the job,’ Sirius said fervently.

We sat down on the garden bench and leaned back, raising our faces to the sun. I bathed in the warmth and wished all days could be like this, and that all the bad stuff would just go away and leave us alone.

We lived on such a beautiful planet. Why did so many people want to waste time fighting on it? Instead of appreciating what we had and enjoying our blessings, we fought for control and power, ravaging the land and seas, plotting against the people we perceived as a threat. How stupid was that?

Human beings are ridiculous, but it seemed to me that witches and fae were just as bad. Fear. That was the problem. When people are afraid they attack. If we could just persuade the fae and the witches that they had nothing to fear from each other... Well, I guessed that was Lowen's job. I didn't envy him.

'So,' Sirius said, 'are you going to tell us what you really saw in Blaise's memories?'

I opened my eyes and turned to see him watching Celeste.

'She already did,' I reminded him.

'I don't buy it. There must be something more for her to suddenly decide that, after everything he did, Blaise St Clair can be trusted.'

'Perhaps,' Celeste said cautiously.

'You don't have to tell us,' Hector said, giving Sirius a meaningful look. 'What went on in there is private, and if you want it to stay that way that's your decision, and we'll respect it. Won't we?' he added, nodding at Sirius.

'Oh come on,' Sirius said, sitting up straight and resting his elbows on the back of the bench. 'You can't blame me for being worried. I saw what he did to her, remember?'

'And I didn't?' Hector said mildly. 'It's still none of our business.'

'It's okay.' Celeste put her hand on his arm. 'Honestly, it's fine. I want to tell you three anyway—as long as it doesn't go any further, okay?'

'Of course,' Hector said, and Sirius and I nodded.

'I'm not sure if anyone would believe me, even if I did tell them,' she admitted. 'I know I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't lived it with him.'

'Lived what with him?' I asked, curious.

'Everything! All those memories! You see, I didn't just watch things happen to him. I experienced them as if I was him. It was the strangest thing.' She put her hand on her heart.

‘I felt him, in here. Every emotion tugged at me. It was exhausting.’

‘No wonder you were so drained,’ Hector said, frowning. ‘Usually you just see the events play out, but you don’t experience the person’s emotions, do you?’

‘Never. It’s the first time it’s happened, and I hope it’s the last,’ she said with feeling.

‘You don’t think it could have been a trap?’ Sirius asked slowly.

‘A trap?’ Celeste tilted her head, thinking. ‘I’m not sure I understand what you mean. How could it be?’

‘Maybe he planted false memories. Or created false emotions. Or...’ He shrugged. ‘I don’t know.’

‘Blaise has no magic,’ Hector reminded him. ‘He doesn’t have the ability to do anything like that. To be honest, I’m not sure anyone but a Guardian could create false emotions. Fake memories perhaps, but not the feelings that go with them. No, that’s got to be genuine.’

‘What emotions are we talking about?’ I asked. I was intrigued to know what Celeste had experienced when walking around in Blaise’s mind. It must have been fascinating. Chilling, but fascinating.

‘Honestly? Not what you’d expect. There was a lot of grief and guilt,’ she said slowly. ‘He adored Bevil and was very protective of him. He got into a fair few scraps with local boys who made the mistake of bullying his little brother.’

‘Well,’ Sirius said uncomfortably, ‘we knew that. Ever since Blaise first recovered some of his memories we’ve had no reason to doubt that he loved Bevil. His last request to you was to clear Bevil’s name, remember?’

‘I know.’ Celeste shrugged. ‘It’s just, knowing it and experiencing it are two different things. It was so heartwarming. And then, of course, when he lost his mum. Oh, I thought his little heart was going to break.’

Her eyes filled with tears, and I realised she wasn't kidding. Celeste really had gone through every emotion with Blaise.

'Look, Celeste, I get it,' Sirius said gently. 'He's not a complete monster. He cared about his family. That doesn't mean—'

'You don't understand!' Celeste pursed her lips, looking stubborn.

'Well, give me something more then!' Sirius shrugged helplessly. 'Sorry, but I don't see how any of this changes anything.'

Celeste turned to Hector. 'When you found Mother Clipson in the dungeon...'

'When he found Mother Clipson *dying* in the dungeon,' Sirius corrected her grimly.

'What about it?' Hector asked, ignoring Sirius.

'I always pictured her lying on the stone floor, but she wasn't, was she?'

Hector's brow furrowed. 'Well, no...'

'She was lying on fleeces,' Celeste said. 'And she had a pillow under her head, and she was covered in fine blankets.'

'She was,' Hector admitted.

'They were Blaise's blankets, from his own bed.'

'But it was Blaise who poisoned her!' Sirius said, exasperated.

'I know that,' Celeste said tearfully. 'But I saw him, Sirius. I felt the regret, and the self-loathing, and the pain. I saw him cradling her and telling her how sorry he was and making her as comfortable as he possibly could. He deliberately chose aqua tofana as it was painless, and he just wanted her to go to sleep. He stayed with her until she did.'

'Celeste,' I said cautiously, 'that's all well and good, but he was trying to murder her. I mean, as character references go, I wouldn't say that putting a blanket over your victim and

making sure she had a pillow under her head was much of one.’

‘Oh, I know that!’ She shook her head, clearly frustrated. ‘It’s hard to explain. It’s so different when you feel what Blaise was feeling. The regret. The pain. I didn’t know, you see. I thought he had no conscience. But he did. And really, I should have known, because when his memories of Mother Clipson returned he was genuinely heartbroken. It was a similar reaction to when his memories of Bevil came back.’

‘It didn’t stop him hurting either of them,’ Sirius pointed out. ‘Physically, in Mary Clipson’s case, and betraying Bevil by practising forbidden magic with Jenet.’

‘I know that. I do know, honestly. But I saw the struggle he had every day about Jenet and Bevil with his conscience. I felt the guilt he felt over keeping such a huge secret from his brother. And then when he was here with us...’

Her voice trailed off and she bit her lip.

‘Go on,’ Sirius said suspiciously. ‘What about it?’

‘He really liked us,’ Celeste said, shooting him a look that dared him to question it. ‘Genuinely. He was starting to see us as real family. He even grudgingly admired you, Hector. Imagine that.’

‘Imagine.’ Hector gave her a crooked smile. ‘I’m guessing he liked you, too? Maybe even more than liked you?’

‘That was faked. He was using her,’ Sirius said immediately.

Celeste looked worriedly at Hector.

‘It’s no more than I’d already suspected,’ Hector said gently. He got to his feet and gazed down at her. ‘He fell in love with you, didn’t he?’

‘He did,’ she said, and I heard the bewilderment in her voice as she spoke the words. Evidently she was still absorbing that little bombshell. ‘I thought he’d lied about the whole thing, but he—he really fell in love. He wanted to stay in Castle Clair and make a life with me.’

‘Then why didn’t he?’ Sirius demanded.

‘Because,’ she said heavily, ‘there was something he wanted even more. He wanted to take what he’d learned in our world back to his own time and use it to help people. He was convinced it was for the greater good. He absorbed knowledge like a sponge, didn’t he? He wanted to learn about everything, and he’d made so many notes and drawn so many diagrams... He thought he could take some of that information back. He wanted to help with medicines and treatments. That was his main priority. But he also thought he could stop some of the mistakes that he’d read about in the history books.’

‘Change history?’

‘For the better!’

‘Did he ever stop to think that meddling in time could cause more problems than it would solve? Many more problems!’ Sirius sounded scornful. ‘You can’t just change the course of history like that. How selfish can you be?’

‘You’re not going to give him a chance, are you?’ Celeste said, exasperated.

‘Well, come on! Okay, I get it. He was a criminal with a heart. He wanted to do good, but it still meant he was willing to do bad things to achieve his goals.’

‘He didn’t really have a choice,’ she said.

‘We all have choices, Celeste,’ Sirius said, a tad patronisingly to be honest. ‘I’d have a word with him about that later. ‘You can’t make excuses for a man who made countless wrong ones.’

‘You’re not listening,’ she said, turning beseeching eyes on him. ‘*He didn’t have a choice!*’

We all looked at each other. Evidently, Sirius and Hector heard the note of desperation in her voice, too.

‘What do you mean?’ I asked.

‘Every time,’ she said, her voice cracking with emotion as her eyes filled with tears. ‘It forced him on, every single time.’

‘What are you talking about?’ Hector crouched down in front of her and took her hands.

‘Fate,’ she said bitterly. ‘Every time he tried to back away from his mission it called to him. Every time he found himself wanting to do the right thing—whether that was telling Jenet the magical experiments were over, or listening to her that night of the witch’s leap, or when his memory came back while he was living with us—every single time it was like a compulsion took over, forcing him to continue, even though every part of him rebelled at the thought. Blaise St Clair,’ she said firmly, ‘was a victim of fate, just as much as Lowen is. How can you have such sympathy for Lowen but none for Blaise?’

‘Well...’ Sirius looked a bit nonplussed. ‘To be fair, Lowen’s trying to bring peace to the world. Blaise would have brought chaos if he’d succeeded.’

‘But that’s just it,’ Celeste said eagerly. ‘Don’t you see? There’s more to all this than we thought. I know it! Think about it. Blaise’s destiny was always to come through time to be here with us in the present, right?’

‘Nooo,’ Sirius said slowly. ‘It was to come through time, gather information and return to the past to wreak havoc. And he would have done if Hector hadn’t taken his magic.’

‘That’s what I used to think,’ Celeste said.

‘But you don’t any longer?’ Hector asked.

She shook her head. ‘No, I don’t. Because I felt it, Hector. I felt the pull of fate. I’d already experienced it for myself, in a smaller way. That obsession with Blaise that haunted me all those years. Remember, Sirius? Remember how you and Star used to tease me because I was “in love” with a portrait of a man who’d died three hundred and fifty years earlier?’

‘You used to tell me I wasn’t normal. And you were right. The whole thing wasn’t normal. But I had to be obsessed with Blaise for him to find me at that point in time. Now I’ve lived in Blaise’s head, I understand how strong that pull of fate is.’



‘And I know, I just know, that if Blaise was meant to go back in time he’d have found a way. He’s here for a reason. Do you honestly believe it’s a coincidence that the woman he fell in love with was Romy? I can tell you now, he nearly didn’t go to that psychology conference. He picked up the phone twice to cancel, but each time something made him end the call. Fate. Destiny. Call it what you will. Don’t you think it odd that just months later, Romy received that invitation from Meri Kittow, putting her in touch with our branch of the family? It was inevitable that, at some point, Blaise would return to us.’

‘Are you saying Blaise is meant to be here, and he’s meant to be back with us?’ Hector asked.

She shivered. ‘Without a doubt. And whatever it is that’s led him this far, it hasn’t finished with him yet. There’s more to come. I just know it.’

‘That sounds ominous,’ I said. ‘You think he’s here to cause more trouble?’

‘You do realise you’ve just made me even more wary of him?’ Sirius said heavily.

‘I don’t know what fate has in store for him,’ Celeste admitted. ‘All I know is, Blaise is a better man than I thought, and with the influence of John Ford, I think there’s a very good chance that we can keep him on our side. I want to help him because I know now that he deserves our help. He’s been through so much already, lived so many different lives—first in the 17th century, then here as Blaise, then in Cumbria as John Ford. Now he’s been thrown into confusion yet again. Whatever fate’s got planned, we need to be there to make sure he makes the right choices this time.’

She fixed Sirius with a stern look. ‘I need you on my side in this. Star and Sky will never believe me, but they’ll listen to you, and to Hector. Please talk to them. Please tell them he must be made to feel welcome, Sirius. If he feels respected, wanted, and like part of the family, it’s going to be so much easier for him to resist if fate has a nasty card up its sleeve. You see?’

‘I suppose so,’ Sirius said doubtfully. ‘But I’m going to be watching him like a hawk. You know that?’

‘I know.’ She sighed. ‘I think we all should, as long as we don’t let him know we are.’

‘And what about Romy?’ I asked, thinking of my newly found sister, so vulnerable in her hopeless love for this man.

‘He adores Romy,’ Celeste said. ‘He wouldn’t hurt her.’

‘He was in love with you,’ Hector reminded her. ‘Yet he pulled a knife on you at Castle Lodge, remember?’

‘Which he never for an instant meant to use,’ she said earnestly. ‘Trust me on that. I saw that moment so clearly and I know exactly what he was feeling. It was absolute dread because he knew if you called his bluff he had nothing left. There was no way he’d ever have hurt me. I’m sure he would never hurt Romy, no matter what fate has in store for him. He loves her with far more depth and passion than he ever loved me.’

We were, it seemed, nothing more than chess pieces on a board, being moved around and manipulated for reasons none of us could fathom. Did that make Blaise our enemy, or our comrade in arms?

Celeste sighed. ‘Poor Blaise. Poor Lowen. I wouldn’t be in their shoes for anything.’



## Chapter 27

### *Lowen*

‘It will be the biggest decision you ever make in your life. Probably.’ Emrick shrugged. ‘I can’t offer you any advice. This must be your choice and yours alone. Lowen’s already made his, but you two need to figure this out for yourselves.’

We were all sitting round the breakfast table in Peloryon House. I say “all”. I mean what seemed to have become the island branch of this weird, extended family set-up I was now a part of. The Castle Clair contingent had returned home after the funeral, except for Trinity and Sirius, naturally. They seemed to see the island as more their home these days anyway, and still harboured hopes of setting up the school here when this mess with the Pendragons was over.

It seemed like years since I’d been living on my own in that flat next to the pub in Gerrenporth. I hadn’t seen my mum in months. I hadn’t seen my dad for over a year. I should rectify that, I thought, although I couldn’t help wondering if they’d even noticed my absence.

‘Lowen?’

I blinked. ‘Sorry? What?’

Emrick sighed. ‘Pay attention, there’s a good man. It would save me a lot of time if I didn’t have to repeat myself so often. I was wondering if you had an opinion on this subject?’

*What subject?* I swallowed guiltily, but luckily Trinity covered for me, even though I highly doubt she’d meant to.

‘What the heck’s it got to do with Lowen? Wow, talk about sexist! I think Romy and I can make our own decision, thanks very much.’

Romy nodded. ‘Absolutely. No offence, Lowen,’ she added hastily.

‘None taken,’ I assured her, even though I had no idea what they were on about.

‘I wasn’t saying you needed his permission to reclaim your magic,’ Emrick said with a patient sigh. ‘I was merely asking his opinion on the subject, that’s all. My word, you’re all prickly today. What’s wrong with you all?’

Oh. Magic. That old thing.

I could hazard a guess that was exactly what was wrong with us all. If they were anything like Keely and I, they probably hadn’t slept a wink all night, wondering what would happen next. Having made public my decision to reclaim my magic, naturally thoughts turned to whether Romy and Trinity would wish to do the same. I should think my sisters, along with Blaise and Sirius, had wrestled with that conundrum into the wee small hours.

Ewella pursed her lips as she poured tea into a cup. ‘Well, you know my thoughts on the subject,’ she said firmly.

‘We certainly do, Mother,’ Keely said, rolling her eyes.

‘Romy and Trinity should forget all about magic and concentrate on living nice, normal lives.’ She added sugar to her tea and stirred it furiously. ‘Why invite trouble if you don’t have to?’

‘But the Pendragons might already know who Trinity is,’ Sirius pointed out. ‘Look, I’m as worried about her as you are. More. But she might already be in danger, and she can’t stay hidden on this island forever. I don’t know. Maybe magic would provide her with some safety? At least she’d have a means of protecting herself. Right now, she has nothing.’

‘Besides,’ Romy added, ‘it’s hardly fair to put all this on Lowen. He hasn’t got a choice in this. He’s got to become Wulfram. Why should he have to do this alone? We’re his sisters and he’s going to need us.’ She gazed round at us. ‘He’s going to need us all. Every single one of us. Arthur didn’t fight alone. He had a whole round table of knights. Well, we’ve got

a breakfast table of friends and family, and that will have to do.’

She grinned at me, and I grinned back, thinking how much happier she looked this morning, despite the pressure we were all under. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that she’d moved into Blaise’s bedroom last night. I guess the two of them were back on.

I’d been surprised, though I’ll admit relieved, to see Sirius being extremely polite and even friendly to Blaise. They’d chatted quite amiably over porridge, and even though Blaise was clearly wary of this change of heart—not to mention very obviously stunned by it—conversation had flowed, and it had been a very pleasant breakfast for once.

Until Emrick mentioned magic. Naturally.

I glanced at Keely and saw her watching me. We smiled at each other, needing no words. Keely and I had made our peace with what was to happen. I knew, no matter what the outcome would be, she had my back as I had hers. We would support each other to the end, however much it hurt. I couldn’t ask for anything more.

‘If you’re going to do this,’ Killian said, chewing—rather ill-manneredly—on a slice of toast as he spoke, ‘I need to tip the folks off. When the Pendragons get the message you’re back they’ll be on the lookout for you, Lowen. And if there’s more than one of you...’ He rolled his eyes. ‘Jeez, it’s going to be a fun few months, that’s for sure.’

‘You think it’s going to last a few months?’ Harley asked anxiously.

His expression softened. ‘Ah, darlin’, I was being optimistic.’

‘Oh.’

‘Whoever takes back their magic has to accept that, from that moment, they cannot leave this island,’ Emrick said. ‘Not until they’ve mastered at least a few basics in magic, and until they understand both the witch and fae sides of their natures. There will be people here to help you with that. Killian and

Aidan have offered, and Suibhne has kindly said he'll be of service if needed. The St Clair girls—that is, the Castle Clair St Clair girls—will also be visiting to help when they can, and I'm sure you, Sirius, can be of use. Hector will also be here to guide Lowen on Guardian matters.'

'You're right, of course,' Ewella said, dropping her teaspoon resignedly. It clattered onto her saucer, and she stared at it for a moment, as if wondering how it had got there.

When she made no further comment, Keely frowned. 'About what, Mum?'

Ewella blinked. 'Oh! Sorry. I was miles away. I mean, Romy's right of course. We can't just leave this to Lowen. If he needs us we must be there for him. Shoulder to shoulder. So I was thinking, maybe a few refresher lessons, Emrick?'

Emrick stared at her. 'Are you serious?'

'It's a long time since I did any magic,' she admitted. 'Any real magic, I mean. I might need a few reminders, but I'm sure I'll get back in the swing of things when I get my confidence back.'

'And you want me to teach you?' he said incredulously.

'Well...' She laughed. 'I wouldn't exactly say teach me. Maybe nudge me in the right direction.'

'Now that,' he said smiling, 'I can do.'

'Are you serious?' Harley's eyes were like saucers. 'You're going to use magic again, Mum?'

'Needs must,' she said. 'It's not a course of action I'd necessarily have chosen, but this is our fight, not just Lowen's. I can't let my boy do this alone. It's obvious that whatever's going to happen will happen, whatever I feel about it, so I might as well shut up and get on with it.'

'Well said, Ewella!' Emrick beamed. 'And welcome back to the fold.'

'Hmm, let's not get carried away,' she said, lifting her teacup to her lips. There was, though, a distinct gleam in her

eyes, and I had a sudden feeling that, deep down, she was quite looking forward to it.

‘I wish I could help.’

We all fell silent at Blaise’s words.

‘Well,’ Sirius said awkwardly, ‘I’m afraid you can’t really. Not without magic.’

‘This is all my fault,’ Blaise said miserably. ‘I’ve caused all this. If I hadn’t dabbled in time travel we wouldn’t be in this mess now. Yet here I am, unable to be of any use to you.’

‘But you’ll be here for us, supporting us,’ Romy said firmly. She turned to face us. ‘Blaise and I discussed all this last night, and I’ve already made my decision. I’m going to take back my magic.’

I felt the pressure of Keely’s leg as she pushed it against mine. Evidently she wasn’t too sure about this turn of events, and I could understand why. Blaise had no magic of his own, but what if he used Romy’s somehow? What if he manipulated her into using it in a harmful way? Was it even possible that she could restore his magic for him? It hadn’t, after all, been drained like hers had. It had been removed by a Guardian. Did that mean only a Guardian could return it? I had so much to learn.

‘Are you sure about this, Romy?’ Harley asked anxiously. ‘It’s an awfully big step.’

‘Ah, she’ll be grand,’ Killian assured her, liberally spreading jam on yet another slice of toast. ‘We’ll all be there to watch her back. Let her have a bit of fun.’

‘It’s not about having fun,’ Harley reminded him frostily. ‘This is serious stuff.’

‘Sure, I know that! Did I say it wasn’t? I’m just saying, magic can be fun, too, and why shouldn’t she reclaim it? She’s been deprived of it nearly all her life.’ He winked at Romy. ‘When your fae blood stirs you’ll be a new woman, Romy! You wait and see.’

‘Do you ever take anything seriously?’ Harley asked him.



Killian sighed. ‘Oh, I do, believe me. But only when I absolutely, one hundred per cent must. If I can get away with it then why wouldn’t I?’

‘Er, because of responsibilities,’ she said.

‘Now, darlin’, you know me and responsibilities,’ he said, giving her a peck on the cheek. ‘We’re strangers to each other, and long may it stay that way.’

She didn’t reply but picked up a cup of coffee and sipped from it, no humour in her eyes. It seemed Killian’s attempt to lighten the mood hadn’t gone down too well with his new wife.

‘So,’ I said hastily, turning to Romy, ‘you’re sure? You’ve made your decision? You realise that if you do this you won’t be able to leave the island for the foreseeable future? What about your plans to go to Castle Clair?’

‘I’ll return to Castle Clair alone,’ Blaise said. ‘Not for long, but for long enough to familiarise myself with the place again and help “bed in” those memories which are still slightly foggy. I’ve heard that great changes have occurred there since I was last in the town, and I’m looking forward to seeing how the family has restored Bevil’s reputation. I’ll stay a few weeks and then I’ll return to support Romy.’

‘Romy, that’s what you want?’ I asked.

‘Absolutely.’ There was no hesitation in her voice at all. I half envied her that much certainty. It seemed she wasn’t as beset with doubts as I was.

‘And you’re really all right with this?’ Trinity asked Blaise curiously. ‘Romy becoming a magical being?’

Romy took hold of Blaise’s hand. ‘We made our decision. Together.’

‘I wouldn’t want my magic back,’ Blaise explained. ‘Not for anything. Although I wish I could help you all in some way. But as for Romy... She’s been deprived of it through no fault of her own, and that’s not fair. If she wants to experience who she really is, who am I to stop her?’

‘I’m just...’ Keely gestured helplessly as she tried to formulate the words. ‘I’m worried, Romy. It’s so different to the life you’ve been used to. You’re such a gentle person. I’m not sure you’re cut out for this.’

‘But it’s who I really am,’ Romy pleaded. ‘Can’t you see that? Have you any idea how hard it was for me to grow up alongside you and Harley? My little sisters, who had so much power between them, and thought nothing of casting spells every day, even though Mum had expressly forbidden you to.’

Harley and Keely shifted uncomfortably.

‘Sorry, Mum.’

‘Sorry, Mum.’

Ewella sighed. ‘I think we’re a bit beyond that now.’

‘The point is,’ Romy said, ‘you have no idea how much I longed to be like you. It was a physical ache inside me. It wasn’t jealousy. It was so much deeper than that. It was like a part of me was grieving for something I could never have. Maybe, in some way, it was a memory of a kind, of something I used to have and had lost. I don’t know, but it hurt. It hurt so much. And now I have the chance to be that person again. I have the chance to explore that world and find out who I really am. Please don’t try to talk me out of this or tell me I’m wrong. Please, just be happy for me.’

‘I think,’ I said slowly, seeing that Keely was struggling, ‘it’s a wonderful thing that we have the chance to be the people we were born to be. I support you fully, Romy.’

‘And so do I,’ Trinity said, ‘because I’ve decided that I’m going to reclaim my magic, too. Finally, I’ll get to take part in this incredible, amazing, magical life I married into, instead of just being an observer. When I think about my mom—our Aunt Keresen—and all the things she sacrificed for me, I know she wouldn’t want me hiding away on here, unable to defend myself. She’d tell me to be brave, like she was brave. She went halfway round the world to keep me safe. I owe her this, and I’m not going to let her down. Besides,’ she added, ‘we all owe it to the memory of our parents. Havok Pendragon

killed Laragh and Ashen, and he killed Roderic St Clair. He's not gonna get away with that any longer.'

'You're right,' Harley said, her eyes gleaming with tears. 'He's not.'

'Then I guess that, tomorrow night, all three of you are reclaiming your magic,' Emrick said, smiling.

'Why tomorrow night?' I asked.

'Ah, you'll see, my boy. You'll see.'

'Just—just be careful, okay?' It was Blaise again, his voice hesitant. 'I know how intoxicating this must feel right now, but magic can be unpredictable, and it comes with huge responsibilities. It's easy to feel invincible. To feel you can do anything and no one can stop you. You must be aware of how much power you wield and be sure to keep it under control.'

There was silence for a moment, then Sirius said with a short laugh, 'Well, surely that depends upon the person wielding the magic?'

'You'd think, wouldn't you?' Blaise said heavily.

Emrick clapped him on the shoulder. 'Quite right, Blaise, and well said that man! And don't think I haven't already considered that. We'll be discussing those sort of things with them all during training. Perhaps you'd like to be part of that? After all, you said you wanted to help, and maybe hearing your story would be a good lesson for them.'

'What not to do,' Sirius muttered.

Blaise straightened and his gaze met Sirius's. I thought, suddenly, that in that moment he looked nothing like John Ford. John would never have faced Sirius like that.

'You can mock me if you like,' he said calmly, 'but in a way you're right. I'm an object lesson in what not to do with witchcraft. I'm not denying it.' He turned to Emrick. 'Thank you. I'd be happy to help in any way I can.'

I held my breath but to my relief Sirius smiled. 'Sorry, Blaise. Force of habit. I apologise for being so rude.'

Blaise nodded. 'Thank you. Apology accepted.'

I didn't miss the look Trinity and Sirius exchanged, and it made me uneasy. I had the feeling there was something I didn't know, which must surely explain why Sirius was being so weirdly nice to the man he'd professed to despise not too long ago.

Well, it could wait. I had more important things to think about right now. Like the little matter of tomorrow night being when I finally reclaimed my magic and the name, Wulfram Pendragon.



# Chapter 28

## *Lowen*

The moon was full and bright as the four of us walked along the track that led from Peloryon House.

It was a mild night, but to be honest, even if it had been pouring with rain I'm not sure any of us would have noticed. We were all in a state of nervous excitement. Even Emrick looked a little hyped up as he led the way.

Romy and Trinity shuddered and yelped as winged insects brushed their faces, and we saw a couple of bats swooping ahead of us. Meanwhile, I tried to pretend things like that didn't bother me, although how I stopped myself from yelling when something touched my cheek I don't know. Thank goodness I managed it, though, because it was only a leaf on a branch. Pathetic. Some Great Guardian I was going to make.

'Where exactly are we going?' Romy whispered.

Trinity shrugged. 'I thought maybe to the chapel, but he's gone the other way. Looks like we're going to the beach. Maybe the jetty.' She paused. 'Do you think we're going to the mainland?'

'It's possible,' Romy agreed.

I frowned. 'I wouldn't have thought it likely, though. Emrick's been warning us for ages that, if we take back our magic, we have to stay on this island for our protection. He's not likely to take us off here, is he?'

'Unless he has to,' Trinity said ominously, and I couldn't deny that was a possibility.

'Stop worrying,' Emrick said amiably. 'You're not leaving the island. Nearly there.'

'How did he hear that?' Romy whispered incredulously.

‘I have ears like radar sets,’ Emrick said cheerfully. ‘Come on, now. Keep up.’

We arrived at the pick-up point, where Emrick always waited for new arrivals with the horses and charabanc.

‘Are you sure we’re not leaving the island?’ Trinity asked suspiciously.

‘Trust me.’ Emrick turned to face us, smiling. ‘Here we are then.’

We stared at him. ‘Where?’

He tutted and waved a hand at the door beside him. ‘Where do you think? Harrod’s toy department?’

‘The generator shed?’ I asked. ‘Why would you bring us to that?’

‘Wrong question, Lowen,’ he said, tapping the side of his nose. ‘What you should be asking—what you should have always been asking—is why does an island entirely run on magic need a generator shed?’

We all looked at each other rather sheepishly. He was quite right, but I’m ashamed to say it hadn’t even occurred to me.

‘Okay then,’ I said slowly. ‘So why does an island entirely run on magic need a generator shed?’

He grinned. ‘I’m very glad you asked me that. To generate magic, of course!’

He pushed open the door and we stepped inside, disappointed to find a pretty ordinary and rather grimy-looking shed.

‘You can flick that light on,’ he said, nodding at the wall where I spotted a light switch. ‘Don’t worry. We won’t be seen from the mainland or at sea, should any boat be in the vicinity. There’s a very thick screening of trees all round this building, remember?’

I fumbled with the light switch, relieved when light flooded the shed and made everything feel just that little bit

more normal.

‘So, are you ready?’

‘As we’ll ever be,’ I said.

‘Ready for what? What are we doing here?’ Trinity questioned.

‘Just bolt that door, Lowen, there’s a good chap,’ Emrick said. ‘That’s it. Right then. Here we go.’

Over in the corner of the room, the bulky, rather dirty machine that I’d assumed was a generator, shimmered and vanished, revealing a trap door beneath where it had been standing.

‘We’re going down there?’ Romy squeaked.

‘We are,’ Emrick said. ‘Now, go careful, as there’s no hand rail. I’ve been meaning to put one in for years, but I never got round to it. My bad.’

He hauled up the trap door and began to descend. We all huddled together and peered down, watching his progress as he lightly made his way down a flight of stone steps.

Romy shivered. ‘Seriously?’

I felt a surge of protection for them both—my two sisters, looking so worried and vulnerable.

‘It will be fine,’ I assured them. ‘Do you want me to go first, or in the middle, or last?’

‘Can I go next?’ she pleaded. ‘That way Emrick will be just in front of me.’

‘I don’t mind,’ Trinity said with a shrug. ‘You can go second or third. It doesn’t matter to me.’

‘You’re brave,’ Romy told her.

‘I’m kinda getting used to being taken to basements lately,’ Trinity said wryly. ‘I just hope there’s not some crazy mermaid down there with a Marks and Spencer cardigan and hair like Zelda from Terrahawks.’

‘Who?’ Romy asked blankly.



‘Oh, boy. You haven’t lived.’ Trinity shook her head sorrowfully.

‘You go next,’ I told her, as Romy began to descend. ‘I’ll bring up the rear.’

‘I don’t need protecting,’ she assured me.

‘I know,’ I said, grinning. ‘Just let me pretend to be the hero for a few moments, before my new identity is thrust upon me, and we all find out I’m no such thing.’

She smiled. ‘Don’t worry about that. You’ll be amazing.’

She followed Romy down the steps, and I was soon close behind her, wondering as I went if I’d been supposed to close the trap door or leave it open? I hoped it wouldn’t matter.

It was very dark on the staircase, though there were torches positioned at various points on the wall on our way down.

As we went further and deeper I realised we were descending into the cliff, and as the thought entered my head I heard a faint pulsing sound.

‘What’s that?’ Romy said, turning to face us.

‘Like a sort of throb,’ Trinity said.

‘I mean the light. Look.’

We gazed over her shoulder and saw a strange, greenish-blue light that seemed to be moving in time to the sound.

‘Ready now?’ Emrick was waiting for us at the bottom, and we looked around us in amazement. We were in a cave. A huge, pulsing cave, that hummed and throbbed and glowed as if it were alive. And no wonder. Its walls were incredible, made of crystals. Long, hexagonal prisms, that glinted and gleamed in the moonlight that seeped in from the entrance to the cave. It was like our very own northern lights display.

‘Won’t someone see?’ I didn’t know what else to say, I was so completely dumbfounded.

He shook his head. ‘We can see the beach, the ocean, the night sky and the beautiful moon, but out there—if you were

standing right in the entrance to this cave you wouldn't see it. No one will see what's going to happen now.'

'What *is* going to happen now?' Romy asked nervously.

'Why, you're going to reclaim your magic, of course. Take it back from where it's been stored safely for you all these years. This place is like a giant battery. Right now it's supercharged from the full moon, and it's ready to hand over some of its precious energy to you three. Are you ready?'

'What do we have to do?' I asked, feeling dazed. These crystals, they stored actual magic. It was unbelievable.

'It's not difficult,' Emrick said. 'Just touch them.'

We looked at each other warily. 'That's it?' I asked. 'Just touch them?'

'What else would you do with them?' he said, looking rather nonplussed.

'Will it hurt?' asked Romy.

'Of course not. You'll feel energised if anything. Just lay your hands on some of the crystals and watch what happens.'

'Any crystals?' Trinity asked warily.

'You'll probably find yourself drawn to particular ones. Just relax and let it happen.'

He headed towards the mouth of the cave.

'Where are you going?' I called nervously.

'To breathe in the night air,' he said. His eyes gleamed with tears. 'This is private, Lowen. It's your moment. Yours, Romy's and Trinity's. What was taken from you, for your protection, will now be returned to you with love for the same purpose. I'll be waiting outside.'

We watched him leave the cave, then I took a deep breath.

'Okay, who's going first?'

The two girls looked at each other, and I thought, *Why did you even ask that? Stop being such a coward.*

I gazed at the wall, wondering where to start, and as I did so a group of red crystals on the wall seemed to gleam brightly, as if beckoning me towards it. Without hesitation, I moved forward and placed my hands on the crystals.

It was like being pulled into the wall by a strong magnetic force. Before I could stop myself I found I was flat against the crystals, their sharp points digging into my flesh, my face turned to the side, my hands stuck to the wall with no hope of pulling away.

Different sounds assaulted my ears. It was hard to make sense of what they were. Whale song, perhaps? The sound of wind howling through the trees. A waterfall. Chanting. Humming. Songbirds. The call of an owl. The howl of a wolf...

I closed my eyes, hardly able to breathe. It was difficult not to panic, because I had no way of moving from this position. I didn't know if Trinity and Romy were watching me, or if they were experiencing the same thing right now.

I wondered if I could take a breath but even that seemed impossible. There was a sudden rushing sensation inside me, as if I could feel my own blood coursing through my veins. My temples throbbed. The call of a raven. The roar of thunder. The sound of pouring rain.

I was starting to panic. I just couldn't take a breath. I was held fast against the wall with no way to step back and inhale. Lights were flickering in my eyes, and I thought that wasn't down to the crystals. It was down to my respiratory system failing. I was about to keel over and die.

And then, from nowhere, I had the distinct impression I was witnessing a huge, magical battle. It was very odd because I couldn't see anything, but I felt it, deep within me. And then began a dreadful lament, much like the one we'd heard at the funerals of Meri and Zephyr, but even more powerful. Sung, it seemed, by thousands of voices. So much grief. A farewell to hope. A farewell to Arthur.

Suddenly, with astonishing clarity, a beautiful, dark-haired woman stepped into my mind.

‘Welcome back, Wulfram Pendragon.’

A chorus of voices. ‘All hail, Wulfram Pendragon. Our Great Guardian has returned.’

Water trickled down my face, but whether it came from the wall or if it was simply sweat I couldn’t tell. Everything was starting to go dark. My head was spinning. There was no air, no way for me to breathe, no space for me to inhale the oxygen I desperately needed.

‘Look for the sword in the stone,’ the dark-haired woman whispered to me. ‘Save him, Wulfram. Give my beloved his freedom. When you find him, you will find the sword.’

I saw a dark, stone room, and could sense the presence of two people, a man and a woman. She wasn’t the dark-haired woman I’d just seen. I knew that, even though I couldn’t see their faces.

‘Only you can do this, Wulfram. This is your destiny,’ the man said.

The dark-haired woman’s face filled my mind again, obliterating everything else.

‘Free my love!’ she cried.

The sound of battle returned. Terrified screams and anguished cries filled me with grief and dread. Then there was an ominous silence and my heart thudded with fear. Something was coming. A slow, rhythmic beating sound filled the air. The beating of huge wings in the sky.

And I saw it.

My insides melted with terror as a huge dragon appeared on the horizon. Its nostrils quivered as its eyes fixed on mine. It flew closer and closer, and I couldn’t move. My legs wouldn’t work. It meant to kill me, there was no doubt about it. And I had no escape.

Then suddenly a piercing bright light shot out, as if coming from me. It radiated into the darkening sky and enveloped the huge beast. The dragon, unbelievably, was gone.

I fell to the floor, and all was silence.

I took great gasps of air, feeling as if my lungs would burst with the effort. Everything was spinning.

‘Lowen? Lowen, are you all right?’

I opened my eyes and groaned, my head spinning. Romy’s anxious face loomed into view as she cradled my head in her lap, while Trinity wiped my forehead with a tissue.

‘You had us scared. You went purple,’ she informed me.

‘I—I couldn’t breathe,’ I managed. ‘Wasn’t it that bad for you?’

They looked at each other.

‘It was weird, but not bad,’ Romy said at last. She sounded almost ashamed of the fact. ‘I could feel a sort of rushing through my veins, and my heart raced, and I heard some sounds—’

‘Nature sounds,’ Trinity added. ‘Like running water, and the ocean waves, and the wind on the mountain tops. That kind of thing.’

‘Yes, but then I just felt really blissfully happy,’ Romy admitted. ‘Honestly, I could have happily stayed there hugging that wall for hours, but it seemed to decide I’d had enough, and it let me go. When I pulled away, Trinity was just doing the same. But you...’

She shuddered and Trinity said, ‘You looked ready to pass out. Your eyes were white, and you weren’t breathing. I was just going to get Emrick when you fell to the floor.’

‘I guess recovering the magic of the Great Guardian takes a lot more doing than simple witch/fae magic,’ Romy said.

As she said it we stared at each other. It finally dawned on us that we had our magic back.

‘Do you feel any different?’ Trinity asked cautiously.

I lay on my back and stared upwards, my head comfortably on Romy’s lap, while above me the roof of the cave pulsed with life and energy. I felt distinctly queasy. ‘Bit,’

I said, not wanting to admit that the only difference I felt right now was nausea. ‘How about you?’

Romy wrinkled her nose. ‘Not really,’ she admitted, sounding thoroughly disappointed. ‘Trinity?’

‘Nope,’ Trinity said with a shrug. ‘Guess this isn’t going to be as big a deal as we thought. You don’t suppose our magic has been damaged while it’s been stored here, do you?’

‘Could magic be damaged?’ Romy asked doubtfully. ‘I suppose the only way to know for sure is to ask Emrick. He’s bound to know.’

‘What am I bound to know?’

We jumped at his voice, and I attempted to sit up.

‘No, no, take it easy, my boy,’ he said, placing a hand on my shoulder. ‘You’ve had a trying time. Take a few breaths and let the world steady itself first.’

‘You said it wouldn’t hurt,’ I managed.

‘Well, strictly speaking,’ he said, rather shame-faced, ‘I told Romy it wouldn’t hurt. And I’m quite sure it didn’t, did it, Romy? Trinity? But you—I’m afraid it was always going to be a more frightening experience for you. You had so much to absorb from the previous Great Guardians. I’m sorry.’

‘Why didn’t you warn me?’

‘Why frighten you?’ He stroked my hair gently. ‘Here. This’ll do the trick.’

To my surprise he handed me a Mars Bar.

‘Seriously?’

‘Try it. You’ll be amazed.’

I took a bite and chewed doubtfully, but I must admit that, within a few seconds, I was already feeling better.

‘See? Told you.’

I sat up and offered the girls some of the chocolate, but they refused. They certainly looked a lot better than I felt. In fact, as I watched them curiously, I realised they’d never

looked so healthy and alert. Those green eyes of theirs were positively sparkling.

‘You look really well,’ I said enviously.

‘And so do you,’ Romy said, eyeing me in surprise. ‘There’s something different about you. I can’t quite put my finger on it.’

‘Magic,’ Emrick said, laughing. ‘What else?’

‘So you don’t think our magic was damaged while it was in storage?’ I asked doubtfully.

‘Damaged while in storage? This cave isn’t some furniture warehouse. These crystals kept your magic safe all these years. It generates all the magical power on this island.’

‘But where did they come from?’ Trinity asked. ‘These crystals, I mean.’

‘They’ve been here since the beginning,’ Emrick assured her. ‘It powers not just Peloryon Island, but Lyonesse too, remember.’

‘Lyonesse?’ I gazed round in awe. That was some power.

‘Do you remember learning about the sacred places? Well, this is sort of what they look like. Underneath the land, this is what lies there. A giant battery pack, picking up signals and giving out warnings when necessary to the Guardians. Storing magic. Regenerating. Reusing. It’s an extremely efficient system.’

‘So Peloryon Island is one of the five sacred places?’ Trinity asked.

Emrick shook his head. ‘No. There is a sacred place in Cornwall, but it’s not here. This is something entirely separate, and part of the Otherworld, remember?’

I finished my Mars Bar and got to my feet.

‘Are you ready to go home?’ Emrick asked me kindly. ‘Wulfram Pendragon.’

I swallowed. ‘I guess so, yes.’

‘Good, because everyone’s waiting for you, and there’s quite a feast being prepared even as we speak.’

‘At this time of night!’ Trinity gasped.

‘You think this could possibly happen without a celebration?’ Emrick shook his head. ‘Come now, Trinity, surely you know everyone better than that. They’ll no doubt have a million questions to ask you, too, so be prepared.’

‘But...’

‘But what?’

‘I was going to say it’s late and I’m tired, but the funny thing is, I’m not. Not any more. I feel wide awake.’

‘You wouldn’t be able to sleep tonight if you tried,’ Emrick assured us. ‘Tomorrow will be time enough to sleep. Everyone plans to do the same thing. Sleep tomorrow. Party tonight. Come on, let’s go home.’

‘Are we safe?’ Romy asked, suddenly nervous. ‘I mean, won’t some sort of alarm have gone off somewhere, alerting the Pendragons that we’re back?’

We were all silent for a moment.

Emrick put his arms around us and drew us into a hug.

‘You’re safe and sound on this island, where no one can harm you. We’ve a long time before we need think about those people,’ he said firmly.

As the girls headed back up the steps, I caught Emrick’s arm.

‘The dragons. They’re here, aren’t they?’ I turned and nodded at the red crystals that had held me tightly to them just moments before. ‘The box is somewhere in there, isn’t it?’

He nodded. ‘It is, and there’s nowhere safer for it.’

‘I guess not. They must never be released into this world, Emrick. I saw one...’ I shivered, remembering the terror I’d felt at the sight of that huge beast approaching. ‘I can only imagine the devastation they’d cause. At least the Pendragons can’t get access to this island so—’



I caught the look in his eyes and my stomach turned. 'They can't, can they? I thought you said this island decided who could land here, and this island's mission is to keep us safe.'

'Don't worry, Wulfram. It is, and no, they can't land here. At least...' He shrugged. 'Maybe this is a conversation for another time.'

He put his foot on the bottom step, but I stopped him from going any further. 'Tell me now,' I said. 'I need to know if we're in any danger.'

He sighed. 'You're in no danger, Wulfram. But I must tell you this. If someone should take possession of both keys, the whereabouts of the dimension box will be revealed to them, and a path will open for them to reach it. It doesn't matter who that is. That's why it's so imperative that only you are ever in possession of both keys. Now do you understand the stakes?'

'They'd have to be pretty stupid to release dragons in the world,' I said. 'They can only be controlled by Excalibur, and only the Great Guardian has custody of that.'

'Yes, they'd have to be pretty stupid.' He paused. 'Or so filled with hate they didn't care.'

I swallowed, realising I wasn't as secure as I'd thought I was, and neither was that dimension box. A dragon flying free in my mind had been bad enough, but the thought of goodness knows how many escaping into the world made me feel sick with fear. I couldn't let that happen. I had to find the keys. And I had to find that sword.

I thought about the dark-haired woman and wondered who she was. What did she mean about finding her beloved? And why did I have to save him? From what?

I would talk it over with Emrick tomorrow, but not now. My sisters were waiting for us at the top of the stairs, and I didn't want them to worry about any of this. Not tonight. As we made our way out of the generator shed and into the night air, it felt as if every nerve ending was jangling with life and anticipation. Every scent seemed sharper, every sound clearer,

and I realised my sight had improved, too. I obviously wasn't the only one who felt that way, as Trinity remarked on her own experience.

'That's your fae blood,' Emrick said as we walked.  
'You're more in tune with nature now.'

And it was, we realised, quite true. The girls no longer ducked and squealed when insects brushed past them. Instead, they stared at them in obvious fascination. They were already beginning to change.

*I* was already beginning to change.

The process of transformation into the Great Guardian had begun at last.

## Part 2: After Lowen



## Chapter 29

### *Wulfram*

‘Not good enough, Wulfram Pendragon! You’re a dead man!’

I glanced down at the rapidly spreading patch of red across my chest and fell to the floor. I gazed up at the clear, blue, winter sky above me and thought ruefully that I’d seen it more from this angle than from any other recently.

Frey kindly came to stand by my side. He gave me a mournful look and tapped my nose with his paw. *Better luck next time.*

From the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of dangling feet, way above my head, and heard a giggle.

‘Dead again, Wulfram?’ Romy called. ‘Dear me, how embarrassing for you.’

Star held out her hand and I took it, somewhat sheepishly. ‘To be fair,’ she told my amused sisters, who were sitting on the branch of a tree watching my pathetic display, ‘he did a good job fending off my fireballs. It’s not his fault he was ambushed by two treacherous Shining Ones.’

Killian and Aidan laughed as I got to my feet and brushed the red powder from my jumper.

‘Treacherous? That’s fighting talk,’ Aidan said. ‘No respect for their betters, these witches, have they, brother?’

‘None,’ Killian said, shaking his head. ‘You should try being married to one.’

As it dawned on him what he’d said he bit his lip and gave his brother an apologetic look. ‘Aw, sorry, man.’

‘I don’t see why poor Wulfram is having to fight off fireballs from Star anyway,’ Trinity called, thankfully

changing the subject. 'It's hardly likely he'll be attacked by a witch, is it?'

'Are you saying only fae are the enemy?' Killian asked indignantly.

'No, I'm saying only the Pendragons are the enemy,' Trinity said. 'Why would a witch be hurling fireballs in his direction?'

'We already know it was probably a witch who betrayed Zephyr's whereabouts to the Pendragons,' Aidan said. 'At this stage we can't rule out anyone. Besides, look at the trouble the Golightlys and the Crossleys are stirring up. Can you honestly say you believe none of those would hurt Wulfram if they thought he was about to bring peace? They're itching for war. Only the fact that they haven't yet mustered up enough support is stopping them from upping their game. I hate to say it, but Wulfram out of the way would be very convenient for them.'

'Great,' I said. 'And so far I've failed dismally to stop these attacks.'

'Not true,' Star said firmly. 'You've stopped my fireballs many times, and Celeste said you were successful in dealing with the water illusion she sent your way.'

I shivered, remembering what an awful experience that had been. There'd been no warning. I'd stepped into a puddle in the woods, while dodging missiles Sky was zapping at me, and had found myself in a hole full of water that came above the top of my head. I'd tried and tried to get out of it, but for an agonising moment I'd been convinced I was going to drown. It was only when it occurred to me that the puddle hadn't been there just minutes ago that the doubt had set in. Somehow, I'd managed to calm my mind enough to realise it was an illusion, and that I wasn't drowning at all, and sure enough, I'd found myself dry and safe on firm land, no puddle in sight.

'I'm not having as much luck with air, though,' I said thoughtfully. 'Sky's trying so hard to get me to zap, but I don't

seem able to get very far. And I'm not great at moving things either.'

'Well, you can't be good at everything,' Trinity said with a shrug, as she jumped down from the tree. 'Is that it for today then? Time for dinner and an early night. We've got a long day ahead of us tomorrow.'

'I don't mind having another session if anyone's up for it,' Romy said eagerly.

We all laughed.

'Do you ever stop?' Star asked her. 'Your enthusiasm is exhausting. I do admire you, Romy, but we have lives to live, you know. I need to get home and make sure the children are all right. Plus I've got to drop them with Nan as soon as they've eaten. She's minding them for me while Celeste and I spend the night at Lily Cottage with Sky. Benedict's staying with Jethro at his house, and I can't imagine who'll be the more nervous of the two of them.' She sighed wistfully. 'It's going to be lovely to have both my sisters with me at the cottage again. It's been years since we all lived there together.'

'I can't believe the wedding's tomorrow,' Trinity said, as we headed along the track towards Peloryon House. 'I'm so sorry I won't be there tonight, but I'll see you all tomorrow.' She hesitated. 'Does Sky mind too much? I mean, about getting married here on the island, rather than in Castle Clair?'

Star hesitated. 'She wanted to marry in the church where we all got married,' she admitted, 'but she knew it was a choice. Either marry on the island, or half the family can't be there. She chose her family. I would have done the same.'

Trinity smiled and linked arms with her as they walked, chatting about Sky's wedding dress, and flowers, and all that sort of thing.

I fell back and walked with Romy and the two O'Briens.

'How are you feeling, Wulfram?' Aidan asked. 'Not too downhearted about today's defeat, I hope?'

'I'm getting used to defeat,' I admitted glumly. 'I don't see how I'm ever going to get the hang of this. I could be stuck

on this island for years at this rate.'

'Don't be so hard on yourself,' Killian told me. 'Taking on two Shining Ones and a witch in one go, all by yourself, it would be a miracle if you hadn't been "killed". And to be fair, the chances of you being attacked by any Shining One is zero, so take heart from that.'

I grinned and nodded. 'I guess so.'

'Keely's doing really well with fire,' Romy told me. 'Star's impressed with her. It seems that's her gift, which makes sense when I think about it. Keely's always been the fiery one.'

'Whereas Harley seems more at home with earth magic,' Killian said. 'And that makes sense, too. She's always liked growing things. She takes after her father, apparently. Ewella said he loved gardening. Ah, it's a shame I never met the fella. I've a feeling I'd have liked him a lot.'

'I'm sure you would,' Romy said softly. 'I have very few memories of him, but they're all happy ones. I wish I had some memories of my real parents, but I'll never have those.'

'Aye.' Aidan sighed. 'I know we complain about our folks, but it must be said I'm grateful to have them in my life. We've been very lucky, right, Killian?'

Killian nodded. 'We have. I feel for you both, I really do. The Pendragons have taken an awful lot away from you.'

'Which is why I'm going to make sure they don't take anything else,' I said grimly. 'At least, once I get the hang of magic.'

'Like I said, you're doing grand,' Aidan said. 'It's a lot to juggle: fae magic, witchcraft, and the Guardian gifts.' He gave me a curious look. 'Which do you feel the most affinity for?'

I honestly didn't have an answer, so I merely shrugged. I didn't feel competent in either fae magic or witchcraft, and I felt as if I'd barely scratched the surface of being a Guardian, which had been mostly theory so far. Hector had assured me that, although we had a lot of learning to do first, once I started work as a Guardian, it would all come easily and naturally to



me. I could only hope he was right, though based on the struggles I was still having with my other so-called natural gifts, I didn't hold out much hope.

It had been a long and exhausting four months since we'd reclaimed our magic. Sometimes, I would literally crawl into bed at night and fall asleep before my head had even hit the pillow. Other nights I would lie there in the darkness, staring up at the ceiling into the early hours, my mind racing, my body and brain exhausted, but unable to switch off.

Everyone had been amazing, and so generous with their time. Even Mrs Greenwood had sent us regular cakes to show her support, which I thought was lovely of her.

Blaise and I both agreed that her chocolate fudge cake was to die for. He'd been back to Castle Clair and had been surprised and touched when she popped round to Castle Lodge one afternoon to say hello, and had brought a full cake for him, remembering how much he'd loved it when he lived there before. He had, he admitted to me, been reduced to tears by her kind gesture, especially given that he'd almost killed her grandson. Not his finest hour.

I had to admit, against all the odds, I'd really grown to like Blaise. I'd liked him as John Ford, of course, but there was an added depth to him now he was his full self again. He was bright and interesting, and he made me laugh a lot. He was surprisingly wise, and incredibly patient with me. Apart from Emrick and Keely, he was probably the person I talked to the most. I would never have believed it.

I'd spoken to Trinity and Sirius about the cryptic looks they were giving each other about him, and at first they'd denied all knowledge. Eventually, though, after asking Celeste's permission, they'd confided what she'd told them.

It worried me, I can't deny it. Knowing that destiny was still pulling Blaise along, that it hadn't finished with him yet, was scary. Given what it had made him do in the past, I couldn't help but fret that he was going to cause huge problems for us in the future.

Even so, I found myself trusting him a little more each day, and I just hoped Celeste's strategy would prove effective. If he was treated as family, with love and kindness, maybe he'd find the strength to turn away from the dark side.

It was quite certain he was always watched anyway, whether by Trinity and Sirius, Celeste and Hector, Iliana and Raiden, not to mention the other Castle Clair witches. I knew Ewella was also watching him, which was natural because of her love for Romy.

It surprised me a little that Emrick seemed to have no worries about him, and maybe that was what gave me confidence. Whatever the reason, I felt I'd made a friend. It would have been nice if he'd had magic and could have helped me in that way. I knew he'd been a very talented witch, and I felt his experience could have been useful. As it was, we talked a lot about the mistakes he'd made, and about how easy it was to let magic dominate your life and use it as a way of getting anything you wanted.

He was very clear that I couldn't allow that to happen, and that I had to be responsible, and I know he talked it over with Romy a great deal, too, because she told me. The overwhelming feeling I got from Blaise was regret for his mistakes and the people he'd hurt. It touched me when he cried with happiness as he thanked Celeste, Hector, and Jethro for the hard work they'd done to clear Bevil's name. He'd been over the moon, upon his return to Castle Clair, to find that his brother was now seen as the hero, even though his own reputation was completely trashed. I thought that spoke volumes about him.

When it came to the three of us Pendragon children, Romy was the star turn among us, which had surprised everyone—mostly herself. She'd absolutely blossomed since her magic returned, and she seemed to handle it all beautifully. She was gifted in the same way Sky was, finding it easy to zap herself to wherever she pleased and becoming frustrated that she was currently restricted to the island, but that was Emrick's orders, and even Romy wouldn't push him. She could move other objects effortlessly and levitated for fun. In

fact, she and Trinity had levitated onto the tree branch, rather than climb the tree. I hadn't reached even that level yet, which was embarrassing.

My head was buzzing with the three disciplines I was trying to juggle, and all the time I kept thinking about the visions I'd seen as my magic had been restored.

Who was the dark-haired woman, and who did she want me to save? And where was the little stone room I'd seen in my vision? Who were the man and woman who were with me, and what did the man mean, only I could do this? Do what?

'Find the sword in the stone,' the dark-haired woman had pleaded. 'Free my love'.

I'd spoken to Emrick about it, naturally, but he'd merely shaken his head and said life was full of mystery, and the visions the crystals had chosen to show me would probably make sense one day, if not now.

He didn't seem particularly keen to try to work out what they meant, claiming that the most important thing right now was to focus on managing my gifts. And I supposed he was right. It was just another frustrating question, to add to all the other questions I had burning away inside my mind.

We reached the gate at Peloryon House and Star and Aidan said a regretful goodbye.

'Are you not coming in for something to eat?' Killian asked his brother, but Aidan shook his head.

'Sorry. We have—things to discuss this evening,' he said quietly. 'I promised the folks I'd be there.'

'What kind of things?' Killian asked, then sighed. 'Don't tell me. Wedding stuff, right?'

Aidan shrugged. 'Has to be done.'

'I can't believe you're going ahead with this charade,' Killian said.

'We've been through this,' Aidan reminded him. 'Don't you think it's more important than ever right now that we link our people through marriage? The most important witch

family in this country, and the old gods, joined in matrimony. A clear signal that witches and fae can and must get along through love and commitment, not just because of mutual fear.'

'Me and Keely are already proving that,' Killian muttered.

Aidan raised an eyebrow. 'Are you?'

I frowned. What did that mean?

'I have to go,' Aidan said. 'Good luck tomorrow, everyone.' He nodded at Star. 'Tell your sister I hope she has a wonderful time, and I wish her and her husband a lifetime of happiness.'

With that he was gone, and after hugs and promises to pass on our good wishes to Sky, Star disappeared not long after.

'December already,' Romy said, as we headed up the path to the back door of the house. 'It will soon be Yule. I can't believe we're almost at the end of this year. So much has happened in it.'

She wasn't wrong there. I just wondered if this eventful year had any more surprises in store for us. It would be nice to see out the year in peace and harmony.

Honestly, I never learn, do I?



# Chapter 30

## *Wulfram*

I usually loved these cold, winter nights, snuggled under the duvet with Keely. We do tend to huddle together, and I'm fine with that, I really am. In fact, I can't think of many things I love more. But right now I was hot. Too hot. I wiped sweat from my forehead and blinked into awareness, wondering why December had suddenly changed to July.

Then I understood. Frey was sitting on top of the duvet, and as my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, I realised he was staring straight at me. To his left I could make out Runa lying on top of my poor girlfriend.

Keely groaned at that moment and muttered, 'Gerroff me!'

She received a whack on the face from her cat's paw as a result.

'Ow!' Keely spat cat hair from her mouth and sat up. 'For goodness' sake, Runa, I'm absolutely boiling. Are you trying to cook us, or what?'

Frey informed me they'd been trying to wake us up for a few moments now, and did we have any idea how inconvenient it was to be familiars to such heavy sleepers?

*Get up, he insisted. Something's afoot.*

'All right, Sherlock,' I muttered, reluctantly getting out of bed. I knew I had no need to explain to Keely, because Runa would have been saying practically the same thing to her. Sure enough, Keely followed me to the window, and we drew back the curtains.

'What are we looking at?' she mumbled, rubbing her eyes and yawning.

At that moment, the door flew open, and Harley and Killian entered the bedroom. Sid and Betty, Harley's guinea pig familiar and his wife, were in her arms.

'Come in, why don't you?' Keely said sarkily.

Harley ignored her. 'Have you seen?' she asked. 'Sid woke me up and I must admit it's quite a spectacular display, but look at the time! I reckon the council will have something to say about this.'

'About what?' I asked blankly.

Killian tutted. 'Aw, this bedroom's on the wrong side of the house. Come and look from our window.'

We followed them back into their room and headed over to the window, which had a clear view over to Gerrenporth. It wasn't what you expect to see at that time in the morning. Fireworks lit up the sky. Showers of blue, green, orange, and red sparkles cascaded down upon the little cottages and shops.

Killian opened the window, and even from this distance we could hear the bangs and shrieks across the water. Lights were coming on in the buildings, and I could imagine there'd be absolute fury over there.

'Somebody's having one heck of a celebration,' Keely muttered.

'At this time?' I said worriedly. 'It doesn't add up.'

Killian leaned forward. 'I can smell smoke.'

'That'll be the fireworks,' Harley said, but he shook his head.

'This is more than smoke from fireworks,' he said firmly. 'Look, can't you see it? Those wisps of smoke in the air?' He sniffed. 'More than one fire, I reckon.'

'You can smell smoke from here?' I asked, impressed.

'Something's not right,' he said. 'I think we should investigate.' He hesitated, then said. 'Well, not you, Wulfram, obviously.'

‘I’ll go with you,’ Keely said immediately, and Harley reluctantly agreed she would join them.

‘I can go with you,’ I said. ‘Come on. It’s only across the water. It couldn’t be any closer, could it?’

‘And that’s why you most definitely can’t go,’ said a voice behind us.

We spun round to see Emrick standing there, already dressed in jeans and a thick jumper.

‘You’re going across?’ Killian asked.

Emrick nodded. ‘Something’s not adding up about this. I need to check it out. Wulfram, you must stay here. You understand?’

I scowled. ‘Are you serious?’

‘Perfectly serious. Until we know what we’re dealing with you remain here, protected.’

‘It’s probably just some drunken kids,’ I protested.

‘And if it is,’ Keely said, giving my arm a squeeze, ‘we’ll put the fires out and come straight back.’

By the time we headed onto the landing Romy, Blaise, Sirius, Trinity and Ewella were tumbling out of their rooms.

There was a lot of arguing about who should and shouldn’t be going across to Gerrenporth to see what was happening.

‘The three Pendragon children stay here,’ Emrick said. He raised a hand as Romy, predictably, opened her mouth to protest. ‘It’s not up for discussion. Blaise, Ewella, will you make sure they do as they’re told please? The rest of you come with me. Let’s see what’s going on across there, shall we?’

‘Are we going by boat?’ Sirius asked. ‘I’m not emotionally attached to Gerrenporth. Is anyone else?’

Killian shrugged. ‘No need. I can zap Keely and Harley over there. Emrick, you take Sirius.’ He dropped a kiss on Harley’s cheek. ‘You’re sure about this, darlin’?’



‘Of course I’m sure,’ she said indignantly. ‘You’re not leaving me behind.’

She and Keely linked arms with Killian, and Keely blew a kiss to me before they all vanished, followed moments later by Emrick and Sirius.

‘Hang on,’ I said, as the thought occurred to me. ‘How come Emrick can zap over there?’

‘Oh, he’s emotionally attached to the place,’ Ewella said airily. ‘He’s lived in this area a long time, after all.’

We all looked at each other, feeling useless.

‘I suppose it’s probably just drunks,’ Trinity said cautiously. ‘We’re probably worrying about nothing.’

‘I expect you’re right,’ Ewella assured her. ‘They’ll put the fires out in no time and be back before we know it. I think we should make some hot chocolate for when they get back. I know I could do with a mug of it right now. Anyone else?’

We all agreed that we may as well, since there was nothing else we could do. I felt sick with frustration that I was being kept away from something as simple as rowdy revellers letting off fireworks, and wondered if I was ever going to be let out of my protective cage.

‘I know how you’re feeling,’ Blaise murmured to me as we headed downstairs. ‘Try not to let it get to you. It won’t be long before you’re on every callout, and you’ll be heartily sick of the whole thing and wishing they’d give you a day off.’

He patted my shoulder, and I managed a rueful smile.

‘I suppose you’re right.’

‘Sometimes,’ he said, ‘being a leader means having the strength to hold back, rather than charge ahead. You’re too important, Wulfram. We can’t let anything happen to you, so you must stay here safely until you’re ready to fight.’

‘I know, I know.’ I sighed. ‘Just a bit embarrassing when your girlfriend is more use than you are.’

He laughed. ‘Tell me about it.’

‘Oh yeah.’ I grinned back. ‘Sorry. I forgot.’

‘I think there’s some of Mrs Greenwood’s chocolate fudge cake left,’ he whispered. ‘Shall we treat ourselves?’

‘At four in the morning?’

His eyes twinkled and I shrugged, amused. ‘Oh well, why not?’

We gathered in the living room with our mugs of hot chocolate and cake. The central heating was on, so it was nice and cosy in there, and the lamps added to the homely atmosphere. Romy put the television on and, since Blaise and I weren’t fussed about watching anything, she, Trinity, and Ewella decided to watch some romcom Christmas film.

I leaned back in my chair and surveyed the scene, wondering with amusement what the villagers of Gerrenporth would say if they could see the way we lived here, on this little island less than a mile from them, which was supposed to be bleak and bare, with a basic shack for living accommodation and only intermittent electricity. I remembered when I’d been told I had to visit Peloryon Island by Mr Carpenter Junior. I’d been dismayed at the idea, and that feeling hadn’t been eased when he’d warned me to take a tent to sleep in because there was no decent accommodation on the island. When I’d seen this amazing house...

I took a sip of hot chocolate. Things had changed so much since then, yet it was only in the spring that I’d arrived here, fresh-faced, and completely innocent, having no idea that magic and witchcraft and the fae even existed, let alone that I was the next Great Guardian. Life was full of surprises.

I glanced over at the television where some woman—who, bizarrely, was wearing a smart suit and high heels, despite it being thick snow—was having an argument with a man in jeans and a casual sweater. She was getting very irate—something to do with deadlines and the forthcoming holidays. He, meanwhile, was telling her she was in the country now and they did things differently here. Besides, she wouldn’t be able to do any work because this little town had no internet. Smart woman nearly fainted on the spot.

I drained my hot chocolate, put the mug on the coffee table next to my empty plate, and leaned back, half watching the film, half daydreaming. It was so warm and cosy in here.

Frey leapt up onto my lap and I stroked his ears.

The next thing I knew there was a lot of noise and Frey was padding my chest to wake me up.

*You're always asleep!*

‘Well, it is four o’clock in the morning,’ I said, annoyed.

I glanced at the clock and my mouth fell open. It was nearly six! Good grief.

Keely, Harley, Killian, Sirius and Emrick hurried into the living room. They didn’t have to say anything for us to realise something was badly wrong. They were covered in soot and grime, and their expressions were deadly serious.

‘What happened?’ I demanded.

‘Did the fires get out of hand?’ Romy asked.

Ewella put her hand to her mouth. ‘Please tell me no one was hurt.’

Emrick shook his head. ‘No one was hurt. There were several buildings burning, but we managed to contain them even before the fire brigade arrived. They were non-residential buildings, thank goodness, so no one was in them.’

‘Was it drunks?’ Trinity asked doubtfully.

Sirius shook his head. ‘Far from it.’ He dropped onto the sofa and rubbed his face. ‘If I had to put money on it I’d say it was the Pendragons.’

My stomach churned. ‘Why do you say that?’

Trinity and Romy cried out. ‘Are you sure?’

‘Oh, Emrick, not them. Not so close to the island!’ Ewella gasped.

Emrick held up his hands. ‘Okay, let’s just calm down. I’m afraid I think Sirius is right, although we can’t know for sure. It could have been errant fae causing trouble. Except...’

‘I’m pretty sure I caught the scent of some of the Pendragons,’ Killian said firmly. ‘I believe Spite and Siofra were there. If I had to guess that’s what I’d say.’

‘Who are Spite and Siofra?’ Blaise asked.

‘Spite’s Havok Pendragon’s cousin, and Siofra’s Havok’s daughter. Your cousin,’ Killian added, nodding at me, Romy, and Trinity.

‘And you think they set the fires?’ Romy asked.

‘I do. And the fireworks, too, no doubt.’

‘For what reason, though?’ Ewella asked. ‘Why cause such a big fuss at this time of the morning, waking everyone up? And why target non-residential areas? If they didn’t want to hurt anyone, why do it in the first place?’

Sirius frowned. ‘Isn’t it obvious? To draw the Pendragon children out. To lure Wulfram out of hiding.’

‘You—you can’t be sure of that,’ Ewella said faintly.

‘I think it’s more likely they were goading them,’ Emrick said. ‘They know we’re keeping them safe here, and they’ll also know their stupid games won’t persuade us to change our strategy. But, yes, I do think this was all about getting Wulfram’s attention. You see, one of the buildings targeted was right next to the offices of Carpenter, Carpenter and Fitch, your old solicitor’s offices, Wulfram. It wasn’t damaged by fire, but it had been graffitied. And it wasn’t the only one. In fact, something had been drawn on the building next door to each burning building. It was as if the fires were simply ways to make sure we saw the drawings.’

‘What drawings?’ I asked, my eyes narrowing as I thought of the damage that had been done to the town that night. I could imagine Mr Carpenter Junior’s reaction when he saw the graffiti on his office walls.

‘On one there was a chalice,’ Keely told me, her eyes red-rimmed, whether from crying or smoke I wasn’t sure.

‘On another a pentacle,’ Harley added. ‘And then on the third there was a dragon.’

‘And on the fourth a sword,’ Emrick said flatly. He glanced at Sirius and for a moment they looked at each other.

‘What?’ I said suspiciously.

‘On each drawing, a word had been written across the centre,’ Emrick admitted reluctantly.

‘What word?’ I asked.

‘*Liar*, on the chalice,’ Keely said bitterly. ‘*Fake* on the pentacle.’

‘*Prove it* on the sword,’ Emrick said.

‘And on the dragon?’ I asked.

He hesitated. ‘*Coming soon.*’

‘What on earth does all that mean?’ Blaise asked, clearly baffled.

‘It’s a message to me,’ I said. ‘The chalice and the pentacle represent the two keys that I have to find.’

‘The keys to this box where the dragons are kept?’ he asked, and I nodded.

‘Yes, the Golden Chalice Key, and the Silver Pentacle Key. They’re clearly calling me a liar and saying I’m not the real Great Guardian because I haven’t found the keys. Not only that, but they’re basically trying to scare me into believing they have them, or that they’re close to finding them, and that they’ll be releasing the dragons soon.’

‘Hell,’ Blaise said, ‘that doesn’t sound good.’

‘It’s a lie,’ Emrick said firmly. ‘We have no reason to believe the Pendragons have either of the keys, let alone both. They’re bluffing. These are intimidation tactics, designed to scare you, and to cast doubt among the witches and fae. The last thing the Pendragons want is for those communities to believe in a Great Guardian who will bring peace. They need doubt and fear to grow.’

‘And the sword?’ Romy asked. ‘I’m guessing that’s their way of reminding us that, until Wulfram finds The Sword of Feidhlim, there’s no way of proving who he is.’

‘There was something else,’ Sirius said hesitantly. He gave Blaise an apologetic look. ‘I’m sorry, but I think it was about you.’

‘Me?’ Blaise asked, shocked.

Sirius nodded. ‘There was a clock, and drawn across that were the words, *Witch traitor*. I’m guessing that’s a reminder that a witch betrayed the peace agreement by travelling through time.’

‘Me,’ Blaise said quietly. ‘I see.’

‘It’s all just to grab your attention, that’s all,’ Emrick said. ‘Look, no one was hurt. It’s all bluster and showing off. We have no reason to believe they know anything, and let’s face it, a few small fires and an inconvenient firework display are pretty tame for the Pendragons.’ He managed a smile. ‘It’s like they’re not even trying.’

‘Emrick’s right,’ Ewella said, clearly trying to sound more confident than she was feeling. ‘Look, why don’t you all go and get cleaned up, and I’ll make breakfast. We’ve got a long day ahead of us. We’ve a wedding to attend, remember?’

There were some weary mumbles of agreement and we got to our feet, realising it was the only way to react. We couldn’t let this spoil Sky and Jethro’s big day. In fact, we all decided it was best not to even tell them.

Then a cry in our midst stopped us all in our tracks.

‘Oh, thank goodness you’re all awake!’

It was Iliana, who’d arrived without us even noticing, and looked absolutely exhausted as well as shaken.

‘Iliana?’ Ewella put an arm around her sister-in-law’s shoulders. ‘What on earth’s happened? You look terrible.’

Iliana hitched up her turquoise glasses, which perfectly matched the turquoise jumper she was wearing.

‘I’m afraid the wedding’s off,’ she said, rather shakily. ‘Something terrible’s happened in Castle Clair.’



# Chapter 31

## *Wulfram*

‘What are you talking about?’ Ewella asked anxiously. ‘What do you mean the wedding’s off?’

Iliana sank onto a chair and massaged her temples, looking more flustered than I’d ever seen her.

‘It was awful,’ she said. ‘Just awful. That poor man. Trust me to be the one to find him. Although, I suppose, it’s probably a good thing I did.’

She looked round at us all. ‘Can you imagine if it had been someone unfamiliar with magic? Heaven knows what they’d have thought. I do wish these Pendragons would be more considerate of people’s feelings. And the castle grounds are only a few minutes’ walk from the police station for goodness’ sake. It really was a miracle no one spotted it before I did. And usually it’s dog walkers, isn’t it? That’s what you always find. When you watch the news they say, “The body was discovered by a man walking his dog”, or a “A woman walking her dog was shocked to discover the body” ...’ Her voice trailed off. ‘I haven’t even got a dog.’

We all looked at each other. She was clearly in shock.

‘Are you saying you found a body?’ Emrick asked gently.

Iliana nodded then promptly burst into tears, which was the most frightening thing that had happened so far today. She was the calmest person I’d ever met. If she was crying we were all in trouble.

‘I keep thinking of Aurora,’ she said, as Ewella pushed a glass of brandy into her hand. ‘I mean, it was bad enough for me finding a body, but imagine finding your own father! And now I know how shocking it truly is when you’re not prepared... I mean, how could I possibly have expected that? I



was only on my way to see the girls. They were all staying at Lily Cottage, you see, and it's quicker to cut through the castle grounds. We were going to have such a lovely morning together, getting ready for the wedding, and now it's in ruins. Poor Sky.'

'But, Mother,' Sirius said kindly as he crouched before her, 'you haven't told us whose body you found. Who's died?'

'Oh!' Iliana looked startled. 'Haven't I? I thought I told you. It was Bob, darling,' she said, taking his hand. 'Poor Bob was murdered by the Pendragons.'

'You're sure about this, Iliana?' Emrick asked, as the rest of us grappled with the realisation that the Pendragons were most definitely upping their game, what with the disturbances in Gerrenporth this morning, and now this.

'Of course I'm sure,' Iliana said tearfully. 'I found him, didn't I? And I saw Zephyr's body, remember? I know what the fae do to them. Oh, dear, I feel quite queasy.'

'Maybe I shouldn't have given you brandy,' Ewella said anxiously.

'Oh no,' Iliana said at once. 'In fact, I think maybe I need another one.'

Ewella duly obliged.

I ran a hand through my hair, feeling helpless.

'We have to do something,' I told Emrick. 'We can't let this pass. The witches will never allow it! How can we expect them to? This is the second member of the High Council to be murdered in five months! The cries for retaliation are going to be deafening.'

'I know, I know. But be patient,' Emrick said.

'Be patient?' Sirius shook his head. 'I think we've been patient for long enough. You can't seriously expect us to ignore this?'

'Have the High Council been informed?' Emrick asked Iliana, who nodded and drained her second glass of brandy.

‘Of course. I put a protection spell around the body to prevent anyone else accidentally stumbling upon it, then I zapped straight home and dear Castor kindly went to rouse Kendrew. He, Amlodd and Aveta arrived at Castle Lodge about half an hour ago.’

She sighed. ‘They must be wondering who’ll be next. It’s like that Agatha Christie film, isn’t it? *And Then There Were None*. It’s funny, because I remember we were worried about the same thing when we were all marooned on this island, do you remember? But I think this is much more serious. Then all we had to worry about was Star running out of cake. Now people are actually being murdered.’ She shuddered. ‘You know, I’m rarely truly scared, but now I am. I don’t know what’s going to happen next. I don’t see a way out of this situation that won’t result in war.’

‘I’m going to go over to Castle Lodge and see what’s what,’ Emrick told her, taking the glass from her hand. ‘I need a word with the High Council anyway. Don’t worry,’ he said as we all began to protest, ‘I’ll be back as soon as I can, and I suspect I won’t be alone. We’ll fill you in on everything we know. Just be patient. And look after your mother,’ he added to Sirius who, as I’d suspected, was clearly furious that he was, once again, being asked to do nothing. ‘She needs you.’

Since he couldn’t deny the truth of that statement, Sirius had no choice but to do as Emrick asked. Immediately, Emrick left for Castle Clair, and the rest of us could only wait and wonder. What did the Pendragons have in store for us next?

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Peloryon House was a scene of chaos. Everyone from Castle Clair had turned up, including Aurora, Raiden and Aither. Even Mrs Greenwood was there, busy handing out sausage rolls and bacon sandwiches, and generally trying to keep people’s spirits up with endless cups of tea.

Emrick and the members of the High Council still hadn’t returned, but that didn’t stop the theories from flying about. Everyone seemed to have a different idea about why Bob had been targeted, but to be honest, none of them made sense. He

was an affable sort of man, devoted to his wife, and their life together in a little hotel on the outskirts of Tintagel. He wasn't pushy or go-getting. He hadn't tried to cause trouble with anyone. The only people he'd ever got irate with were the St Clairs, apparently, but there were some rueful mutterings among the family now that confessed he'd had good reason to be.

'Bob was so protective of Zephyr,' Sky said, wiping tears from her face. 'And really, given the stress we put him under, one can hardly blame him for that.'

'It's such an awful way to go,' Star said bitterly. 'Aged to death. How unutterably cruel is that?'

I had to admit, my attention kept wandering. I couldn't help it. For some reason I found myself staring at Aither, Aurora and Raiden's little boy. Was I imagining it or was he—

'Don't worry,' Hector murmured to me. 'You're not going mad.'

I spun round. 'It's like he's illuminated!'

He laughed and patted my shoulder. 'I know.' He leaned towards me and whispered, 'Aither is a Guardian.'

I reeled back, stunned. 'You're kidding!'

He shook his head. 'No. And what you're sensing is that power within him, calling to the power within you. He's my charge. That's why I was able to let the St Clairs keep their memories of who I am.'

'Do they all know?'

'Oh yes. Well, the immediate family do. Sadly, I wasn't allowed to tell Zephyr. Members of the High Council must never know who the Guardians are. It's something Aurora's struggling with—the fact that her father never knew his grandson was a Guardian. He'd have been thrilled.'

'So how come I don't see the same thing in you?'

'As Guardians grow they become adept at controlling the power within them. At Aither's age they're not able to do that,

and it swirls around them, unchecked. Luckily, only other Guardians can detect it.'

At that moment, Emrick arrived back with Aveta, Kendrew, and Amlodd, the much-depleted High Council of Witches.

'You've been ages,' Castor grumbled. 'What's to do? I hope you've got a plan this time, cos I'm telling you now, no one's going to let this be brushed under the carpet.'

'And nor should it be,' Aurora added. 'No one's paid for what they did to my father. We need to do something. He deserves justice, as does poor Bob.'

'Will you just be patient with us a little while longer?' Emrick pleaded. He turned to Killian. 'Do you think you could fetch your brother please?'

'Aidan?' Killian shrugged. 'Sure. What's the problem?'

'If you'll just bring him here I'll explain everything,' Emrick assured him. 'I'd prefer to have two of you here, just to be certain.'

Killian's eyes narrowed but he said nothing more and vanished.

Amlodd mopped his forehead with a handkerchief. 'This has been one hell of a day, and it's only nine o'clock,' he moaned.

'Sit down,' Mrs Greenwood said kindly. 'Bacon sandwich?'

Amlodd went quite pale. 'After what I've just seen, no thank you. A brandy wouldn't go amiss, though, if you have some.'

'I think we have some left,' Ewella said, casting an amused look at Iliana, who was on her fourth glass. She hurried into the other room to fetch the bottle.

Killian and Aidan were back within moments.

'This is bad news,' Aidan said bleakly. 'My wedding's supposed to be happening on the winter solstice. The way

things are going the Nine Sisters are going to rethink the whole thing.'

'And that's a bad thing?' Killian asked, surprised.

Aidan ignored him.

'My wedding was supposed to be happening today!' Sky cried. 'How do you think I feel?'

'We'll still get married,' Jethro assured her, putting his arm around her. 'It will happen one day, when the time's right.'

'I'm so sorry,' Aidan said. 'I wasn't thinking.'

'It's all right,' Jethro assured him. 'To be honest, I think we have far more important things to worry about than cancelled weddings, don't you?'

'Would you come with me, please?' Emrick asked the O'Briens. He turned to me. 'Wulfram, you, too.'

'Why not me?' Sirius demanded.

'Darling boy, you really don't want to see it,' Iliana said bleakly. 'I presume you're going to see Bob?'

Emrick nodded. 'His body has been moved to the crypt and I want the boys to take a look at it.'

'You're wasting your time,' Kendrew said heavily. 'You really are.'

'We'll see.' Emrick shrugged. 'Ready?'

We all agreed we were, and a few moments later we were standing at the chapel door. I'm ashamed to say Emrick had helped me. Zapping just wasn't my strong point.

'It's not a pretty sight,' Emrick warned me. 'You'd better steel yourself.'

We headed into the chapel, which I noticed wasn't decorated for a wedding. Evidently, the island had got wind that it had been cancelled. For the first time I noticed a narrow, wooden door in the far wall. I was almost sure it hadn't been there before, but Emrick led us straight to it as if he was

familiar with it, so I supposed it must have been. He pushed it open, and he, Killian, Aidan, and I began to descend some stone steps into the crypt.

I'm not sure what I was expecting the crypt to be like. I don't think I'd ever been in one before, not surprisingly. It was bitterly cold. A stone room with large pillars and a flagstone floor. There were torches on the walls casting spooky shadows, and I tried not to look at the body of Bob, which was lying on a stone table at the end of the room.

As we walked—reluctantly in my case—towards the table, I was overcome with a sudden dizziness.

‘Wulfram, are you all right?’

Emrick's voice was a distant echo and I bent over, putting my hands on my knees, and taking deep breaths.

‘Free my love! Take the sword from the stone!’

There she was again. The dark-haired woman. I felt a hand on my back and Killian said urgently, ‘Wulfram, what is it?’

Shakily I straightened. ‘Sorry.’

‘No need to be sorry,’ Emrick said. ‘I gather you saw something?’

I nodded. ‘It's this room,’ I said, staring round me in amazement. ‘This is it! This is where the Sword of Feidhlim is.’

Killian and Aidan looked at each other, then around the room, then back at me. ‘It can't be! There's nothing here. Well, nothing except...’

Their voices trailed off as we all saw what was left of Bob lying on the table.

‘Oh, that's...’ I had no words and fought to keep the bacon sandwich and all that chocolate fudge cake down.

Aidan and Killian were made of sterner stuff. They headed straight over to the table and began to examine the body with interest, as if it had never been a real person at all.

‘Are you okay?’ Emrick asked gently.

‘It’s all a bit much,’ I confessed. ‘First the vision, and now, that. What are we even doing here, Emrick?’

‘I want the O’Briens to give me an honest opinion,’ he explained. ‘I know what the High Council says, and what Iliana believes, but I’m not so sure. Only experts on the fae can give me the answer I require.’

Killian and Aidan muttered together for a moment, then they stepped back from the body and eyed us gravely.

‘This wasn’t a fae attack,’ Aidan said firmly.

I gasped. ‘Are you sure?’

‘I knew it!’ Emrick said. ‘Witchcraft?’

Killian nodded. ‘I’d say so. It’s been manipulated to try to copy the ageing effects of a fae strike, but it’s a poor attempt to be honest. Okay at first sight, but when you look deeper it’s obvious.’

‘You’re sure?’ I asked. ‘Can you prove it?’

‘Do you want to have a look?’ Aidan asked.

Emrick and I exchanged looks.

‘You don’t have to,’ he assured me.

‘But I need to understand,’ I said reluctantly.

I had to force myself to join the others at the table and covered my mouth with my jumper as if to protect myself as we all stared down at the body.

‘You see,’ Aidan said, gently prodding the skin of what had once been poor Bob with a penknife, ‘the ageing process from a fae strike goes through the epidermis, through the dermis, and into the subcutaneous layer. Not only that, but every cell in the body ages. The organs themselves wither and die. But look at this. Only the epidermis has been aged. Dig below the surface and the body composition is normal.’

‘Witchcraft made to look like a Pendragon attack,’ Killian said grimly. ‘The question is, why? I can understand witches

wanting to frame the Pendragons, sure enough. But why kill Bob? What's he ever done to anyone?'

'It's what I suspected,' Emrick admitted.

'The High Council will have to be told,' I said, and he folded his arms.

'I already told them,' he said. 'They tried to tell me I was mistaken. I insisted upon calling in Killian and Aidan to prove it. They clearly didn't want me to. They agreed that, if my suspicions were correct, they would launch an investigation.'

'Like they did into Zephyr's death?' Killian said bitterly. 'Didn't get very far, did it?'

'No,' he admitted. 'It didn't. I have a feeling the High Council knows more than it's letting on about Bob's death.'

'Well they can't let witches believe this was the Pendragons,' Aidan said firmly. 'We're having enough trouble as it is, keeping the fae calm. You've no idea how jittery they are. They know the witch who travelled through time is still here, and the rumours are starting up again—stoked, no doubt by the Pendragons and their allies—that maybe he really is here looking for the keys to release the dragons. We've received intelligence that certain members of the fae community have launched their own search for the keys.'

'You're joking?' I couldn't believe he was only telling us this now. 'How long has this been going on, and why didn't you tell us?'

'We're dealing with it,' Aidan said. 'Leave the fae to us. You need to sort the witches out, because it seems to me you don't know who you can trust any more, and whoever's doing this is playing a very dangerous game.'

As Emrick had predicted, the High Council tried to sound shocked when the O'Briens delivered their verdict to them, but they weren't very convincing. They blustered and stammered and assured us the matter would be dealt with before heading off the island as fast as they could manage.

'This just goes from bad to worse,' Castor said, shaking his head. 'I've never heard owt like it. Witches doing this to



one of our own! Why?’

‘That’s not all we’ve got to worry about,’ I said, and told them all what Aidan had revealed about fae searching for the keys because they believed Blaise was here for just that purpose.

Poor Blaise looked distraught.

‘My fault again! I’ve caused so much damage.’

‘Yeah, you have a bit,’ Killian said. ‘But look, I want you all to understand that the fae aren’t looking for the keys because they want to release the dragons. They’re only trying to make sure that witches don’t have both of them, so they don’t have access to the dragons themselves.’

‘That’s right,’ Aidan said. ‘Fact is, they’re losing all trust in witches. They’ve been scared ever since the alarms went off to tell us a witch had broken the deal and had arrived in our time, but we managed to reassure them that a Great Guardian was coming who’d bring peace. Since then it’s been all rumours but nothing’s materialised, has it? I mean, our parents have assured our people that the Great Guardian is here among us, because they’ve already met him, but they want proof.’

He sighed. ‘To be honest, you need to find that sword, Wulfram, because I don’t know how much longer we can keep the lid on this, and I suspect—from the way your High Council is acting—that they’re having an even harder time of it than we are.’

I opened my mouth to speak but Emrick interrupted before I could.

‘I think some of us should get some sleep. It’s been an exhausting night here on the island, and a weary day for all of us, and we’re none of us any good right now. We need to rest, catch up on the sleep we’ve lost, and then we can look at this with fresh eyes.’

‘Why did you lose sleep?’ Aidan asked. ‘I thought the body was only found this morning?’

‘I’ll fill you in,’ Killian said, putting his arm around his brother’s shoulders. He glanced over at Harley. ‘I’m going

back to An Teach Bán, darlin'. I need to talk things over with my family. And truth to tell, I'm not tired, so I'd only disturb you. You get some sleep while I'm away. Is that okay?'

Harley shrugged. 'If that's what you want.'

Killian gave her a wistful look, and Aidan glanced sharply at his brother and sister-in-law.

'Right,' he said, having clearly decided not to mention the obvious tension between the two of them, 'we'll leave you to it.'

They disappeared, along with the Castle Clair branch of the family, and the rest of us trudged wearily to our beds.

'What's going on with Harley and Killian?' I asked, as I pulled off my jumper and jeans and clambered in beside Keely.

'Oh, exactly what we could have predicted really,' Keely said sadly. 'Very different expectations of married life. I think Harley's missing her old life. She wants a home of her own, and a little garden, and she's really missing the library. But of course, Killian's never been interested in that sort of thing. He flits from one place to the other, doesn't he? And he's not really the settling down sort so... Harley thinks Killian's gone off her. That she's too dull for him.'

'I don't think he's gone off her, do you?' I asked. 'I just saw the look he gave her, and it seemed to me that he was hoping she'd ask him to stay. I mean, I might be wrong but...'

'Who knows?' Keely sighed. 'We did warn her that marrying a Shining One was going to be fraught with difficulties. They're so different. But I know they love each other, deep down. I just hope they can work it out.'

So did I. Somehow, Killian and Harley had come to symbolise the possibility of peace and love between fae and witches. If these two, who loved each other so much, and had fought so hard to be together, couldn't make it work, what hope did any of us have for the future?





## Chapter 32

### *Wulfram*

I barely slept at all, despite the weariness I felt in my bones. My body might be exhausted but my mind refused to switch off. So many questions buzzed around my brain. Why would witches attack one of their own? Why someone as harmless as Bob? And where was the Sword of Feidhlim?

I'd been so sure, standing in that crypt, that this was the place I'd find the sword. It was—I was certain—the room I'd seen in my vision. But if that was so, where was it? Because as far as I could see there was no sign of it in there. What was I missing?

Eventually, worried and confused, I must have dozed off. When I woke up the bed was empty, and I glanced at the clock shocked to find it was three o'clock in the afternoon.

I yawned and threw back the duvet, then headed into the bathroom for a hot shower. I needed to think. Something was buzzing round in my brain, and funnily enough I often found ideas came together when I was standing under the water, humming some tune or other and thinking about anything other than magic.

By the time I'd stepped out of that shower I had the germ of an idea. As I towelled myself dry and got dressed, the idea took shape. As I headed downstairs I knew exactly what I had to do, and even though the thought filled me with trepidation I knew there was no alternative. I had to call a meeting.

'Good afternoon, Wulfram,' Ewella said, smiling as she spotted me in the hallway. We were obviously both heading towards the kitchen. 'Did you sleep well?'

'Eventually,' I said. 'Where is everyone?'

‘In the living room. We’re having a movieathon. Emrick decided we all needed a couple of hours of normality, so we’ve been watching an old comedy film and eating nachos and dips. There’s plenty left if you want some. I’m just putting the kettle on. Do you want a cup of tea?’

I shook my head. ‘Can that wait, Ewella? I really need to speak to you all.’

Her smile faded. ‘Sounds serious.’

‘It is a bit,’ I admitted. ‘I’m sorry to spoil everyone’s fun.’

She swallowed then put her arms around me.

‘You’re such a good, brave man,’ she told me softly. ‘I’m so proud of you, and I know your parents would be, too.’

I blinked away tears and hugged her tightly. ‘Thank you,’ I said. ‘For everything.’

‘Oh, bless you. You don’t have to thank me,’ she said. ‘Caring for you was a pleasure and an honour. Come on. Let’s go and call that meeting.’ She pulled away from me and smiled. ‘Personally, I’m not a fan of *Groundhog Day* anyway. It gets very tedious very quickly.’

She winked and slipped her arm through mine, and we headed into the living room together. I was quite pleased to see the credits were rolling on *Groundhog Day*. Not that I disliked the film, but at least it meant I wasn’t going to interrupt everyone’s viewing.

Emrick caught my eye, and I had the strangest feeling that he knew exactly what I was about to say. He gave me a reassuring nod, even as Keely urged me to sit down and told me I could choose the next film, and did I want any nachos and dip? Hector and Celeste had returned to Castle Clair, and I noticed Killian wasn’t back from Ballydraiocht yet. No matter. I still had to make this announcement.

‘I’m sorry,’ I told them all, meaning it. ‘I don’t want to spoil your fun, I really don’t, but this can’t wait. I need to talk to you all.’

I saw the carefree expressions on their faces change immediately, and guilt almost overwhelmed me. Why did I have to do this now? And yet I knew this couldn't wait. We were running out of time. The days of wait and see were over.

'What's up?' Keely asked, and I saw the dread in her eyes and wished I could reassure her.

'I'm sorry,' I told her. 'I know we said we'd talk everything over first, but this came to me when I was upstairs alone, and I knew it had to be said now. No putting it off. I must tell you all together.'

'Go on,' Harley said, taking Keely's hand in support. 'Just say it.'

I faced them all, wishing I was better at public speaking and hoping I didn't mess this up.

'There's something I didn't tell you,' I said. 'When I took back my magic I had a vision. Well, a few of them actually. But this one...'

Briefly, I told them about the room and about the woman I'd seen, begging me to release the sword from the stone and free her love.

'But who is she?' Keely asked immediately. 'And who's her love?'

'I have no idea,' I admitted. 'The point is, though, I now know where we were when she told me this. We were standing in a room. A stone room. And earlier today I was there in reality. It's the crypt under the chapel. And that's where the Sword of Feidhlim is.'

They all exchanged glances.

'The Sword of Feidhlim is in the crypt? Then why didn't you bring it back with you?'

'Ah, well...' I rubbed the back of my head. 'That's the thing. It wasn't there when I went there today.'

'Well then,' Trinity said with a frustrated sigh, 'we're no further on.'

‘Yes, I think we are,’ I said slowly. ‘The thing is, it occurred to me today that, just maybe, I’m not going to find the sword in this time. Maybe the sword is waiting for me in another time.’

There was a lot of murmuring and some excitement.

‘Sounds a possibility,’ Sirius said cautiously. ‘But if that’s the case, how on earth are you going to find it? It could be anywhere. You can’t go back to every single moment in time to search for it.’

‘I don’t think I have to,’ I said. ‘Think about it. What do we know about the Sword of Feidhlim? The one crucial thing we absolutely know for a fact.’

There were a few blank faces. I can’t deny I felt a rush of pride when it was Keely who provided the answer.

‘You had it with you when you accompanied the Tremaynes to Scotland to meet with the Seelie Court,’ she said thoughtfully.

‘Exactly!’ I said, beaming at her.

‘So what are you saying?’ Romy asked. ‘That you’re going back to the seventeenth century in the hope that, somehow, you’ll find the Sword of Feidhlim there?’

‘But what if you don’t find it?’ Sirius asked. ‘What happens then?’

‘Have you any better ideas?’ I asked. ‘Right now, this is the only shot I have at finding it. If any of you have any other suggestions I’m happy to listen.’

As I’d suspected, there was silence.

‘But—but that means you’ll have to go back in time,’ Keely said nervously. ‘You’ve never done that before.’

‘Doesn’t mean he’s not capable of it,’ Emrick said briskly. ‘He’s the Great Guardian, for goodness’ sake. If anyone can do this, it’s Wulfram.’

‘Do you even know how to?’ Trinity asked.



‘No, but I’m sure Hector will give me a few pointers,’ I said.

‘But what if it goes wrong? What if you end up in the wrong time? What if you get stuck there in the past? What if —’

‘Keely,’ I said gently, ‘we can’t live our lives worrying about all the things that might go wrong. Not when we have so many things we need to put right.’

She swallowed down tears even as she bravely nodded, and I squeezed in between her and Harley on the sofa.

‘I’m sorry,’ I said. ‘I know this is hard for you.’

‘Harder for you,’ she said, her voice thick with emotion. ‘I just don’t want to lose you.’

‘You won’t,’ I said. ‘I’ll come back to you. I promise.’

‘You can’t promise,’ she said tearfully.

‘Yes I can. According to the O’Briens I’ve already been in the seventeenth century. Surely if I’d got stuck there they’d have known all about that. I’d be long dead by now and I’d be part of the history books.’

‘You’re part fae,’ Trinity reminded me. ‘You might live a lot longer than a human being, so you could still be alive and very, very old.’

‘An old man?’ I wrinkled my nose. ‘You mean, there could be two of me? Me now, and the old version who’s been slowly growing older over the last few hundred years since getting stuck in the past?’

‘This is getting way out of hand,’ Emrick said firmly. ‘Wulfram won’t get stuck in the past. He’s a Great Guardian. Have you people no concept of what that means? He may have struggled with some aspects of his magic, but the part of him that is Guardian won’t have any difficulties. It’s who he is. And for what it’s worth,’ he added, ‘I think it’s an excellent idea, and exactly what you need to do. Go back in time, I mean. Find the Tremaynes and get them to help you find the

sword.' He smiled kindly at Keely. 'All will be well. Have faith in Wulfram Pendragon.'

'You're really going to do this, aren't you?' Sirius asked.

I looked round at a sea of pensive faces and nodded.

'I really am,' I said. 'It's time.'



## Chapter 33

### *Romy*

It had been a strange, subdued sort of afternoon. Ever since we'd been summoned to this island by Meri Kittow things had been building towards something, yet somehow it had all seemed slightly unreal. With Wulfram's announcement it felt as if we'd skipped forward. Things were no longer theoretical, and we weren't just waiting around for the next thing to happen to us. We were taking action. Taking control.

Well, Wulfram was. I can't deny I was worried about him, and I knew Trinity felt the same. I couldn't even begin to imagine how Keely was feeling.

Blaise had been quiet ever since my brother's announcement. He barely touched his tea, and went to his room not long afterwards, citing a headache. He was up there for a couple of hours, and when he returned he barely spoke, but sat quietly in an armchair, deep in thought.

Hector and Celeste arrived that evening, summoned by Emrick, and Killian came back not long afterwards. He was full of news about the fae community and how anxious everyone was. There was little trust in the Pendragons, he reported, but it didn't stop some fae agreeing with them that they couldn't trust the witches, and rumours were growing that the time-travelling witch was not only here looking for the keys, but that he'd already found one of them.

'We've told them all it's rubbish, but you know what it's like when rumours take hold.' Killian shook his head. 'Anti-witch feeling is growing, there's no denying it.'

'And where does that leave us?' Harley asked nervously. 'How do they feel about you being married to a witch?'

Killian didn't reply, but the look in his eyes suggested some of the fae community weren't impressed with the fact that a Shining One had done something so treacherous as to marry one of the enemy.

'What about Aidan and Derwa?' I asked. 'Does this mean their wedding's postponed?'

'I wish,' he said. 'My folks had an emergency meeting with the Nine Sisters. There was some disagreement among them—the sisters, I mean—but the vote was in favour of the wedding going ahead. They're convinced it's the best way to show both witches and fae that the other side can be trusted.'

He was delighted that Wulfram was going back in time to look for the Sword of Feidhlim.

'What a grand idea! It makes sense, and I don't know why I didn't think of it before,' he said, slapping his forehead. 'Of course that must be where it is. I can't deny I'm relieved something's happening at last. You must find that sword, Wulfram. No pressure.'

'I'll help you tomorrow, Wulfram,' Hector assured him. 'Don't worry. You'll master it in no time. Time travel is as natural to you as witchcraft is to Keely. All this nonsense about getting stuck in the past is just that. You'll only have to think yourself back here and you will be. Trust me.'

We all found that reassuring, but even so we were shocked when Wulfram announced that the day of Bob's funeral would be the big day, and that he'd be making his journey as soon as the ceremony was over.

'So soon?' Trinity gasped. 'I thought you'd take some time to prepare.'

'Prepare for what?' Wulfram asked reasonably. 'I can't rehearse this, Trinity. I have no idea what I'm going to find when I get there, but I do know what I'm supposed to do and what's supposed to happen. More than anything, I must be at the Seelie Court to reassure the fae that the time loop is closed, and Blaise St Clair is no threat to them.'

'Except, you can't do that, can you?'

I looked over at Blaise. His face was pale, and his dark eyes seemed enormous as he stared at Wulfram bleakly.

‘I’m sorry?’ Wulfram asked.

‘How can you reassure the fae that the time loop is closed and I’m no threat to them when I’m still here in the twenty-first century?’ He shook his head. ‘It would be a lie, and it would never work. And that’s why you must take me with you.’

‘Blaise!’ My heart leapt into my mouth. ‘You can’t!’

‘No,’ Wulfram said grimly. ‘You really can’t.’

‘Don’t you see?’ Blaise pleaded, looking round at us all. ‘This is all my fault. All this mistrust and hatred between fae and witches—it’s down to me. If I hadn’t travelled through time and set the alarms off none of this would have happened. Now we’re on the brink of war, and it’s all my doing. You can’t stand there—an honourable Great Guardian—and lie to the fae that the time loop is closed when I’m still here. I must go back with you. I have to close that loop. The fae need to know for certain that I’m back, and if I travel through time again the alarm will sound once more, and they’ll have proof.’

There was silence as we all thought about what he’d said.

‘He’s right,’ Wulfram said slowly. ‘I can’t see any other way.’

‘No!’ I burst into tears, unable to stop myself. ‘You can’t go,’ I begged Blaise. ‘Please. You can’t leave me.’

Blaise was crying silently. ‘I’m so sorry, Romy,’ he told me. ‘I don’t want to leave you. This is going to break my heart. But don’t you see there are more important things than we two people, no matter how much we love each other? We must put the safety of our world ahead of ourselves.’

He held me tightly.

‘I love you so much,’ he told me fiercely, ‘but I can’t live with myself any longer. I hate what you’re all going through, the danger you’re in, everything you’re having to face. People are dying, and I can’t pretend any longer that there’s nothing I

can do about it. It's all because I was selfish and thoughtless all those years ago. Please, let me put this right. I can't deal with it. It's no life for me, Romy. Try to understand.'

'Blaise St Clair vanished in 1669,' Sirius pointed out. 'You can't return because you'll change history.'

'Not if I stay away from Castle Clair and my family,' Blaise said. 'I've been thinking about it for the last few hours, trying to work out what to do. I need to stay away from the St Clairs, build a new life. I was thinking maybe the Tremaynes could help me. They sound like good people. Perhaps they could get me work, somewhere to live?'

'But to go back in time,' Hector said hesitantly, 'you'd have to be given your magic back.'

He and Sirius exchanged worried looks.

'I don't want my magic back,' Blaise said immediately. 'I have no use for it. It led me down a dark path, and I never want to go there again.'

'If he gets his magic back, who knows where fate will lead him,' Trinity said worriedly. 'He's safer without it.'

'But if I take him back without it,' Wulfram said, 'the alarm won't ring and there'll be no proof he is who he says he is. I'm right, aren't I?' he asked Hector.

Hector nodded. 'Blaise already crossed the timeline once. It will recognise him on return, but only if he still has his magic. He either goes back as a witch or he remains here. It's his choice.'

'Emrick?' Sirius shook his head helplessly. 'What do you think?'

'It's really not for me to say,' Emrick said. 'I'm sorry, but this has to be Blaise's decision.'

Blaise looked stricken. 'I don't want my magic back,' he repeated. 'What if it got out of control again? What if I...' His voice trailed off and he stared bleakly at Celeste. 'What do I do?'

Celeste's expression softened. She took his face in her hands and gazed into his eyes.

'Magic isn't good or bad, Blaise,' she said firmly. 'It's the person wielding it who decides how to use it.'

'But what if I forget all the damage I've done?' he whispered. 'What if I start to crave power and excitement again?'

'I can't give you any guarantees,' she told him. 'But you're a strong man, and deep down you have a good heart. You've proved that. Be the master of your fate, Blaise. It might call to you, but if you don't think it's the right thing to do, you can say no. You can walk your own path. I'm sure of it. I have faith in you.'

'Maybe you should sleep on it,' Wulfram suggested. 'There's no need to decide right now. Think about it, and if you decide you can't take the risk of getting your magic back—well, I'll figure something else out.'

'No,' Blaise said, taking Celeste's hands in his. 'Celeste is right. I can walk my own path, and the path I choose is the path that leads me back to the seventeenth century, where I can try to make amends once and for all.'

He turned to me and his eyes gleamed with tears. 'I'm so sorry, my love.'

I knew he meant it, and I understood why he had to go back. How could I ask him to remain here, tormented with guilt and grief? He needed to at least attempt to fix things or how could he ever be happy? And if he couldn't be happy, neither could I. It would be no life for either of us.

'Don't be sorry,' I told him, managing a smile. 'It's okay.'

'I'll miss you so much,' he told me.

'No you won't,' I said. 'You won't miss me at all. Because I'm going with you.'





# Chapter 34

## *Wulfram*

‘No, Romy!’

It was Ewella’s voice that rang out the loudest, but we all issued our protests as soon as she made her declaration.

Even Blaise was adamant that she couldn’t go with him.

‘You have no idea what the seventeenth century is like,’ he told her. ‘You’d never be able to cope with it. The disease, the dirt—I couldn’t put you through that. I’m sorry, Romy, but you must stay here where you’ll be safe.’

‘Plenty of people stayed alive and well in the seventeenth century,’ she said defiantly. ‘They lived to a decent age. Not everyone died young.’

‘But there are so few guarantees,’ he pleaded. ‘And remember, witches aren’t accepted. We’d have the added danger of discovery.’ He shook his head. ‘I was protected in Castle Clair. We had our safe little bubble, where we were free to be who we truly were. Not everyone was so lucky. We won’t have that bubble if we return. It will be just us, trying to make our way in a hostile and strange world. Even I’m going to struggle, having spent these last four years in this time. I’ve grown accustomed to comfort and security. But at least I’ll understand the world I’m returning to. You...’

He held me tightly and I felt a sob escape him as we stood together. ‘Please, Romy,’ he murmured. ‘You can’t do this. You have to let me go.’

‘Blaise is right,’ Celeste said gently. ‘I’m sorry. I know how much he means to you, but it’s not safe.’

‘It’s not your decision to make,’ Romy said, staring round at us all as if challenging us to disagree with her. ‘It’s mine.’

And I've made it. If Blaise is going back to the seventeenth century then so am I. It might be tough, but we'll be together, and that's all that matters.'

'I won't do it,' Blaise said, stepping away from her. 'I won't let you come with me.'

'And I won't take you,' I added, feeling guilty for crossing my sister, but aware that I was doing her a favour. She'd never survive in that world. I didn't want her to try. She belonged here with us.

Romy spun round and turned appealing eyes on Emrick. 'Tell them!' she begged. 'Tell them it's not up to them.'

Emrick closed his eyes but remained silent.

Romy gave an exasperated cry and swung round to face Hector. 'You'll tell them, won't you? Please, Hector.'

'Romy, stop it,' Ewella said. She hurried over and put her hands on Romy's shoulders. 'Listen to me. This isn't a game. The time that Blaise is from is a hard and dangerous one. I don't want you trapped in that life. Blaise is right. He should know. He has first-hand experience of that period. Listen to him. He's going to have enough to worry about as it is, and the last thing he needs is you weighing him down. You'll be a burden to him; can't you see that?'

She turned tearful eyes on Blaise. 'Thank you for telling her the truth,' she said. 'I'm so sorry you're going to have to go back there. I can imagine what a wrench it's going to be for you. I think you're incredibly brave. But you're right. My daughter belongs here. Thank you for being noble enough to tell her that.'

Sirius and Trinity exchanged worried glances and I knew exactly what they were thinking. The fact was, Blaise might not turn out to be a noble hero after all. Celeste herself had said that fate was still pulling him. What if this was part of a plan for him to get his magic back? How could we be sure? If he turned out to be as rotten as he used to be, I certainly didn't want my sister stuck in another century with him.

'Emrick,' Romy whispered tearfully, 'please.'

Emrick finally opened his eyes and gazed at her thoughtfully. He cleared his throat and we all waited.

‘You do realise, Romy, that no other witch can be allowed to travel through time? You’re half witch. If you went back to the seventeenth century with Blaise, an alarm would sound, warning that yet another witch has time travelled. That, of course, would merely start another set of problems. It would cancel out everything Blaise was trying to achieve.’

I must admit, I hadn’t thought of that, and it was obvious that Romy hadn’t either. Her face fell, but only for a moment.

‘Well, couldn’t the island remove the witch part of me? Or maybe the High Council could do it. Or—’ she swung round and faced Hector eagerly, ‘Hector could do it. One Guardian can remove a witch’s magic, can’t they? And I’d still be half fae.’

Emrick shook his head. ‘And what do you think the reaction would be from the witch community once they heard a fae had travelled in time?’

Romy’s face crumpled. ‘But...’

‘What I’m trying to tell you,’ Emrick said gently, ‘is that, if you really are determined to go with Blaise to the seventeenth century, then the island will have to remove all your magic once again. You can only go back as a normal human being. Normal human beings wouldn’t set off any alarms, you see? And that’s the dilemma you’re facing, Romy.’

He looked round at us all. ‘This has to be Romy’s choice,’ he said. ‘And it’s not going to be an easy one. You all know how well she’s taken to her magic, and how good she is at it. She clearly loves it. Imagine having to give that up. Personally, I believe that if she decides to do so, she deserves the opportunity to go with Blaise wherever he may end up. Love that strong will endure, I have no doubt about it. But Romy must decide for herself, and that’s all there is to it.’

I can’t deny I felt a momentary relief. I’d seen how Romy was doing with her magic. It had brought her so much joy, and

she was clearly so gifted at it that I had no doubt she'd be unable to give it up again. It seemed magic had really saved her, and I was grateful I wouldn't have to abandon my sister in such a grim time.

Romy dropped into an armchair and stared dazedly at the carpet.

Blaise crouched down in front of her and put his hand on her knee.

'It's okay,' he told her gently. 'It's fine. This is where you belong, and I would never, ever expect you to sacrifice your magic. I'll always remember you, Romy.'

She lifted her gaze to his and I saw the frown on her face. My heart sank. I just knew what she was going to say.

'You won't need to remember me because I'll be right there with you. You just don't get it, do you? You mean far more to me than any magic. I love you, Blaise St Clair! Where you go, I go. Nothing's going to break us apart, do you understand? I'm coming with you, and that's my final decision.'

Blaise shook his head. 'I—I really don't know what to say.'

'Say it's okay,' she begged him. 'Say you want me with you.'

'Oh, Romy,' he said, sounding choked. 'Of course I want you with me. I love you, too. So much.'

She grinned at him. 'Then we'll be absolutely fine, you just wait and see.'

She threw her arms around him and looked at us all over his shoulder. 'Don't even try to stop me,' she warned. 'Emrick said it was my decision and I've made it.'

'Yes,' Hector said heavily, 'I suppose you have.'

Ewella gave a strangled sob and rushed out of the room, and I saw Harley and Keely were in tears, too.

Trinity met my gaze and shook her head slightly. Had Emrick just condemned our sister to a life of fear and disease with a man who—when it came right down to it—simply couldn't be trusted?



## Chapter 35

### *Wulfram*

Bob's funeral was arranged for the eighth of December, but it was to be a strictly private affair. Only his wife, Amlodd, Aveta, and Kendrew would be in attendance, along with our island and Castle Clair family—and that was only to swell the numbers and make it look a bit more respectable.

Emrick had decided to make a coffin for Bob in the same barn that had appeared near Peloryon House when he'd needed to make a coffin for Meri, all those months ago. A couple of days before the funeral I saw him head out to begin work and remembered the day, back in the spring, when Keely and I had found him there, absorbed in his sad task. A real labour of love if ever there was one.

I wondered how he was coping without Meri and decided to follow him to have a chat with him. We seldom seemed to get the chance to talk much these days, and when we did it was usually about the next crisis. It would be good to have a simple catch-up for a change.

'Cup of coffee there for you,' Emrick said, nodding over at a work bench the moment I entered the barn.

'How did you—?' I sighed. 'No surprising you, is there?'

'Not really,' he said with a grin. 'What brings you here, Wulfram? I hope you haven't come to beg me to stop Romy from travelling with Blaise.'

'No,' I said reluctantly. 'Although I wish you would. Aren't you worried about her? I mean, it's Blaise.'

'Meaning?' Emrick was busy measuring some pieces of wood and didn't seem at all concerned.



‘I like Blaise, I really do,’ I said. ‘Don’t get me wrong. I’ve always got on with him, and he’s a likeable, bright, fun chap. But...’

‘Ah,’ Emrick said, nodding as he scribbled measurements on the wood in pencil. ‘*But.*’

‘Well, Celeste says fate has played such a big part in Blaise’s life,’ I said worriedly. ‘It seems to pull him along somehow, making him do things he doesn’t really want to do. We all thought fate, or destiny, or whatever, had finished with him, but Celeste memory-walked inside his mind, and she’s convinced it hasn’t. And the thing is, to go back in time, he has to regain his magic. What if that’s the trap?’

‘Trap?’ Emrick raised an eyebrow. ‘What do you mean, trap?’

‘I mean, what if all this going back in time stuff is just so that Hector will return his magic to him? Let him loose on the seventeenth century again and who knows what will happen. He could cause havoc.’ I shivered at the mention of that word. How appropriately named my uncle was.

‘Didn’t you just say you really liked him, and thought he was bright?’ Emrick picked up a mug of coffee and took a sip, watching me keenly.

‘I did. I do. He is.’

‘Well then, surely he’s not stupid enough to make the same mistake twice?’

‘But if fate pulls him along...’

‘Oh, you mean as if we have no choice in the matter? I see your dilemma,’ Emrick agreed.

I eyed him, rather indignantly. ‘I don’t know why you’re making fun of me,’ I said. ‘Ever since we met you’ve been telling me that we mustn’t do this, and we mustn’t do that because we can’t change fate.’

He shook his head slightly. ‘But that just proves my point, doesn’t it? Fate *can* be changed, and it really doesn’t take much. A careless conversation, a decision to turn left instead

of right, anything really. Why do you think I've been so careful to tell you as little as I possibly can? I've had to tread such a difficult path, because I know what fate has in store—at least up until a certain point. But if I said the wrong thing, it might have led you to behave in a different way, and then fate would have changed. And for now, it's imperative that it doesn't.'

'But it still could?'

'Of course! You have no idea how scared I've been that I'd influence you all, ever since my informants told me what was in store.'

'Who *are* your informants, Emrick?' I asked curiously.

'I could tell you,' he said, winking at me, 'but then I'd have to kill you.'

'Did they tell you what happens when I go back in time?' I asked.

'Obviously, although that's hardly a secret, given the O'Briens remember it.'

'And what about Blaise?' I ventured hopefully. 'Did they mention him at all? Does he have a part to play in this story?'

He put down his mug and took the pencil from where he'd slotted it behind his ear.

'I'm not going to influence you, but nice try.'

'So should I take him back in time with me or not?'

'Wulfram,' he said patiently, 'the decision has already been made. Romy is going with him. They've chosen their path.'

'But how do I know if it's the right one?'

'You don't,' he said with a shrug. 'What you do know is that it's imperative that the Great Guardian can look the Seelie Court members in the eye and assure them, hand on heart, that the witch has returned to his rightful time without any keys, and that the time loop has closed. Now, you know that, because the O'Briens told you—as did legend—that your

reassurance was what calmed talk of war down in that period. So what do you think is the right course of action?’

‘Put like that,’ I said glumly.

‘Excellent.’

‘But what about now?’ I asked. ‘It’s all right me going back to the seventeenth century and reassuring the fae of that time, but how do I reassure them here in the twenty-first century?’

‘You show them the sword, and you tell them the witch has been returned to his own time, without either of the keys. Simple.’

‘And that will be enough?’

‘For most witches and fae, yes. The Pendragons, of course, are a different kettle of fish, but what you must hope is that support for their cause will rapidly ebb away when you produce evidence of who you are, and they’ll crawl off back under the rock they came from.’

‘And if it doesn’t?’

He sighed. ‘Then we’ll think again. But I’m not worried about that, and neither should you be. One step at a time, eh, Wulfram?’

‘I suppose.’ I sipped coffee and watched as he expertly drew an outline on the piece of wood. ‘This must bring back some awful memories for you,’ I said sympathetically.

He hesitated. ‘You mean Meri? You could say that.’

‘You must miss her a lot,’ I said. ‘I’m sorry. We haven’t really had chance to talk about any of this, but how are you doing? Really, I mean.’

He lifted his head and I saw a sheen of tears in his eyes. ‘Thank you very much for asking,’ he said gently. ‘I appreciate that. It’s been tough. Some days are worse than others. You’re right. I do miss her a lot and I don’t suppose I’ll ever stop missing her.’

‘She was a remarkable woman,’ I agreed.

‘She was. A woman who was far braver than she realised.’ He bit his lip, remembering. ‘Life, though, is full of hellos and goodbyes. Maybe one day I’ll get to see her again. Who knows? One day.’

He leaned against the work bench, suddenly looking shattered.

‘You’re tired,’ I said.

He managed a short laugh. ‘Tired? Oh, Wulfram, you have no idea. I’m exhausted. But on we go, eh? There’ll be time to rest when this is over.’

‘Will it ever be over?’

He opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again.

‘Emrick?’

‘I don’t know,’ he said honestly. ‘Can we ever really know? I hope and pray that, once the sword and keys are found, there’ll be peace at last. But I suspect there’ll always be someone or something trying to stir up trouble. It’s the way of the world. Not just our world, mind. If you ever watch the news you’ll see humans are pretty adept at making a huge mess of things, too. I think there’ll always be something we have to watch out for. Still,’ he gave me a wry grin, ‘it’s a job, right?’

I laughed. ‘I suppose so. I hope...’ I trailed off, not wanting to offend him.

‘Go on,’ he said. ‘What do you hope?’

‘I was going to say, I hope you meet someone else. Someone who can make you as happy as Meri made you. You’re still only quite young. I mean, what are you, mid-fifties? You could meet someone and spend the rest of your life with her. I’m sure Meri wouldn’t mind that. She wouldn’t want you to be lonely.’

He put both hands on the work bench and leaned on it, as if needing the support. He was quiet for a long moment, and I wondered anxiously if I’d upset him.

‘Meri saved me,’ he said at last. ‘I’d been lonely for such a long, long time, Wulfram. I never expected to meet anyone who would change that. She saw through the madness—because, believe me, at times I thought I *was* going mad—and gave me hope, a home, and love. I don’t expect to ever have that again. I don’t believe I could be that lucky three times.’

‘Three times?’ I gasped. ‘You mean, there was someone else before Meri?’

‘Oh yes. And I loved her fiercely. But I lost her, and that’s why I was lonely. Meri was a miracle. I’ve had my share of love, and I can’t ask for more than that. I’ve been blessed. Now I focus on other things. I leave romance to other people.’

‘That seems—’ I’d been about to say it seemed like a shame, but at that moment Keely arrived in the barn.

‘You’d better come to the house,’ she said. ‘The Castle Clair lot are here and so are the High Council members. They say they’ve got news for us, and it sounds serious.’

I grabbed her arm, still not confident about my zapping abilities, and we all headed straight back to the house, wondering what had happened now.

Kendrew, Amlodd and Aveta were in the living room, but had apparently refused to be seated, preferring to stand as they gazed round at us all, looking distinctly nervous.

‘Is everyone here?’ Kendrew asked, and we all double checked then confirmed we were. He nodded. ‘Good, because we have some important information for you all. There’s been a development. Last night we made three arrests as part of the investigation into Bob Pascoe’s death.’

‘Pascoe? Was that his name?’ Sky asked. ‘Well, I never knew that.’

‘Hush, Sky. Go on, Kendrew,’ Iliana urged.

Kendrew looked nervously at his fellow High Council members. Aveta gave him an encouraging nod.

‘We have arrested Marco Golightly, his wife Ariadne Golightly, and his sister-in-law—’ he paused then added

heavily, ‘—Ursula Pascoe.’

‘Pascoe?’ We all gasped. ‘Are you saying...?’

‘That’s right,’ Amlodd said, nodding furiously. ‘His own wife, if you please.’

‘But why?’ Star demanded. ‘Why would Bob’s wife kill him? And why was she working with the Golightlys?’

‘Ahem.’ Aveta cleared her throat then said awkwardly, ‘We’re trying to establish a motive for his murder, but perhaps you should know that Ursula Pascoe and Ariadne Golightly are sisters.’

‘Sisters?’ Castor glared at her. ‘And did you lot know this? Cos I’m sure I never heard so much as a whisper about it.’

‘Of course we knew about it,’ Aveta admitted uncomfortably.

‘And you did nowt about it?’

‘What did you expect us to do? There’s no law against being related to a Golightly,’ Amlodd blustered.

‘And we had no reason to suspect that Ursula agreed with her sister and brother-in-law’s opinions, although it now appears she must have, because what other reason could she have had for conspiring to murder her own husband if not?’

‘Are you quite sure about this?’ Raiden asked, frowning. ‘It all seems very strange to me. Why kill Bob, of all people?’

‘Perhaps he knew something about what the Golightlys were planning,’ I suggested. ‘If he confided what he knew in his wife, maybe her loyalty to her sister took over her loyalty to her husband. It’s one explanation anyway.’

‘Or maybe,’ Keely said, her eyes wide, ‘Bob was about to tell the High Council what really happened to Zephyr!’

Amlodd looked uncomfortable. ‘What do you mean by that?’

‘Well,’ Keely said, ‘supposing Bob had confided to his wife that Zephyr and Trinity were going to be in Whitby that

day. She tells Marco and her sister, and they tip off the Pendragons somehow. Then Bob finds out what they did and threatens to tell the High Council. That would explain why Marco and the two women had to get rid of Bob, wouldn't it?

'It hardly seems likely,' Kendrew said with a shrug. 'For one thing, I can't imagine Bob being so careless as to tell his wife such confidential information. And for another, why would Golightly help the Pendragons? He hates them.'

'But he must have known that the murder of the leader of the High Council and one of the Pendragon children could spark a war between fae and witches,' I pointed out, thinking Keely's theory might not be perfect but it was better than anything else I'd heard. 'That's just what he wants—almost as much as the Pendragons.'

'Sounds like nonsense to me,' Kendrew said dismissively. 'Anyway, we people in this room will now be the only people at the funeral, so we'll be back here the day after tomorrow. Is everything in hand?'

'It is,' Emrick confirmed. 'We're getting to be dab hands at funerals here these days.'

Aveta sighed. 'I'm sorry for the inconvenience,' she said. 'It's been a very trying time for all of us. We'll bid you good day.'

With that they vanished, leaving us all in a state of confusion. Bob's wife! But she helped him run their nice little hotel near Tintagel. They were ordinary people, living mostly ordinary lives. How could this possibly have happened?

'Fear begets hatred, and hatred leads to death,' Castor said, shaking his head. 'When folks are scared of other folks they stop seeing them as living, breathing creatures, with thoughts and feelings of their own. They see only "other", and they want to destroy it, before it destroys them. Reason and compassion go out of the window.' He gave me a worried look. 'I hope everything works out right for you when you go back, young 'un, because honestly, you're our last hope. Everything's riding on you now.'

Wonderful. Just what I needed to hear. Even so, I didn't correct him.

The fact was it was true. It all depended on me. I had to get this right.





## Chapter 36

### *Romy*

I couldn't settle in the chapel. Maybe I'd seen more than enough funerals for this year already and wasn't ready to face another. Maybe it was because I knew this was my last day here with my family, and my mind was in such turmoil that I couldn't face sitting still throughout the entire service, as disrespectful as that might seem.

I had no quarrel with Bob, but right now, I needed to be outside, away from the stifling atmosphere of his funeral service. The moment the song of the merfolk began I knew I had to get away, and I managed to drag myself out of the chapel somehow, despite the lure of the music that was always so irresistible to hear.

'Need some company?'

I glanced round, surprised to see Wulfram just behind me.

'What are you doing here?' I asked.

He shrugged. 'Same as you, probably. I'm too wound up to settle in there. No disrespect to Bob, but I'm not in the mood for a funeral.'

'Me, too,' I admitted. 'I—I'm scared, Wulfram.'

He put his arm around me. 'I suppose there's no point in me reminding you that you don't have to go?'

'Not really,' I said, managing a smile. 'I won't let Blaise go back in time without me. Please try to understand. Imagine if it was Keely who had to go. Would you just accept that, or would you do everything you could to be with her?'

'Do you really have to ask?' he said with a sigh. 'Of course I'd be with her. It wouldn't really matter where we

were if we were together. I get it, Romy, really I do. I'm just worried about you.'

'I know,' I said. 'I'm a bit worried, too. Don't think I haven't thought about all this because I have. The diseases and infections they have no cure for. The political landscape. The fear of witches. It's all terrifying to me.'

'Yet still you're determined to go.'

'I am.' We walked slowly along the path, not really paying much attention to where we were heading. 'I was thinking yesterday about children,' I admitted. 'I would never say this to Blaise, naturally, because he's worried enough. But I thought, what if I get pregnant? How many women died in childbirth in those days? How many babies and children perished? It's not a pleasant thought.'

'No,' he said grimly. 'It's not.'

'But then,' I said, making every effort to sound brighter, 'we have one advantage. Blaise will be a witch, and I'm sure he can make life a little easier and more comfortable for us. How much harder would it be if we went back without magic? I don't know how we'd manage.'

'But you'll have to be exceptionally careful, Romy,' Wulfram warned me. 'Any hint of witchcraft and—well, you know what might happen.'

'I know, I know. We'll be careful,' I promised. I paused. 'Meri's grave, look. Bless her. I do miss her. She was such a lovely woman, wasn't she?'

There were fresh flowers on the grave. Chrysanthemums, even though it was December. We suspected Emrick had laid them. I wondered if he visited her grave often.

We continued along the path, and I told Wulfram how Blaise had tutored me on the seventeenth century for the last few days, and how I'd produced some clothes for us to wear when we went back, using illustrations in an old book as inspiration.

'He looks extremely dashing in seventeenth century clothes,' I told him shyly. 'Mind you, I feel uncomfortable in

mine. No more jeans and jumpers for me. It will be a wrench.'

'Romy, how can you do this?' he burst out. 'Seriously, I know you love Blaise, but this... This is something else.'

'You just told me you'd want to be with Keely,' I reminded him.

'It's true, I would. Even so, I'm not sure I could cope with that sort of life permanently. It's all right for me. I can pop over there and then come back here, but you... You'll be there forever. You do realise that? For the rest of your life.'

'Of course I realise it, Wulfram,' I said patiently. 'I'm not stupid. It's not going to be easy, but I have no choice. When you love someone as much as I love Blaise you'll risk anything for them. Anything at all.'

We stopped and stared at another gravestone that had flowers on it.

'White roses,' I said. 'My favourites. I wonder who put them there?'

'I reckon Emrick pays a visit to this graveyard regularly,' he said. 'Look, it's where the Tremaynes are buried.'

I peered at the faded inscription on the ancient gravestone.

*Here lies Phoenix Tremayne*

*Died October 22nd, 1723*

*Also his beloved wife Wren Tremayne*

*Died November 12th, 1730*

*Ex amore et veritatem venit pacem*

I shivered and pulled my coat tighter. 'Seven years without him,' I said sadly. 'Don't you think it's a shame that couples can't go together? You'd think the universe would be kind and allow that, wouldn't you? Instead of making one person wait years to be with the other again.'

'I suppose so,' he agreed.

‘Do you think they’ll be able to help us, Wulfram?’ I asked, nodding at the gravestone pensively.

‘Who? Pheonix and Wren?’

I wanted him to reassure me that, of course they would help us, but I knew, deep down, that he had no idea.

‘Supposedly they’re good people,’ he said cautiously. ‘Everyone says so. Our mother even named you after her so it must be true. I can’t see why they wouldn’t.’

‘Even once they know who Blaise is and what he did?’

He chewed his lip, thinking. ‘Honestly? I don’t know. But I promise you, I’ll put in a good word for him, and if they’re going to listen to anyone it will be the Great Guardian, right?’

I managed a smile and linked my arm through his. ‘Shall we go and say goodbye to our parents? Ashen and Laragh, I mean. And I’d like to say goodbye to Rodor, too. He was the man I’ve always thought of as Dad. It’s weird to think I’ll never be able to visit their graves again.’

‘Come on then.’

We left the chapel grounds and headed out towards the woods. It didn’t take us long to find the clearing where, today at least, the island had decided we would be allowed to see both gravestones. It was always pot luck, but clearly it knew this was my last chance and had been kind.

We both gazed down at the joint gravestone for our birth parents, Ashen Pendragon and his wife, Laragh. It was strange to think that we owed our very lives to these two people who were complete strangers to us. We had no idea what they looked like, apart from a small portrait of Laragh, and no real clue as to what sort of people they’d been, other than kind and not like the other Pendragons. And very much in love, naturally.

‘They gave up everything to be together,’ I said softly. ‘I think they’d have understood why I have to go back with Blaise.’

‘I think you’re right,’ he agreed. ‘I’m sure they would.’

I crouched down and kissed my fingers before pressing them to the gravestone.

‘Bye, Mum. Bye, Dad. I hope you’re together again and happy,’ I murmured, before doing the same to Rodor’s gravestone. ‘Thank you for taking care of me,’ I told him. ‘You were the only dad I ever knew, and I’ll always be grateful to you.’

I straightened and looked at my brother, my eyes blurry with tears.

‘Will you visit for me, Wulfram?’ I pleaded. ‘Will you lay flowers for me every year, so they know I haven’t forgotten them?’

‘I promise,’ he said. ‘Every year on your birthday.’

I gave a tearful splutter of laughter. ‘Just get it right,’ I said. ‘We don’t want any mishaps there.’

It had been funny, back in the summer, when we all turned thirty. Wulfram had always been told his birthday was August 26th, whereas I’d believed my birthday was September 7th, and Trinity thought she was born in October, on the 3rd.

It turned out we’d all actually been born on the 16th of August, so we were all slightly older than we’d believed.

Emrick, Ewella, and Aunt Keresen had been nothing if not thorough when they created their backstories for us.

‘August 16th,’ Wulfram promised. ‘Every year.’

‘White roses?’

‘Whatever you want.’

I nodded, satisfied, and slipped my hand in his. ‘Goodbye,’ I said, as we turned to leave. I glanced over my shoulder at the stones. ‘I’ll never forget you. Any of you. Thank you.’

My brother squeezed my hand, and we walked slowly back to the chapel, knowing we would never visit this place together again.



## Chapter 37

### *Wulfram*

Aveta, Kendrew, and Amlodd didn't come back to Peloryon House after the funeral. As soon as Bob's body was lowered into the ground and the earth had been scattered on his coffin, they bid farewell to us all, after Emrick assured them he would deal with the open grave. Bob was next to Zephyr, which seemed fitting since he'd been so attached to him in life.

The grave was filled in and flowers were laid, then we headed solemnly back to the house. Well, most of us did. Emrick and Romy made a detour. The moment had come for Romy to have her magic removed, and Emrick told us it was a private moment and not one we could share with her.

We all hugged her and reassured her because it was obvious she was scared.

'You don't have to do this,' Blaise told her, cradling her face in his hands. 'It's not too late to change your mind. If you want to stay here and keep your magic, I'd understand. Please, please reconsider.'

Romy was adamant. 'If it's a choice between magic and you, you win every time,' she told him. I could see in her eyes that she meant every word, and evidently Blaise could see it, too, because after a moment's hesitation he hugged her and told her how much he loved her.

'That's real love,' Keely said, as we walked hand-in-hand back to the house. She gave me a mischievous look. 'Would you give up your magic for me?'

'Would you give yours up for me?' I counterchallenged.

She tilted her head, considering. 'You know what? I think I would,' she admitted, sounding as surprised about that as I was.



‘Me, too,’ I told her, kissing the tip of her nose.

‘But not until we’ve sorted all this Pendragon mess out, naturally,’ she added.

‘Naturally,’ I agreed, smiling.

There was no wake waiting for us at the house. It seemed a bit sad for poor Bob, but to be honest, we all had more important things to think about.

We’d all agreed that, since it was Blaise’s and Romy’s last day here, they could choose their favourite lunch and we’d all go along with that.

Romy had opted for a pepperoni pizza. Blaise had chosen a quarter pound cheeseburger with pickles and sauces and a ton of fries.

Ewella had prepared the meals, and some of us had gone along with Romy’s choice, while others had plumped for Blaise’s. Sirius, Trinity, and Celeste had opted for vegetable pizzas instead of pepperoni, though.

I know we were all anxiously waiting for Romy to return, and when she did I could tell instantly that her magic had gone. She looked different. Smaller. Not as confident or as sparkly. It broke my heart, and looking round at the others I knew they all felt the same.

Blaise was clearly devastated, but Romy took him outside and talked to him, and whatever she said it worked, because they came back arm-in-arm and determined to enjoy their very last junk food meal.

We tried hard to keep our spirits up as we ate, but I couldn’t help thinking this meal bore a startling resemblance to the last one we’d shared with Meri. We knew it was our final goodbye, just as we’d known with her, and it was so hard to stay positive and not give way to tears.

I also had to deal with my nerves. Hector and I had gone over what I needed to do, and he’d made it sound so simple. We’d realised I needed to go back to December 1673 because, according to Ewella, that was the month the island returned

from the Otherworld. Unfortunately, she didn't know the specific date, so I'd had to go with my instinct.

'Just visualise yourself stepping into a calendar showing the date,' Hector advised. 'That's all there is to it. Honestly, it will come naturally to you.'

'But what if it doesn't?'

He grinned. 'It will. Stop worrying.'

But I was worrying. It wasn't just getting us back to December 1673 that was scary. It was what would happen there once we arrived. I had to find that sword, and if I didn't... It didn't bear thinking about.

I wasn't entirely convinced that Blaise and Romy were enjoying their meals as much as they should be, but who could blame them for that? After managing to eat most of them, they headed upstairs and were gone quite a while. No one questioned why. They had a lot to think about, after all.

'So what happens next?' I said to Hector.

'We wait for those two to come downstairs,' he said, 'then I'll restore Blaise's magic. Then, my friend, it's up to you.'

We all looked at each other nervously. Would we see a difference in Blaise when his magic returned?

'He says he doesn't want it back, but, ya know...' Trinity said hesitantly, which suggested she'd voiced what the rest of us were thinking.

'What if he does change?' Sirius asked. 'What if fate's too strong for him? How will Wulfram manage him?' He gave me a questioning look. 'Do you think you're up to handling a powerful witch like Blaise St Clair? Because, believe me, he is a powerful witch, and if his magic turns him into the old version of himself you'd better be ready.'

'Romy won't let him do anything to harm me,' I said, with more confidence than I felt.

'Romy might not be able to stop him,' Hector said gravely. 'You should be aware of that, Wulfram. I can't

guarantee the effect his magic will have on him. He's been without it for four years. This could go to his head.'

'Well,' I said uncertainly, 'I guess we'll just have to see what happens won't we?'

I glanced at Emrick, and he gave me a reassuring smile, which cheered me up a bit. After all, Emrick had prior knowledge of events, and he didn't seem too worried. I just wondered how much prior knowledge Emrick actually had. Hadn't he admitted that, by the end of the year, we'd know as much as he did? Maybe I shouldn't be so confident in him after all.

'I think I'll go upstairs and make sure those two are okay,' Emrick said. 'They may need some help with their dress.'

Ten minutes later there was a clattering sound on the stairs, and we all fell silent as Emrick, Romy and Blaise returned to the living room. The appearance of the latter two had an extraordinary effect on us all. Seeing them in seventeenth century clothing was a real shock, and a bit of a reality check. This was how they would be dressed from now on.

Romy wore a dress with a long bodice. The overskirt was draped and pinned up behind revealing her petticoat. I could only suppose that was the fashion. Her hair, although partly pinned into a bun, had tight curls hanging at either side of her face. She reminded me of an illustration in my childhood nursery rhyme book of Little Bo Peep. For the first time she was wearing the fede ring Meri had left her in her will, adamant that she wouldn't be parted from it. She'd also manifested a long cloak, which she'd certainly need at this time of year.

Blaise looked like a different person and wore his clothes well. I saw Celeste's face and knew she'd had a flashback to the Blaise St Clair she'd once known, loved, and feared. I could only imagine how unnerving this must be for her.

'Your hair...' I swallowed, eyeing Blaise in some dismay. 'Please don't tell me I have to wear my hair like that.'

‘It’s the fashion of the time,’ Romy said with a shrug. ‘We have to fit in. Besides,’ she added, giving Blaise an admiring look, ‘I think it looks rather dashing.’

Dashing! Blaise’s hair tumbled to his shoulders, a glossy mass of dark, loose curls. Oh please, no!

‘Well,’ Blaise said awkwardly, ‘this is a strange feeling, I must say. I’d forgotten how uncomfortable these clothes are. I’m going to miss zips!’

He managed a laugh, but I could see he was scared. Truly scared. I wondered what it was he was most afraid of.

‘There’s an outfit waiting for you in your room,’ Romy told me. ‘You’d better go and put it on.’

‘This I’ve got to see,’ Keely said, giggling. ‘Go on, Wulfram. Go and get your kit on.’

‘I’ll come with you and show you how to dress,’ Blaise said.

I pulled a face but headed upstairs where I found my new clothes hanging on the back of my door. The outfit, like Blaise’s, consisted of a long and rather baggy coat, with an upturned cuff and three-quarter length sleeves, a waistcoat, a ruffled, long-sleeved white shirt, cravat, breeches, and a hat with a large brim, turned up on one side.

I won’t lie. I felt an absolute fool. It wasn’t the easiest thing in the world to put on, and it wasn’t the most comfortable either. I was glad of Blaise’s advice, and I could only be grateful that I wouldn’t be stuck with this sort of clothing for long.

‘We’ve gone for a look that will be just a couple of years out of date when we get back,’ Blaise explained. ‘We don’t want to draw attention to ourselves by looking too grand, but we need to command a little respect so people will help us if needed. We thought we’d aim for a faded gentility.’ He grinned. ‘*These people have a little money but they’re not worth mugging.*’

That made sense to me. I braced myself for Keely’s reaction when she saw me.

Predictably, she burst out laughing when I entered the living room, dressed in all my finery. I could tell, though, that she was partly laughing with nerves, and that tears weren't far away. She was dreading me leaving.

She'd clung to me last night in bed, as if she was afraid she'd never see me again, and no amount of reassurance had persuaded her to let me go. It had been a very hot and uncomfortable night, not helped by the fact that Frey and Runa were lying across our legs, having sulked for the last couple of days because I'd told Frey he couldn't possibly go back in time with me, and he'd just have to stay here and help Runa care for Keely. This had deeply offended Runa, who'd informed me, via Keely, that she was perfectly capable of looking after her charge herself and didn't need her brother's help.

Now the moment of our parting was almost here she gripped my hand, and I squeezed her fingers reassuringly.

'It's okay,' I told her. 'I'll come back to you. I promise.'

'You'd better,' she said tearfully. 'Don't make me set off another alarm by hijacking Hector and forcing him to take me back there to look for you. Because I will,' she added firmly. 'Count on it.'

'Your hair, Wulfram,' Romy reminded me, and I groaned. 'Seriously?'

'Absolutely.'

'Do I have to wear a wig?'

'I'm sure I can do something with your own hair,' Emrick offered, a twinkle in his eyes.

'Why do I think you're enjoying this?' I said suspiciously.

He laughed, but the deed was done almost instantly. I wound dark brown locks around my fingers and gazed at them all in dismay.

'I look a prat, don't I?'

'You look gorgeous,' Keely assured me. 'I might make you keep it that way when you get home.'

‘You can try,’ I said.

Hector cleared his throat. ‘I guess it’s time to restore Blaise’s magic then. Blaise, are you ready?’

I saw the look of dread on Blaise’s face. He didn’t want his magic back. Either that or he was playing a really good part.

Hector placed his hands on the sides of Blaise’s face and pressed his forehead against his. There was total silence as we watched, awed. Both men had their eyes closed. There was a sudden flash of white light and I saw Celeste’s hand fly to her mouth. Sky and Star immediately put their arms around her and huddled against her, as if protecting her from a terrible memory.

Then it was over. Hector stepped away and Blaise put a hand to his temple and rubbed it, a dazed expression on his face.

‘How do you feel?’ Romy asked anxiously, and we all waited, wondering if we were going to be dodging fireballs or something at any moment.

‘Strange,’ Blaise said at last, and I was slightly relieved to hear he sounded just the same. ‘But,’ he added slowly, ‘already it’s feeling familiar. I’d forgotten...’ He looked around at us all and smiled. ‘Don’t look so worried. I’m not about to attack you. But yes, it’s kind of like putting on an old, familiar suit of clothes. Not this one,’ he added, waving a hand over the magically constructed outfit he was wearing. ‘A real one. One that you’ve worn many times before. One that fits like a glove and makes you feel comfortable and confident when you wear it.’

‘And—and you’re not feeling overwhelmed?’ Celeste asked hesitantly.

‘No,’ he assured her. ‘Please don’t worry, Celeste. I’m not about to harm you, or anyone else. I just want to go back to my own time and fix this mess I’ve caused, that’s all.’

‘We need to put a translation spell on you,’ Emrick said. ‘Blaise is already under one, so Hector tells me.’

‘What do you mean?’ I asked.

‘When he first arrived in our time,’ Celeste explained, ‘we had difficulty understanding everything he was saying, and vice versa. The High Council placed a translation spell on him so that, although he’s speaking as he always has, we can understand him. To us, it sounds as if he’s speaking just the same way we do. Mind you,’ she added thoughtfully, ‘he probably is by now. He’s been here four years, so it’s probably natural to him. You’re going to need the same sort of thing. Otherwise you’ll struggle to make yourself understood, and you won’t have a clue what people are saying to you.’

Emrick quickly did what was necessary. ‘There. You shouldn’t have a problem now,’ he assured us.

Ewella handed Romy an envelope.

‘These,’ she explained, ‘are the deeds to Peloryon Island. Keep the envelope out of sight because I don’t think they had those back in 1673. Give the deeds to Phoenix Tremayne. The island must be passed to his family, so it will eventually go to Meri. You understand?’

‘I do,’ Romy said. ‘Don’t worry, Mum. I’ll make sure he gets it.’

They hugged tightly.

‘Oh, my darling girl,’ Ewella sobbed. ‘I love you so much. Be happy.’

She gripped Blaise’s arms. ‘Never let her down,’ she pleaded. ‘Look after my daughter.’

Blaise nodded. ‘I swear to you, Mrs St Clair. I’ll do everything I can to make her happy and keep her safe.’

Ewella nodded, then turned to me. ‘Travel safely, darling boy. Come back to us, won’t you?’

‘I will,’ I promised. ‘Take care of Keely for me while I’m away.’

She gave me a tearful smile. ‘I doubt I’ll be much of a substitute for you, but I’ll do my best.’

Emrick put his arms around Romy and Blaise.

‘This is quite the adventure you’re embarking on,’ he told them. ‘Be brave, and always remember who you are, and what you hope to achieve. Live well, my dear friends.’

‘Thank you, Emrick,’ they said in unison.

Hector nodded at Blaise. ‘It’s all up to you now,’ he told him. ‘You have your magic back. What you choose to do with it is in your hands. Make wise choices, Blaise. You’ve been given a second chance. Don’t mess it up this time.’

‘I won’t,’ Blaise assured him. ‘Will I lose my memory, the way I did when I first came here?’

Hector considered. ‘I think you might have some slight memory issues, but nothing like you had the first time you time travelled. I think the shock of landing in the Hrafn on a freezing cold December night probably did the most damage there. However,’ he added, ‘I can’t promise there’ll be no other side effects. It might affect you physically. It’s a huge shock to your body. It goes against all the laws of nature, and you might suffer for a while, especially as this is the second time you’ve put yourself through this.’

‘And Romy?’ he asked anxiously. ‘Will she be okay?’

‘She’ll be fine. Now she has no magic in her, time travel won’t affect her at all. Wulfram, I should warn you that you might feel drained the first few times you travel through time, but once you get used to it that will wear off. Just try to rest when you arrive. Oh, and don’t worry about setting off any alarm for yourself. This land knows the Great Guardian. It won’t worry about your arrival, wherever you may turn up in time. Oh, and remember, we’re not sure what date the island returned from the Otherworld. Aim for Gerrenporth. At least we know that was there and you don’t want to land in the sea.’

Blaise shuddered. ‘No we don’t. Landing once in freezing cold water was enough, thanks very much. And I won’t have the St Clair heroes to fish me out this time.’

He nodded at Jethro, Benedict, and Sirius, who each gave him a rueful smile.



‘I know we’ve not been sisters very long,’ Trinity said, taking Romy’s hand, ‘but—well, you know.’

Romy nodded tearfully. ‘Take care of our brother when he returns,’ she said. ‘It was lovely getting to know you, Trinity. I just wish...’

She broke off and shook her head. ‘Bye, Trinity.’

‘Bye, Romy.’

Trinity kissed her lightly on the cheek, then Keely and Harley pulled Romy into a group hug.

‘We love you,’ Keely told her brokenly. ‘Never, ever forget that.’

‘I won’t,’ Romy promised. ‘And don’t forget that I love you, too.’

‘Be happy,’ Harley sobbed. ‘We’ll never forget you and we’ll miss you forever.’

‘I’ll miss you,’ Romy said, tears rolling down her cheeks. ‘Look after each other and look after Mum for me.’

‘Oh, Romy.’ Ewella couldn’t manage anything else for her tears, and Emrick took her hand to comfort her.

Killian gently guided Harley into his arms where she clung to him, heartbroken, and I kissed Keely passionately, not even caring that it was in front of everyone.

‘I love you,’ she said. ‘Please take care of my sister and come home safe.’

‘I’ll be back before you know it,’ I assured her. ‘And don’t worry about Romy. I’ll make sure she’s safe, and I won’t leave her until I’m certain.’

I met Celeste’s eyes over Keely’s shoulder and an understanding passed between us. If I thought for one minute that Blaise was going to revert to type, I was going to bring Romy home with me, whether she wanted to come back or not. No way was I leaving her in the seventeenth century with someone who would lie to her and treat her badly. Celeste and

I had already discussed it. I just hoped it wouldn't be necessary.

'Goodbye, Celeste,' Blaise said, standing in front of her. 'I'm—I'm so sorry for everything that happened.'

'I know,' she told him. 'You don't have to apologise again. You've already apologised goodness knows how many times. Just make better choices this time and look after Romy. That's all I want from you. Don't let me down.'

'I won't,' he promised.

'Okay,' I said. 'We really have to go.'

I took Romy's hand in one hand, and Blaise's hand in the other and closed my eyes as Hector had told me. In my mind's eye I saw a date. December 8th, 1673. I saw myself stepping into that date.

'You're in charge of your own destiny, Blaise,' Celeste said urgently. 'Don't forget that!'

'Don't worry, Celeste,' Blaise called. 'I'll remember. *Astra inclinant, sed non obligant.*'

I vaguely heard Celeste say, 'Wait, what did you say?' but then she was gone, and I heard the cry of seagulls, and waves crashing on the shore, and men shouting instructions to each other. I opened my eyes to find we were no longer in Peloryon House, but in what I could only hope was Gerrenporth.

My legs almost buckled, and I realised my energy levels were seriously depleted. Anxiously, I looked to the side and saw Blaise staring round at the scene with wide eyes. Romy took a deep breath.

'Well,' she said heavily, 'it looks like you did it, Wulfram. We're here.'

Blaise turned to us, and we both gasped as we saw a thick streak of white through his long, dark, curly hair. Evidently time travel had caused at least one physical effect.

'Where are we?' he asked, clearly bewildered. 'And who are you?'

So his memory *was* jumbled, as Hector had warned it might be. How long would that last? And what sort of person would he be when he remembered who we were, and why we were here?

I supposed only time would tell.



## Chapter 38

### *Wulfram 1673*

I looked around in some disbelief. So this was Gerrenporth back in late 1673? It was barely recognisable. In my own time it was a pretty coastal village, heavily geared towards attracting tourists. The shops and cottages were mostly painted white, and many had cutesy names, hanging baskets of flowers or foliage, and smartly painted front doors. The seafront was full of floral displays, benches for tourists to sit and admire the views, ice cream shacks, seafood stalls, teashops...

I couldn't believe the difference. This was dirty and grim. The houses were all bleak, with grimy windows and shabby doors. There was mud everywhere, and rather than swarms of relaxed tourists, there were hordes of men and women going about their everyday business, looking quite worn and serious.

From their clothes it was obvious this wasn't an affluent town. Most of the men wore baggy britches and coats, with several patches to cover holes and tears. The women wore patched-up long skirts or dresses, ankle length which at least prevented them from being trailed in the mud. Their heads were covered by bonnets or hats, and they had large, linen squares tied around their necks.

I twitched my nose. I can't say the place smelt particularly fragrant.

'Wasn't Gerrenporth famous for its pilchard fishing in this time?' I whispered to Romy.

'Yes, but that's a late summer thing,' she whispered back. 'Gosh, Wulfram, look how shabby everything was then. I mean, now. The people look poverty-stricken.'

'Where are we?' Blaise asked, both sounding and looking confused.

I wondered what was going through his mind. Was he thinking he should be in seventeenth century Castle Clair? Was he thinking he should be on Peloryon Island? Or had he no idea whatsoever about who he was, let alone where he was supposed to be?

‘We’re in Gerrenporth,’ Romy said gently, taking his hand. ‘You know, Gerrenporth, on the Cornish coast?’

‘The Cornish coast...’ Blaise repeated the phrase, puzzled. ‘You mean, Polkayne?’

‘Er, no,’ Romy said, frowning.

‘Polkayne?’ I asked wearily. That’s the next village along from here. How does he know about that?’

‘Goodness knows,’ Romy said. ‘Are you okay, Wulfram? You look awful.’

‘It’s like Hector said,’ I admitted. ‘I’m so tired I just want to lie down and sleep.’

Romy pulled her cloak tighter around her. ‘Look, I think we ought to get off the streets,’ she said, as several people passing by gave us curious looks. ‘It’s getting dark already, you’re exhausted, and Blaise is in no fit state to be out either.’ She stared towards the sea. ‘I can’t see the island, can you?’

I squelched heavily through the mud, every step a huge effort, dodging several people to get a closer look at the sea. She was right. There was no sign of the island. I felt a pang of homesickness and real fear. We were in a strange place—because this certainly wasn’t the Gerrenporth I’d grown up in—surrounded by people who would string us up if they knew the truth about us. It wasn’t a pleasant position to be in.

I stared out at the horizon and thought of Keely. Somewhere in the future she was out there, safe and secure in Peloryon House, surrounded by her family and friends. How was she feeling right now? Was she missing me?

I mentally shook my head. We’d only been gone a few minutes! I had to get a grip and push my exhaustion to one side. I couldn’t leave this to Romy, and it was obvious Blaise wasn’t up to helping.

I hailed a couple of men who were strolling past, hands in pockets. To be honest, they looked a bit dodgy, but I supposed I couldn't really judge them from my twenty-first century perspective. They might be perfectly respectable family men for all I knew.

'I don't suppose you know where we might find the Tremaynes?' I asked doubtfully. 'Phoenix Tremayne? Do you know if he lives round here?'

They shook their heads. 'Sorry. Never heard of him.'

I'd been afraid they'd say that. I asked a couple more people with the same result. It seemed the Tremaynes hadn't yet arrived in Gerrenporth. Maybe they only came here when the island appeared?

'We need to find a bed for the night,' I said, aware that the light was fading fast and I could barely keep my eyes open. 'We can't really do anything else now it's getting dark.'

'We'd better ask someone if there's an inn around here,' Romy said, shivering.

'Why are we here?' Blaise muttered. He stared at Romy and added, 'Who are you?'

'Oh heck,' I said. 'We'd better get him safely into a room before he says something he shouldn't. Excuse me, madam!'

I hailed a woman who was passing by with two young children at her side. She eyed me with some surprise, then glanced at Romy and Blaise. Evidently our unpatched clothes gave us a certain respectability.

'Can I help you, sir?' she asked.

'I was wondering if you knew of anywhere we could rent rooms for the night?' I said hopefully. 'An inn perhaps?'

Her brow furrowed as she considered my question. The young boy by her side nodded eagerly.

'The Royal Oak's not far away, is it, Ma?'

The woman tutted impatiently. 'No, it's not, but...' She looked doubtful. 'Perhaps it's not to your standard, sir.'

‘I’m sure it will be fine,’ I said, thinking the sooner I could lie down, and we got Blaise inside the better. ‘You couldn’t show us where it is, could you?’

The boy nodded eagerly. ‘I could take you.’ He paused. ‘Although it’s a bit out of my way, mind.’

I rummaged in my pocket and held up a silver threepence. ‘Would this help to make up for your trouble?’

He grinned. ‘Okay. I’ll show you.’

‘You come straight home,’ his mother told him. She took the coin from my fingers. ‘I’ll keep that safe, sir,’ she said primly, which made the boy groan while the girl laughed gleefully.

The boy led us through various alleys I barely recognised. I was quickly confused, which was strange as I’d lived in this village all my life, and many of the buildings in it were extremely old. Evidently not as old as I’d assumed, though. And I couldn’t deny that the appearance was so different to modern-day Gerrenporth that it was easy to become disoriented.

‘I know this place,’ Romy murmured, as the boy cheerfully waved a hand and told us we were at The Royal Oak.

I thanked him and gave him another penny, which put a wide smile on his face as he ran off. I doubted he’d tell his mother about his little bonus.

‘What do you mean, you know this place?’ I asked Romy, who’d gone distinctly pale.

‘In our time,’ she whispered, ‘this was called The Fool’s Journey. I don’t like it in here, Wulfram. This—this is where it all started.’





## Chapter 39

### *Romy 1673*

I couldn't help but feel apprehensive. I had bad memories of this place. 'The very first day Keely and Harley and I arrived in Gerrenporth we went inside this place. We met someone there. A woman called—'

'Lyrica,' Wulfram finished for me. 'Keely told me. She read your tarot cards, didn't she?' He surveyed the squat building with interest. 'I think you're right. This is The Fool's Journey. Well, it is in our time, but for now it's The Royal Oak, and let's hope they have a couple of rooms to let.'

'Seriously?' I asked. 'We're going in there?'

'We need to get off the streets,' he reminded me. 'Sorry, Romy, but I honestly don't think I can stand up much longer. You have no need to worry. Lyrica's hardly likely to be in there now, is she?'

I felt a bit foolish. 'I suppose not. Sorry.'

'Where are we going?' Blaise cried in alarm, as I took his hand and led him towards the door.

'It's all right,' I reassured him. 'We're just going to take a room for the night. You're not well, my love, but you'll feel better in the morning.'

I gave Wulfram a look. *At least, I hope so.*

'You'd better try to keep him occupied and leave all the talking to me,' Wulfram said quietly. 'We don't want him saying something he shouldn't.'

I nodded and tightened my grip on Blaise's hand as my brother led us inside.

The pub was a dark and dingy mess. Nothing like the sort of pubs you get nowadays, with their games machines, sound systems, gastropub menus and specials boards. It smelt strongly of fish and stale beer and was enough to turn my stomach. Then again, I remembered it had been dark and gloomy and definitely not to my taste even in my own time.

It was packed with loud and raucous people who, quite frankly, frightened the life out of me. I looked and felt out of place here. We were going to have to be very careful.

Blaise and I followed Wulfram as he pushed his way to the bar. Several heads turned in our direction and there were some nudges and sniggers. I wondered if women were supposed to be in here. There didn't seem to be any other females in the inn.

'What can I get you, sir?' the barman asked, looking Wulfram up and down as if he couldn't believe such well-dressed strangers had entered his establishment.

'I was wondering if you had any rooms for the night,' Wulfram said, sounding impressively businesslike and confident, despite his obvious exhaustion. 'We'll require two.'

'Oh, will you?' The barman frowned. 'And who are you, might I ask?'

Hmm. He would never get a job in reception at the Premier Inn, I thought. Manners clearly weren't his thing.

'I'm—' Wulfram hesitated, and I realised we hadn't discussed the names we'd be travelling under. 'I'm Lowen Ericson, and these are my friends, Mr and Mrs John Ford.'

He motioned to us, and I tried to look confident, too. A sideways glance at Blaise revealed that he, on the other hand, looked completely dazed.

'He's not sick is he?' the landlord asked nervously.

'No, no. Not sick. We've just had a long journey,' I said hastily. 'We're very tired.'

'Where have you come from then?'

Wulfram hesitated. 'Cumbria.'

*No, Wulfram!* I remembered that Cumbria hadn't existed back in 1673. Luckily, it seemed the translation spell had changed what he said, and the landlord had evidently heard the word Cumberland, as he merely nodded and said, 'Ah, right. Long way to come, that. Business, is it?'

What did he want from us? Our names, dates of birth, national insurance numbers and dental records?

I don't suppose they had the latter two in the seventeenth century, I thought. Luckily, Wulfram answered quite calmly and easily.

'Bit of both,' he said with a shrug. 'So do you have any rooms, or should we look elsewhere?'

'No need for that, sir,' the landlord said amiably. 'I do have two rooms as it happens. Mind you, they're my best rooms, and it is short notice so I can't let you have them for less than four shillings each. Of course, I'll be happy to do you a spot of supper and breakfast in morning for that.'

'That's fine,' Wulfram said, and I breathed an inward sigh of relief. I had no idea if he was ripping us off or giving us a bargain, but frankly I didn't care.

'In advance,' our host added, somewhat cautiously.

Wulfram handed over some coins and he stared at them in delight. Clearly, he'd expected an argument. He beamed at my brother. 'Would you like to dine downstairs or in your rooms, sir?'

It seemed he couldn't do enough for us, now he realised we could pay. I stifled a smile.

'If it's all the same to you, I'll dine with my friends in their room,' Wulfram said. 'We have business to discuss.'

*Wow, go Wulfram!*

'As you wish, sir.' The landlord bellowed over his shoulder. 'Annie!'

A buxom woman with rosy cheeks appeared next to him.

‘Show this gentleman and his friends up to their rooms,’ the man said. ‘The two front rooms, Annie,’ he added, nodding furiously.

She looked impressed so I guessed that was a good thing.

‘Have you any luggage?’ she enquired politely, looking me up and down.

‘Er, no,’ I said, realising how suspicious that must seem. ‘Our luggage was sent ahead with the carriage. We decided to stop off here for the night on the spur of the moment and quite forgot to bring anything with us. No matter. It’s only for one night.’

Oh, how I hoped it would only be for one night. Well, it would be. Even if the island didn’t appear overnight, surely we’d find somewhere better to stay than this?

Blaise and I followed Wulfram up the stairs, as the comely Annie clomped ahead of us, chatting merrily about the terrible weather, and how she couldn’t imagine why we’d come to Gerrenporth for pleasure, and did we have family in the area?

Wulfram gave non-committal responses, clearly too tired to do much more than grunt, while I prayed that Blaise would keep his mouth shut. Luckily, he seemed too confused to say anything that contradicted my brother.

I’m not sure what my face did when Annie opened the door and showed me the first room. Evidently it worried her because she frowned and said, ‘Is it not to your liking?’

‘Oh,’ I said hurriedly. ‘It’s fine, thank you. This will do splendidly.’

She gave a relieved sigh then showed Wulfram to the room next door.

‘I’ll bring you some supper up later,’ she said. ‘Make yourselves at home.’

With that, she turned and thudded down the wooden stairs.

I lifted an eyebrow. ‘Oh, wow.’

‘You’re not kidding,’ Wulfram breathed.

The rooms were awful, with tiny leaded windows and dirty wooden floors. One side of each room was taken up by a box bed, and closer inspection showed that they each contained a straw mattress.

‘Don’t look too hard,’ I advised. ‘They’re crawling.’

‘You’re joking,’ Wulfram said, horrified.

‘Nope. Why do you think well-off people used to bring their own beds with them when they travelled? I’ve been reading all about it. People have been known to catch all sorts from infected beds in places like these. Even smallpox. I mean, call me fussy, but there’s no way I’m sleeping in that thing.’ I shuddered. ‘Anyway, it would be like sleeping in a coffin.’

‘I suppose it’s to keep warm,’ he said, eyeing the box bed doubtfully. ‘There’s no fire lit, I notice. I wonder if that’s an extra charge.’

‘I’d be happy to pay it,’ I said. ‘What are we going to do?’

‘I’m just thinking of the supper Annie’s going to bring us up,’ he admitted. ‘Can you imagine what it’s going to be?’

‘I don’t know,’ I said, ‘but I somehow doubt the chef has passed his food hygiene exams.’ I gave a sudden cry of horror. ‘Oh no!’

‘What is it?’ Wulfram said, as Blaise’s head jerked round and he eyed me nervously.

I stared down at my hand. ‘The fede ring,’ I said, feeling choked. ‘It’s gone! It must have fallen off somewhere. I need to go back to the seafront and—’

‘No chance,’ Wulfram said immediately. ‘I’m sorry, but it’s dark out there and it’s probably been picked up by now anyway. That’s if it even made it back to this time with us. It could have dropped off your finger at home, or even while we were mid-journey.’

I felt sick with grief. Meri had given me that ring and I’d lost it. How could I have been so careless? Suddenly it was all

too much for me. What had I done?

I sank onto a wooden chair and put my head in my hands, overwhelmed. ‘This is my life now, isn’t it? All—’ I waved a hand around the room in despair, ‘this.’

‘No,’ he said. ‘Don’t worry. This is just the first night. You’ll be able to find somewhere out of other people’s way to make your home, and then you’ll be free to live exactly as you wish. Maybe the Tremaynes will let you stay on the island, and then you can do what you like, just as Meri did. Just as Ewella and Emrick do now. Remember? Everyone in this town thinks there’s nothing there but an old shack with an ancient generator that gives them intermittent electricity, but look how they live! You’ll have all the comforts you had back in our time, Romy. It will be fine.’

I was overwhelmed with shame. Had I really had such a huge wobble this early in the game? ‘You’re right, of course. Always supposing the Tremaynes accept us and allow us to stay with them. If not we’ll manage. As you say, we can find a cottage somewhere out of the way. Just me being a drama queen. I guess it’s been more of a shock to the system than I supposed, and with Blaise not remembering who he is...’

I eyed Blaise sadly. He was leaning against the wall, watching us both curiously.

‘Wulfram,’ he said slowly. ‘Romy.’

We exchanged delighted glances.

‘You remember us?’

He rubbed his head. ‘I’m so confused. Why do I have two names in my mind? Am I Blaise or John?’

‘Now that’s the question,’ Wulfram said.

I gave Blaise a reassuring smile. ‘Don’t worry, darling,’ I said. ‘It will all become clear very soon. You’ve had a—a bump on the head, and your memory’s a bit jumbled, but it will come back to you very soon.’

I looked at Wulfram hopefully. ‘Celeste said it took him ages to remember anything before. This has got to be a good

sign, right?’

‘I think it must be,’ he said, crossing his fingers. ‘There are no locks on this door, are there?’

I checked. ‘Nope. That’s not good, is it?’

‘Dare we risk magic in here? Given that someone could walk in it at any moment? And how would we explain the door being locked if we did that by magic?’ He groaned. ‘I mean, I could possibly conjure up a couple of mattresses for us, and maybe a couple of duvets too, but if anyone should see...’

‘If I still had my magic I’d risk it,’ I admitted. ‘But I know you’re not so confident, and Blaise—well, he’s so out of practice and not with it anyway. I think we’re going to have to suck it up tonight.’

‘You’re not going to sleep on that thing?’ Wulfram said, staring at the box bed in dread.

‘Nope. I think the floor’s going to have to do us tonight,’ I admitted ruefully. ‘I also think we’re going to have to go hungry, because I’m not risking eating anything made here.’

‘Well,’ he said slowly, ‘we won’t go hungry exactly.’ He dug into his coat pocket and pulled out a packet of chocolate biscuits. ‘It’s not much, but it will stave off the hunger pangs until we can get out of here.’

I could have kissed him. ‘Excellent. And we could pay the extra and get a fire going in both our rooms, which would keep us warm through the night, even if we are lying on the floor.’

‘Sounds like a plan. To be honest I’m so tired I think I could sleep on a bed of nails.’ He tucked the biscuits carefully back out of sight. ‘Thank goodness it’s only for one night.’

‘We hope,’ I said. ‘That’s if the island shows up tomorrow. It could be days for all we know. All we know for sure is it appeared in December 1673.’

He shook his head. ‘I’ve just got a feeling,’ he admitted. ‘It’s why I decided on this date. It’s close by, I can tell. And anyway,’ he added, ‘even if it isn’t, there’s no way we’re



staying here. We'll find something a bit classier somewhere else, don't worry.'

Blaise scratched his head. 'Chocolate biscuits?' he said hesitantly. 'I think I like those, don't I? Milk or plain?'

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Oh, what an uncomfortable night that was! At Wulfram's advice, I'd wedged the chair firmly beneath the door handle to keep out unwanted visitors, but it hadn't really reassured me, and I'd barely slept a wink. Then again, I doubted very much that I'd have slept anyway. The fire had long since died out, and this room was freezing. The hard, wooden floor was tough on my hips and back. I'd heard loud scratching sounds too and had an awful feeling we'd been visited by rodents at some point.

That was confirmed when I found the thick slices of bread that had accompanied something that passed for a stew last night, and which we'd left untouched, half chewed on the top of the small cupboard that was the only other bit of furniture in the room, apart from the washstand. Gross!

I sat up and rubbed my aching hips, then glanced over at Blaise. It took some getting used to, seeing him with that long curly hair. The white streak was quite fetching, though. It added a certain distinguished look to him. I smiled, tempted to stroke his face and wake him with a kiss, but I didn't think it would be such a good idea. Not until he remembered who he was anyway.

Reluctantly, I got to my feet and removed the chair from beneath the door handle.

'Romy?'

I glanced round, smiling as Blaise sat up. He pulled a face.

'My back! What on earth are we doing lying on the floor?'

'It seemed less of a health hazard than the mattress,' I said, nodding at the box bed.

He peered over at the offending article and wrinkled his nose. 'I can imagine. Oh, I'd forgotten how grim things are here. What I wouldn't give to be lying in our bed in our little cottage in Bartonbrook. Just you and me, and nothing to worry about apart from what to have for dinner tonight.'

'You remember Bartonbrook?' I said in delight, hurrying to sit down beside him.

'I remember everything.' He put his arm around my waist and pulled me towards him, kissing me tenderly. 'I'm so sorry you've had to endure a night like that one.'

'It's okay,' I said. 'I'm just glad you're back with us.'

He glanced around. 'Why hasn't Wulfram used his magic to give us all some comfort?' he whispered.

'He's just not confident enough,' I confessed. 'He was worried something would go wrong and alert the landlord that we weren't exactly normal guests. Besides, he wasn't himself last night. He was absolutely drained, and you weren't really up to it last night, so...'

'So you had to put up with sleeping on a floor?' He shook his head. 'I'm so sorry, Romy. What are we doing here anyway? Does this mean the island isn't back from the Otherworld yet?'

'No,' I said with a sigh. 'It isn't. But don't worry. Wulfram says if it isn't back today we'll find better accommodation.'

'Well,' he said, grinning at me, 'that shouldn't be too difficult. It would be hard to find anywhere worse.'

'We were in a bit of a hurry last night,' I said. 'It was getting dark, and we had no idea where we were. I warn you now, Gerrenporth looks nothing like it did in our day.'

Although, even as I said it, I realised that 1673 *was* his day. It was me who was out of time. 'Well,' I added, 'you know what I mean.'

'I'm not familiar with Gerrenporth anyway,' Blaise said. 'I don't remember visiting it, in my time or yours. It's

Polkayne I vaguely know. The next village along.'

'Oh yes,' I said eagerly. 'You mentioned that last night. It's ringing a bell with me, too, but I can't think why.'

He gave me a sad smile. 'It was where my family lived when I was young, just for a few years, while the war was going on. It's where my mother's family are from. Bevil and my baby sister were born there, and my mother and sister are buried there.'

I put my hand to my mouth. 'Oh, Blaise, I'm so sorry! I didn't realise.'

'It's okay. It was a long time ago.' He tilted his head to the side, thinking. 'Though not as long ago as it was yesterday. This is so confusing, isn't it? I expect you've had an awful shock. No regrets? Because if you've changed your mind—'

'I haven't,' I said quickly. 'I just want to be with you.'

He kissed me. 'I have no idea how I got so lucky finding you,' he said. 'But I'll never stop being grateful that I did.'



# Chapter 40

## *Wulfram 1673*

I tapped gently on the door and called quietly, ‘Are you awake?’

‘Come in, Wulfram,’ Romy replied, and I pushed open the door and stepped inside, closing the door after me. I stood, my back flat against the door in a highly dramatic fashion, as I stared at the two of them in horror.

‘There was a rat in my room last night!’

To my indignation, Blaise laughed.

‘Sorry, but you should see your face!’

‘It’s true, you do look funny, Wulfram,’ Romy admitted apologetically. ‘Mind you, I’ve just realised that it was rats I heard scratching around in here, not mice. I’m so glad I didn’t realise that before.’

‘It ate my bread,’ I told her, still feeling queasy at the thought.

‘Ours, too. Good luck to it,’ Romy said, grimacing. ‘How are you? You look more awake anyway.’

‘Slept like a log until that rat ran past me,’ I said, pulling a face at the memory. ‘I’m feeling loads better today. What about you, Blaise?’

‘I’m fine, thanks,’ Blaise reassured me. ‘I think my memory is fully intact, and nothing else seems to be wrong, so it looks like my return trip was a lot less traumatic than my first.’

‘Have you told him about his hair?’ I asked, unable to resist.

‘What about it?’ Blaise said immediately.

‘Er, you’ve just developed a very distinguished white streak in it, that’s all,’ Romy said hastily.

‘You’re kidding?’ he said aghast.

‘Nope. If it had been just a bit wider I’d have started calling you Cruella de Vil.’

Wulfram!’ Romy reproved. ‘The glee in your voice is, in my opinion, quite unbecoming for the Great Guardian.’

Blaise burst out laughing. ‘I don’t know how you’ve got the cheek to criticise me, standing there looking like a third-rate Brian May impersonator.’

I tossed my brown curls and pouted. ‘How dare you? I think I look stunning.’

‘All right, girls,’ Romy said, grinning. ‘Now we’re all awake what do we do next? We need to get out of here, fast, because if we don’t there might be awkward questions about why none of us touched our stew, and we’ll have to think of a reason why we don’t want any breakfast. Because we don’t, do we?’

Blaise and I instantly shook our heads, in complete agreement that we didn’t.

I strode over to the window and gazed outside. ‘Still too dark to make out whether the island’s here or not.’ I groaned. ‘I’m starving. Those chocolate biscuits didn’t do a lot to fill me up.’

‘If we leave here,’ Blaise said quietly, ‘we can go somewhere out of the way, and I’ll manifest us all a bacon sandwich. How does that sound?’

‘Seriously?’ I asked, my stomach rumbling at the thought of it. ‘You think you can do it?’

‘I know it’s been four years since I last had you-know-what,’ he whispered, ‘but I’m pretty sure a bacon sandwich is within my capabilities, whether I’m out of practice or not.’

‘What are we waiting for?’ Romy was already on her feet, and I rubbed my hands together in glee.

There was a tap on the door, and we all stared at each other in dismay.

‘What time will you be wanting breakfast, sir?’

I opened the door and Annie started in shock.

‘Oh. I thought you were in the other—’ She peered round me and saw Blaise sitting on the floor and Romy standing next to him. Her brow furrowed.

‘Business meeting,’ I explained, smiling. ‘Sorry, Annie, but we won’t be requiring breakfast after all. We have to be somewhere quite urgently.’

She looked suspicious. ‘Oh, all right then. Will you be needing the coach, because—’

‘No, that’s all right,’ Blaise said, getting to his feet. ‘It’s not far. We do appreciate you putting us up at such short notice, though. Thank you for your hospitality.’

‘Fair enough, sir.’ Annie shrugged. ‘If you go downstairs my husband will show you out.’

Frankly, we couldn’t get out of there fast enough, and wondered what Annie would say when she realised we hadn’t touched our stew either. I couldn’t help thinking that, most likely, she’d warm it up for another guest this evening. Maybe she’d done that before. I could only breathe a sigh of relief that we hadn’t touched it ourselves.

Gerrenporth was a hive of activity, even so early in the morning, but we didn’t linger to speak to anyone. Instead, we headed out of the village, following Blaise as he led us into woodland, just as the dawn broke.

‘Where are we going?’ Romy asked breathlessly, clearly struggling to keep up with him as he strode purposefully along a well-worn path.

‘It’s not far,’ he said.

‘What’s not far?’ I asked, trying not to sound too suspicious. ‘Where exactly are you taking us?’

We were going deeper and deeper into the woods, and the path was climbing steeply. Romy admitted she had a stitch, and that she felt a bit shaky. Lack of food and drink, I supposed. I didn't feel that great myself.

'Blaise,' I said sharply, seeing my sister was struggling, 'tell us where we're going.'

Blaise turned, looking a bit sheepish. 'I hope you don't mind,' he said. 'This is Polkayne Woods. It separates Gerrenporth from Polkayne. I thought, while we're hanging around waiting for the island, we could go to the church there. I'd—I'd quite like to visit my mother's grave if that's all right with you. It's been years. Decades. I never returned to Cornwall after we left here when I was a child. I'd like to pay my respects to her. Is that okay?'

'Of course it's okay!' Romy put her arms around him. 'What a lovely idea.'

'In the meantime,' he added, 'I thought we could sit on that overturned tree there and have those bacon sandwiches. What do you think?'

My suspicions vanished. 'Now you're talking,' I said eagerly.

We all hurried over to the tree and sat down, glad to be off our feet. Every part of me was aching, and I thought I'd be paying for that night on the floor for a good while. Within minutes we were hungrily tucking into bacon sandwiches, and Blaise produced mugs of hot, steaming tea for us all.

'I can't believe how easily magic has come back to me,' he admitted. 'It's like I never lost it.'

I tried not to feel uneasy at the thought, remembering how he'd feared that the restoration of his powers would corrupt him. He seemed to have forgotten those worries already and was smiling as he tucked into his breakfast.

Then again, I could hardly blame him for that. I'll say one thing for Blaise. He could manifest an excellent bacon sandwich.



‘This is so good,’ Romy said happily. ‘Oh, what I wouldn’t give for a hot shower right now.’

‘I wonder how Keely’s doing,’ I said wistfully.

She gave me a sad smile. ‘I’m sure she’s missing you like mad,’ she said. ‘But it won’t be long until you’re back with her. Chin up.’

I nodded. ‘I’m sure she’s missing you, too. You know she’s going to want to know every little detail when I get back.’

Romy laughed. ‘Maybe don’t tell her about the rat,’ she suggested. ‘I don’t want her thinking that’s what my life is going to be like from now on.’

‘It won’t be,’ Blaise promised. ‘We just need to find the island and meet the Tremaynes, then hopefully, we can start again. And let’s hope that sword’s where you think it is, Wulfram.’

Having eaten the sandwiches and drunk the tea, we reluctantly got to our feet and continued along the steep path through the woodland towards Polkayne.

‘Maybe,’ Romy said breathlessly, ‘there’ll be a better inn there.’

‘I think that’s guaranteed,’ Blaise said, laughing. ‘Although, perhaps we could come up with something more comfortable if necessary. Maybe a cabin in these woods?’

‘Ooh,’ she said happily. ‘That sounds much better. Do you think you’re up to that?’

‘Only one way to find out,’ he said.

I said nothing. Something that had bugged me last night had just returned to nudge me. I kept trying to think what it was, and why it was worrying me so much.

‘You okay, Wulfram?’ Romy asked.

I nodded. ‘Yes, fine. Don’t worry.’

‘Well then,’ she said, touching my face, ‘turn that frown upside down.’

I smiled, resolved to push whatever it was that was bothering me away and concentrate on the moment.

The woodland cleared, and we found ourselves on the cliff top, looking down over the sea.

Now that it was daylight we had a clear view for miles, and it was obvious that the island hadn't returned overnight.

'Oh, please hurry up and come back. I really don't want another night like the last one,' Romy pleaded to the empty sea.

I gazed up at the sky and as I did, a vague memory stirred.

'Blaise,' I said thoughtfully.

'That's it!' Blaise cried suddenly. 'That's St Kayne's church.'

He pointed to the little building not too far ahead of us, its steeple a welcome sight after our long walk.

'Come on,' he said. 'We're nearly there.'

He was almost running in his eagerness to reach the church. Romy clearly didn't have the energy to even try to keep up and followed at a more sedate pace with me walking by her side.

'Is something worrying you?' she asked curiously. 'You're being very quiet, and you've got a weird look on your face, like you're trying to work something out.'

I shrugged. 'Just something Blaise said, back on the island. Just before we left.' I didn't want to alarm her, but it was seriously bugging me now. 'I've heard it before. Where have I heard it before?'

'Heard what before?' she asked, puzzled.

'Forget it. It's probably nothing. Come on, we'd better catch him up.'

Blaise was already in the churchyard, moving from one gravestone to the next as he searched for the one belonging to his mother. We hurried, as best as we could, towards him. Romy cursed her enormous skirt and swore that if she ever

found a place to call home, away from prying eyes, she'd risk wearing jeans around the house. I couldn't say I blamed her. Seventeenth century clothing wasn't made for comfort.

We realised Blaise had stopped searching, and was standing with his hands clasped together, staring down at a headstone.

We finally made it to his side, and I gazed around, taking in the pretty building and the neat little churchyard.

'Lovely church,' I said absently, still thinking about the words Blaise had spoken just before we left the island. I knew them from somewhere. I was sure of it. I tried to remember.

I'd said them out loud myself once. I'd said them to—

'No!'

Romy gave a smothered gasp, and I spun round, shocked to find her on her knees, her hands to her face. Her eyes were wide with fear as she stared at the gravestone. Behind her, Blaise stood, looking shocked at her behaviour.

'Romy, what is it?'

I knelt beside her and put my arms around her, then turned to look at whatever it was that had frightened her so much.

It was Blaise's mother's gravestone. Catherine Elizabeth Mary St Clair...

My mouth fell open in shock as realisation hit me. Goosebumps broke out on my arms as the final pieces of the jigsaw slotted into place, and I remembered where I'd heard the words Blaise had uttered to Celeste before.

*Astra inclinant, sed non obligant.* The stars incline us, but they do not bind us.

'It might not mean what you think. It could be a coincidence,' I said faintly. But I knew it wasn't. That was why the quote had bugged me. And gazing at the inscription on the gravestone it only confirmed what I'd suspected.

'I knew it!' Romy whispered, tears rolling down her cheeks. 'I think, somewhere deep inside, I've always known it.'

It's like I was expecting this.' She lifted her face to mine, a look of desperation in her eyes. 'How was I expecting it, Wulfram?'

I turned to look at Blaise and my heart sank.

'Oh, Romy.'

'I can't,' she whispered, shaking her head frantically. 'I can't do this. I can't be as brave as she was.'

'Romy?' Blaise asked anxiously. 'What on earth's the matter?'

I could barely look at the man who stood beside us, knowing what I knew, knowing the terrible burden that had just fallen upon my sister's shoulders. Knowing what she would have to live with.

Blaise St Clair was going to die. And life for Romy had just changed forever.



# Chapter 41

## *Trinity*

It was hard to believe it had only been less than twenty-four hours since Wulfram, Romy, and Blaise left us. We were all on edge, worrying about what was happening to them.

Ewella was in bits, and no amount of reassurance from the rest of us seemed to calm her down. She went on and on, catastrophising out loud, reeling off the worst possible scenarios to frighten us all to death.

‘For goodness’ sake, Mum!’ Keely had clearly had enough. ‘Do you really think I need to hear this? My boyfriend and my sister are out there somewhere, facing goodness knows what, and you’re telling me all the horrible things that might be happening to them. I don’t need it! Just be quiet.’

Ewella’s face went pink. ‘I—I’m sorry, Keely. I just...’

‘I know you’re upset,’ Keely said tearfully, ‘but do you think you’re the only one? I’m scared stiff. I don’t want you putting any more scary thoughts in my mind, because believe me, I’ve got enough of my own.’

‘You should all calm down,’ Emrick said. ‘Everything will be fine. Wulfram and Blaise have magic. The Pendragons are no threat to them in that time zone. They’ll find the Tremaynes and the sword, and Wulfram will return before you know it. Why don’t you do something useful and productive with your time instead of moping around here, imagining the worst?’

Ewella nodded. ‘I’m sorry, Keely. I’m just scared. But Emrick’s right. I think I’ll do some baking. Take my mind off things.’

‘Good idea, Mum,’ Keely said.

Ewella headed into the kitchen and Emrick sighed. ‘That’s better. Now, why don’t you girls think of something to do this afternoon, too? Killian’s going for a boat ride, isn’t he? Why don’t you go with him?’

‘Maybe,’ Harley said doubtfully. ‘We’ll see. Don’t worry about us, Emrick. We’ll figure something out.’

He nodded cheerfully. ‘Fair enough. I’ll leave you to it.’

He left the room, whistling, leaving Keely, Harley, and I alone. Sirius was doing some research for the school he was still determined to open here when all this madness was through, Killian was taking a walk to the jetty, and everyone else was back in Castle Clair.

‘I hate this,’ Keely muttered. ‘Just sitting here, waiting.’

‘Me, too,’ I said. ‘Both my brother and sister are back in the seventeenth century doing something noble and useful, and I’m stuck here, doing nothing.’

Harley eyed us both thoughtfully. ‘You know, we *could* do something,’ she said. ‘I’ve been thinking about Lyrica lately. I don’t know why, but she popped into my head last night and I can’t seem to shift her. And I thought about how much she knew—the prophecies she made that day in *The Fool’s Journey*.’

‘What about them?’ I asked.

‘Well,’ Harley said slowly. ‘I was wondering if, just maybe, she knew anything else.’ She looked round at us all. ‘Like, maybe if Wulfram and Romy are okay, or where the two keys are.’

Keely’s eyes widened with excitement. ‘She might, too! Why didn’t we think of her before?’

She jumped to her feet. ‘Right, let’s get going to Gerrenporth.’

‘Whoa,’ I said. ‘You’re going now?’

‘Why not? I’m driving myself mad sitting here, worrying about Wulfram and Romy. I need to do something useful.’

Wouldn't it be great if we could give Wulfram the keys when he got home?'

'It's not likely, though,' Harley said cautiously. 'I mean, I know this was my idea, but we must be realistic. It's a long shot.'

'Still better than doing nothing,' Keely said. 'Get our coats please.'

I stood. 'Right, I'm coming with you.'

They both protested immediately.

'No way!' Harley said. 'You can't do that, Trinity. You know that, now you've got your magic back, you're a target for the Pendragons. They'd sense you if you left the island and you could be attacked. I'm sorry but we can't risk that.' She hurried out of the room, presumably to fetch hers and Keely's coats.

'But—'

'No,' Keely said firmly. 'Sorry, I really am. I know it must be frustrating for you, but there it is. Hurry up, Harley,' she called. 'We need to catch Killian before he leaves in the boat.'

'Can't you zap there?' I asked sulkily, as Harley returned and threw Keely her coat.

'We have no emotional connection to Gerrenporth,' Harley explained, buttoning up her own coat. 'Not strong enough to zap there anyway. We can zap to Killian, though.'

She nodded at her twin. 'Ready?'

'Ready.'

They both gave me apologetic smiles.

'We won't be long, Trinity,' Harley said. 'I really am sorry, but it's for your own safety.'

Sure it was. I watched them go and threw myself back on the armchair, furious with myself for being so feeble. I shouldn't have let them dictate to me what I could or couldn't do. I mean, look at me! Here I was, half witch, half fae, and I



was a prisoner. I'd been stuck on this island for ages, with no way off because of Havok Pendragon. My uncle.

I wished I could get my hands on him. He'd made my life a misery. He'd robbed me of my parents and caused my mom to go on the run halfway across the world. Now he was making damn sure I couldn't even set foot off this island.

I thought about my brother and sister. They were somewhere in Gerrenporth right now. Or maybe they were even on this island. But they were out of reach. Working together to find the sword. Doing something useful. Contributing.

I couldn't just sit here and wait around. It wasn't fair to expect me to.

Eyeing the clock thoughtfully, a plan began to take shape. I couldn't zap to the boat. After what had happened to my real mother and to Rodor St Clair, I wasn't going to risk being out on the open water.

Even so, there was nothing to stop me zapping to Gerrenporth, was there? I had no emotional connection to the place, but I didn't need one. I was half fae and the fae could transport themselves wherever they liked. I'd give Keely and Harley time to arrive on the mainland then I'd go straight to them, and they wouldn't be able to stop me. We could find Lyrica together then zap right back here. Job done. I wouldn't be off the island long. Surely Havok Pendragon wouldn't have time to do anything, even if he sensed me?

I knew Sirius and Emrick wouldn't approve, and I also knew Keely and Harley would be furious when I turned up. Even so, I had to do something useful. I was going nuts just sitting around waiting for something to happen. Wulfram and Romy were playing their part, and I needed to play mine.

My mind made up, I watched the clock impatiently, trying to figure out how long it would take the twins and Killian to arrive on shore. I grabbed my coat, keeping my fingers crossed that no one would spot me wearing it. If they did, I'd just say I was going for a walk to stretch my legs. It was partly true. I'd have to walk to The Fool's Journey anyway.

Finally, I figured they must have landed by now. I steadied myself and whispered, ‘Gerrenporth, where Keely and Harley are.’

Almost immediately I heard the cry of seagulls and the buzz of a busy coastal town. Even in winter this was a bustling place, and as I looked around and realised I was down a side street that led to the main shopping street I thought it was no wonder it sounded busy. There were plenty of people going in and out of shops and peering through the windows at the goods on display.

‘I don’t believe this!’

I flinched as my arm was grabbed and I was pulled into a shop doorway. The twins were glaring at me.

‘What do you think you’re doing?’ Keely demanded. ‘How could you be so stupid?’

‘I couldn’t just hang around waiting for you to get back,’ I protested. ‘Would you?’

‘Yes,’ Harley hissed. ‘I would.’

Keely slumped a little. ‘No,’ she admitted. ‘I’d have done exactly what you’ve just done.’

‘Well then,’ I said.

‘I give up!’ Harley shook her head. ‘You’ve put us all in danger, you realise that? Let’s get to The Fool’s Journey as quickly as possible. We don’t want to hang around here any longer than necessary.’ She tutted. ‘I was going to do some Christmas shopping, too. That’s out of the question now.’

‘Sorry,’ I said sheepishly.

‘You’re here now,’ Keely said. ‘Come on. We need to cut through that alley there. The Fool’s Journey’s just at the end.’

‘Where’s Killian?’ I asked as we walked.

‘Talking to fellow boat lovers in the harbour,’ Harley said, smiling. ‘He loves it there. Being on the water is his favourite thing.’

‘Apart from you,’ Keely said, nudging her.

‘Hmm. I wouldn’t put money on it.’

I was about to ask her what she meant, but at that moment Keely nodded. ‘There it is.’

The Fool’s Journey was a squat building, long but low, with a slate roof, whitewashed walls, thick black beams, and small, leaded windows.

I whistled in appreciation. ‘Wow, that’s old.’

‘Yeah,’ Keely said wistfully. ‘I wonder if it was around when Wulfram went back? I mean—oh, you know what I mean.’

I gave her a sympathetic look and we all headed into the pub. It was certainly ancient, and quite dark and gloomy, despite strings of fairy lights looped around the beams, and the multitude of wall lamps that tried valiantly to make the place look brighter.

There were few customers. Two old guys were sitting at a table nursing half pints of beer and chatting. Other than that the place was empty.

‘I recognise him,’ Harley said, nudging Keely. She nodded over to the bar where a man was leaning on the counter, reading a newspaper. ‘He was here before. Remember him? He told Lyrica off for bugging us.’

‘No sign of Lyrica, though,’ Keely said, disappointed.

‘Maybe she’s in the back?’ I asked hopefully.

We approached the bar, and I cleared my throat. The man folded the newspaper and smiled at us.

‘Good afternoon, ladies. What can I get you?’

‘Actually,’ Keely said, ‘we’re looking for someone. Is Lyrica here by any chance?’

The man rolled his eyes. ‘Lyrica? What’s she done now?’

‘Nothing! We just needed to speak to her,’ I assured him.

He shook his head. ‘Well, you’re out of luck then. Lyrica left here a few months ago. Just took off, she did. Left me with

no notice whatsoever. There's gratitude for you, after all I've done for her. I only took her on out of respect for her old dad, you know. He used to own this place.'

'Do you know where she's working now?' Keely asked hopefully.

He shrugged. 'Nowhere round here. If you ask me, she's done a bunk. Left Cornwall. She kept muttering about it. Very odd sort of woman is Lyrica.' He tapped his temple. 'Not all there, if you know what I mean. Away with the fairies, and that's putting it politely.'

He frowned suddenly. 'Don't I know you three? Yeah, I remember. You came in back in the spring. I remember you because she frightened you all to death giving you one of her card readings. I recall there were three of you, and I remember your red hair,' he added, nodding at me.

Clearly, he was getting me mixed up with Romy, but it didn't matter. It was an opportunity to press him for more information, which Keely seized.

'That's right. We were hoping she could help us with something.' She hesitated. 'She certainly has a gift, doesn't she?'

He snorted with laughter. 'A gift? I don't know about that. She's weird, if you ask me, and you certainly didn't seem to appreciate her back then. As I recall you got quite irate with her.'

'Yes, well,' Harley said, 'a lot's happened since then. Maybe she's been proved right.'

'I can't believe she's left,' Keely said heavily. 'Oh well. If you can't help...'

'Actually,' the man said, almost reluctantly, 'I might have something for you.'

'Really?' We all looked at each other excitedly. 'Her address?'

'Like I told you, I don't know or care where she's gone,' he reminded us patiently. 'Thing is, not long after you visited,

she had a funny turn. Ran out of the pub like something was after her. One of my customers told me they spotted her on the pier, if you can believe it, staring out to sea like she was possessed or something. Anyway, when she came back she was acting weird. Even more weird than usual. Couldn't wipe the smile off her face. I asked her what was up with her, and she just kept saying, "He has returned." I mean, it isn't normal, is it? Who's returned, I ask you? But the thing is, that same day she gave me something to pass onto you. She reminded me of you, and said I had to give this envelope to you, if you ever returned and asked for her. To be honest,' he admitted reluctantly, 'I nearly threw it away, especially after she did a bunk. Can't think why I didn't. Anyway, it's here, behind the bar.'

He rummaged around and handed us an envelope.

Keely took it, her eyes shining. 'Thank you! Was there any other message?'

'Nope. That's it. Sorry.' His eyes lit up as the door was pushed open and a couple entered. 'Tina! Pete! What can I get you? Usual, is it?'

'Come on,' Harley murmured. 'Let's get out of here and zap home. I can't wait to see what this is.'



# Chapter 41

## *Trinity*

‘I should tell Killian we’re zapping back,’ Harley said, as we left the pub and entered the alleyway, ducking as a few large seagulls flew past.

‘You could go back in the boat with him,’ Keely suggested. ‘Trinity and I will zap back.’

‘No way! You’ll open that envelope without me,’ she protested.

‘As if I’d do that,’ Keely said innocently.

I grinned. Even I knew she would, so she had no chance of convincing her twin sister otherwise.

‘How about if I take it on the boat with me?’ Harley suggested.

‘Forget it! You might drop it in the water and then where would we be?’

‘We could open it now, all together,’ I said hopefully.

The twins stared at me as if they’d forgotten I was there.

‘We need to get you home, fast,’ Keely said, slipping the envelope in her coat pocket. ‘Never mind this. Harley, you go and tell Killian what’s happened, and I’ll get Trinity back to the island before—’

She broke off as a man stepped in front of us. I hadn’t even noticed him in the alley.

‘Good day, ladies.’

He had jet black hair and pale green eyes and was wearing a suit that wouldn’t have looked out of place in the nineteen-

forties. I wouldn't have been at all surprised if he'd offered us cheap nylons and chocolate. The word spiv was made for him.

'Excuse me,' Harley said politely, 'we need to go.'

'Go where?' the man asked. 'Back to that island by any chance?'

Goosebumps broke out on my arms. I risked a sideways glance at the twins and saw they looked frozen.

'Who are you?' Keely managed.

'Don't worry, I'm not interested in you, witch,' he drawled. He turned to me and gave me an oily grin. 'Now you, you're a different matter entirely. It's you I'm interested in, naturally. Say hello to your old uncle, Trinity.'

I felt sick with terror.

'Havok Pendragon!' Keely gasped.

'I'm flattered you know my name,' he said, giving her a slight bow.

'I know your name all right,' she said, through gritted teeth. 'You're responsible for the death of my father.'

'And my parents,' I said, having finally somehow managed to find my voice. I was shaking like a leaf and knew I had to focus. I needed to get back to the island. It was me he was after, not the twins. I had to get away, fast.

No matter how I tried, though, all I could see were his pale green eyes, staring insolently at me.

'Your parents,' he said, shaking his head slightly. 'I don't know what my brother expected. I mean, what did he think I'd do? He left me with no alternative when he married that witch.' His lip curled as he said the word. 'And then when I found out there were children. A Great Guardian! How could someone as pathetic as Ashen produce one of those? I've been very patient; you can't say I haven't. But you must know, Linnet Pendragon, that I can't let you live. I can't let any of you live.'



‘All this,’ Harley said, ‘just to stop witches and fae living in peace. What’s your problem? I mean, apart from your dreadful fashion sense, obviously. You do realise that if you’re trying to blend in with humans you really ought to stop wearing clothes that are eighty years out of date.’

A clearly livid Havok pushed his face too close to hers for comfort. ‘My problem is that witches are scum. Traitors. We had it all! We were the Shining Ones, the Gentry! Then witches and humans teamed up and drove us out of our land, into the woods, beneath the ground, and under the sea. We became fae. Have you any idea how humiliating that is? We were gods! We were worshipped! Now we hide away like criminals.’

‘If you behave like criminals, what do you expect?’ I snapped, terrified, but unable to stomach his ranting any longer. ‘Time has moved on. Witches and fae have lived in peace since Arthur’s day. Humans have forgotten we exist. Let it go.’

‘Since Arthur’s day? You clearly don’t know your history,’ Havok sneered.

‘Oh, we do,’ Keely said. ‘We know how the Pendragons tried to stir up war back in the seventeenth century, but it didn’t work, did it?’

‘Thanks to that nephew of mine,’ Havok growled. ‘Great Guardian! Guardian of who, eh? Not the fae. Traitor. If he was on our side he’d be slaughtering the witches. What do you expect when he’s half witch himself? But I’ll tell you this much, girlies, we came close. We came so close. And now we’re closer still. The witches are in turmoil, demanding retribution for the death of their beloved leader, Zephyr Ambrose, and the fae are in a state of fear, dreading what they will do in revenge.’

He stepped back, suddenly smiling. ‘I love fear,’ he admitted. ‘It leads to so much hatred. Give people something to be afraid of and the job is almost done. It’s only a matter of time until the witches attack innocent fae, and then...’ He gave a sigh of satisfaction. ‘No one will be able to stop it.’

I eyed Keely nervously, and she reached for my hand. It was clear to both of us that we had to zap out of here. Fast. We tried to catch Harley's eye, but she was too focused on Havok. Her arms were folded, and she had a challenging look in her eyes. I wondered what had gotten into her. Harley wasn't the confrontational type, but right now she looked fearless.

'That's what you think,' she said. 'Clearly you're not as sure of that as you're making out. If you were, you wouldn't be so terrified of your own nieces and nephew. Deep down you know they're going to stop you, don't you? Tell me, that day in Whitby, was it Zephyr or Trinity you sent Malliss to kill?

That seemed to hit a nerve. Havok's eyes narrowed, and he looked as if he'd like to kill her, the way he'd killed poor Zephyr.

'Both.'

'Oh dear. That was a big fat failure then, wasn't it?'

What the hell was she doing? Winding up Havok Pendragon didn't seem like such a good idea to me. I gave Keely a desperate look. We were both trying to focus on getting out of here, but we were too worried about Harley to do it. Even if we succeeded, how could we leave her behind? And she didn't seem to even notice what we were trying to do.

'So how did you know they'd be in Whitby?' she demanded. 'Go on. Who told you they'd be there?'

He smirked. 'Wouldn't you like to know?'

'Yes,' she said. 'I would. I should have thought the fact that I asked you the question would have given you a clue.'

'What a pity you'll never know the answer then,' he said.

'Why? Are you too scared to tell us? I can't believe the mighty Havok Pendragon is too frightened of a witch to tell me who tipped you off about Trinity and Zephyr being in Whitby.'

'I'm not scared of any witch,' Havok said. 'You, on the other hand, should be terrified. I was going to let you two

witches go, but now I think I've changed my mind. Such a pretty face. I wonder what it will look like when I've aged it a hundred years or so?'

I couldn't move. My legs were rooted to the spot with fear, and no matter how many times I whispered, 'Peloryon Island,' to myself, nothing was happening.

'You think you can leave?' Havok said, smirking at me. 'Your powers are still weak. I can easily block them. You're going nowhere.'

We were trapped. He grinned and held up his hand. A sickly green light emanated from his fingers and then...

I stared in astonishment as a white light encased Harley, Keely, and me. The green light coming from Havok was completely ineffective. It couldn't penetrate this barrier. But where was it coming from?

Havok's face was a picture. If I hadn't been so scared I'd have laughed. His eyes widened in shock, then he glared at something behind us.

'You! I should have known the witch wouldn't travel anywhere without her traitorous husband!'

Sirius? I managed to turn and heaved a huge sigh of relief as I saw Killian standing there, fury on his face. In fact, he looked so angry I wondered if we were safe standing between him and Havok after all, despite the magical barrier he was holding in place.

'Traitorous?' he spat. 'The only traitor around here is you, Pendragon. You'd bring our people into war. You'd happily stand by and let thousands of fae be slaughtered, all to satisfy your lust for power. You're deluded. Even if there were no more witches, do you seriously believe you'll ever become Shining Ones again?'

'Over time, yes!' Havok cried. 'Our descendants will once again rule these lands. We'll live openly, no more hiding away. Our powers will grow until, one day, we'll be where we were once before, and no one will ever take that away from us again.'

‘You know the problem with that little plan, Pendragon?’ Killian said.

‘Enlighten me.’

‘It’s complete bollocks!’ Killian shot something towards Havok and yelled at us, ‘Go! Back to the island, now!’

We didn’t need telling twice. We each grasped Harley’s hand, and I closed my eyes and thought of the safe and warm living room of Peloryon House.

We were home.

I almost fell on the sofa and Keely and Harley collapsed at either side of me.

‘Bloody hell!’ Keely could barely breathe. ‘Thank goodness for Killian.’ She rounded on her sister. ‘What were you thinking? Why were you goading Havok like that?’

‘I wanted to know who’d betrayed Zephyr and Trinity,’ she confessed. ‘Didn’t you?’

‘Yes, but not at the expense of making that psychopath so angry he turned me into a pickled walnut!’

‘It’s all right,’ Harley said. ‘I knew Killian had our backs.’

‘What? You knew Killian was there?’ I gasped. ‘I didn’t see him.’

‘Large seagull to our left,’ she said, managing a faint smile. ‘Pecking around, looking for bits of food. Or so it seemed.’

‘How on earth did you know that was Killian?’ Keely demanded.

Harley shrugged. ‘I don’t know. I just did. On our honeymoon he promised me that, now we were married, I’d always be able to spot him, no matter what form he took. And it seems he was right. I just knew he was there. That’s what gave me the confidence to stand my ground.’

‘Do you think he’s all right?’ I asked anxiously.

‘He’d better be,’ Harley said grimly. ‘But don’t worry. I think he’s more than a match for any fae.’ Her eyes gleamed suddenly. ‘Wasn’t he amazing? Honestly, he made me go all funny inside. He’s never looked sexier.’

Keely rolled her eyes. ‘Too much information.’

‘I’m so sorry,’ I murmured. ‘I was such an idiot. I should never have followed you to Gerrenporth.’

‘No,’ Keely said. ‘You shouldn’t. But I can’t say I blame you. Like I said, I’d probably have done the same. Even so, it’s shaken me up. I thought we’d just be able to zap away if we were confronted by the Pendragons, but we weren’t focused enough. We were too scared. We need to work on that. All of us.’

‘And he blocked my transporting powers,’ I added. ‘I really wasn’t expecting that.’

‘The envelope!’ Harley said. ‘Please tell me you’ve still got it.’

‘Of course I have.’ Keely pulled it out of her coat pocket. ‘Shall we?’

We both nodded eagerly, and Keely carefully tore open the sealed envelope. We stared at the contents on her lap in some confusion.

‘Okay,’ Harley said. ‘I wasn’t expecting that.’

‘Is that it?’ I said, disappointed. ‘What does it mean?’

‘Tarot cards,’ Keely said in disgust. ‘The ace of pentacles, and the tower. Meaning what? Jeez, all that effort for this! Thanks a lot, Lyrica.’

‘It must mean something,’ Harley said firmly. ‘We just have to figure out what.’

‘Maybe Emrick knows the meaning of them,’ I suggested. ‘He seems to know everything else.’

‘It’s odd really,’ Keely mused. ‘I mean, when Lyrica read our tarot cards in the spring, she used a different pack. Remember? She said they were her own design. But these—

they're traditional tarot, so we just have to find out what the interpretation of them is and then we can find the message. Hopefully.'

We looked up, relieved to see Killian standing there.

'Well,' he said, 'that was fun.'

Harley jumped up and threw her arms around him. 'You were magnificent! I'm so glad you're all right. And you were right, I knew it was you!'

He grinned and hugged her back. 'I gathered. The way you were winding him up... I was going to throw a barrier round you earlier, but I was so fascinated by what you were saying I clean forgot.' He laughed. 'He didn't know what he was dealing with, did he? Taking on you three. Maybe he'll think twice before he does that again.'

'More likely he'll bring reinforcements next time,' I said gloomily. 'I really am sorry. I put you all in danger.'

'Ah, think nothing of it. Who can blame you for wanting to get off the island once in a while,' Killian said, waving a hand at me. 'I'd be going stir crazy, too, if I were you. No harm done. And, sure, you did me a favour in a way. I managed to plant a little surprise on Havok that might come in useful in the future.'

'Meaning what?' Keely asked, intrigued.

'I microchipped him,' Killian said gleefully. 'Like a dog! Whenever he shows up within thirty miles of here I'll know about it, and I'll be able to track him. That should keep you safe if you fancy any more jaunts to the seaside.'

'Oh, Killian, you're amazing!' Harley squealed. She turned to us and gave us an apologetic look. 'Do you mind if we leave you to it for a while? I have—something to talk to Killian about.'

Keely smirked. 'Sure you do. See you later, kids.'

Harley and a highly delighted Killian headed upstairs, and Keely threw herself back on the sofa. She blew out her cheeks.

‘Well, at least they seem loved up again,’ she said. She eyed the tarot cards glumly. ‘Now we just have to figure this out. The ace of pentacles and the tower. What on earth is Lyrica trying to tell us?’





## Chapter 42

### *Trinity*

The entire Castle Clair family joined us for dinner that night. It seemed none of them could settle. They were all deeply anxious about what was happening back in the seventeenth century with Wulfram, Romy, and Blaise. I guess they thought they'd rather be here with us, chewing things over, than fretting back at Castle Lodge.

Once Astra, Seren, and Aither were put to bed, we all settled down to eat and discuss the events of the day. Naturally, I'd had to confess what had happened in Gerrenporth, and I was in everyone's bad books.

Sirius was furious with me and went on and on about how reckless and stupid I'd been. Ewella was in tears, and I wasn't sure if it was because of fear of what might have happened to her daughters, or rage at my crazy behaviour.

'No harm done,' Killian assured everyone. 'I was there to protect them, and now that I've put the tracker on Havok I'll be there for them every time.'

'If they stay within thirty miles of the island,' Raiden reminded him. 'Once they're out of that radius we'll have no way of knowing if he's near them.'

'And that's only Havok,' Sirius added. 'What if he sends Malliss to do his dirty work? Or that cousin of his. What's his name? Spite.'

'Wow, you know how to bring a mood down,' Killian said glumly.

Harley squeezed his hand. 'Well, I think you were brilliant,' she said.

He grinned at her. ‘Thank you, mo ghrá. That’s all I need to hear.’

‘The point is,’ Sirius said, ‘you could have been killed. It was sheer luck that Killian decided to leave the harbour and go and look for you all near the pub. You just can’t take risks like that again, Trinity!’

‘So what’s the alternative?’ I demanded, my eyes blurry with tears of humiliation and frustration. ‘I can’t just sit here on this island while my brother and sister are somewhere back in time, trying to save the world! Have you any idea how inadequate that makes me feel?’

‘You’re no different to the rest of us,’ Keely assured me. ‘I feel useless, too. My boyfriend and sister are searching for the Sword of Feidhlim. They’re trying to find the Tremaynes, and hopefully Wulfram will head to Scotland and reassure the Seelie Court that there’s no need for war. Meanwhile, I’m sitting here, staring at two tarot cards, and realising I can’t even fathom what they mean! Way to go, Keely.’

‘Tarot cards?’ Celeste asked with interest. ‘From where?’

Briefly, we explained what Lyrica had left for us in the envelope and showed everyone the cards we’d found.

‘I know a bit about tarot cards,’ Mrs Greenwood said, most unexpectedly.

‘You do?’ Castor sounded amazed. ‘Why would you know owt about them?’

She shrugged. ‘It made me feel like one of the gang. Silly, I know, but when your husband and daughter are witches it can leave you feeling a bit out of things. I thought I’d take up tarot reading. See if it worked.’

‘And did it, Nan?’ Benedict asked, his eyes wide with astonishment.

‘No,’ she admitted. ‘It was absolute rubbish. Mind you,’ she added hastily, ‘I’m not saying it wouldn’t work in the right hands. I clearly don’t have the gift. But I did study the craft, and I do know the meanings of the cards.’

‘So what do they mean, Mrs Greenwood?’ I asked eagerly.

She frowned. ‘What were they again, dear?’

‘The ace of pentacles and the tower,’ Keely said.

Mrs Greenwood inhaled sharply. ‘I’ll have to give some thought to what the ace of pentacles means,’ she admitted. ‘But I do know the tower is worrying. May I see it more closely?’

Keely passed her the card, and Mrs Greenwood peered at it. ‘Disaster, you see? Disaster is either striking now or has already struck. Or,’ she added in hushed tones, ‘it’s about to strike. You see the lightning strike, and the person falling from the tower? Karma. That’s what that is, my dears. You mark my words. Like a flash of lightning, the old order will be toppled, and there will be a fresh start for everyone.’

‘Well,’ Keely said hesitantly, ‘that’s good, right?’

‘Oh yes,’ Mrs Greenwood agreed. ‘It’s just getting to that point. And to get to that point there will be upheaval and revolution. Madness, despair, instability. Oh, we’ve definitely got troublesome times ahead of us.’ She beamed round at us all, looking almost gleeful. ‘But I’m sure it will all end happily.’

None of us knew what to say to that.

Emrick coughed and said, ‘Well, that was fascinating. Thank you. I must say, Mrs Greenwood, this Bakewell tart is delicious.’

‘Oh,’ she said, beaming, ‘thank you so much. I’m rather partial to it myself, I will admit.’

‘The ace of pentacles symbolises a talent which, if tended carefully, will reward you with future fulfilment,’ Sky said. ‘It represents the first step to a goal. The first step in a journey of a thousand miles, so to speak.’

‘How on earth do you know that?’ Star said, sounding impressed.

Sky waved her mobile phone. ‘Just googled it.’

‘Why didn’t I think of that?’ Keely groaned.

‘That was it,’ Mrs Greenwood said, nodding happily. ‘I knew it was something like that.’

‘But what does it have to do with anything?’ Harley asked, puzzled. ‘Why would Lyrica leave those particular cards for us?’

‘When you decided to see her,’ Celeste asked Keely, ‘what was in your mind? What motivated you to visit her after all these months?’

Keely thought about it. ‘A few reasons,’ she said. ‘But if I’m being honest, the real motivation was finding the keys. You know, the keys to the dimension box where the dragons live? I want to surprise Wulfram when he gets home. He’s already got so much on his shoulders, and I thought, if we could just find the keys that would be one less thing for him to worry about. Well, two less things really.’

‘The keys,’ Celeste said thoughtfully. ‘It’s funny, because I’ve been giving a lot of thought to those lately, too. It’s like they’re in my head and I can’t shift them. Something I saw. Something I heard. It’s most frustrating.’

‘Wasn’t one of the keys a pentacle?’ Sky asked suddenly.

We all looked at each other.

‘It was! Is!’ Star nodded. ‘What was it again?’

‘The Silver Pentacle Key,’ Emrick said. ‘The key given to the fae. You think the Ace of Pentacles has something to do with that?’

‘It might,’ I said. ‘If we can just figure out what it has to do with the meaning of the cards.’

‘Maybe Lyrica knows where the key is,’ Keely said eagerly. ‘That’s what she’s trying to tell us! We just have to work out the clues.’

We all deflated, realising none of us had the first idea what the tarot cards meant in relation to that. No amount of looking it up on Google was going to help with that.

‘The thing is,’ Celeste said cautiously, ‘I keep having flashbacks to a memory I saw in Blaise’s head when I memory-walked. And the more I think about it, the more I wonder if it has anything to do with the keys.’

We all turned to her excitedly.

‘But, darling,’ Iliana said in surprise, ‘why didn’t you tell us that before?’

‘Well,’ she said reluctantly, ‘there has been a lot going on. And I might be wrong. It’s just a vague feeling, that’s all. But it connects with something Wulfram told us ages ago, about what he experienced in Avalon.’

‘Go on,’ Keely said eagerly. ‘Tell us.’

‘Well, I might be completely off track here,’ Celeste said reluctantly, ‘but this idea has lodged in my brain, and it won’t go, so I might as well tell you all. Remember when Wulfram was in St Michael’s Tower in the Avalon version of that place?’

Keely shuddered. ‘Do I! He was in such a state.’

‘Yes,’ Celeste said, ‘because he saw the death of Richard Whiting, the last abbot of Glastonbury Abbey. And he also saw, if you recall, a vision of a golden chalice, that changed form and became a key. The Golden Chalice Key. The key given to the witches by Arthur for safekeeping.’

‘Yes,’ Raiden said doubtfully, ‘but what does that have to do with anything?’

‘When I memory-walked in Blaise’s mind, I saw him as a little boy, sitting on Titus’s knee. Titus was talking to him, and I couldn’t hear what he was saying, but he was telling him something. Something important. Something Blaise needed to know. The next moment I found myself alone at Glastonbury Abbey, looking down at the plaque marking the site of Arthur’s grave.’

‘Arthur’s grave?’ Sky asked. ‘But I thought he was buried in Avalon?’

‘He was,’ Celeste said patiently. ‘But centuries ago, in 1191, monks at Glastonbury Abbey claimed to have discovered two bodies—the bodies of Arthur and Gwynnever, or Guinevere. It was hailed as quite the discovery, and their bodies were reburied with great ceremony in a magnificent tomb. In 1278 the tomb was opened for a visit by King Edward I and Queen Eleanor, that’s how important it was deemed to be. Now, of course, there’s nothing left of the tomb, or any bones, or anything else really. Except for this plaque which marks the spot where it’s believed the tomb was.’

We all waited for her to get to the point.

‘I can’t help thinking that whatever Titus told Blaise had something to do with the key. Do you think it can be a coincidence that those are the two visions Wulfram was given while in the Avalon version of the Tor? They must be connected—Abbot Whiting’s murder and the chalice key. What if Richard Whiting knew something about its whereabouts? What if he was killed so brutally because he refused to give up the information he knew? And what Titus told Blaise had something to do with Arthur’s tomb. What if that’s where it was buried all those years?’

‘But as you say,’ Iliana said, ‘there’s nothing left of the tomb or any bones now. Even if the key was buried with whoever’s body that really was, it doesn’t help us now, does it? Because it’s long gone sadly.’

‘But what if its whereabouts was told to someone?’ Celeste asked. ‘What if, somehow, the message was given to the St Clairs, and Titus passed that information on to Blaise in the form of a story? Because that’s the impression I got. That he was telling Blaise a story.’

‘It’s a possibility,’ Sirius said doubtfully. ‘But even if it’s true, it still doesn’t help us. Blaise isn’t here any more to tell us, remember? He’s gone back to 1673, and we can’t ask him what he remembers.’

Celeste shook her head. ‘He doesn’t remember any more than I saw. The memory is long gone. A wisp. A fragment. But

don't you see? If the story was passed from Titus to Blaise, maybe it was passed to other members of the St Clair family.'

'What I don't get is why Titus told Blaise,' Raiden said. 'Blaise was Rafe's son. Why didn't he tell his own son?'

'Maybe he did,' Celeste said patiently. 'But remember, Titus didn't have a son until quite late in life. Maybe he'd given up hope of having one of his own and decided to pass the information on to Rafe's son instead. Or maybe Titus only told it as a fairy tale, not believing there was any truth in it. Maybe he'd been told it in the same fashion. Who knows?'

She looked round at us all. 'It's a possibility, isn't it? And if it's true, then it means that we have a chance of finding the Golden Chalice Key.'

'How?' Raiden shook his head. 'I certainly don't remember any such story being told to me. I would have passed it to Sirius if I had.'

'No, but you're Rafe's descendant,' Celeste said. 'And when Titus had children, if there was any truth in the story, it would be Titus who passed the information on to his own line. Don't you think?'

There was a silence and we all turned as one to look at Castor.

He spluttered with laughter. 'Rubbish! Sorry, kiddo, but you're barking up the wrong tree. I'd have remembered. 'Course I'd have remembered if my dad had told me about some key.'

'But would you?' Celeste persisted. 'It's been hundreds of years since this story began. I expect your own father and even your grandfather believed it to be nothing but a charming fairy tale. If you attached no importance to it, and neither did they, would you really remember it all these years later?'

'Well, even if they did tell me,' Castor pointed out, 'I don't remember, so that's that. It's gone, for good or bad.'

'Not necessarily,' Hector said quietly.

‘Celeste can memory-walk again,’ Jethro said excitedly. ‘She can go into your memories and see if that particular memory is lodged in there somewhere, Castor!’

‘She bloody well cannot!’ Castor spluttered indignantly. ‘Them memories are private. You keep out, thanks very much.’

‘Runa says Celeste might be onto something,’ Keely said excitedly. ‘She says I’ve got to make you agree, Castor.’

‘Does she indeed?’ Castor grunted.

‘Sid says the same!’ Harley’s eyes lit up. ‘He says if you don’t agree he’ll set Betty on you.’

‘Like I’m scared of a guinea pig!’ Castor snorted but I saw a distinct look of fear in his eyes which amused me.

‘Oh, Castor,’ Mrs Greenwood said, shaking her head. ‘Don’t be so silly. This could be important. Vital. If you let Celeste do this,’ she added, batting her eyelashes at him, ‘I’ll bake you a coffee and walnut cake. Your favourite.’

Castor scowled. ‘You fight dirty, don’t you?’

‘I promise,’ Celeste said, ‘that I won’t linger in there. I’m getting better at this all the time, and I’ll try my best to head straight for your childhood. See if I can find the memory I need and nothing else.’

‘You’d better,’ he said.

She beamed at him.

‘So you’ll let me do it?’

‘Like I’ve got any choice,’ he said grumpily. ‘You’ll never let me get a minute’s peace until you do. I know you lot. How do I get myself into these situations? Here I am, minding my own business and now I’m going to have someone walking round in my mind. I must want me head read.’

‘That,’ said Celeste with a smile, ‘is exactly what I’m about to do. Thank you, Castor. It might not work, and it might be a false lead, but it’s all we’ve got for now. Maybe your memories will change everything!’





## Chapter 43

### *Trinity*

We all waited anxiously in the living room while Celeste took an extremely reluctant Castor upstairs. Hector went with them just in case Celeste got stuck again and needed guidance to get out of Castor's mind.

'Well,' Aurora said, munching happily on leftover Bakewell tart, 'this has turned out to be jolly exciting, hasn't it?'

I was delighted to see she'd regained her appetite. For a while there, I'd feared we'd lost the old Aurora. Grief and anger had overwhelmed her, understandably, but she was getting more like her old self every day. I'd missed her. I was determined that, somehow, we'd find out who'd betrayed her father and me, and we'd make them pay.

Keely was still obsessing over the tarot cards.

'If Castor knows the whereabouts of the witch's key,' she said, 'we could find it before Wulfram gets back. And if we can just work out what Lyrica means by these tarot clues we could also find the fae key. Imagine how relieved and happy he'd be when he got home.'

I knew she was obsessing because she was worried about Wulfram and missing him. I understood that. I was worried about him and missing him, too. I couldn't even let myself think about Romy, because the grief at losing her for good was all too real. I'd had her in my life for such a short time. It must be heartbreaking for Keely and Harley. No wonder Keely needed to focus on something else.

Thoughts, naturally, turned to what the three of them might be doing in 1673.

‘Do you think the island’s returned yet?’ Sky pondered. ‘They’re going to be jolly stuck until it does.’

‘It better have,’ Star said. ‘We want them home before Yule.’

‘But we don’t know for sure when the island returned,’ Killian said glumly. ‘And I’ve asked the folks back home if they can remember when the Seelie Court meeting took place, but they can’t. They know the year, and they know it was winter, but that’s it. We don’t follow your calendar. Days are meaningless to us, as are all these festivals you celebrate—Yule and Christmas and the like. So, given that it was winter and in 1673, we only can say for sure that it’s some time in December. It might be the very last day of the month for all we know.’

‘Don’t say that!’ Keely gasped. ‘I need Wulfram home before Christmas. It would be awful without him.’

‘He’ll be home,’ Harley said comfortingly. ‘I’m sure of it. And I’m sure he’s happily ensconced on the island right now, having supper with the Tremaynes in whatever version of this house existed back then.’

We all looked around, as if we’d see the shadows of the past among us somehow. It was beyond weird to think that, somewhere in time, the Tremaynes might be sitting with Wulfram, Romy and Blaise in this very spot.

‘Do you think Castor does know anything?’ Mrs Greenwood asked wistfully. ‘I feel a bit mean, bullying him into letting Celeste walk through his mind. I’m not sure I’d fancy it, if I’m being honest. Some things should remain private, after all.’

‘Celeste’s a good person, Nan,’ Benedict reassured her. ‘She’ll be discreet and as careful as she can be. Don’t worry.’

‘And if Castor hasn’t got that memory,’ Star said, ‘what do we do then? We’re running out of options.’

‘Someone must know where the keys are,’ Keely said desperately. ‘They can’t just have vanished off the face of the earth. I mean, Arthur entrusted one each to the fae and the

witches. How could they have been so careless as to lose them? If we do find them, I'll never let them out of my sight, and I'll make sure their whereabouts are passed to someone responsible.'

'Easy to say,' Emrick said with a wry smile. 'Those keys were given in the sixth century, Keely. That's a long time to keep something safe.'

'Evidently,' she said coldly. 'Useless idiots. Fancy letting them be lost! Now look at all the work we're going to have to do to find them.'

'Let's just hope no one else has beaten us to it,' Jethro said glumly.

'Jethro!' Sky cried. 'Don't even think that, let alone say it!'

We all fell silent as we heard footsteps on the stairs. A shaky looking Celeste entered the living room, helped by Hector who had his arms around her, supporting her.

'Any of that Bakewell tart left, Mrs Greenwood?' he asked. 'She needs something to eat, fast.'

Unfortunately, Aurora had just stuffed the last piece into her mouth, but Ewella had baked that afternoon and hurriedly brought in a chocolate cake, which not only satisfied Celeste but made Aurora's eyes light up like Christmas trees.

'Where's Castor?' Mrs Greenwood asked anxiously.

'He's asleep,' Hector said. 'Don't worry, he's fine. He's just resting. Evidently, having your memories walked around in takes it out of you.'

'How are you feeling, darling?' Iliana asked, leaning towards Celeste.

Celeste was busy eating chocolate cake, but she nodded and put her thumb up to indicate she was okay. We all let her eat in peace, even though we were bursting with impatience, and Ewella made us all cups of hot chocolate while we waited, which we were very grateful for.

At last, Celeste was ready to talk.

‘Okay,’ she said, leaning back in her chair. ‘So I was right. Titus evidently did pass the story on to his son, and that was handed down through the generations. It’s quite a tale. The witch’s key—the Golden Chalice Key—ended up in the possession of the abbots of Glastonbury Monastery. I don’t know how that happened, or who had it before they did unfortunately. It was discovered when the two bodies of “Arthur” and “Guinevere” were recovered. The key was removed, and the bodies reburied. The secret stayed with the abbots through the years, but rumours circulated that it was in their keeping. The dissolution of the monasteries was the perfect excuse for the authorities to try to extract the information from Abbot Richard Whiting, but he was exceptionally brave. He refused to disclose its whereabouts and that’s why his execution was so brutal and so public. It was like a warning to whoever else knew where the key was hidden. Before he was arrested, knowing what would happen to him, he entrusted the key to his childhood friend, Sir John St Clair, great great grandfather of Blaise and Bevil. Their grandfather, Sir Edward, passed it to his youngest son, Titus.’

She took a sip of hot chocolate. ‘In his old age, Titus found a safe place for it. Titus’s son helped him put it there, and from then on the story was passed down to the next generation. Sadly, as the years came and went, it became a sort of family myth. No one really believed it to be true and no one attached any real importance to it. Hence, Castor having no memory of even being told it. Luckily for us, he *was* told it, and that memory stayed there, buried deep.’

‘Then you know where the key is?’ Keely asked hopefully.

‘I do,’ Celeste said. ‘That is, providing no one’s found it and removed it, of course. It’s buried with Titus’s wife. If we want to get it back we’re going to have to open her tomb. Not a pleasant job.’

‘Ugh!’ Sky wrinkled her nose. ‘Seriously?’

‘Where is this tomb?’ Keely asked.

‘It’s in a little village just outside Beverley in East Yorkshire. Remember, Titus lived near Beverley? Well, his wife is entombed in a small churchyard a few miles from the town.’

‘Right,’ Keely said. ‘Tonight I’m heading there to find it. Who’s coming with me?’

‘Tonight?’ Sky cried. ‘But it will be dark!’

‘Do you think we’d be better off doing it in broad daylight?’ Harley said. ‘I’m sure no one will object to us opening up a tomb, will they?’

‘But—but it’s going to be so creepy,’ Aurora said with a shudder.

‘We don’t have a choice.’ Keely shrugged. ‘I’ll go alone if necessary.’

‘You will not,’ Harley said immediately. ‘If that’s the case then I’m coming with you.’

‘Me too,’ I said.

‘Forget it!’ Sirius glared at me. ‘Have you learned nothing from this afternoon?’

‘I can go with them,’ Killian said. ‘I’ll be there to protect them if there’s any Pendragon activity.’

‘No,’ Emrick said firmly. As I opened my mouth to protest he said, ‘I’m sorry, Trinity. I know this must be frustrating for you, but you’ve already endangered lives once today. If you remain here on this island there’s no reason the Pendragons will even know there’s anything going on tonight. If you go they’ll sense it, and that will only draw attention to the hiding place of the key.’

‘But—’

‘No!’

He clearly wasn’t going to be talked out of his decision.

‘Listen to me. Your presence will attract Havok and his men to the tomb where, just possibly, the Golden Chalice Key is hidden. Can you imagine how you’d feel if, because of your

actions, the Pendragons got hold of that? And yes, Killian could be there to protect you, but why should we risk him? Even Killian is only one person. Who knows how many Pendragons might turn up looking for you? Be sensible, please.'

He was right and I knew it, but it didn't make it any easier to deal with.

I folded my arms. 'Okay,' I said gloomily. 'You win. But I want it on record that I'm sick and tired of being a prisoner.'

'Of course you are,' he said. 'And that's why we've got to focus all our energy on finding the keys while Wulfram's doing his bit to find the sword, because the sooner we have all three the sooner we can stop this warmongering by the Pendragons in its tracks and life can go back to normal. Just be patient a little longer, Trinity. Please.'

As infuriating as that was, I knew it made sense.

'Right,' Sirius said, rubbing salt in the wound. 'I'm happy to go with Keely and Harley.'

'And I'll go, too,' Star said. 'I'm good at fireballs, and if we get any unwelcome visitors I'll shoot a few in their direction.'

'I don't think that's such a good idea,' Benedict said immediately.

'Well of course you don't, Benedict,' she said. 'Nevertheless, I'm going.'

'But you're a mother, darling,' Iliana pointed out.

'What's that got to do with it?'

'Star, I really don't want to say this,' Iliana said, 'but if something were to happen to you... Think about Astra and Seren. You must put them first.'

Star opened her mouth to protest, but nothing came out. Her mother had a point and I guess she knew it.

'I should go too,' Celeste said, but Hector shook his head. 'You've been through enough and it takes it out of you. You

know you'll need to rest. You don't want to be a burden to anyone, do you?' He gave us an apologetic look. 'I would volunteer, but to be honest, raiding someone's tomb—it wouldn't be looked on kindly. It's not the sort of thing a Guardian should really be involved with.'

'Point taken. I suggest Harley, Keely, Sirius, and I go,' Killian said. 'And I'll ask Aidan to come with us, too, just in case. Two Shining Ones and three witches should be a match for the Pendragons, even if they bring lots of back up.'

We finally agreed that was the best plan.

'Midnight tonight,' Killian said. 'I'll go and tell Aidan now.'

'You'll be just like Lara Croft,' Sky said, trying to smile. 'What an adventure.'

I guess that was one word for it.





# Chapter 44

## *Trinity*

‘I think the house looks lovely,’ Emrick said, beaming round at us all. ‘The island always provides us with a splendid tree, and this one’s something special, don’t you think? Wonderful job, everyone.’

I knew he was trying to cheer us all up and I appreciated his efforts, but honestly, I wasn’t convinced it was going to work. As the days had dragged on we’d become increasingly anxious and frustrated, and I thought Keely was close to breaking point, no matter how many times we reassured her that Wulfram would be all right, and that he’d be home any day now.

As each day passed with no sign of him it became harder and harder to stay optimistic.

It was just nine days to Christmas day. The house was decorated with evergreen branches: cedar, pine, and spruce, as well as sprigs of holly and a multitude of pine cones. There were candles burning everywhere, and fairy lights adorned the house. The main attraction was the Christmas tree which Emrick had brought inside, and which we’d all helped decorate, even though our hearts weren’t really in it.

It had, after all, been over a week since Wulfram, Romy and Blaise had left. We had no idea what had happened to them, and Keely was growing increasingly anxious that Wulfram had somehow got stuck in 1673 and was unable to get back, even though Hector promised her that wouldn’t happen.

She’d begged Hector to go back there to look for him, but he’d told her he couldn’t do that. Time travel was strictly for

emergencies, and they had no proof—no reason at all—to believe that anything had happened to Wulfram.

‘We knew it might take time,’ he reminded her. ‘We don’t know the exact date the island returned to this world. They could still be in Gerrenporth waiting for it to show up. Please don’t worry, Keely. Everything will be okay.’

It was a sentiment that Emrick echoed. He’d been kindness itself to Keely and Ewella, promising them that Wulfram would be perfectly all right, and that he’d be back before they knew it. He was determined that life should go on as if everything was well.

‘We have so much to celebrate,’ he pointed out. ‘Haven’t we achieved something amazing? Think how happy Wulfram’s going to be when he gets home and finds we’ve recovered one of the keys.’

Ah yes. The key. The Golden Chalice Key to be exact.

The mission to find it had been a success. The five intrepid tomb raiders had returned triumphant, although Keely and Harley looked distinctly shaken by the whole experience.

‘We were as respectful as we could be,’ they promised Castor. ‘We disturbed Titus’s wife as little as possible. Just think, Castor. All this time the witches’ key has been kept safe in the tomb of your ancestor. Isn’t that amazing?’

Castor had to admit it was. For the first time ever, he confessed to feeling a glow of pride about his ancestry, which was lovely for him. At least Titus had accomplished one thing. He’d managed to keep the key safe, even if he had let Bevil down badly all those years ago. It didn’t quite redeem him in Castor’s eyes, but it helped.

There’d been no appearance from the Pendragons at the tomb, and I supposed that was down to me not being there. Of course, Emrick and Sirius had been right. I could never have gone there without putting both the key and everyone’s lives at risk. I don’t know what I’d been thinking.

It still left me feeling useless, though. I threw myself into getting the house ready for Christmas, determined to have

something else to focus on.

Sirius and I spent our evenings sitting with Ewella—who was also clearly struggling—and we went over the plans for our school for witch and fae children. It was good to have something to plan for and dream about. A future that was full of hope and good things. If we could just find the second key, and if Wulfram would come home safe with the sword, everything would be all right.

*If.* What a huge word those two small letters make.

‘Shall we play some carols?’ Harley suggested. She put her arm around Killian’s waist. ‘Do you know any carols?’

He shook his head. ‘Not really. Christmas isn’t a thing for us. Neither is Yule. But the winter solstice—now that matters. It’s nature, you see. We understand that. Hence the winter solstice wedding for Aidan and Derwa.’

I put some Christmas carols on to play gently in the background then sat down as Killian mused on the progress of the wedding plans.

‘It’s going to be grand,’ he said. ‘It will take place at twilight. A candlelit ceremony officiated by the leader of the High Council of Witches and by my mother. Well,’ he said frowning, ‘that’s if the Guardians get their act together and choose a new leader of the High Council. You know, they’re certainly taking their time, don’t you think? Has Hector any news on that? Because we’ve heard nothing.’

‘Nothing so far,’ Sirius said. ‘And the High Council seems to be in a bit of a mess. Let’s be honest, everything’s a mess right now.’

‘Which is why we must focus on the good things,’ Emrick said. ‘Like family, and Christmas.’

‘How’s Aidan feeling, now that his wedding day is so close?’ I asked.

Killian sighed, ‘He’s being very stoic. You know Aidan. He knows it’s his duty and he’s determined to do what they ask of him. But it’s going to be weird for him. He’s used to living a pretty normal life, you know. He loved working in The

Green Man pub. I know that sounds strange, but he loved mixing with ordinary folk, chatting about everyday things. He's not one for grandiosity or pomp and ceremony. Being married to one of the Nine Sisters... To be honest, I don't know what he's going to do with himself. I don't know what either of them are going to do with themselves. He can't live in Avalon. It's so female-centred, there's no place for him. And is Derwa going to be happy in Ballydraiocht? Really? Our ways will seem so strange to her.'

'Why can't they find their own way, like we have?' Harley asked.

He gave her a troubled look. 'Is that we've done, mo ghrá? Really?'

'Don't you think so?' she asked, sounding hurt.

'I know you've struggled,' he admitted quietly, staring down at the floor. 'To be honest with you, darlin', I thought maybe you'd decided you'd made a big mistake marrying me. I wouldn't blame you. I'm an eejit most of the time and I know it. I haven't been very understanding of how much this life has affected you. Being with me, it can't be easy. I'm sorry.'

Harley lifted his chin and turned his face to hers. 'I've never regretted marrying you,' she told him. 'It's just been a big adjustment, and it worries me, thinking of us drifting along for the rest of my life with no purpose. But that's something I'm going to have to get used to. It's the way it is, and if that's the price I pay for having you in my life then I'll happily pay it. I suppose I miss my job more than I realised I would. If I've taken that out on you, I'm sorry. But you do know I love you, don't you?'

'And I love you,' Killian said. 'And as long as we still have that—'

He broke off and turned to us, alarm in his expression. 'You hear that?'

'Hear what?' Sirius said with amusement. 'Yours and Harley's sickening declarations of love? All too clearly, I'm

afraid.'

'What is it, Killian?' Emrick asked, his face grave.

'The tracker,' Killian said, leaping to his feet. 'Havok Pendragon is somewhere close by. What in the name of the goddess is he up to now?'



## Chapter 45

### *Wulfram*

I staggered back and leaned against a tree, wondering where on earth I was. Wondering *when* on earth I was. Something had clearly gone wrong. I was supposed to be back in my own time on Peloryon Island, but looking around me it was obvious this wasn't the island. I was on the edge of some woods, and they weren't Peloryon Woods. I was very familiar with those.

I took a deep breath, trying to get my bearings. I was so tired. I just wanted to sleep but there was no chance of that until I got home. I glanced down, relieved to see I was wearing contemporary clothing again, and a quick pat of my head told me my hair was back to normal. No more long curls!

But was I in the right time? I tried to clear my thoughts and be logical, but everything I'd seen and done over the last week or so was rushing through my brain like I was in a cinema, watching some improbable fantasy film.

I sank onto the ground, my back against the tree, exhaustion overwhelming me. This was one side effect of time travel I really didn't like. At least Hector had said it would only affect me like this the first few times. I closed my eyes. I'd worry about where I was in a minute.

I felt a pang of grief and loss, knowing I'd left behind my sister and would never see her again. I thought of all the things I had to tell the people back home and wondered how they'd react. I tried to picture Keely's face. I'd missed her so much. Had she missed me?

*I need to sleep.*

*Not now! You need to go home.*

But it was no good. I couldn't make myself get up.



*Just five minutes.*

I'm not sure how long I was asleep but when I woke up I felt a little better. I got to my feet and took a few deep breaths then looked around me, noticing that just past the trees the view opened up, and I could see the sea. These woods were on a cliff top then. I turned my head slightly and frowned. A church steeple, reaching up into the wintry sky from among a cluster of rooftops. It looked familiar yet different.

*Take away those rooftops and see it standing in open countryside.*

I nodded to myself. I was in Polkayne. This was the church where...

What was I doing here, though? I'd been trying to get back to the island. Although, I vaguely recalled, as I'd focused on the date I was heading for, that wistful memory of the moment by Catherine St Clair's grave had popped into my mind. I suppose that had thrown me off course.

Well, at least Polkayne wasn't too far away from Peloryon Island. Providing I was in the right time I could transport myself home and that would be that.

Feeling slightly easier I closed my eyes and stifled a yawn, but my eyes flew open again when I heard a worrying snarling sound. I stared nervously at a large, black dog that was prowling towards me.

He wasn't on a lead and there was no sign of any owner.

*Okay, stay calm. It's just a dog.*

I swallowed nervously as a second black dog loped over to join the first.

*Okay, two dogs.*

'Nice doggies,' I said, hoping they didn't sense my fear. I liked dogs generally, but these were huge, and there was something about them that suggested they'd prefer me to a tin of Pedigree Chum any day.

'I see you've met our faithful pets.'

I dragged my gaze from the dogs, hoping I'd find some genial owner who'd assure me that Fluffy and Cuddles were absolute sweethearts and wouldn't hurt a fly. What I saw filled me with dread. Five men and a woman were standing there, smirking at me. They were wearing brown breeches, waistcoats, and white shirts, and all had red neckerchiefs, as if it was some sort of uniform.

The man at the front had black hair and pale green eyes and a nasty sneer on his face. The young woman also had black hair, but her eyes were dark. She stood, arms folded, a little behind the first man, watching me with a look of curiosity on her face. I guessed she was a lot younger than the others. Maybe only in her twenties.

Behind them stood four other men with reddish-brown hair. They were grinning at me as if they found this whole scene hilarious.

'I have,' I said, hoping my voice didn't sound too shaky. 'Very nice dogs.'

They seemed to find that funny. The dogs growled loudly. If I hadn't known better I'd have sworn they understood what I'd said and had taken it as an insult.

'Sorry,' I said, 'but would you mind calling them to you please? I must get home.'

'So soon?' The man at the front shook his head sadly. 'What a shame. And you've only just arrived.'

I narrowed my eyes. Meaning what? Had they seen me arrive back in this time? But Hector had assured me that humans never noticed the arrival of Guardians in their midst, even if we appeared right in front of them during our time travel.

My pulse began to race. *Humans never noticed.* What if these weren't human?

'I must go,' I said, taking a step forward.

The dogs padded forward, too, drool dripping from their jaws.

‘Could you call them off please?’ I repeated.

‘And why would we do that, Wulfram Pendragon?’

I stared at the man with the dark hair and my heart sank. I’d lingered too long away from the safety of the island. The Pendragons had tracked me down. I needed to get out of here, fast, but somehow, his pale green eyes were locked on me, holding me fast. I couldn’t think straight.

‘I think he’s figured out who we are,’ the woman said.

‘I think you might be right, Siofra.’ The man stepped towards me. ‘So you’re my nephew. The mighty Great Guardian. Meet the family, Wulfram.’

He half turned, waving a hand to encompass the gathering behind him.

‘Siofra’s my daughter. Your cousin. Say hello, Siofra.’

‘Hello, Wulfram,’ she said, smirking.

‘This fine chap is my cousin, Spite.’ He indicated a burly man standing a few paces behind. ‘I suppose that makes him your half cousin or second cousin or something. I can’t be bothered to work it out. What does it matter, eh? We’re all family.’

My stomach was whirling so fast I thought I was going to be sick. Why couldn’t I zap out of here? I kept repeating where I wanted to be in my mind, but nothing was happening. I had to try harder. I was in real trouble here.

‘These are our—shall we say helpers?’ He grinned. ‘Malliss, take a bow.’

‘Malliss!’

The word was out before I could stop it, and Malliss beamed at me. He was a small, wiry man, nothing like I’d imagined. I’d almost say he was puny. Yet this creature had killed Zephyr Ambrose.

‘I think your reputation has gone before you, Malliss,’ the first man said with a grin.

‘He killed Zephyr,’ I managed.

‘He did! Got quite a bonus for that, didn’t you, Malliss? Of course,’ he added with a sneer, ‘he’d have got a bigger one if he’d managed to kill Linnet Pendragon too, the way he was supposed to.’

Malliss looked abashed and Siofra gave him a gleeful look.

‘Then we have Hawdon and Greywood,’ the man finished, indicating the final two men as if he’d already lost interest in them.

‘And I gather you must be Havok Pendragon,’ I said.

‘Not as stupid as you look.’ Havok held out his hand. ‘Pleased to meet you, dear nephew.’

I didn’t move, but somehow managed to hold his gaze. Eventually he shrugged and stepped back. ‘I must say, your manners are as bad as your sister’s. She wasn’t exactly polite when I, er, bumped into her recently.’

My heart leapt into my throat. ‘Trinity! What have you done to her?’

He wagged a finger at me. ‘Wouldn’t you like to know? Of course, she wasn’t alone. She had two witches with her. Not that they were much use either. Mouthy little things. Clearly had a terrible upbringing.’

Two witches? Not Keely and Harley? If the three of them had encountered Havok and his crew they’d have stood no chance. What had I come home to? I should have been here, protecting them. What if it was too late?

‘There’s no point looking like that,’ Havok said. ‘Witches are disposable. The fewer of them in this world the better. You know, it could have been so different. If your father had just married a fae none of this would have happened. To fall in love with a witch! The disgrace of it! And now he’s saddled the world with a Great Guardian who seriously believes he can stop this war.’

He jabbed his finger in my chest. ‘Nothing can stop it now. We killed the leader of the High Council. Do you think

we don't know that witches are making plans to attack the fae? And once they do there'll be nothing you can do to end it.'

'How did you know?' I asked, aware that my voice sounded croaky and cursing myself for being so feeble. 'About Zephyr and Trinity, I mean. How did you know they were in Whitby? It was Marco Golightly, wasn't it? He told you. You see? We've got our own methods of finding things out. It's not just you.'

Havok turned to look at the others, and to my discomfort they burst out laughing.

'Oh nephew, how you disappoint me.'

He prowled around me like one of his dogs, his eyes never leaving me. I could only stand there, frozen to the spot, wondering exactly how long it would be before he inflicted the same death upon me as he had upon Zephyr.

'Are you really that stupid?' He shook his head. 'You're boring me now. I can't be bothered with this. Siofra! You tell him. Explain to your dim cousin what really happened.'

Siofra shrugged. 'It's pretty simple. It was that buffoon from the High Council who told us where Zephyr and Linnet would be.'

'What buffoon?' I gasped.

'You might well ask,' Spite drawled. 'They're all buffoons, if you ask me.'

'Bob,' Siofra said. 'That's his name. Bob told us.'

My jaw dropped. 'I don't believe you,' I said at last. 'Bob adored Zephyr. He would never do anything to betray him.'

'Suit yourself,' Siofra said. 'Believe me or don't. Why should I care?'

'You're quite correct,' Havok said. 'Bob did adore Zephyr. It was quite sickening really. But he didn't adore the St Clairs. Far from it. And he was furious that they were, as he saw it, putting Zephyr in danger. He was sick of the fact that Zephyr was forever, as he put it, "running around clearing up their messes". We knew Excalibur had been handed over to the

next Great Guardian and things were moving towards the final prophecy. We'd been watching the members of the High Council for some time, and quickly identified Bob as the weak link. We—how shall I put this—made him an offer he couldn't refuse.'

'What sort of offer?' I asked suspiciously.

'He'd give us information about the children of Ashen and Laragh, and we'd let him and his beloved wife live.' He laughed. 'He was all too eager to spill what he knew.'

'Except he didn't, did he?' Siofra said.

Havok glared at her. 'Which only proves what I've always told you. No witch can be trusted.' He turned back to me. 'He lied to me. Told me he didn't know who the male Pendragon heir was. I told him that was a shame because it meant I had no further reason to keep him alive. That's when he blurted out that he knew where the female Pendragon would be. That she'd recently been discovered and was heading to Whitby on business. Even better for us, Zephyr would be keeping an eye on her.'

'Of course,' Malliss said, his voice surprising me by how thin and reedy it sounded, 'we gave him our word that we weren't interested in Zephyr Ambrose. It was only Linnet Pendragon we wanted.'

Siofra laughed. 'And he believed us!'

'He was beside himself when I killed Zephyr,' Malliss said gleefully. 'He said he'd rather we'd killed him than take his great leader.'

'We were about to do him a favour and grant him his wish,' Havok said, 'but his precious wife—the wife he'd begged us to spare—took matters into her own hands. It was so amusing, and they had no idea we were even there, watching them. You should see the efforts they went to trying to make it look as if it were our handiwork. I was quite insulted. Of course, I knew even witches would see through that little performance easily enough. So there you have it.'

‘But you failed, didn’t you?’ I said, thinking at least Bob hadn’t mentioned Sister Agnes. The Pendragons clearly had no idea that Trinity had, in fact, been in Whitby looking for details about our birth. ‘You didn’t kill Trinity, only Zephyr.’

Havok and Malliss exchanged glances.

‘It was one of Malliss’s rare failings,’ Havok admitted. ‘We’re not sure what happened there, but it won’t happen again. Besides,’ he added with a smug look, ‘it meant that I had the pleasure of meeting your sister in person. It was a most satisfying meeting.’

‘Tell me you didn’t kill her,’ I managed, my throat dry with terror.

‘Why would I do that?’ Havok enquired. ‘Anyway, what does it matter now? You won’t be alive long enough to grieve for her.’

His hand shot out and without thinking I hurled a fireball in his direction. He easily dodged it and laughed gleefully.

‘Enjoy yourself, my pets!’

Focus on the island, Wulfram. Focus!

I tried, I really tried, but I heard Siofra laughing and then the two dogs launched themselves at me.

Instinctively, I threw up my hands to protect myself, then stared in disbelief. They were frozen mid-leap. I looked past them to where the Pendragons were standing, but they weren’t moving either. What had happened?

I stepped away from the tree and moved out of the path of the dogs, noticing as I did so that I was wrong. They weren’t frozen. They were still moving, but so slowly it was difficult to notice without studying them closely.

Even as I registered that fact I realised that something else was happening. Malliss was somehow moving faster than the others. I remembered that Killian had said he was like quicksilver, and I supposed that, although I’d somehow managed to slow them all down, his abilities and speed were ensuring he could still move quicker than I liked.

He slowly turned his head to look at me, and I saw rage in his eyes. Very slowly his hand began to lift. He wanted to kill me, there was no doubt about it. I thought of Zephyr and what this man had done to him, and I was filled with a sudden rage. My fingers began to twitch, and I looked down, shocked to see a sickly green light emanating from them.

This wasn't something I'd been able to do before and I knew instinctively that it was fae magic. I saw Malliss's face change. The rage turned to fear as he tried desperately to move out of my line of fire. There was no way he could possibly be quick enough. I couldn't fail to hit him.

And yet... I couldn't do it. Whatever this was, I couldn't kill him in cold blood, and something told me that's exactly what I'd do, and it wouldn't be quick or pretty.

*No. I'm not that person. I don't want to be that person.*

His expression changed from fear to scorn as he realised I hadn't taken the opportunity to inflict upon him what he'd inflicted upon who knows how many others. His hand was now glowing with the same green light I'd just extinguished in myself.

Without thinking I hurled a fireball at him, gasping in shock as it hit him squarely in the chest and he fell to the floor. Even as he did so, time moved on and things returned to normal speed again.

'What have you done?' Havok gasped, staring at Malliss in shock. His favourite henchman was dead on the ground and Havok turned to me, fury in his eyes. 'You'll pay for that, nephew. Your time is done!'

'Look out, Wulfram!'

I looked round, staggered to see reinforcements had arrived. It was Emrick who'd shouted to me, and I was so overwhelmed to see him again that I almost forgot about the danger I was in, but quickly spun round again just in time to dodge a blast from Spite.

How had they known where I was? Sirius, Harley, and Trinity were with Emrick. And so was Keely! So they were all



right. Havok hadn't killed them! My heart lifted and I was filled with a new determination.

I edged my way backwards towards my family, keeping my eyes firmly on the Pendragons who were clearly shocked by the new arrivals.

'What are you doing here?' I managed, blasting a fireball at Havok.

'No time for that now, we'll explain later,' Keely gasped. I nodded and she added, 'I'm so glad you're home.'

'Me, too.'

It wasn't the most romantic reunion, but it was the best we could manage. That sickly green ray was emanating from Havok's fingers and Emrick shouted a warning before blasting my uncle with something that made Havok let out a yell and drop his hands.

Immediately, Spite shot out a vivid purple ray, and I glanced round, horrified to see Trinity was in its direct line, but that she wasn't looking in his direction. She was too busy firing blasts at Siofra.

'Trinity!'

My warning was unnecessary. Sirius had obviously spotted the danger she was in, and he threw himself against Trinity, knocking her to the ground, where he let out a cry of pain.

'Sirius, you're hurt!'

I heard Trinity's anguished cry but could do nothing to help. I was being blasted by both henchmen now, and it was taking everything I had to fend them off. I wished I could figure out how I'd slowed down time previously, but no matter how many times I threw up my hands nothing seemed to be happening.

Suddenly a white light enveloped us, and I heard Keely say, 'At last!'

'Don't fire!' Emrick shouted to us, and I lowered my hands realising we were behind a shield.

I looked round and saw Aidan and Killian standing by our side. Killian was holding the shield steady with one hand and he and Aidan were blasting the Pendragons. The two henchmen were killed instantly.

Havok glared at the O'Briens. 'You again. Well, not this time, traitorous worms!'

He aimed a blast of purple light at Killian's shoulder, knocking Killian and lowering the shield. We were exposed again. It was only for a moment, but in that time I saw the green light coming from Havok's fingers and heading straight for me. I stared at it, too frozen with fear to do anything.

Suddenly I was flying through the air as if I'd been catapulted. I landed with a thud on the ground and rolled over and over before coming to a painful halt against a tree.

How had I escaped Havok's attack?

I glanced round to see who had helped me, but everyone was busy fighting. Then I noticed Siofra, standing a little apart. She gave me a knowing look, put her hand on one of the dog's heads, and the two of them vanished.

I lay there stunned. What had just happened? Surely Siofra hadn't helped me? It made no sense. Someone else must have blasted me out of the way. Whoever had done it, I had no time to think about it.

I scrambled to my feet, looking around. Only Havok and Spite remained. Killian threw the shield around the others and Aidan blasted Havok with something which looked like a shimmering blue ice ball. It was a direct hit.

Havok gave an anguished cry and fell to the floor, not far from where his number one henchman, Malliss, lay dead.

Spite clearly saw he was outnumbered. With a cry of anger he vanished, taking the other dog with him. A moment later the bodies of Havok, Malliss, Greywood and Hawdon vanished too.

I sank to my knees, dazed. Havok Pendragon was dead? I could barely take it in. Then I realised Trinity was crying and hauled myself up off the ground.

‘Sirius! He’s hurt,’ she sobbed. ‘Do something, please.’

‘It’s okay. I’m all right.’ Sirius lay on the ground, sweat pouring from his forehead. His leg looked mangled and bloody, and I was pretty sure he was far from all right.

‘We need to get back to the island, now,’ Emrick said. ‘Are you all ready?’

We all grouped together, sitting beside Sirius, too weary and shocked to say anything else. We put our arms around each other and visualised the living room at Peloryon House, then we left Polkayne Woods far behind us and—at last—I went home.



## Chapter 46

### *Trinity*

What a couple of days we'd had! Sirius was badly wounded in his left leg, and I'd sat with him day and night, refusing to leave his side for a moment. Iliana had been horrified when she heard what had happened to him, and the whole Castle Clair family had moved to Peloryon House in a show of solidarity and support.

Of course, Castor, Iliana, Star, Sky, Celeste, and even Aurora had chastised us for not calling them to help in our battle with the Pendragons, although we tried to explain that there hadn't been time.

Once Killian had got a warning about the Pendragons being in the vicinity he'd headed to Ballydraiocht to enlist Aidan, just in case, and the rest of us had rushed to Polkayne to see what they were up to. When we saw them with Wulfram there'd been no time to think about anything else, let alone send one of us to Castle Clair for reinforcements.

I was still amazed they'd let me go with them, but Keely had argued my case, pointing out that I wouldn't be luring the Pendragons anywhere as they were already there, and that the more witches there were to fight them the better. Even Emrick had decided to go with us. In fact, he'd insisted upon it, and had also spoken up for me. Sirius had been reluctant, but I'd told him I had to start fighting my own battles at some point, and he had to let me take part or how was I ever going to learn to defend myself?

Even so, part of me wished I hadn't insisted. If I hadn't been there Sirius wouldn't have leapt in front of me to save me, and he wouldn't have been wounded. His leg was a mess, although Iliana had summoned Elinora Harbottle to the island, because she was apparently a very gifted healer.

Elinora shook her head when she saw the wound. ‘Very nasty. Very nasty indeed.’ She gave us all a cheerful smile. ‘Still, it could have been a lot worse, and I’m sure I can fix it. Mind, you’ll probably have a bit of a limp, Sirius. I can do magic but not miracles.’ She winked at him. ‘I always think a man with a cane looks very distinguished, and you’ll have a war wound to boast about, so look on the bright side, eh?’

Sirius was being incredibly noble and didn’t blame me at all. Once the fever had passed, he sat up in bed and demanded to know everything that had happened with Wulfram in 1673.

‘Your guess is as good as mine,’ I said. ‘He still hasn’t told us.’

‘What do you mean, he hasn’t told you?’ he asked incredulously. ‘He must have said something.’

I shook my head. ‘He’s still processing it all, I think. Emrick told us to leave him alone and he’ll tell us in his own good time.’

‘What about the sword?’ he asked anxiously. ‘I didn’t see it when we were fighting, did you?’

I bit my lip. The same thought had been bugging us all, ever since we arrived back on the island. There was no sign of the sword and Wulfram hadn’t mentioned it. No one liked to bring the subject up, and even Keely admitted she knew no more than we did.

‘The only person he’s spent any time with is Emrick,’ I said. ‘Honestly, you should have seen him when we got back to the island. I mean, he was obviously happy to be with Keely again, but it was Emrick he kept staring at. He just sort of staggered towards him, and they exchanged this huge bear hug, and Wulfram cried.’

I swallowed. It had been an emotional sight, watching my brother sobbing in Emrick’s arms. Emrick had soothed him and told him everything was all right, and then he’d led Wulfram into the snug away from the rest of us, where they’d sat and talked for hours, leaving poor Keely feeling very disappointed and the rest of us burning with curiosity.

Sirius insisted, the following day, on heading downstairs to eat dinner with us. Iliana transported him down because she wouldn't let him even attempt to walk, and I can't say I disagreed with her. Gee, Sirius was a terrible patient! He kept insisting he was perfectly all right, when it was obvious to anyone that he was still in pain and that, despite Elinora's healing, his leg was far from better. I supposed he was as stubborn as I was.

Everyone was delighted to see him downstairs, and Ewella and Iliana had pulled out all the stops, preparing a glad-you're-well-enough-to-join-us and a we're-so-glad-you're-home-safe meal in honour of him and Wulfram.

It's a good job the island knew what we needed, because the dining room would have been packed. Somehow the walls had expanded, and the table had been lengthened so everyone could sit together yet have plenty of space, and Sirius was given a special velvet chair and footstool to make sure he was as comfortable as possible.

I noticed Wulfram was sitting next to Emrick with Keely on his other side. It seemed odd to me that he'd become so attached to Emrick suddenly. I thought Wulfram had been through something extraordinary, and it had clearly had a big impact on him. For some reason he seemed to see Emrick's presence as a comfort.

It was all well and good, but I was dying to hear about Romy and if she was okay. And where was the sword? That was something we were all anxious about. Had Wulfram failed in his mission? If he had, where did that leave us?

Emrick had made it very clear, though, that we weren't to question Wulfram, and that he'd tell us everything when he was ready, so no one spoke of his recent jaunt back in time, or of the battle we'd just gone through. Instead we kept things light, praising Ewella and Iliana for the wonderful food, chatting about how Seren was teething already, and discussing Aither's new nursery school which, apparently, he was loving.

We'd just finished our meal and were about to start clearing the plates when there was a knock on the door.

We all looked at each other, startled. No one ever knocked on that door.

‘Should I go?’ Ewella asked nervously.

‘I’ll go,’ Emrick said. ‘Don’t look so worried. I doubt it’s anything to fret about.’

We heard voices and exchanged glances.

‘That’s Aveta,’ Iliana said. ‘Sounds like we’re being visited by the High Council.’

‘They never knock,’ Keely said. ‘They usually just zap in here.’

‘Not when it’s official business,’ Raiden told her. ‘Sounds like this is important.’

Sure enough, when Emrick returned he was trailing the High Council members behind him. There was another person with him, too. Elinora Harbottle.

‘How lovely to see you,’ Ewella said politely. ‘To what do we owe this pleasure?’

‘We’re here to inform you of a couple of things,’ Aveta said, nodding her thanks as Ewella motioned to the four of them to sit down on the empty chairs that had just appeared at the end of the table. ‘Firstly, the Guardians have selected our new leader. Elinora Harbottle has taken the place of Zephyr Ambrose.’

There were some gasps of surprise at this.

‘No offence,’ Iliana said hastily. ‘I just assumed they’d choose Aveta.’

Aveta held up her hand. ‘Frankly, I’m relieved they didn’t. I’m too old and too tired. The last few months have taken it out of me. Elinora has proved to be a loyal and intelligent witch, and I have every faith in the Guardians’ choice.’

‘Of course. Congratulations, Elinora.’

We all added our congratulations to Elinora, who thanked us warmly.



‘About time we had another woman on the High Council,’ Star said. ‘Well done.’

I sneaked a look at Hector, but his face was impassive. He must have known this, but he hadn’t breathed a word of it to us. Still, I guess that was his job. Fair enough.

‘Secondly,’ Aveta said, ‘following Bob’s demise, we have, of course, another vacant space in the High Council. Elinora?’

Elinora nodded and smiled. ‘The Guardians leave the election of other members of the Council to us, and we’ve decided we’d like to offer the position to you.’ She turned her head. ‘Sirius St Clair.’

Sirius stared at her. ‘What? Me?’

‘Oh, Sirius,’ Iliana breathed. ‘What an honour!’

‘But why me?’ he asked. ‘Especially now. I’m going to be walking with a cane, you said so yourself. Besides, I’ve done nothing to deserve this.’

‘We disagree,’ Kendrew said. ‘For one thing, you’re a gifted and steadfast witch. For another, we’re impressed by your plans to open a school for fae and witch children, and your determination to sow the seeds of friendship and love between future generations of our people. Plus,’ he added with a shrug, ‘you’re a St Clair. We figure it’s best to have one of you on the inside. What is it they say?’ He grinned. ‘Better the devil you know.’

‘Charming,’ Raiden said.

‘You know what I mean,’ Kendrew said. ‘I think we need one of you on our team.’

‘But why not Celeste?’ Sirius protested. ‘She’s the raven, after all.’

‘I really don’t want to be on the High Council,’ Celeste protested. ‘It wouldn’t suit me at all.’

‘And, er... Oh dear,’ Amlodd said uncomfortably, ‘don’t take this the wrong way. Thing is, you’re married to a woman who’s half witch and half fae, Sirius, whereas Celeste... Well, her husband is an ordinary human. It wouldn’t do really.’

I smothered a grin and saw some of the others were trying to hide their amusement at this statement. If they only knew!

Wulfram, however, didn't look amused at all. 'Phoenix Tremayne was married to an ordinary human,' he reminded them. 'If it was good enough for the greatest leader the High Council has ever had, why isn't it good enough for Celeste?'

They all looked at each other.

'We're not prejudiced,' Aveta said hastily, 'and we do take your point. But things are so tricky right now. The witches are saying we let them down by bringing the O'Briens into our midst. No offence,' she added, seeing Killian sitting next to Harley. 'We're having to do a lot of work to reassure them we're completely on the witches' side and that they can trust us one hundred per cent.'

'Except that's not entirely true, is it?'

'Wulfram?' Keely frowned as he got to his feet and glared at the High Council.

'I had an encounter with Havok Pendragon recently,' he said. 'He told me everything.'

We all looked at each other, wondering what he meant. Only Emrick seemed unsurprised.

'I'm sorry,' Elinora said, glancing at her colleagues. 'What is he talking about?'

'The person who betrayed Zephyr and Trinity to the Pendragons,' Wulfram said. 'It was Bob. But then, I guess you already knew that didn't you?'

'You must be mistaken!' Elinora gasped.

We all stared at Wulfram in astonishment. Was he serious?

'Oh dear,' Amlodd said. 'I told you it would come out eventually.'

'Bob!' Aurora had gone pale. 'That's not possible. He would never betray my father!'

'I'm sorry,' Wulfram said gently. 'It's true.'

Briefly, he explained what the Pendragons had told him in the moments before we'd all arrived at the scene. We couldn't take it in.

'And you knew?' Raiden said, his voice tight with anger as he faced the High Council. 'When were you planning to tell the rest of us?'

'Good point,' Elinora said, her lips pursed. 'When were you?'

'Please, try to understand how difficult it's been for us,' Aveta pleaded. 'Bob didn't have a choice. The Pendragons were threatening his family and home. He had to give them something, and he tried to protect Wulfram by giving them Trinity instead. I know, I know,' she added as we all chorused our disgust. 'But what would you have done? What would any of us have done in his position?'

'Tell the High Council what was going on. Done anything rather than betray my father,' Aurora snapped.

'Bob paid for his mistake. He couldn't live with himself when the fae killed Zephyr. He confessed to his wife, and she was so furious that he'd helped the Pendragons that she told her sister and brother-in-law, who decided to get rid of him and use his death to turn the witches against all fae. They have now all had their magic removed by the Guardians and have been excommunicated from magical society. I promise you, they'll cause no further trouble.'

'And when were you planning to tell everyone this?' Sirius asked.

'We can't! This must never come out!' Kendrew cried. 'Can't you see that? The witches must know they can trust us. If they discover one of the High Council was responsible for the death of Zephyr they'll turn on us. We won't be able to control them, and Havok Pendragon will take the opportunity to start a war.'

'Havok Pendragon is dead,' Wulfram said flatly. 'Aidan killed him.'

'And Wulfram killed Malliss,' Keely added.

‘And Killian and Aidan killed two of their henchmen,’ Harley finished.

‘Havok Pendragon is dead?’ Aveta sounded dazed. ‘You’re sure about this?’

‘I saw it with my own eyes,’ Emrick told her.

She covered her face with her hands. ‘Thank the goddess.’

‘Even so,’ Sirius said, ‘I believe you’re wrong. Unless you tell our people the truth about Bob I refuse to be part of the High Council. Don’t you see how hypocritical it is? You’re saying the witches must trust you, yet at the same time you’re openly admitting that you intend to keep lying to them. I won’t be part of that. Tell them the truth. Apologise to them. Give them assurances that the Council has two new members, including a new leader, and that things will be more open and honest from now on. That’s the deal or count me out.’

I’d never felt prouder of my husband in my entire life.

‘And me,’ Elinora said defiantly. ‘Sirius is right. I can’t be the leader of any organisation that behaves so disgracefully and in such a duplicitous fashion. Confess to the witches or you’ll have to ask the Guardians to find another leader.’

I saw the slightest twitch of Hector’s lips and knew he approved fully of her statement. It seemed the Guardians had chosen wisely.

‘Very well,’ Amlodd said. ‘It seems we have no choice.’

‘Don’t look so worried,’ Emrick said kindly. ‘I reckon things are going to get a lot easier from now on. Trust me.’

‘Sirius, you’ll accept our offer?’

Sirius hesitated and looked at me. I smiled at him. There was no way I wanted him to turn down such an incredible honour, especially seeing how he’d already forced a U-turn on the Council members. With his influence and Elinora’s I could only believe that the High Council would become a greater force for good.

‘What about our school?’ he asked me.

‘We can still run it, can’t we? I mean, Zephyr managed to run a fish and chip shop and he was the leader. And all the members have jobs, don’t they? Even Aveta still does some midwifery at her great age.’

‘Yes, thank you very much, Trinity,’ Aveta said wryly. ‘She’s right though. We certainly don’t want you to give up your plans for the school, especially now the Pendragons are out of the way. You can do both. Have no fear of that.’

‘Then,’ Sirius said when I nodded at him, ‘thank you, and I accept your offer.’

‘Excellent!’ Elinora said, beaming at him. ‘As soon as your leg heals we’ll make the announcement. In the meantime, the rest of us had better start preparing a statement, don’t you think? Time to be honest with our community.’

‘At least it should be easier to appease them, now the Pendragons are gone,’ Kendrew said thoughtfully.

‘They’re not gone,’ Wulfram pointed out. ‘Yes, Havok’s out of the way, but his cousin Spite is still on the scene, and his daughter Siofra is very much alive.’

‘You think they’ll take up Havok’s mantle?’ Aveta asked worriedly. ‘Then we still need to act. You must find the Sword of Feidhlim, Wulfram. Everything depends on you proving to our community, and to the fae, that you truly are the Great Guardian.’

‘I’ll show you out,’ Emrick said cheerfully. He stood and beckoned to them to follow him. ‘Come with me,’ he said. ‘Let’s you and I have a little chat.’



# Chapter 47

## *Wulfram*

Sitting in the snug with Emrick that night I mulled over the problem of how to tell everyone what I knew.

‘How do I explain what happened to Romy and Blaise? How do I tell Keely, Harley and Trinity what became of their sister?’ I asked. ‘It’s huge.’

‘Don’t worry about all that, my boy,’ he said. ‘You’ll find a way.’

I knew Keely was hurt that I hadn’t confided in her anything that had happened since I’d left, but my head was still buzzing with it all. I was still trying to process all that had happened, and to figure out the best way of explaining it.

How could I expect them to grasp it all when I was still having trouble myself? I would never have believed, when I arrived in Gerrenporth in 1673, what lay ahead of me. It seemed unreal. But I knew it was true. I had proof.

I glanced down at the sword that lay by my side. It gleamed as if it had been polished every day for hundreds of years, even though I knew for a fact it hadn’t been. Precious stones adorned the hilt and I had to admit it was a thing of beauty. I still couldn’t believe the others couldn’t see it, but it was obvious they couldn’t. Perrie, I recalled, had told me back in Glastonbury that the sword could only be seen if the Great Guardian permitted it. Evidently, there was a part of me that had wanted it to remain secret. I wasn’t sure why. Maybe it had been a protective instinct when I first arrived back in my own time. Now... I suppose it was bound up with all the other secrets I was keeping. Secrets I would have to reveal very soon.

‘I haven’t even told them about this,’ I said, nodding sadly at the sword, knowing Emrick could see it as well as I.

‘All in good time,’ he said comfortably. ‘I will say, though, that I had to tell the High Council. They needed some good news after the day they’ve had.’

‘I suppose so. I’m glad Sirius and Elinora are replacing Zephyr and Bob. Sirius will do an excellent job, and Elinora seems like a good person.’

‘She is. The Guardians don’t make mistakes.’

‘Maybe the Guardians should choose all members of the High Council,’ I said ruefully, ‘not just the leaders. Maybe they’d have seen Bob’s weakness.’

‘Perhaps. But then, you and I both know that things tend to play out as they should. It was all meant to be, Wulfram.’

‘And what happens now?’ I shook my head. ‘Of course, you don’t know, do you?’

‘Afraid not.’ He smiled. ‘The intelligence from my informants is at an end. I’m as much in the dark as you now.’

I couldn’t help but laugh. It was funny when I came to think of it. Then I thought of everything that Emrick had been through, and my laughter died.

‘I’m so sorry. I can’t even imagine...’

‘Now, now. We’ve been through this. I’m fine. Look at me! And I’ll tell you now, I’ve never been so happy to see anyone in my life as I was to see you in Polkayne, even if you were facing the Pendragons.’

‘Oh, and believe me, I was glad to see you,’ I said fervently. ‘I owe you so much. I owe you—everything.’

‘You don’t owe me anything, Wulfram,’ he said. ‘It’s the rest of us that owe you. You’ve done your duty and saved our world from a war.’

‘I still can’t believe Havok is dead,’ I said. ‘You know, after everything he did to us—killing my parents and Keely’s



dad for a start—I always thought it would be me who killed him. I used to play it out in my mind, imagining the moment.’

I’d often seen myself standing over his dying form, saying to him, ‘This is for Ashen, Laragh, and Rodor. This is for Zephyr.’

But in the event it had been Aidan who killed him. No fanfare. No final words. Just a blast of blue light and it was all over.

‘Taking revenge?’ he asked.

‘I suppose so.’

‘Is that what you wanted?’

‘I thought it was,’ I said. ‘But...’ I hung my head. ‘I killed Malliss and I hate that,’ I admitted. ‘I shocked myself. I don’t think I’m cut out for this life. When I was under attack that same green light that Havok produced was coming from my fingers, and I knew I could kill Malliss the same way he killed Zephyr. But I couldn’t bring myself to do it.’

What sort of leader, I wondered, did that make me? A weak one, I supposed.

‘Just the thought of it sickened me. I only threw the fireball because I was about to be attacked by him and it was pure instinct to defend myself. But when I saw him fall to the ground dead... I can’t get the image of his body out of my mind, Emrick. I know he was a bad person, but does that make me any better? I’m a murderer when all’s said and done.’

‘You did what you had to do,’ he said gently. ‘You gave him a far quicker and less painful death than you could have done. He never gave his victims the same consideration. You’re our protector, Wulfram, and it’s your duty to face down all threats to the witch and fae community. That’s what you did, and you did it with compassion. I’m proud of you, I really am.’

‘I suppose this is my life now,’ I said. ‘You’re right. I know I must do what’s necessary, but I can’t imagine a time when killing someone comes easily to me.’

‘I’m very glad to hear it,’ he said. ‘You wouldn’t be much of a Great Guardian if it did.’

‘Do you think—I mean, what if my magic isn’t strong enough? When I was facing the Pendragons... Truth is, I don’t think I’d have stood a chance if you hadn’t all arrived.’

‘But you’d already killed Malliss by then,’ he pointed out. ‘That’s no easy task. As for needing back-up—it’s early days. You’re still learning and getting used to having magic. You’re right at the start of this journey and there’s still much to do. Some of the Pendragons are still out there, and there are other threats to peace. You’ll learn and grow and deal with each problem as it arises. Never fear. You’ll figure out your path soon enough, and you have some wonderful people backing you all the way. Like Keely for example.’

I smiled at the thought of her. ‘She was right by my side, facing the Pendragons. She’s fearless.’

He shook his head. ‘You’re wrong there. She was terrified, and she’s suffered the whole time you were away, fearing the worst. But that’s what makes her so brave. It takes so much more courage to fight through your terror. She’s devoted to you, Wulfram. You’re going to make an excellent team.’

‘I have to tell her the truth, don’t I?’ I said wistfully. ‘Tomorrow. I can’t put it off any longer.’

‘I think that’s probably wise,’ he agreed. ‘And maybe she might surprise you with her own news. I have a feeling there’s something everyone in your family is longing to show you.’

‘Really? What?’

‘Now, Wulfram,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘You couldn’t possibly ask me to reveal that, could you? And you know how good I am at keeping secrets, after all.’

I couldn’t argue with that. He was probably the best person at keeping secrets I’d ever met or would ever likely meet.

And I would never stop being grateful to him for that.

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I slept well that night. In fact, I slept so heavily that I didn't wake up once and was oblivious to Keely getting up and going downstairs.

By the time I stumbled out of bed, showered, and headed down to the kitchen, everyone had already eaten breakfast. Ewella kindly insisted on making me something to eat, though I declined her offer of a cooked breakfast and settled for cornflakes.

It was a bit overwhelming to see so many faces turn expectantly towards me when I entered the living room, carrying my bowl of cereal. They did their best to hide the fact that they were longing for me to tell them what had happened, but they weren't particularly successful. I knew it was time to be honest with them. I'd had long enough to unpack everything in my mind, and they deserved to know.

Before I could work out how to explain, though, Keely jumped up and said, 'We've got something to show you!'

So this was what Emrick had been talking about last night? I wondered what they had that was so important.

I nodded keenly. 'Great.'

I noticed Seren and Aither playing with some toys in the corner of the room and was relieved to find that, even though the light was still dancing around Aither, it wasn't dragging my attention to him any longer. Maybe I was settling into this Guardian role at last?

I ate my cornflakes while Keely ran out of the room and the others watched me, huge smiles on their faces. Whatever this was, it clearly meant a lot to them all, so even if it failed to ignite any enthusiasm in me I was determined to act as if it did.

In the event I needn't have worried.

Keely returned, took the bowl from my hand, and said, 'Close your eyes.'

I gazed round at them all. They looked as if they were about to burst with excitement.

Star, who was feeding Seren, gave me an impatient look. ‘Well? You heard her!’

‘Really?’

‘Really,’ Keely said firmly. ‘And hold your hand out.’

Smiling, I did as I was told and felt something land in my palm.

‘You can open them now,’ Keely said, and I heard some laughter and enthusiastic whispering going on.

Slowly I opened my eyes and stared down at my hand. My jaw dropped.

‘Is this...?’ It couldn’t be, could it? But there in my palm was a golden key, and the bow was shaped exactly like the chalice I’d seen in my vision.

My head shot up and I stared at them all in amazement. ‘It can’t be!’

‘It is!’ Keely dropped onto the arm of the chair I was sitting in and beamed at me. ‘Celeste figured it out.’

‘With a lot of help from Castor,’ Celeste added. ‘And some from Blaise.’

‘Blaise?’

‘Yes, I couldn’t have done it if I hadn’t memory-walked in his mind and—oh, it’s a long story! Keely, you might like to explain it from the beginning.’

I sat, dazed, as Keely told me how they’d finally guessed where the key might be hidden, and how they’d visited the tomb of Castor’s ancestor in the dead of night to search for it.

‘I can’t believe you did that,’ I said, full of admiration at their nerve. ‘Fancy it being with Titus’s wife all that time.’

‘Aye,’ Castor said. ‘Almost makes me forgive Titus for being such a gutless coward. Almost.’

My stomach turned over and I shook my head when Keely offered me the cornflakes back.

‘I’ve had enough,’ I said. ‘I’m so grateful to you all for searching for the key for me, but—’

‘We thought we might find the second key,’ Trinity added. ‘Sadly, we’re having a heck of a lot of trouble working it out. We’ve got a clue from Lyrica, you see, but it’s a bit cryptic.’

‘From Lyrica? The woman the twins met in *The Fool’s Journey*?’

I shuddered inwardly as the memory of my visit to that establishment in 1673 returned. I vowed never to pop in there again for a pint no matter how much it had changed.

‘Yes,’ Harley said. ‘We went back there to see if she’d had any more visions about us because, after all, she might be odd, but she was spot on about the things she told us, wasn’t she? But she’d gone. The landlord reckons she’s left Cornwall. However, she did leave us some clues. It’s just that we’re not bright enough to work them out.’

Frey wound his way through my legs then leapt onto my lap.

*They’re not kidding. You should have seen the stupid theories they came up with. Dim as a broken lightbulb.*

I ignored him. He could be a very rude cat.

Keely stood up and reached for something from the mantelpiece which she handed to me. ‘See?’ she said, sitting down again. ‘Tarot cards. We’ve looked up the meanings of the tower and the ace of pentacles, but we can’t figure out how they lead us to the key. Or if they’re not about the whereabouts of the key, we can’t figure out what else they could mean. We’re at a dead end with that one, I’m afraid.’

‘It doesn’t matter,’ I said. ‘It takes two keys to open the dimension box, and as long as we have one safe no one else can open it, or even locate it. We have plenty of time to find the other if we make sure this one doesn’t fall into the wrong hands.’

‘Well,’ Iliana said with relief, ‘that’s good to know. And it’s safe on this island, which is something.’

‘We need to find a hiding place for it, though,’ I said warily. ‘Remember, Bob visited this island. If it had been here then who knows what might have happened? What if he’d found it?’

‘In our bedroom? What would he be doing in there?’ Keely asked.

‘That’s not the point. It must be secured. You never know.’ I shoved a disgruntled Frey off my lap and tucked the key inside my pocket for the moment then looked at them all. ‘There’s something I need to show you now.’

They all settled and waited for me, an expectant look in their eyes.

I glanced at Emrick, who gave me an encouraging nod.

Turning my head to the right of my chair, I lightly touched the sword, thinking that I’d really love for them all to be able to see it now.

Immediately there were gasps of amazement from everyone.

‘The Sword of Feidhlim!’

‘You found it!’

‘Where was it?’

‘Have you had that with you the whole time?’

‘The whole time,’ I admitted. ‘Isn’t it beautiful?’

‘Oh, Wulfram!’ Keely breathed, her eyes bright with tears. ‘You did it! You actually did it!’ She threw her arms around me. ‘I’m so proud of you.’

‘Now you have proof of your identity as the Great Guardian,’ Killian said, clearly relieved. ‘This will change everything. Once the fae and the witches know you’re who you say you are there’ll be no more talk of war, especially since they’ve already had the information that Blaise St Clair went back to his own time. And when they know you’ve got

one of the keys safe, too...' He leaned back in his chair and rubbed his forehead. 'Job well done, Wulfram. I can't tell you how happy I am that you succeeded. I'll not lie to you; things were looking dodgy there for a time.'

'But where was it?' Aurora asked, and everyone fell silent suddenly as they waited for me to fill them in.

Emrick got to his feet. 'I think maybe I'll leave you to it,' he said. He smiled warmly at me and left the room.

I looked round at all those eager faces.

'Perhaps you'd better make yourselves comfortable,' I said. 'I've such a lot to tell you.'





## Chapter 48

### *Wulfram 1673*

It took us a while to compose ourselves at the gravestone. As realisation dawned, a new reality confronted us, and we needed time to adjust to that. Our plans had changed, and I knew we needed space to be alone together to get our heads around our circumstances.

‘I think,’ I said heavily, as Blaise and Romy stood, arms around each other as she sobbed quietly into his chest and he stroked her hair, ‘we need to find somewhere to stay tonight. Just in case the island doesn’t appear today.’

‘Not another inn,’ Romy begged. ‘I can’t. I don’t want to be around people today.’

‘A cabin in the woods,’ Blaise suggested. ‘Like I said, I’m pretty sure I can manifest something suitable and shield it from onlookers.’

‘That would be so much better,’ she said gratefully. She wiped her face and pulled away from him. ‘I’m so sorry I’ve made such a fuss.’

‘You haven’t,’ I said. ‘And, well, even if you have I don’t blame you.’

‘Me neither,’ Blaise said ruefully. ‘It’s a lot to take in.’ He kissed her nose then rested his chin on the top of her head, gazing out to sea. I wondered what was going through his mind. It was just as much for him to take in, I thought, and marvelled at his composure. Then again, he didn’t know everything. Romy had been very careful to leave one important piece of information out.

‘Come on then,’ I said. ‘Let’s head back into the woods and see if we can make this cabin happen.’

‘Wait,’ Blaise said suddenly, an edge of excitement in his voice. ‘Over there! Am I seeing things or...’

Romy spun round and I hurried to their side. We all stared out to sea and gasped. There was a ripple in the water. Not just in the water either. It was the strangest thing—like the whole horizon was rippling too. Like the very air itself was shimmering. It reminded me of something.

The O’Briens! It was the same effect I’d seen when they’d changed from their human form into their true selves.

‘The island! It’s coming back from the Otherworld.’

‘It has to be,’ Romy said. She closed her eyes. ‘Oh, please be the island. Please.’

We moved closer to the cliff edge and then squealed in delight, hugging each other. There was no mistaking it. Peloryon Island—our precious piece of Lyonesse—was back in the mortal realm.

‘We can go home,’ Romy said tearfully. She turned to Blaise. ‘We can go home, darling.’

He smiled, his own eyes bright with tears. ‘And we’ll make it a home. Never fear.’

My heart lifted. At last we were getting somewhere.

‘We should ask a fisherman or someone if they can take us across on their boat,’ I said.

‘Won’t you be able to zap there?’ Blaise asked, surprised.

‘To be honest,’ I added, rather ashamed, ‘I’m not sure my zapping skills are up to it, and I’d hate to land us all in the English Channel.’

‘Fair point. Okay then.’ He straightened his shoulders. ‘Well, since I have no real attachment to the place, I guess we’d better walk into the village and see if we can get a boat there.’

Polkayne wasn’t somewhere I was too familiar with in the present day, though I’d visited it a few times as a child. It was a probably a little bit smaller than Gerrenporth in my time, but

now the difference was noticeable. A few tumbledown cottages and an inn lined a tiny, natural harbour, and although a few small boats were moored there, there was little activity compared with the bigger village.

In fact, the only people we spotted were some children, who were playing far too close to the water for my peace of my mind.

‘Excuse me,’ I said, catching the eye of one of them, who couldn’t have been more than about seven, ‘do you know anyone who could take us out to that island there?’

I pointed out to sea, and she turned to look where I was indicating. Part of me expected her to shriek, ‘Where did that come from?’

She didn’t. Instead, she shrugged and said, ‘Peloryon Island? I don’t know, mister. It’s spooky there.’

We exchanged glances. How did she even know its name?

‘What do you mean, spooky?’ Romy asked gently.

‘Monks used to live there,’ a little boy of about six informed us solemnly. ‘They reckon their ghosts still walk about at night, and you can hear the bell from their church clanging across the sea.’

‘And chanting,’ the girl reminded him. ‘Don’t forget the chanting.’

I hid a smile, all too aware that there had never been monks on that island, and it was all part of the mythology that this amazing place had already, miraculously, created for itself.

‘And the witch,’ another little girl added, her eyes like saucers. ‘My ma says there’s a witch used to live there.’

‘A witch?’ Romy asked curiously. ‘I’ve never heard that before.’

‘It’s true,’ the girl said defiantly. ‘I’m not lying!’

‘I’m sure you’re not,’ Romy said hastily. ‘I’m just saying I hadn’t heard about it, that’s all.’

‘Well, where do you think the name comes from then?’ the boy asked, jutting his chin at us.

‘I’m sorry?’

He gave me a scornful look. ‘Peloryon. Don’t you know your Cornish? It means white witch.’

‘A white witch who’s a man,’ the older girl added. She shivered. ‘I wouldn’t go over there, not for anything, and my ma says she wouldn’t go if they offered her a golden guinea.’

So Peloryon meant a male white witch! And we’d had no idea, all this time.

‘I don’t suppose you know anyone who would take us there?’ Blaise asked kindly. ‘We’d be very grateful.’

They all kept silent.

‘We’d pay well,’ he added.

‘I reckon Grandad would take you,’ the little boy said hesitantly. ‘But you’d have to make it worth his while.’

‘I’m sure we could do that,’ I assured him. ‘Where would we find your grandad?’

He jerked his thumb towards the inn. ‘He’ll be in there, keeping warm,’ he said flatly. ‘No firewood at home and his bones ache in the cold. Shall I fetch him?’

‘If you would,’ I said gratefully.

The boy ran off and the two girls surveyed us curiously.

‘What you wanna go over there for?’ one of them queried.

‘Bird watching,’ Romy said immediately. ‘We’re ornithologists. We study birds in their natural habitat and there are reputedly lots of seabirds on that island.’

‘Ornry what?’ The youngest girl wrinkled her nose. ‘Who wants to go all the way over there just to look at birds? There’s birds everywhere!’

‘Well,’ Romy said, ‘that’s just what interests us I’m afraid.’

They exchanged glances which clearly said they thought we had more money than sense.

The little boy returned a few minutes later, hand-in-hand with a red-faced man who, to be honest, didn't look strong enough to row us out to the island. He was elderly, incredibly thin and quite small, and his clothes had been patched so many times they were more patch than original material.

My heart went out to this family. Life round here was clearly tough. Who could blame him for seeking warmth in the inn?

'Jago tells me you want to go to the island,' he said.

'They watch birds, Grandad,' the little girl said. 'They're ornry something.'

He frowned. 'Eh?'

'We're ornithologists,' I explained hastily. 'We study birds in their natural environment. If you'd take us out there we'd be very grateful.'

He considered the matter. 'And you'd want me to wait around while you're looking at these birds? Or would you expect me to go back an' pick you up?'

'Oh no,' Blaise said immediately. 'We have a friend with a boat who can collect us later. It would just be one journey for you and no waiting.'

'Hmm. Friend with a boat you say? From these parts?'

'No,' I said. 'Just visiting. He'll be putting out from Gerrenporth.'

He shook his head, clearly baffled. Even so, his need for money got the better of him. 'How much would you be willing to pay?' He nodded at the sea. 'Bit choppy out there today and freezing cold. My old bones ache at the best of times so I'm not going out there for nothing.'

'Naturally,' I said. 'Would ten shillings suffice?'

His eyes widened and I heard his grandchildren gasp. Maybe I'd been over generous in my offer? But how could I

begrudge them payment, given their obvious circumstances?

‘Er, I reckon that would do the job,’ he said, trying to sound nonchalant.

I gave him the money. ‘And a penny each for the children, since they were kind enough to recommend you,’ I added, handing the delighted youngsters their finders’ fee.

‘I went and fetched him for you,’ Jago reminded me hopefully.

I laughed. ‘Another penny for you then.’

‘Don’t go spoiling them,’ the man warned. ‘You lot, get off home now and tell your ma where I’m going.’ He handed the eldest girl the money I’d given him. ‘Give that to her an’ all. Now, you keep that safe, Mary. And don’t go tellin’ anyone about it neither, you hear me?’

She nodded and the three of them ran off.

‘Right,’ the man said heavily. ‘I suppose we’d better get goin’ then.’ He eyed the sky doubtfully. ‘I reckon there’ll be rain later. Heavy rain. You sure about this? Nothin’ on that island from what I’ve heard except some trees to shelter under.’

‘We’re used to it,’ Romy assured him. ‘It’s what we do as ornithologists. We’re carrying out important research into English birds and their natural environments.’

‘Funny job for a woman, being an ornary...’ He floundered and scratched his head. ‘Funny job for anyone if you ask me, but what do I know? No disrespect intended. We’d best set off now afore the weather turns.’

It wasn’t a pleasant trip to the island. In fact, I felt distinctly queasy, and looking at Romy and Blaise I could see they were having trouble preventing themselves from literally throwing up. The old man didn’t speak which we were grateful for. The waves heaved and tossed the little boat around, and I had an awful flashback to the day I received Excalibur. At least we had the island to look forward to, and it grew ever nearer, filling me with hope the closer we got to it. I would never, I thought fervently, be gladder to set foot on that shore.

The man dropped us as close as he could to the shingle beach, but there was no jetty in this time and nowhere to moor the boat. We had to jump into the sea and wade the rest of the way.

‘I’m not so sure about this,’ he said, frowning as Romy let out a yelp as the icy water hit her. ‘You’re gonna catch your death if you ask me. How long afore this friend of yours arrives to pick you up?’

‘Oh, just a few hours,’ I said airily, hoping he couldn’t hear my teeth chattering. ‘We’ll light a fire and get dry, don’t worry. This is what we do, you see. We’re used to it.’

He shrugged and bid us farewell, though we distinctly heard him muttering to himself about “mad ornarolgists” as he rowed away.

‘Thank goodness for that,’ Romy said, gratefully taking Blaise’s hand as he helped her to the shore. ‘I’m so cold I think I’m going to die.’

She looked at me and her face paled even more than it already had.

‘Come on,’ I said briskly, not wanting her to go down that path again. ‘Let’s see if there’s anywhere to stay here. If not, you might have to manifest that cabin, Blaise.’

We scrambled wearily up the side of the cliff to where we knew one day the generator shed would stand. I was all too aware that, beneath our feet, the crystal cave glowed and pulsed. It made me feel less homesick, somehow, knowing that we were still linked to the present day by something so magical and yet so real.

There was no path yet, so it was hard to climb to the top, particularly given our unsuitable footwear and poor Romy’s voluminous dress. We took far longer than we normally would, and then we were faced with the long walk along the top towards where Peloryon House usually stood. I trudged through the grass, my eyes fixed on my feet, and mentally crossed my fingers that we’d find some sort of shelter, because

what if Blaise's magic wasn't up to producing a cabin yet?  
Then what would we do?

'Wulfram!' Romy and Blaise stopped dead and turned to me, their eyes shining with delight.

I looked past them, and my heart soared. There was shelter all right. Not just any old shelter. The original Peloryon House.

We found ourselves feeling lighter and able to move more rapidly now that we had somewhere to aim for. At last we stood outside the door of a beautiful Tudor manor.

'It's just like Castle Lodge!' Romy shook her head. 'Look at it! It's exactly the same.'

She was right. I couldn't believe it, but it was as if the island had replicated the house that was so familiar to us and placed it on the island for us as a comfort.

'Do you think it's deliberate?' Blaise asked, his eyes shining. 'My old home! I'm overwhelmed. I never thought I'd see this place again.'

Cautiously we pushed open the front door, our hearts racing in anticipation.

As we walked slowly around the house Romy burst into tears again, and I must confess Blaise and I were in tears, too. At least this time they were tears of joy.

The island had replicated modern day Castle Lodge in its entirety. Fires burned in every grate, fairy lights twinkled around the beams, electric lamps glowed in every corner. It was incredible.

We found warm bedrooms with comfortable beds, complete with duvets. We all agreed we'd be getting an early night tonight, given the terrible time we'd spent on wooden floors last night. We agreed to shower and change into something more comfortable and meet back downstairs in half an hour.

'You see?' I said, my voice breaking with emotion as I saw the look of bliss on Romy's face when she came into the



living room a little while later, dressed in, of all things, tartan pyjamas, and slippers. ‘You’re going to be fine. This island and this house, they’ll take care of you. You’ll be safe, Romy.’

She nodded. ‘You’re right. Our sanctuary from the seventeenth century. Oh, I’m so relieved.’

‘Me, too,’ Blaise admitted. ‘I know I’m from this time originally, but to be honest, I’ve got used to living in comfort. I was dreading with dealing with it all again, and I didn’t want you to have to endure such hardships. It seems the island is protecting you. Rewarding you.’

‘Rewarding you both,’ I said quietly. ‘You’ve both got a lot of work to do, and you know what’s ahead of you.’

‘I still can’t believe it.’ Romy sat down next to Blaise on a comfortable leather sofa, almost identical to the one in the house at Castle Clair. ‘Blaise, why didn’t you tell me?’

‘Tell you what?’ he asked, putting his arm around her.

‘About your mother’s maiden name,’ she said. ‘It would have made things much clearer far sooner.’

‘Have you any idea how common that name is in Cornwall?’ he asked. ‘How was I supposed to know it meant anything?’

‘I had a vague idea,’ I admitted. ‘That is, something was nagging away at me. When you called out to Celeste it rang a bell, and when I finally remembered where I’d heard it before... *Astra inclinant, sed non obligant*. The stars incline us, but they do not bind us.’

‘Engraved on the pocket watch Meri left Celeste in her will,’ Romy said.

‘The pocket watch Phoenix Tremayne wore on his wedding day to Wren,’ I added. ‘When I saw your mother’s maiden name was Tremayne it all fell into place.’

‘Even the white streak in your hair,’ Romy said, smiling as she stroked Blaise’s hair lovingly. ‘It will be all white one day. I know. I’ve seen your portrait as an old man. Phoenix

Tremayne. Witch extraordinaire. The most loved and respected leader of the High Council of Witches ever known.'

'And his wife, Wren,' I said. 'We should have guessed.'

'So I was named after myself.' Romy laughed. 'How many people can say that?'

'It's a huge responsibility,' Blaise said, shaking his head. 'Me, of all people! The Guardians will choose me as the very first leader of the High Council after everything I've done.'

'But you'll repay them for their faith in you,' I said firmly. 'History tells us that. You can do this, Blaise. Although,' I added thoughtfully, 'I suppose I ought to start calling you Phoenix now. You need to get used to it. Phoenix and Wren. I'm honoured to meet you both.'

We all smiled, still finding it hard to believe how things had turned out.

'I know it was a shock,' Phoenix said, 'but I still don't understand why you were so overcome, Romy. I mean, Wren.'

She swallowed. 'It was just seeing it there on the gravestone. As it all sank in it was a lot to deal with. Me, the wife of the first High Council leader! I knew it meant we'd be going with Wulfram to the Seelie Court. It's a big deal. I guess I just got overwhelmed.'

He nodded. 'I suppose so. I don't know about you but I'm hungry. It seems like a long, long time ago since we had that bacon sandwich. Shall I go into the kitchen and prepare us something to eat?'

'Sounds brilliant,' Romy agreed, and I nodded eagerly, feeling the rumblings of hunger in my stomach.

He headed out to the kitchen, and I looked at my sister.

'You're not going to tell him, are you?'

'Would you?'

I sighed. 'It's a lot for you to carry on your own, Wren.'

'Meri managed it.'

I couldn't deny that. Even so, my heart broke for her, knowing that she was now in the same position as her descendant, Meri Kittow.

As Romy, she'd faced her own gravestone. Hers and her future husband's. She knew the dates of both their deaths, and she knew not only when they would die, but also that she would outlive the man she loved by seven years.

'Like Meri, I'm beginning to realise how lucky I am. I know we both live to a ripe old age,' she said quietly. 'And I also know that I have fifty years ahead of me with that man in there. What more can I ask for? Any time I waver, whenever I feel it's too much of a burden to carry, I'll remember my lovely Meri and how brave she was. And I'll try to be like her.'

'I think she probably got it from you,' I said, managing a smile. 'How mixed up is that? You must be her twelve times great grandmother or something. Imagine!'

She laughed. 'I can't. It makes my head hurt. But I'm very proud of her. No wonder we had a bond.'

'You realise it was Blaise—I mean Phoenix—who started this whole thing? He was the one who wrote the list of names of people for Meri to invite all those years in the future. The one who told her I had to be invited. Keely, Harley, you, all the Castle Clair family.'

'August 1700,' she said. 'I remember her telling us. And I'll make sure he does that so Meri can read it out to us, and I can sit there in the twenty-first century and wonder why on earth she left me a fede ring.'

'It all makes sense now,' I said. 'Remember how no one could work out why it was you and Celeste who were left items in her will? The link was Blaise. Phoenix. A message to you both.' I shook my head in wonder. 'This is incredible.'

At least my mind was at rest over Blaise now. Celeste had said fate was still pulling him along, and she'd been right. It had been, but not for the reasons we'd feared. Far from it. Blaise's destiny had been to return to his own time and

become Phoenix Tremayne. His name would be known and revered by witches for centuries. And I already knew that Phoenix adored Wren. My sister would be safe with him. They were going to be amazing together.

‘Come and get it!’ Phoenix called from the kitchen.

My sister smiled at me. ‘Tomorrow we hunt for the sword, and then we figure out how to contact the Seelie Court. But tonight we eat and then we sleep.’

I had no arguments with that.



## Chapter 49

### *Wulfram 1673*

Dressed in jeans and jumpers, thick winter coats, scarves, and gloves, we set off the next morning to see if there was any sign of the chapel. We knew it should be there. After all, it had a long history—far longer than three hundred and fifty years or thereabouts. Even so, we admitted to a few nerves that it wouldn't have yet materialised, or that we wouldn't be able to find it for some reason.

We needn't have worried. It was on the other side of the island, exactly where it was supposed to be. It looked a little less derelict than it did in our time, but not much to be honest.

'You'd have thought it would have dressed in all its finery to welcome us back,' Wren said, laughing. 'What sort of poor show is this?'

'I'm just glad it's here,' I said. 'Although, I hope it's not so derelict that we can't gain access to the crypt.'

'Are you absolutely sure that's where you saw the sword?' Phoenix asked as we neared the building that we'd been in so recently and yet so far in the future. 'It was definitely in the crypt?'

'The vision was really clear,' I said. 'As soon as we went into the crypt to look at Bob's body I recognised the place instantly. The woman—whoever she was—told me it was there. Not in so many words but... I can't explain it. There was the strongest feeling it was there. You were both there with me, I realise that now. And you told me to take it because it was my destiny.'

'I did?' He raised an eyebrow. 'Oh well, at least I know my lines now.'

We exchanged amused glances, even though we were both anxious. So much rested on finding the sword. If I was wrong...

No. I couldn't be. Failure wasn't an option. It had to be there.

I saw my sister cast a nervous glance to the side of the chapel, but she needn't have worried. There was no graveyard here. How could there be? She and her husband were the first to be buried here, and that was fifty years in the future from now. She wouldn't see anything she shouldn't.

We pushed open the door which was hanging off its hinges. It creaked and groaned, and I worried for a moment that it was going to fall to the ground. Luckily it hung on, and we sidled past into the building itself. Or what remained of it.

There was little more of the roof left than in our day, though the walls were perhaps slightly more substantial, but there were still no windows. I supposed it didn't really matter. When we needed the chapel to look stunning it never disappointed. Let it keep its secrets for now. Well, some of them.

*Please, please, if the sword is here, don't hide it from me. I have to find it.*

'Where's the door to the crypt?' Wren asked in hushed tones. 'I've never noticed it before.'

I looked around, hoping against hope that the door would reveal itself to me. It hadn't always, I recalled.

'I can't see it,' I said, growing increasingly worried. 'I think it was over there,' I added, pointing to the far wall.

'You think?' she asked. 'Or you know?'

It was hard to get my bearings since I'd only seen the door once before, and the chapel had looked so very different then.

'There's no door now,' Phoenix said. 'What should we do?'

'Maybe press against the walls?' Wren suggested. 'What's left of them anyway. See if we can get them to reveal their

secrets.’

‘But that’s just it,’ I said. ‘Look at them. There isn’t enough of any wall standing to hold a full-size door even if it were visible. What do we do now?’

We gazed around in dismay.

‘There must be a way,’ Phoenix said calmly. ‘We just need to put our heads together and think.’

Suddenly we heard the flapping of wings and a familiar cry. We all spun round, and I’ll admit I stupidly expected to see Bran, Belasko, or Branwen, the ravens who belonged to Raiden, Celeste, and Hector.

‘Beautiful,’ Phoenix breathed. ‘Look at you!’

The glossy black raven swooped round us and settled on Phoenix’s shoulder. He gently stroked its head, and it sat patiently as if it were perfectly happy to be by his side. As if it already knew him.

‘I think you’ve found your raven,’ Wren said. ‘Isn’t he gorgeous?’

‘She,’ Phoenix corrected her, his voice breaking with emotion. ‘Wren, Wulfram, let me introduce you to Nightwing.’ His eyes filled with tears. ‘How did you find me, my old friend? How did you travel all the way from Castle Clair to here? And more importantly, why would you want to, after everything I did?’

Nightwing nuzzled his face and I saw tears rolling down Phoenix’s face. He really loved that raven, and he’d clearly missed her a lot.

‘Didn’t—didn’t she attack you?’ Wren asked nervously. ‘I seem to remember Celeste mentioning it.’

‘Never,’ Phoenix said. ‘Jennet’s raven, Merle, attacked me, and quite rightly. But Nightwing here—she simply sat and watched. She didn’t approve of my actions, but she couldn’t bring herself to hurt me. I’m so sorry, Nightwing. I let you down so badly. I’ll never do that again, I promise you.’



The raven seemed quite happy with that, judging by the way she rested her face against his. I'd never seen such an affectionate raven. She'd been waiting for his return a long time. I was so glad they'd found each other again.

'I'm happy for you,' I said. 'Even so, this doesn't solve our problem, does it?'

Nightwing called out and flew off. For a moment I thought she'd changed her mind about being reunited with her old master, but then I realised she'd landed on the floor by the far wall. She looked at it then at us.

'Do you think she knows something?' I asked, hardly daring to believe it was possible.

'I'd bet on it,' Phoenix said. 'She never lets me down.'

'But I can't see anything.' Wren moved cautiously to the wall, keeping a wary eye on the raven. She pressed the stones, but nothing happened. 'And it's as you say, the remainder of this wall isn't even tall enough to hold a door.'

I stood, staring in frustration at what was left of the wall. That door had been there, though, I was sure of it. I closed my eyes, trying to remember what it had looked like back in the twenty-first century. I saw it clearly. I remembered us opening it, going through it, heading down those steps...

'Wulfram! Look!'

Wren's excited cry made me open my eyes and I was full of relief to see the wall had repaired itself and there was a door clearly visible, as if it had always been there. Which, I supposed, it always had. I just hadn't realised it.

'You clever girl,' Phoenix said to Nightwing, who hopped smugly back onto his shoulder and gave us all a satisfied look, as if perfectly aware we'd never have found it without her help.

'Go on,' Wren said, nodding at me. 'You first.'

I pushed open the door and sure enough there were the steps leading down to the crypt. Surprisingly, they seemed to be in excellent condition, as did the walls. We headed down

below the chapel, glad of our winter coats, and looked around in amazement. Torches burned on the walls, and it looked to be as whole as it had been when I'd last been there. However derelict the chapel became, it clearly didn't affect the crypt.

'Look at that!'

Phoenix's cry made me swing round and my heart thudded. Against the far wall, where years in the future both Zephyr and Bob would one day lie, was a stone sarcophagus, with an effigy of a man lying on top of it. But what held my attention was the sword that was standing erect, plunged through the chest of the effigy.

'The Sword of Feidhlim!' The words were out before I could stop them, and Wren and Phoenix stared at me in surprise.

'What sword?'

'You can't see it?' I could hardly believe it. 'But it's right there! It's embedded in the effigy of that man. You must be able to see it?'

They stared at the sarcophagus then slowly shook their heads.

'Honestly, we can't see any sword,' Wren said.

'But don't you see? That proves it's the Sword of Feidhlim,' Phoenix said excitedly. 'You're the Great Guardian. It's only visible to you and those you wish to see it.'

'Well, I wish you two to see it,' I said immediately.

Honestly, I really didn't expect anything to happen, but Wren's hands flew to her face and Phoenix's jaw dropped.

'Oh my word!' Wren breathed. 'It's true. It's really here.'

'You can see it?'

She nodded and she and Phoenix took a step closer to it. 'It's beautiful, Wulfram. Come and look at it.'

Now the moment was upon me I was seized with an attack of nerves. All right, I'd found it, and I could see it, but

what if I couldn't remove the sword from the stone? What then?

'I wonder who this man is?' Phoenix said, peering at the effigy with interest. 'It couldn't possibly be Arthur, could it? I mean, with the sword being there with him.'

'Arthur's buried in Avalon,' I said firmly. 'That much I do know. Still, whoever this is, he must be someone important. Someone very important, connected with the sword and with Arthur.'

'Wulfram,' Wren whispered, hardly daring to take her eyes off the sarcophagus, 'you need to come and read this.'

Hesitantly I joined her at the side of the huge stone tomb and followed her gaze to the writing on the side panel. At first it was illegible to me, written in a language I couldn't understand. Slowly, though, the letters seemed to rearrange themselves into familiar words. It seemed the translation spell applied even to writing.

*Here lies the great sorcerer Merlin,  
Guardian of the Great Guardian, Arthur,  
Defender of this realm,  
Keeper of the Sword of Feidhlim.*

*Rest, my love, until Albion needs your help once more.*

I stepped back, shaken to the core.

'Merlin's buried here?' I gazed at the effigy in awe then frowned. That face...

'You need to take the sword,' Wren murmured.

'I—I can't. It's too big. All this, it's huge. This can't be meant for me!' I felt a wave of panic. Merlin? Arthur? These people were the stuff of legends. What on earth was I doing, thinking I could ever be part of this world? I was a solicitor from Cornwall. I didn't belong here.

'Only you can do this, Wulfram,' Phoenix said gently. 'This is your destiny.'

My blood turned to ice in my veins as I recalled the vision I'd had in the crystal cave. Him saying those exact words to me.

The image of the dark-haired woman filled my mind again. 'Free my love!'

I knew what I had to do.

I stepped onto the narrow ledge at the side of the sarcophagus, grasped the handle of the sword firmly, and pulled.

It slid out easily, as if it had been embedded in butter rather than stone.

'You did it!' Wren gasped.

There was an ominous rumbling sound. The effigy crumbled to dust and the sarcophagus began to crack.

'What's happening?' I cried, terrified. We all leapt back and Nightwing flew to the other end of the crypt. Wise bird.

The ground shook and I thought the whole chapel was going to collapse and we were going to be buried alive.

'We need to get out!' Wren cried, but I couldn't move.

'No,' I said, suddenly realising that was the last thing we had to do. 'Wait.'

The sarcophagus broke apart and we all coughed and spluttered as clouds of dust obliterated our vision and blocked our nostrils.

I waved my hand around, trying to clear the fog. I heard Wren scream and my heart thudded. Now what?

The cloud of dust dispersed, and I stared down at a man, lying in what remained of his tomb. His eyes fluttered then opened fully and he stared up at us all in bewilderment.

He muttered something I couldn't understand and sat up.

We all stood, frozen to the spot.

He repeated what he'd said earlier, but none of us could fathom what he meant. For some reason the translation spell

wasn't working. It didn't matter at that moment. All that mattered was that at last I was beginning to see the bigger picture, and everything was making sense. Not only that, but I knew suddenly, with absolute certainty, that I was no longer alone.

This was Merlin, and he was here to help me.

As he'd always helped me.

My friend. My mentor.

Emrick.



## Chapter 50

### *Wulfram 1673*

Not surprisingly, Emrick was shaky on his feet and seemed dazed by recent events. His skin was icy cold to the touch, and I knew we needed to get him back to Peloryon House to warm him up.

‘I think we should try zapping,’ Phoenix said firmly. ‘I know we haven’t been here long, but we’re all emotionally attached to Castle Lodge, and to the Peloryon House that now stands on that spot. And I don’t know about you, but I already feel a real attachment to our new home. It’s got to be worth a shot. It’s going to take us ages to walk him back otherwise.’ He stroked Nightwing’s head. ‘Follow us, little one. You know where we’ll be.’

We held Emrick up between us and huddled together, while I kept a tight grip on the sword. We left it up to Phoenix to transport us. His magic was rusty after four years without it, but even so I was pretty certain it would still be more reliable than mine.

Sure enough, when we opened our eyes we found ourselves in the living room of Peloryon House, where a fire blazed in the grate and all was warmth and comfort.

Emrick stared around him for a second or two, clearly amazed, but then exhaustion overwhelmed him, and we helped him onto the sofa.

He leaned back and muttered something, but again we found it impossible to understand him.

‘I wonder if he’s talking some form of old English?’ Blaise said, puzzled.

‘Welsh!’ I said suddenly. ‘He’s Welsh! I’ll bet that’s what he’s speaking.’

‘Why isn’t the translation spell working on him, though?’ Romy mused. ‘We’ve understood everyone else since we got here, and they’ve understood us.’

Emrick rubbed his forehead and I sat beside him and gazed at him in wonder. Emrick was Merlin! All this time he’d kept his secret. All this time? How long had he been alive? How old was he? It blew my mind. I mean, in our time he only looked to be in his mid-fifties, if that. No ordinary witch lived so long.

But he wasn’t an ordinary witch, was he? He was Merlin, the greatest sorcerer the world has ever known. I felt truly humbled to be in his presence, let alone to be his friend.

He frowned at me, clearly having no idea who I was, and I realised that, as yet, I wasn’t his friend. I was a stranger. How on earth did I explain all this to him?

And at that very moment it hit me. Emrick’s informants! Of course. *We* were Emrick’s informants. We were the ones who would provide him with all the information he’d pass on to us in the future. Wren, Phoenix, and me. No wonder he’d said that soon he would know no more than we did. I would return to my own time and Phoenix and Wren would know nothing of future events. His source of information would be at an end once we’d imparted everything we knew to him. When I got back home, he would be as much in the dark about what happened next as the rest of us.

We heard a tapping at the window and Phoenix smiled. ‘That’s Nightwing. I’ll just let her in, and I’ll make us all hot drinks while I’m in the kitchen.’

Wren sat down in an armchair close to the fire and smiled gently at Emrick. ‘It’s so good to see you again.’

‘See me again?’ Emrick shook his head slightly. ‘I don’t even know you. Or do I? It’s been such a long time.’

‘The translation spell has kicked in!’ I was relieved to say the least. ‘I wonder what delayed it?’



‘You put a translation spell on me?’ Emrick asked. ‘That would never work. A protection spell would have been put on me to shield me from other people’s magic while I was sleeping. It will take a while to wear off.’

‘Then how...?’

‘I just did my own translation spell,’ he said, giving us a look that plainly said, *Surely you’re not so stupid you couldn’t figure that out?*

He frowned, as if suddenly noticing our strange clothes. ‘What year is this?’

‘It’s December, 1673,’ I said. ‘I gather you’ve been asleep for a long time.’

His face paled and he shook his head slightly. ‘1673? Eleven hundred years in my prison.’

‘Your prison?’ Wren’s face crumpled. ‘Who did this to you, Emrick?’

He gave her a bemused look. ‘How do you know my family name? The world knows me as Merlin. Who told you who I really am?’

‘Oh heck,’ she muttered. ‘This is going to take an awful lot of explaining.’

Phoenix returned with Nightwing on his shoulder. He carried three mugs of hot chocolate, complete with whipped cream and marshmallows. I smiled to myself. Wren was going to have a much better life in this time than I could possibly have hoped.

‘How’s he doing?’ he asked us, handing our guest a mug.

‘*He* is doing just fine,’ Emrick said brusquely. ‘And *he* can speak for himself.’ He gazed at the confection before him. ‘What is this?’

‘Try it,’ I said. ‘It’s delicious.’

He put it on the table in front of him and stared at it suspiciously as if it were laced with poison.

‘I’ve never seen the like. What a strange world I find myself in.’

‘We’ll tell you everything,’ I promised. ‘But it’s an awfully long story and it’s going to take us a heck of a long time to tell it. I will say right now, though, that you don’t have to fear us. We’re your friends. I swear to you, you’re safe with us.’

‘I know,’ he said with a sigh. ‘You carry the Sword of Feidhlim. I know what that makes you. It’s all starting again, isn’t it? I take it you’re Arthur’s replacement?’

As he said it tears welled in his eyes. ‘I wonder if you know the task before you? You walk in the shadow of the greatest man I ever knew.’

‘I know that,’ I said, feeling the burden once more. ‘Believe me, I do. But I must believe I’m up to the job. You see, I know a great man, too, and he told me I can do this. In fact, he’s told me many times.’

‘I hope he’s as great as you say he is then,’ Emrick said, somewhat grumpily.

I smiled. ‘Oh, don’t worry about that. He is.’

‘Emrick,’ Wren said, clearly oblivious to the line of whipped cream that now coated her top lip, ‘who put you in that tomb? Who would do that to you? I mean, I’ve heard the myth about what happened but... And have you really been in there since the death of Arthur?’

Emrick watched, fascinated, as Phoenix scooped up some marshmallows and cream. He eyed his mug warily then reached for it and took a cautious sip. Evidently he liked what he tasted because it was several minutes before he put the mug down again and began to talk.

‘Nimue imprisoned me in the tomb,’ he said flatly.

‘Nimue?’ Wren gasped. ‘So the stories are true! I read she was a witch who tricked Merlin into teaching her magic then betrayed him and imprisoned him for a thousand years. I’m so sorry. What a horrible woman!’

‘No!’ Emrick shook his head vehemently. ‘She’s not a horrible woman, and she didn’t trick me. I happily taught her. We loved each other.’

‘That’s not what the legends say,’ Phoenix said cautiously.

‘I don’t care what the legends say! Legends can be wrong.’

‘Oh,’ Phoenix said, nodding his head wisely, ‘believe me, I know all about that.’

‘But why are you defending her?’ I asked. ‘You may have loved each other once, Emrick, but she imprisoned you all that time.’

‘She did it to save me. When Arthur died—’ He paused and looked round at us all. ‘I presume you know how Arthur died?’

‘Mordred,’ I said heavily. ‘There was a battle on Lyonesse and both men ended up killing each other. Mordred was buried somewhere on Lyonesse by Morgan le Fae, and Arthur was taken to Avalon where he was buried by the Nine Sisters.’

Emrick nodded, and his eyes welled with tears again. ‘I was distraught and so angry. I wanted to take revenge on the Pendragons, which would only have ignited more fighting. I was out of control with grief and Nimue tried everything to calm me down. I couldn’t see a future without Arthur, but she reminded me that one day, another Great Guardian would come to take his place and I had to be ready. I refused to listen.’

He swallowed nervously. ‘I—I’d had episodes of madness before, in the past. It wasn’t easy growing up so different in a world that didn’t understand magic. I was alone a lot of the time. I saw things. Had visions. I thought I was possessed by a demon at one point. Nimue was afraid I was going through a similar experience so she did what we’d once agreed she must do if I ever displayed those signs again. She imprisoned me in my tomb and sealed the spell with the Sword of Feidhlim, knowing that only the next Great Guardian would be able to free me. When there was need of me again, I would be

released. Nimue,' he finished, his voice thick with emotion, 'saved me.'

I leaned back in the sofa thinking. Nimue. The image of the dark-haired woman begging me to free her love came into my mind. So she was the one who had shown me the whereabouts of the sword. It wasn't only Emrick who had cause to be grateful to her.

'I'm so sorry,' I said. 'First Arthur died and now you've lost Nimue. It must be an awful shock to you.'

'Nimue isn't dead, if that's what you're thinking.' He considered me a moment. 'You wield the Sword of Feidhlim. What about Excalibur?'

'I have Excalibur,' I told him. 'It's safe.'

'And did the Lady of the Lake present it to you?' he asked.

'Not exactly. A hand reached out of the sea and passed it to me,' I said.

'And that was Nimue,' he said tearfully. 'She's the keeper of Excalibur as I am the keeper of the sword.'

Nimue had given Excalibur to me? I blew out my cheeks, stunned at this new information. I thought about the conversation I'd had with Emrick about his love for Meri. She'd saved him, he'd told me. He'd been lonely for so long before he met her. He'd had another great love, but he'd lost her. He must have meant Nimue, of course.

'Are you and she immortal?' I breathed.

He shook his head. 'No. One day others will take our place. But for now we have our roles to play, and since I've been freed and you wield the sword, I presume our islands have need of a Great Guardian once more.'

'They do,' I said cautiously, 'but it's not as simple as all that.'

'What do you mean?' he asked.

We all looked at each other. Where to start?

‘We’re in 1673 now,’ Phoenix said, ‘but the real trouble is in the twenty-first century.’

‘And that’s when Wulfram became the Great Guardian,’ Wren continued. ‘It’s a long story.’ She eyed him warmly. ‘And to be honest, I think you’re too tired and probably far too hungry to hear it all now. You should eat and rest. We’ll tell you everything later today.’

‘I think that’s a very good idea,’ Phoenix said. ‘I’ll make us some lunch. In the meantime, we need to think about contacting the fae. We have a meeting to arrange with the Seelie Court, remember?’

‘And how do we do that?’ I wondered aloud.

‘Easy,’ he said, smiling. ‘Now we have Nightwing it should be easy. We can attach a message to her, and she’ll deliver it.’

‘Really?’ I gave Nightwing an admiring glance. ‘She’s quite something, isn’t she?’

‘She is.’ He stroked her affectionately. ‘I can’t tell you how happy I am to have her back in my life. Now,’ he added, as he got to his feet briskly, ‘lunch. And you can think what to write in that message.’



# Chapter 51

## *Wulfram 1673*

Nightwing was dispatched that same day with a message from Phoenix Tremayne, requesting a meeting with the Seelie Court to discuss the matter of the time-travelling witch. Emrick might only have a vague outline of what had happened to us but that didn't prevent him from being useful when it came to the precise wording of the message. He was the one who told us to add that we acted with the blessing of the Great Guardian, something I'd completely forgotten to mention.

We saw Nightwing off and hoped fervently that our request would be met favourably.

We spent another comfortable night in Peloryon House, as we supposed it was. Emrick was overwhelmed by the bedroom we showed him to, and considering he'd spent well over a thousand years lying in a stone tomb, I should imagine he found the spring mattress on his divan exceptionally comfortable, and the winter duvet snug and cosy.

While we waited for Nightwing's return we told him everything we could remember about what had happened to us. He amazed me by not asking too many questions, listening intently, and absorbing the information like a sponge. He didn't seem surprised by anything we'd told him except for one thing.

Meri.

'My heart belongs to Nimue,' he said firmly. 'I could never—'

'I know that,' I said. 'You told me you never thought you could love another after her. But you did, Emrick. We saw it and it was beautiful. Your relationship with Meri was everything to you, believe me.'

We told him how Meri had brought us all together on the island and how brave she'd been, facing her own death with such acceptance and courage. I found it hard to say the words, thinking of Wren sitting just feet away from me, bearing the same burden. She showed no signs that our story was affecting her, and I thought again that Meri must have inherited a lot of her character from my sister.

There was so much to tell him that I knew we couldn't possibly do it all in one day. We broke it into small chunks and gave him time to absorb each bit before moving onto the next, but even so there was still a lot to tell him when we went to bed the second night.

I realised, though, that it didn't matter. I would be leaving this place soon, but Wren and Phoenix would remain, and there was nothing to stop them spending time with Emrick and telling him more as the weeks and months progressed. I had no fears about them forgetting it. Who could forget the incredible events that had happened to us, after all?

Nightwing returned late that evening. She perched on Phoenix's shoulder and tilted her head to the side. As far as I could see she carried no message, but I was wrong. The message was in her head, and she imparted the information to Phoenix in the same way Frey told me anything I needed to know.

'The meeting has been agreed,' he told us nervously. 'We're to travel to the Scottish Highlands where the Seelie Court will hear what we have to say. We have three days to prepare.'

'Three days?' I gasped as we exchanged worried glances. 'We'll never make it there in that time. You can hardly manifest a car and drive us up there. For one thing, the roads aren't up to it, and even if they were can you imagine what people would say if they saw that?'

'We'd need to go by carriage,' Phoenix agreed. 'I can make sure the horses travel much faster than they would normally. Even so, I can't see how we can make it in that time. I can't imagine how bad the roads are so far north. Unless...'



‘Unless what?’

He hesitated. ‘Look, I know it’s risky, and I know what we said, but we could cut an awful lot of time off this journey if I zapped us to Castle Clair before we got a carriage. I know, I know, but hear me out,’ he said, raising a hand as we protested. ‘I know I shouldn’t be going anywhere near Castle Clair, but we’re never going to get to the Scottish Highlands from Cornwall in that time, magically enhanced carriage or not. I can’t see any other option, can you?’

He was right and we both knew it.

‘Okay,’ I said. ‘So you transport us to somewhere near Castle Clair, which will cut the journey at least in half. How long do you reckon it will take us to get to the Borders in your magically enhanced carriage?’

He considered. ‘The horses will still need to rest, and given the state of the roads...’ He groaned. ‘You know what? I’d say it will still take about four or five days. What are we going to do? We’re never going to make it on time, even with the help of magic.’

Emrick cleared his throat. ‘Er, sorry to interrupt, but haven’t you forgotten something?’

We looked round at him. He was sitting in an armchair munching happily on cheese on toast. This life definitely suited him, as he looked much more like the Emrick I knew and loved, with a rosy glow in his cheeks and a sparkle in those brown eyes of his.

‘Have we?’ Phoenix frowned. ‘Such as?’

Emrick swallowed his cheese on toast and leaned forward a little. ‘Well, aren’t you the Great Guardian?’

I nodded. ‘I am, but what does that have to do with anything?’

He looked baffled that I even had to ask. ‘But a Great Guardian... That means you’re half witch, half fae, right?’

‘Yeesss,’ I drew out, not sure where he was going with this.

Wren squealed with excitement. ‘Of course! Why didn’t I think of that? You’re half fae, Wulfram! You know what that means? The fae can transport themselves anywhere. They don’t need to be emotionally attached to a place.’

Realisation dawned. I’d been so used to the way Keely zapped that I’d quite forgotten I had fae abilities.

‘But I’m still learning how to use magic,’ I said, feeling my optimism drain away. ‘I’m not very good at zapping.’

‘Rubbish!’ Emrick put down his empty plate and brushed crumbs from his jumper onto the carpet, which Wren kindly didn’t mention. ‘This is all about confidence if you ask me. Fae magic is in your blood. It’s instinctive. Who you are. I reckon you’ve been so focused on trying to copy the way the witches move that you haven’t given the fae side of you free rein.’

‘He’s right, Wulfram,’ Wren said. ‘You don’t have enough confidence in yourself, but fae magic is in you. I found transporting myself so easy, and I’ll bet it was because I wasn’t trying to do it the way Keely and Harley do it.’

‘Then how do you do it?’ I asked. ‘If you’ve never been to a place before and have no attachment to it, what do you visualise?’

She shrugged. ‘You don’t visualise anything. You just mentally say the words.’

‘That’s it?’ I said, disbelievingly. ‘As easy as that?’

‘Try it.’

‘How? I’m not going to risk zapping away from this island.’

‘Is there anywhere on the island you’re not attached to?’ Emrick asked. ‘Anywhere you’re not familiar with? Haven’t been perhaps?’

I thought about it. I was rather ashamed to admit I’d never been to the southern end of the island. In all the times I’d visited and lived there, I’d never gone further south than Peloryon House. I’d spent all my time in the area between

there and Landing Beach. Oh, I'd gone to the west of the island as the chapel was on that side, but since there was no beach and nothing but rocks and sea at the south...

'There is a part I've not visited,' I admitted sheepishly. 'The south of the island. You think I should try that?'

'You've nothing to lose,' Emrick said, while the others nodded eagerly.

I got to my feet and closed my eyes.

'No, no!' Wren said immediately. 'You're visualising again. You're overthinking this. Don't try to picture somewhere you've never been. Just think the words.'

I took a deep breath, hoping she was right.

*South Peloryon Island.*

I jumped back as I was immediately hit by what felt like buckets of water being poured over my head. I was standing on the island, looking down on rocks which were being pounded by ferocious seas. And the rain was pouring down. We'd been so warm and cosy at home that we hadn't even noticed how bad the weather was outside.

*Peloryon House.*

I arrived back indoors soaking wet and cold, but full of excitement. I'd done it!

'Oh well done!' Wren said, clapping her hands enthusiastically.

'You're dripping water on the carpet,' Emrick observed, which was a bit rich considering he'd just brushed a load of toast crumbs onto it.

'Go and dry off,' Wren said cheerfully. 'Now we know we can make the meeting in good time, we'd better plan exactly what we're going to say to the Seelie Court.'



## Chapter 52

### *Wulfram 1673*

If we thought the weather had been bad in Cornwall it was nothing to what greeted us in Scotland. I honestly thought we were going to freeze to death when we arrived in the Highlands two days later, having left Emrick and Nightwing safely at home.

Phoenix had warned us that Scotland was a tumultuous place. It had been dragged into the English Civil War in the 1640s, mainly over the issue of religion. An English occupation of the country had only ended as recently as thirteen years ago, and there was a great deal of hostility and suspicion about Englishmen.

Luckily for us, he managed to make us all sound like Highlanders, which was a good job because Jon Culshaw I was not.

We'd arrived on the outskirts of Inverness and, having dismissed any thoughts of staying in an inn after our shocking experience in The Royal Oak, we decided to manifest that much talked about cabin, this time on an isolated stretch of Loch Ness.

'It would be just our luck if Nessie popped up to say hello,' I said glumly, although my spirits soon lifted when I saw how Phoenix had produced a small, rather desolate looking stone hut that would never draw attention on the outside but was like a luxury holiday lodge on the inside.

'Don't worry,' he said. 'No one will notice it, and if they do they'll assume it's been here for years. We're safe.'

We were relieved to settle down and make ourselves comfortable and warm.

‘I have to say,’ I told Phoenix, ‘I have such admiration for you and for all the people who lived in these times. We’re so cosseted now, with our central heating and triple glazing, that I’m finding it impossible to cope with these low temperatures. I have no idea how you managed.’

‘To be honest,’ he said, ‘this has been as much of an eye-opener for me as it has for you. I was cosseted too. My father was wealthy and powerful, we had servants, a good home. I was fed well and kept warm. I never realised how ordinary people lived, or how much they must have suffered.’

He thanked me as I handed him a bowl of thick chicken soup and a plate of warm, crusty bread. I was quite proud of myself for having manifested those. I was improving. Okay, it wasn’t anything spectacular, but I was definitely getting better.

‘You know,’ he said, glancing over at Wren who was eating hungrily, ‘I think I’d like to do something about that.’

She smiled at him. ‘What would you like to do?’

‘I can’t save the world,’ he said with a slight shrug, ‘but what I saw in Polkayne touched me. Those poor children. Did you see how thin their clothes were? And the old man who took us to the island—his clothes were so patched I doubt they’d last much longer. He was so thin, and so grateful for ten shillings! I think, perhaps, I’d like to do something for the people of Polkayne. It was, after all, where my mother’s family came from. Maybe I could set up some poor relief. Maybe eventually a place of education for the children? Something anyway.’ He tore a piece of bread and dipped it in his soup. ‘Just thinking out loud really.’

‘I think it’s a great idea,’ I assured him. ‘You should definitely—’

I froze at a loud bang on the door.

We all looked nervously at each other.

‘Why would anyone be knocking on our door?’ Wren whispered.

‘Open up!’

I got to my feet and turned to Phoenix. ‘No one should have noticed anything odd about this place, right?’ I whispered.

He shook his head. ‘No one. We’d better change this into something more appropriate, though.’

He glanced around him and as he did, the stone hut became just that—a cold, unwelcoming hovel with a dirt floor and nothing but woollen blankets and a small fire to keep us warm.

He nodded at me, and I strode to the door.

Someone shouted, ‘Open up!’ again and there came another bang. Whoever it was wasn’t in any mood to be ignored.

Trying to calm my nerves I opened the door and peered out. Two men stood outside, and the first, a young man with dark hair eyed me suspiciously.

‘What’s your name?’

I bristled. ‘What’s it got to do with you?’

‘Why are you here?’ he demanded. ‘State your business.’

‘Not until you tell me who’s asking and why,’ I said. ‘We’re just sitting here, eating our supper—’

‘Don’t give us that old flannel!’ The older man pushed his way to the front, and I frowned. He looked familiar. ‘We see you! We know this stone hut wasn’t here when we passed this way earlier today, so don’t try to pretend you’re innocent locals cos we know you’re not.’

To my shock he barged past me and strode into the hut, the younger man following close behind.

‘Hey!’ I cried. ‘You can’t just walk in!’

‘I can do what I like,’ he said crossly. ‘I want to know what you’re up to, because if you’re who I think you are...’

His voice trailed off and he stared at Phoenix in amazement. Phoenix got to his feet, and I saw the look of horror on his face.

‘You!’ the man gasped.

Phoenix swallowed. ‘Hello, Uncle Titus. Fancy seeing you here.’

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Titus St Clair! Oh no. Things had just got very complicated.

‘You’d better sit down, Uncle,’ Phoenix said gently, seeing the poor man sway, as if overcome with shock.

Immediately the hut transformed itself back into the lodge we’d been sitting in just moments before. Titus looked around him and shook his head, clearly stunned.

‘Would you like some soup, Mr St Clair?’ Wren asked politely. She glanced at the younger man, who looked completely dumbfounded by these events. ‘I’m sorry, I don’t know your name.’

Titus seemed to recover some of his faculties. ‘This is my servant, Robert. He’s been travelling with me.’

‘What are you doing all the way up in Scotland, Uncle?’ Phoenix asked, sounding genuinely curious.

His uncle gaped at him. ‘What am *I* doing in Scotland? What the hell are *you* doing here? That’s what I want to know. Have you any idea what you’ve put us through? The trouble you’ve caused? I don’t understand. The daoine sidhe said—’

‘The daoine sidhe?’ I asked sharply. ‘When have you spoken to them?’

He turned to look at me. ‘Are you Phoenix Tremayne?’ he demanded.

I wasn’t quite sure how to answer that. What did he know of Phoenix Tremayne?

‘No,’ Phoenix said quietly. ‘I am.’

‘You are?’ Titus rubbed the back of his head. ‘I’m completely lost here. I don’t understand what’s going on. I was summoned up here to explain...’ He leaned forward suddenly. ‘Where the hell have you been? Do you know what’s happened to your brother? Poor Bevil. He’s—he’s—’



‘I know,’ Phoenix said softly. ‘I know. I was sorry to hear it.’

‘Sorry to hear it? Then why didn’t you come back, eh? Why didn’t you go home to Castle Clair and take your rightful place there? You know he married? His young widow, she was expecting. You have a nephew. They need you, and you’re up here doing—’ He threw up his hands in frustration. ‘What are you doing?’

‘Trying to right a great wrong,’ Phoenix explained. ‘It’s a long story. But what are you doing all the way up here? Where are you going?’

‘Home,’ Titus said bitterly. ‘And I never want to come up here again. I was summoned to the Seelie Court, can you believe?’

‘You were?’ Phoenix gasped. ‘But why?’

‘Why do you think? To explain your actions! To tell them what I knew about this witch nephew of mine who’d apparently travelled in time. I told them, it wasn’t possible. My nephew would never do such a thing. My poor Blaise was killed, leaping to his death from a witchfinder. Now I find you alive and well and bearing another name. And to cap it all, the Seelie Court told me they were expecting a visit from one Phoenix Tremayne who promised to explain everything about what happened to you. I never in a million years thought that would be you.’

‘I’m so sorry,’ Phoenix said sadly. ‘I never meant for anything like this to happen. The last thing I wanted was for you to be dragged into it.’

‘Well I have been,’ his uncle said crossly. ‘And your brother is dead, and your sister-in-law is bringing up her son alone, and Castle Clair is in mourning for two sons it loved and lost. How do you think everyone would feel if they knew you were here, eh? How do you think Jennet would feel?’

I saw a shadow cross Phoenix’s face and realised he knew all too well how Jennet would feel.

‘Please Mr St Clair,’ Wren said, ‘make yourself comfortable and have some soup. You too, Robert. We can explain everything, we really can.’

‘And who are you?’ Titus asked, settling himself on a cosy rocking chair, after giving it a suspicious look.

‘This is Wren Pendragon, Uncle,’ Phoenix said.

‘Pendragon!’ Titus gave her a look of alarm. ‘You’re one of the fair folk?’

‘She’s also half witch,’ Phoenix said patiently. ‘You needn’t fear her. She’s on our side. And I’m very glad you’ve had the chance to meet her. You see, Wren and I are to be married in a few days.’

It was news to me, but evidently no surprise to Wren, as she merely smiled. Of course, I knew Phoenix and Wren married at some point, but I hadn’t realised they’d already discussed it, nor that they’d set a date.

‘You’re marrying a Pendragon?’ Titus whispered. It was clearly all too much for him to take in. He buried his face in his hands and groaned. ‘I dread to think what your poor father would say.’

I passed bowls of soup to him and Robert and patted them both comfortingly on the shoulder.

‘Eat this,’ I said. ‘We have a lot of catching up to do.’

To give him his due, he sat quite patiently as Phoenix explained everything that had happened to him and why we were here in the Highlands. He quietly ate his soup and listened, not interrupting, pushing the empty bowl away when he’d finished but still not commenting.

When Phoenix finally finished he leaned back in his rocking chair and closed his eyes for a moment.

‘I’m so disappointed in you,’ he said at last.

Phoenix lowered his eyes. ‘I know,’ he murmured. ‘I’m disappointed in myself.’

‘To time travel, Blaise! You knew the dangers, yet you persisted, and you even tried to drag poor Jennet into your schemes. Thank the gods she had more sense in the end.’

‘I’m so sorry, Uncle,’ Phoenix said miserably.

Titus shook his head and surveyed him sorrowfully. ‘What you’ve brought us to! I don’t know. Then again,’ he said cautiously, ‘if what you say about your future is true then I suppose you’re about to redeem yourself.’

‘It sounds as if fate played a big part in all this,’ Robert said. He’d been listening raptly to Phoenix’s story and had finally decided to comment. ‘It was all meant to be. You can see destiny unfolding, can’t you? Incredible. And when you look at it that way, it’s not really his fault at all, is it?’

Titus turned to look at him and Robert reddened.

‘Since when did I pay you to have an opinion?’ he demanded.

‘Sorry, sir,’ Robert mumbled.

‘You’re right, though,’ Titus said grudgingly. ‘I can’t believe I got dragged into it all. The Seelie Court got your message and immediately sent for me. I had no idea what they were talking about. Like I told them, as far as I knew Blaise died in the River Hrafn. I’d heard nothing of time travel. I suppose they were checking how much our family knew before they heard your side of the story. They’ll think I was lying now.’

‘They won’t,’ Phoenix assured him. ‘I’ll make sure they know the truth.’

‘How did you know we were here?’ I asked curiously. ‘What made you bang on our door?’

‘We’d decided to walk to the nearest inn and have a few drinks to warm us up before heading home,’ he explained. ‘We’d landed not far from here when we first arrived this morning, and we knew this stone hut wasn’t here then. The fair folk had told us they were expecting a visit from some great witch called Phoenix Tremayne who had information about Blaise, and I thought, since this place was obviously

conjured up with magic, maybe this Phoenix chap was here. I wanted to confront him. Find out what he was going to say and if he genuinely knew something, or if he intended to make it up. Never dreamed in a million years that I'd find you here.'

He turned to me. 'So where do you fit into this scenario?'

I shuffled awkwardly. 'I—I'm the Great Guardian.'

His mouth fell open, and Robert dropped his bowl on the floor. Luckily, we had a nice thick carpet, so it didn't break.

'You're what?'

'It's true,' Phoenix said, smiling. 'This is Wulfram Pendragon, Wren's brother. He and Wren are both from the future, Uncle. He's the Great Guardian who, in the twenty-first century, will bring peace between witches and fae. I mean, the fair folk.'

'After he's calmed the Seelie Court tomorrow, naturally,' Wren added.

'I'm so sorry,' Titus said. He got to his feet and bowed low. 'I had no idea. Forgive me.'

I was mortified. 'Please, it doesn't matter. Sit down.'

'But, but I insulted you! The way I spoke to you!' Titus had gone quite pale. 'How can I ever apologise enough?'

'There's no need to apologise,' I assured him. 'It's sorted now.'

'That's very gracious of you,' he said. 'I think Robert and I should go home now. I'm feeling very tired suddenly.' He frowned. 'What do I tell Jennet? She should know. Or should she? And little Bartholomew. How will I explain this to him when he's older?'

'Uncle,' Phoenix said solemnly, 'there's something I need you to do for me. One last favour and I swear you'll never have to see me again.'

'What sort of favour?' his uncle asked suspiciously.

'In a few years, the care of Bartholomew will fall to you.' He sighed heavily and lowered his head for a moment. 'I wish

I could tell you different, but it's true. You will become his guardian. Some of my—friends—will convince you that Bartholomew should grow up believing their story that Bevil betrayed me to the witchfinder, and that I was the innocent party in all this.'

'Don't worry about that,' Titus said indignantly. 'I'll put him straight. I'll tell them all the truth. I won't let Bevil's name be blackened like that. Not that anyone would believe he'd ever betray you anyway.'

Phoenix wiped tears from his eyes. 'I wish that were true. That's the favour I must ask you, Uncle. I need you to promise me that you'll do as they say. That you'll tell Bartholomew that his father was a traitor, and I was the hero who leapt from the castle wall that night.'

'What?' Titus stared at him. 'But—but you loved Bevil! How could you do that to his memory? How could you ask *me* to do that to his memory?' He shook his head vehemently. 'I won't do it! They can kill me if they must. I won't tell such wicked lies.'

Phoenix gulped. 'I know. I understand that. But you must, Uncle. This is what fate has in store for our family. You have to trust me. One day, the truth will be revealed and Bevil's name will be cleared. But for now, you must let people believe that Bevil was the villain in this story. Please.'

His voice cracked and I felt a rush of sympathy for him. I knew how much his brother meant to him, and how he'd pleaded with Celeste to set the story straight and restore Bevil's good name. This must be agony for him, understanding at last that it was his own pleas to Titus that had ensured Bevil became the villain in the Castle Clair legend.

Though, seeing the doubtful expression on his face, I could see Titus wasn't fully convinced. I hated to do this, but I had no choice. I had to make sure Castor's ancestor did what history had recorded.

'He's right,' I said firmly. 'I'm sorry, but for the sake of peace and security in the future, you must sacrifice Bevil's reputation in the present day. I know it's going to be difficult

for you, believe me, but I'm asking you, as the Great Guardian, to do as we request.'

Titus was quiet for a moment, then he nodded. 'I'm not happy about this. That poor lad, growing up, thinking his father was a traitor! But if the Great Guardian tells me it's essential, who am I to argue? I'll do as you ask, but I'll do it with a heavy heart. And may the gods forgive me.'

He got to his feet. 'Come, Robert. Time we were leaving.'

Phoenix stood and they stared at each other for a moment.

'This is goodbye then?' Titus asked.

Phoenix nodded. 'Our paths won't cross again, Uncle,' he said sadly. 'I must keep my distance from Yorkshire and from the St Clair family. No one must know I'm still alive. I'm sorry.'

'Me, too, Blaise. I've already mourned for you once, my boy. Now it seems I must mourn for you all over again. For Jennet soon, too, and for everything else that's to come. Well, fate can be a cruel mistress, but we must all do what we can to keep the peace between witches and the fair folk.'

He pulled his nephew into a hug.

'Farewell, my boy.'

'Goodbye, Uncle.'

Titus smiled at Wren. 'A pleasure to meet you. I hope you'll both be very happy.'

He and Robert headed to the door, and as he passed me he bowed low again, to my embarrassment.

'An honour to meet you. I never imagined that I would meet a Great Guardian. Although, I know the fact that you're here at all means this world is in peril. I'm glad to be able to help in some way, even if it does mean sacrificing one nephew and the reputation of the other.'

I nodded, understanding how emotional he was feeling, and he and Robert left the hut, closing the door carefully behind them.

‘He’ll have a lot to process,’ Phoenix said sadly. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. ‘As do I.’

‘I’ll leave you both to it,’ I murmured, and headed to my bedroom. I had a feeling he and Wren had a lot to talk about that night.





## Chapter 53

### *Wulfram 1673*

‘Welcome, Phoenix Tremayne.’

If the two Shining Ones hoped their appearance would intimidate us they would, I thought, be sadly mistaken. Wren and I had, after all, seen Shining Ones in their true form before and it didn’t worry me. In fact, I considered a Shining One to be one of my best friends. We’d warned Phoenix what to expect so it didn’t come as any shock to him either.

I hadn’t been sure what to expect when a leprechaun arrived at our stone hut to escort us to the meeting. I’d almost asked him how he’d known where we were, but having had dealings with Sweeney in Ballydraiocht, I doubted I’d get a civil answer, so didn’t bother.

Of course, Phoenix and Wren had never met a leprechaun before. I’d had to reassure them that everything was fine, and not to worry.

I’d already advised them that, just because this was the Seelie Court which supposedly consisted of friendly members of the fae community, as opposed to the Unseelie Court which most definitely didn’t, that didn’t necessarily mean we could fully trust them. The fae were tricky creatures, and felt no loyalty to human beings, let alone the witches who had, after all, betrayed them all those years ago. I’d also warned them that, in this time, the term *fae* might not be appreciated, and suggested they refer to them as the *daoine sidhe* or fair folk instead.

‘Just be polite and respectful,’ I told them. ‘And keep your wits about you.’

I vaguely remembered the O’Briens telling us that the meeting between me and the Seelie Court had taken place in a

castle, so I wasn't too surprised to find myself in this magnificent throne room, although I had no idea where the castle actually was, or what it looked like from the outside, as the leprechaun had transported us all directly inside.

Two golden thrones were at the far end of the room. Sitting upon them were the two Tuatha Dé Danaan. Gathered around them were various elves, brownies, sprites, and various other creatures I couldn't identify. Every head turned in our direction as we approached the thrones, and I heard some muttering—not all of which sounded positive.

I bowed before the Shining Ones, wondering if these were Killian's grandparents. I was relieved to see, out of the corner of my eye, that Phoenix and Wren had also bowed.

'Thank you for accepting our request for an audience and inviting us to your home,' Phoenix managed.

There was some laughter behind him, and the woman held up her hand to silence the gleeful audience.

'This is not our home,' she explained. 'This is the home of one of the noblest families in this country, who have graciously invited us to stay.'

I couldn't help wondering how much choice this noble family had had in the matter.

'I am Eithne,' the woman said. 'This is my husband, Cormac. You said you had information about the witch who travelled through time.' Clearly, she wasn't big on small talk. She eyed him curiously. 'I take it you are Phoenix Tremayne?'

'I am,' he said, his voice breaking with nerves. He cleared his throat and tried again. 'This is my future wife, Wren Pendragon, and her brother, Wulfram. We're here to reassure you about Blaise St Clair.'

'And why should we trust the word of Pendragons?' Cormac asked. 'How do you know what happened to the witch, and why do you bring two Pendragons with you?'

'I know what happened to the witch,' Phoenix said nervously, 'because I *am* that witch. And I bring the two Pendragons with me because Wulfram is the Great Guardian

of the future, who has come back in time to be with me today to help explain what happened.'

There was a great deal of excitement at his announcement. Eithne got to her feet.

'We were told you carried with you the blessing of the Great Guardian. We didn't know you would be bringing him with you.'

She walked towards me.

'Can you prove you are who you say you are?'

I nodded. 'I can.'

'Then do so.'

I glanced down at the sword that hung at my side and told it I wished our audience to see it.

There were immediate gasps and Eithne stepped back, clearly impressed.

'The Sword of Feidhlim! You *are* the Great Guardian!'

She waved her hand and immediately three more golden thrones appeared. Not quite as grand as hers and her husband's, naturally, but not bad.

'Please be seated,' she said, and I noted the change in her tone and a sudden hint of warmth in her silvery eyes, if that were possible. 'I had hoped this meeting would give us the reassurance we needed to calm our people, and it seems my wish is to be granted. You must know, Lord Pendragon, that there is turmoil in the world of the daoine sidhe. I should imagine,' she added, glancing at Phoenix, 'there is as much turmoil among the witches.'

'Indeed,' I said. 'That's why I'm here. That's why we're all here. To prove to you that you have nothing to fear from the witches. The man you knew as Blaise St Clair is dead. In his place is Phoenix Tremayne, who has returned to his own time and closed the time loop.'

'Why have you changed your name?' she asked Phoenix.

‘I can’t go back to my own time as Blaise St Clair,’ he explained. ‘History has recorded that Blaise died in 1669, and I can’t change that. It would cause even more disruption. I had to come back as someone else, far away from my home town, and start again.’

‘Then why come back at all?’ she asked, her eyes sharp. I had a feeling she was testing him.

‘To make amends,’ he said simply. ‘I made a grave error when I travelled through time. It was a stupid, selfish act that I’ve regretted for a long time. I can’t let the daoine sidhe and witches suffer because of my actions. I have to put this right.’

‘Tell me,’ Cormac said, ‘why did you disobey such an important law in the first place?’

Phoenix was quiet for a moment. ‘I suppose,’ he said at last, ‘because I wanted to prove to myself that I could. I was a gifted witch. I found magic easy. I wanted to challenge myself, and I knew time travel was difficult for even the most talented witches to accomplish. Few are good enough, and of course, even those who possibly could do it refuse to attempt it. Except me. My pride and arrogance, my excitement at the prospect of achieving something most other witches would find impossible, it coloured my judgment. I lost sight of the danger I was putting everyone in. All I could think about was achieving my goal. I’m so sorry for everything I did.’

‘Why should we believe you?’ the woman asked.

‘You have no reason to,’ he admitted. ‘However, I’m here today to show you that I am genuinely sorry. I’ve returned to my own time. I never went to the future to look for the keys, although I know that’s what the Pendragons have been telling you. I didn’t even know about the keys or the dragons until recently, and I have no interest in them. All I want to do is dedicate the rest of my life to keeping peace between our two peoples, and making amends for the wrong I did.’

‘Phoenix Tremayne is destined to become the first leader of the High Council of Witches,’ I explained. ‘This will be an organisation set up by the Guardians to monitor the activity of

witches and try to prevent any of them stepping out of line again.’

‘The Guardians are to set this organisation up?’ Eithne said, clearly surprised. ‘And yet you say they will choose this man as its first leader?’

‘Because they know how genuinely sorry he is, and that such a talented witch can be put to good use,’ I explained. ‘His gifts will make our world a better place. Phoenix is destined to do so much for both daoine sidhe and witches. And by his side he’ll have his wife, Wren. She is half daoine sidhe, half witch. She has no interest in stirring up divisions between the two communities she is part of.’

‘Even so,’ Eithne said, addressing Wren, ‘you are still a Pendragon. I see that the Sword of Feidhlim trusts in your brother, but how do we know we can trust in you? If the Great Guardian is to be believed, and he must be, you will be the partner of the leader of the witches. You will have his ear. How do we know you won’t work mischief?’

‘You’re judging her because she’s a Pendragon,’ I said. ‘Yet Arthur and Feidhlim were Pendragons. I am a Pendragon.’

‘And the sword judged you all and found you all worthy,’ she reminded me. ‘It gives no such guarantee about this woman.’

Wren lifted her chin defiantly. ‘With all due respect, there were no guarantees about the woman known as Morgan le Fae either. Legend has it that she was a manipulative woman who betrayed Arthur. Yet we all know that’s not true. She was a good person, who wanted peace between her people and the witches, and supported her half-brother in his endeavours. Are all Pendragons to be judged as harshly as she was? I’ve travelled hundreds of years back in time to support the man I love because I believe he will do good in the world. I love my brother, who will dedicate the rest of his life to keeping our communities safe. Do you really believe I’m here to cause division and betray the two men I love most in the world?’

Eithne stared at her, then her mouth curved into what I could only assume was a smile.

‘You make a good argument, Wren Pendragon,’ she said, then called loudly, ‘Send for Aengus!’

The double doors behind us opened and the leprechaun who had brought us here hurried in.

‘Aengus,’ she said, ‘this girl claims to be a Pendragon, yet I sense none of our magic in her, and no alarms sounded when she came back through time. What can you tell me about her?’

Aengus clasped his hands together and his expression became almost comically tragic. ‘I hear the blood of our people in her veins,’ he said with a dramatic sigh, ‘but it’s useless, wasted. It’s singing a mournful lament that makes my heart ache. As for witchcraft—I sense nothing. The girl has no magic.’

‘Thank you. You may wait outside,’ Eithne said dismissively. Aengus immediately hurried out of the room, and she turned to Wren. ‘Well?’

‘Because I gave my magic up,’ Wren explained. ‘Witches are forbidden to time travel. If the daoine sidhe had sensed another witch coming back through time, or the witches had sensed one of the fair folk arriving, it would have scared both communities and stirred up more fear and rumours.’

‘Indeed it would.’ Cormac stroked his chin. ‘That’s a big sacrifice to make. But tell me, how did you suppress your daoine sidhe blood? I understand that witchcraft can be removed by Guardians, but...’

Wren looked at me, clearly worried about revealing too much.

‘Her magic was removed by the sorcerer Merlin and stored in Lyonesse,’ I said.

There was a collective gasp and Eithne and Cormac both got to their feet.

‘Merlin? He is in our world once more? When did he carry out this act?’

‘It was in the future,’ I explained. ‘The twenty-first century to be exact. I know this sounds fantastic, but I want to be completely honest with you.’

‘Lyonesse vanished from your world after the death of Arthur,’ Cormac said, watching me closely.

‘It did. But part of it returned recently as a small island, and it remains so even in the time we come from.’

Eithne’s eyes glowed. ‘Then we were correct. We sensed this recently. It was hard to believe but we were planning to investigate. Our people—do they still live there? Are they well?’

‘I haven’t seen them in this time,’ I admitted. ‘That doesn’t mean they’re not there. We haven’t really had a moment to investigate. But I do know they live on the island in my own time, and they’re happy and well.’

‘The island is our home now,’ Wren explained. ‘Phoenix and I will live there.’

‘On whose authority?’ Eithne enquired.

Phoenix removed a document from his coat and handed it to Wren, who in turn gave it to Eithne. She unfolded it and read it carefully.

‘The Queen of Lyonesse? A direct descendant of King Leodegrance still lives in your time?’ She sounded genuinely delighted. ‘This is good news indeed. The Royal Family of Lyonesse always treated our people well and kindly. And Queen Ewella has given you the deeds to this island for exactly three hundred and fifty years I see, after which, it reverts to her. This all fits with what you’ve told me.’

‘None of us wants more bloodshed,’ I pleaded. ‘I speak with both witches and fair folk, and I haven’t met one yet who wishes to see a repeat of the last great war. Haven’t our people suffered enough? We can’t keep on making the same mistakes, sacrificing thousands, hundreds of thousands, even millions of our kind for nothing. This is a beautiful world. There’s room enough for us all. We should work together to nurture our planet and keep our people safe and happy. The dimension box

is safe. I will return to my own time and find the two keys; you have my word. This is my life's mission: to keep peace and help the fair folk and witches to live securely, without fear or danger from each other, or from anyone or anything else. I swear it on the Sword of Feidhlim as the next Great Guardian of this world.'

She and Cormac exchanged glances then both watched me thoughtfully for a long, agonising moment. Then Eithne nodded.

'So, Blaise St Clair is, to all intents and purposes, dead. The time loop has closed. No rogue witch has stolen a key. We have a new Great Guardian in the future who will, no doubt, keep the peace. And the Guardians are setting up a council to monitor the witches' behaviour, which you, Phoenix Tremayne, will be the leader of.'

She folded her hands in her lap.

'I think we can reassure our people they have nothing to fear.'

'Thank you,' I said gratefully.

'I suspect you have much work still to do in your own time,' she said. 'We will not keep you any longer. You may go.'

I gave her a startled look, but she was already leaning over to talk to her husband, and it was obvious that we were dismissed.

I glanced at Phoenix and Wren who looked as surprised as I was by the abrupt termination of our meeting. I gave them a slight shrug. Such was the way of the Shining Ones and the fae. You never really knew where you were with them, but I knew I could trust Eithne and Cormac to calm their people. Hadn't their children already told me as much?

I motioned to my sister and her fiancé to follow me, and we headed out of the throne room, finding ourselves in a large, grand hall.

'We can go home now then?' Wren asked hopefully. 'Back to the island, I mean?'



‘We can,’ I said distractedly, ‘but there’s something I have to do first.’

I glanced around me, but the hall was empty. Then I heard giggling, and I realised it came from above us. At the top of the stairs sat two children. Shining Ones. I smiled, knowing exactly who they were.

Slowly I climbed the stairs until I was level with them, then I sat down beside them.

‘Hello,’ I said. ‘Are you Orlagh and Ailill?’

They exchanged glances. ‘How did you know that?’ one asked. To be honest, I can’t say which one of them it was. It was hard to tell as they were dressed identically, and both had silver eyes, pale faces, and snow-white hair.

‘Were you waiting for me?’ I asked them gently.

They nodded.

‘Mammy Flynn told us the Great Guardian had arrived with the witch,’ one whispered, ‘and we wanted to see him, but we weren’t allowed.’

The other one sighed. ‘We’re never allowed to do anything interesting, are we, Orlagh?’

‘No. Are you the Great Guardian then?’ Orlagh asked, leaning towards me, and cupping her mouth with her hand, as if by doing so no one else would be able to hear her, even though she hadn’t lowered her voice.

‘I am,’ I said. ‘I’m going home now, but I want you to know that everything’s all right. You needn’t be afraid because Orlagh’s parents and my friends and I have sorted things out between us, and there will be peace.’

‘Aengus told us there would be war soon,’ Ailill said doubtfully.

‘Not any more. The danger has passed. You can trust me.’ Carefully, I took hold of their hands and smiled at them. ‘Everything’s going to be okay. I’m very glad to have met you both.’

They exchanged glances, then to my surprise, Orlagh put her arms around my neck and hugged me. ‘One day,’ she whispered in my ear, ‘I’ll have to oversee all this. Will you help me when I do?’

‘Always,’ I promised.

I got to my feet. ‘I must go home now,’ I said. ‘We’ll meet again, never fear. In the meantime, be happy, and be kind to each other.’ I began to descend the stairs when a thought struck me, and I turned my head to face them. ‘Oh, and one more thing. Witches have the same feelings as we do, you know. Having one of them, or even two of them, in your family wouldn’t be such a bad thing.’

As they exchanged puzzled glances I smiled to myself and headed downstairs where Wren and Phoenix were waiting for me.

Job done. Time to go home.



## Chapter 54

### *Wulfram 1673*

‘Where is he?’ Wren fretted, pacing up and down the living room. ‘He said he wouldn’t be long, but he’s been ages. Do you think something’s happened to him?’

‘I’m sure he’s fine,’ I reassured her, knowing full well what was taking Phoenix so long but unable to tell her because it would spoil the surprise.

‘We said the wedding would be at two,’ she reminded me. ‘It’s half past one now.’

‘Don’t worry about that,’ I said, smiling. ‘It’s not as if the vicar won’t wait, is it?’

I’d been given the great honour of marrying Phoenix and Wren in our little island chapel. Emrick had agreed to be a witness and we were all looking forward to the ceremony. I wasn’t so nervous this time. I had, after all, previously married Killian and Harley.

‘You definitely left him in Gerrenporth?’

‘I told you I did,’ I said. ‘He’s gone to buy your wedding ring. Once I’d dropped him off there I left him to it.’

Despite her best efforts, Wren hadn’t managed to find her fede ring, which she feared had somehow dropped off her finger in the journey from the twenty-first to the seventeenth century. She was understandably upset, as it was all she had of Meri, but Phoenix had promised to buy her the best wedding ring he could find in Gerrenporth as compensation.

Emrick grinned at me. ‘I do like your hair like that,’ he said, his eyes twinkling with amusement.

I tossed my long curls and gave him a haughty look. ‘It’s the latest fashion. Well, sort of. Better than wearing a periwig

anyway. Thank goodness the powdered wigs aren't fashionable yet. Are you sure about wearing these clothes, Wren?' I added, glancing down at my period breeches and coat. 'I thought you were going to stick to comfort.'

Although, I had to admit, she looked lovely in her bridal gown of blue and gold silk brocade, adorned with silk taffeta ribbon.

'We are,' she said, 'but obviously when we're not on the island we'll have to dress for the times, and we thought for formal occasions... Well, it is our wedding day, and since we're getting married in 1673 I feel we should look the part.' She blushed a little. 'Besides, I must admit I like seeing Phoenix in the sort of clothes he would have worn as Blaise. He does look rather dashing in them, don't you think?'

Emrick and I rolled our eyes, then exchanged looks of relief as Phoenix arrived back in the house.

'Where have you been?' Wren squealed, throwing her arms around him. 'I was so worried about you! I was going to send Wulfram to look for you.'

Phoenix stepped back and gazed at her in amazement. 'You look beautiful,' he told her. 'I'm so lucky to have you in my life. I don't think there has ever been a lovelier bride in any century.'

Wren looked at him shyly, then recovered herself. 'Never mind that. Have you any idea how frantic I've been? What took you so long?'

Phoenix gave me a grateful look. 'You didn't tell her then?'

'Of course not,' I said indignantly. 'I made a promise.'

'What's going on?' Wren asked suspiciously.

'Darling, I'm sorry for the deception,' Phoenix said, 'but honestly, the jeweller's in Gerrenporth—well, it could hardly be called a jeweller's at all. Wulfram and I had seen it for ourselves yesterday when we made a brief scouting mission while you were here reading, and I knew it wouldn't have any decent wedding rings.'

‘So I took him to London this morning,’ I explained, ‘and I left him outside a high-class jeweller’s.’

‘Where,’ Phoenix said softly, ‘I found this.’

He rummaged in his coat pocket and told her to close her eyes, then he took her hand and gently placed something in her palm.

She stared down in disbelief. ‘My fede ring!’

‘We realised that the fede ring hadn’t made it back to 1663 with us because, how could it? Meri had given it to you, but she herself had inherited it from her ancestor, Wren Tremayne, who received it on her wedding day. Since you hadn’t had your wedding day yet, the ring wasn’t yours to give. Now,’ he added, smiling, ‘it is. And look, I had it engraved with our new family motto.’

She peered at the inside of the ring and smiled. ‘I know what that means. From love and truth comes peace.’

‘It seems very apt,’ he said. ‘Now that I have the love of a good woman, and I’ve finally been honest with everyone—including myself—about who and what I really am, and the terrible things I’ve done in my life, I feel a real sense of peace, and there’s a lot to be said for that. I can honestly say I’ve never been happier.’

‘Me neither,’ she said, and they hugged tightly.

‘Oh,’ he said, pulling away from her. ‘There’s something else! Look what I found in the shop. I had to get it, of course. It was meant for me.’

He showed us a silver pocket watch which I recognised all too well.

‘The watch you wore to your wedding,’ I said. ‘The watch that was left to Celeste in Meri’s will.’

‘And I had it engraved,’ he said. ‘I expect you can guess what it says.’

‘Hmm,’ I said, pretending to puzzle over it. ‘Somehow I don’t think it’s “Merry Christmas”. And now, you two, since

you have everything you need for this wedding, let's get ourselves to the chapel. Time you two were finally married.'

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We celebrated the marriage of Phoenix and Wren Tremayne with a buffet of all the finest twenty-first century treats we could think of, just to show Emrick what lay in store for him.

We drank champagne and toasted the happy couple, but eventually we all fell quiet as realisation dawned.

'You're going home, aren't you?' Wren asked quietly.

I took her hand. 'I can't stay with you forever,' I said. 'I have work to do in my own time. You know that. But look, you have Phoenix to look after you, and I know he'll do a wonderful job, because history tells us so. And the two of you are going to be amazing. And Emrick's here, too.'

We both looked at Emrick who put down his glass of champagne and paused for a moment.

'I can't stay here either,' he admitted. 'I'm sorry,' he added as Wren began to protest. 'It wouldn't do me any good, would it? You've already told me that I arrived on this island when Meri was alive. I wasn't already here. So obviously I was somewhere else. I can't spend the next three hundred and fifty years hiding out here.'

'But where will you go?' Phoenix asked.

Emrick shrugged. 'The world has changed. I've been asleep for over a thousand years. I need to see what's out there. Meet people. Travel. I've a lot of time to kill, after all.'

I felt a wave of grief for him. To be alone for hundreds of years, waiting for Meri. I couldn't bear it.

'Please stay with Wren and Phoenix,' I begged. 'They love you. You'll be safe here.'

'Wulfram,' he said kindly, 'you know as well as I do that's not my destiny. My job isn't to be safe. My job is to make sure others are safe. I need to absorb information, learn new cultures, prepare myself to guide you when we meet again.'

I blinked away tears, knowing he was right.

‘You’ll always be welcome here, you know that don’t you?’ Wren asked, squeezing his hand.

‘I know. And I’m grateful. Believe me, I’ll take you up on that offer from time to time. It will be good to know I have a home to go to now and then, when the outside world gets a little much. And it will be wonderful to see you two in years to come, what you’ll achieve. I’m already proud of you. Of all of you.’

I could barely see him for tears. As Merlin he’d suffered so much, including bouts of madness caused by his loneliness and the powers he wielded which he struggled to understand. Eventually he’d found his purpose in guiding Arthur, and he’d found love with Nimue. Now they’d both gone from his life, and having been imprisoned in a stone tomb for all those centuries, he was now destined to be alone again for another three hundred years. Not only that, but he had to carry the burden of everything he knew. He would know what would happen to Meri, to Laragh and Ashen, to Roden, to we three Pendragon children, to Keresen...

How could he bear it? And why should he have to? If I thought my load was a heavy one, I thought Emrick’s was far greater. Destiny had been cruel to him. He deserved peace.

‘Don’t look so sad, my boy,’ he said, giving me an understanding smile. ‘When you return home you’ll find me there waiting for you. Give me a hug because I’m sure I’ll be ready for one.’

I spluttered, half laughing, half crying, and nodded. ‘I will,’ I promised.

‘When will you both leave?’ Wren asked.

‘Oh, I’ll stay around for another week or so,’ Emrick promised. ‘I need to make sure that you’ve told me everything I need to know, so it will give you the chance to double check you haven’t missed anything. Don’t worry,’ he added with a mischievous grin, ‘I’ll keep well out of the way of you newlyweds. Well, for a couple of days at least.’



Wren blushed and Phoenix turned to me.

‘And what about you, Wulfram?’

My silence must have told them everything they needed to know.

‘So soon?’ Wren cried. ‘Really?’

‘I’ve been away for eight days,’ I said. ‘I can’t believe it’s only been that long, to be honest. It feels like weeks. Even so, it’s long enough. I need to get back. I need to show them all that I have the sword, and we must find those keys. I’m sorry. I don’t want to leave you but...’

‘I know, we understand,’ Phoenix said.

I got to my feet, and they followed suit. We all hugged each other, overwhelmed with emotion.

‘Don’t forget,’ I said, ‘August 1700. You must write the instructions for Meri, Phoenix. She needs to know who to invite to the island to hear the reading of her will, and whatever you do, don’t forget that scared solicitor from Gerrenporth.’

‘I won’t,’ he promised. ‘I won’t let you down.’

‘I know you won’t.’ I gazed round at them all—three people I loved dearly. ‘None of you will. And I’ll do my very best not to let you down either. Goodbye. I love you. All of you.’

‘We love you,’ they called.

I heard Emrick add, ‘I’ll see you soon, Wulfram. Well, you’ll see *me* soon anyway. Don’t forget that hug!’

Then I thought about my own time and their voices faded away.

I would never hear the voices of my sister and brother-in-law again.



# Chapter 55

## *Trinity*

When Wulfram finally finished telling us his story there was a long, hushed silence. If everyone else felt the way I did right then, there were an awful lot of shocked people in that room.

I could hardly take it all in, and I put my head in my hands, trying to make sense of everything I'd heard.

'Romy...' Keely was the first to speak, but her voice was barely a whisper. 'Romy was Wren Tremayne. All that time!'

'And Blaise was Phoenix,' Celeste said. 'I had an inkling when he called out to me before he left but I couldn't quite believe it. *Astra inclinant, sed non obligant*. The stars incline us, but they do not bind us. Oh, Blaise.'

'Everything was meant to happen the way it did,' Star said, gazing down at a sleeping Seren. 'All of it. Blaise arriving in Castle Clair from 1669. Meeting Celeste. Having his magic removed by Hector. Building a new life with Simon in Cumbria. Meeting Romy... It was his destiny all along. He had to go through all that to become Phoenix Tremayne.'

'The greatest leader the High Council of Witches has ever had,' Jethro murmured. 'I can't believe it.'

'Castor,' Sky said tearfully, 'you realise what this means?'

Castor was doing his best not to show any emotion, but he was failing dismally.

'Titus wasn't a coward or a traitor,' Mrs Greenwood told him, squeezing his shoulder. 'Oh, Castor, he was a good man. He did what he was told to do by Wulfram and Blaise, for the good of us all. It had to happen that way.'

'I know it must have hurt him a great deal,' Wulfram said gently, wanting Castor to understand. 'He was adamant he

wouldn't do it, but I had to make him promise. He was a brave man, Castor. He pushed his own beliefs and feelings to one side for the sake of our future. You can be proud of him.'

Castor gave an anguished moan and then, to my amazement, he covered his face with his hands and began to sob. I'd never seen him cry before and it made me want to cry myself. I could see my sisters-in-law and Sirius felt the same.

Mrs Greenwood put her arms around him and held him tightly, tears running down her cheeks. All his life Castor had believed his ancestor had betrayed Bevil because he was a coward. Now at last he had peace. I couldn't begin to imagine how important that must be to him.

'At least,' Harley said faintly, 'we know Romy was safe. She loved Blaise, but I was so worried he'd let her down. Now I can be sure he didn't. He loved her just as much in return, and they had a long and happy life together.'

'He'd have made sure she lived a very comfortable life,' Wulfram promised. 'Nothing was too good for Wren as far as Phoenix was concerned.'

'But what about afterwards?' Keely asked, stricken. 'I saw their grave!' She put her hand to her mouth. 'I remember Romy feeling scared and queasy when we found it. Blaise—I mean Phoenix—died seven years before she did. What happened to her then, alone in the eighteenth century with no magic?'

There was a tap at the door and Emrick peered round.

'Up to date?' he asked quietly and Wulfram nodded.

'All done.'

'Emrick!' There were lots of excited cries and almost everyone rushed to the door to greet him.

'You're Merlin!'

'I can't believe it!'

'Why didn't you tell us?'

'I don't know what to say. Merlin! It's amazing.'

‘Oh, Emrick,’ Sky said tearfully, ‘you’ve had such a hard life. I’m so sorry.’

Emrick smiled and ruffled her hair. ‘Now, come on. I’m just me, same as I’ve always been. No need to be sad for me. All that’s in the past. I’m here with you all and things are looking good for us right now. Let’s enjoy the moment, eh?’

He nodded over at Hector who was sitting close to Castor. ‘Told you they’d make a fuss.’

‘Hector!’ Celeste gasped. ‘You knew Emrick was Merlin?’

‘Well,’ Star said thoughtfully, ‘I suppose he is a Guardian. He’s bound to know.’

‘At least I understand now why Hector valued your opinion so much,’ Sirius said. ‘I can’t deny it annoyed me at times. Sorry, Emrick. Mind you, something tells me he wasn’t the only one who knew the truth.’ He turned to Ewella who was sitting quietly on the sofa. ‘Am I right?’

‘You knew, too?’ Harley gasped.

‘Do you really think Meri and I could have persuaded her to help us do anything if she hadn’t known?’ Emrick said. ‘She’s the Queen of Lyonesse. She wasn’t going to give up her nice, quiet life for just anyone.’

‘Frankly,’ Ewella said, ‘you’ve been a pain in the bum a lot of the time.’ She hesitated, then her face widened into a smile. ‘But mostly you’ve been wonderful, and I’m so glad you came into my life. We’re all very lucky to have you on our side.’

‘Stop it, you’re making me blush.’ Emrick turned his gaze to Castor. ‘Are you all right, my friend?’

Castor nodded and sniffed. ‘Sorry for being a bit daft. Don’t know what came over me.’

‘You have every right to be emotional,’ Emrick said. ‘I’m just glad you finally know the truth about Titus St Clair. Not only did he sacrifice his own good name, but he kept the

Golden Chalice Key safe all those years. You should be very proud of him indeed.'

Castor nodded. 'I am, believe me I am. You know,' he added, 'I have a feeling I understand what that invitation meant now. You know the one Meri sent me all those months ago? *Understanding will bring you rest*. That's what it said. Now I understand and I feel I can rest easy after all these years.'

'You should check it,' Sky said excitedly. 'You might find the wording has changed.'

'Can't,' he admitted sheepishly. 'Chucked it in the fire as soon as I got home from the island.'

'Oh, Castor!' Sky cried, exasperated.

'It doesn't matter,' Emrick said. 'I think you're probably right. And all that really matters is that you know the truth and feel at peace.'

'Do you remember what it said on Romy's invitation?' Keely asked suddenly. 'Because I do. It said she would begin her journey home.' She burst into tears and Wulfram quickly gathered her in his arms as she sobbed. 'Well, she's gone home now, hasn't she? We'll never see her again.'

Killian put his arms around Harley as she, too, began to cry. I knew I couldn't possibly be feeling as bad as they did, because I hadn't known Romy anywhere near as long as they had, but she was still my sister, and I'll admit I felt a huge sense of loss. She'd left before I'd even had the chance to get to know her.

'Mum,' Keely asked finally, as her sobs quietened down, 'did you know this would happen to Romy?'

'No,' Ewella said. Her eyes were bright with tears, but she wasn't crying. 'I just knew one of the two girls would make a huge sacrifice and I was terrified every day about which one of them it would be and what the sacrifice would entail. Now that I know, I must admit I'm relieved. Romy gave up her magic and I know that was a huge thing for her. And she gave up her family to travel through time with the man she loved. But I

feel at peace, too, because I know she and Phoenix were happy. Romy—Wren—found her place in the world. Her home. I can only be happy for her.’

‘But what about after Phoenix died?’ Keely insisted. She gazed beseechingly at Emrick. ‘Did you see her? Please tell me she was all right even without magic.’

‘She was absolutely fine,’ he promised her. ‘Of course she grieved for her husband, but she had the compensation of a loving son, who took care of her and made sure she was comfortable and safe. And she also had the joy of her grandson, who she adored.’ He smiled. ‘They named him Lowen. I can’t imagine why.’

Wulfram swallowed. ‘They named him Lowen?’

‘Phoenix and Romy made sure their son and grandson knew all about you. About all of you. That family was exceptionally good at keeping secrets.’

‘Well, you can talk!’ Sky said, and we all laughed, easing the tension a little.

‘Perhaps there’s something you’d like to see,’ Emrick said. ‘Something that might bring you some comfort. I found it some time ago and moved it to the classroom. You know, the room in the tower where you all had your lessons with Sirius?’

‘Let’s go and find it,’ Sky said eagerly.

Iliana, Raiden, Aurora, Hector, Castor, and Mrs Greenwood decided to stay put, as did Benedict, who took a sleeping Seren from Star’s arms so she could join us, and Sirius who was still in too much pain with his leg to climb so many stairs.

‘We’ll see it later,’ Iliana promised. ‘Right now, I think we need time to absorb everything we’ve heard. You all go ahead and tell us what you find.’

The rest of us fairly galloped up the stairs of the tower and threw open the classroom door, shuddering to a halt as we saw, on the wall at the back of the room, a portrait of three people: a white-haired man and a red-haired woman, perhaps in their mid to late forties, and a young black-haired boy with dark

eyes, aged around eleven or twelve. Perched on the man's shoulder was a beautiful raven. Nightwing.

Awestruck, we crept slowly towards it and stared up at it, drinking in every detail. Celeste read the attached plaque out loud.

'Phoenix and Wren Tremayne with their son...' She hesitated, and I saw her swallow hard before continuing. 'With their son, Bevil Emrick Tremayne. 1690.'

'He named his son after his brother,' I said.

'The brother he never stopped adoring,' Celeste said.

'And Emrick, too,' Wulfram added. He smiled. 'He looks a bundle of mischief, doesn't he? But at least we know he grew up and took care of his mother. A good man.'

We all looked at each other and I knew we were all struggling to contain our feelings.

'She looks happy,' Keely said. 'She does, doesn't she?'

Wren and Phoenix gazed unseeingly at us, their smiles wide, their eyes bright. Their body language told us they were as much in love as they'd always been.

'She really does,' Harley agreed, putting her arm around her twin. 'They all do.'

'Look at Blaise with his white hair,' Celeste said. 'I can't believe it. He came good in the end.' She leaned against Star who linked arms with her. 'I'm so glad. I'm happy for him, I really am. Funny to think that he bought that pocket watch especially for me. Oh, this has been such an adventure. Finally, finally I feel it's coming to an end.'

'We won't know what to do with ourselves,' Harley joked.

'Find the other key,' Keely said firmly. 'That's our next task.'

Wulfram frowned. 'Find the other key,' he murmured. 'You're right. We have the Golden Chalice Key, the Sword of Feidhlim, and the magical wand, Excalibur. All that's missing



is the Silver Pentacle Key.’ He ran a hand through his hair, clearly thinking. ‘Chalice, Sword, Wand, Pentacle. The four suits of a tarot deck.’

‘Oh, don’t mention tarot,’ Keely said. ‘Those cards are driving me nuts!’

‘Keely,’ he said suddenly, standing very still, ‘I think maybe we’ve been overthinking this. You said Lyrica normally used her own design of cards, not the traditional tarot she left for you. Maybe she didn’t attach any deeper meaning to those cards. Maybe she meant us to take them at face value.’

‘What are you talking about?’ Sky asked, confused.

Jethro gave a whoop of excitement. ‘Of course! The tower and the pentacle!’ He grinned round at us all. ‘What are we standing in right now?’

‘A classroom?’ Star ventured.

‘A tower!’ Keely cried. ‘And the ace of pentacles—she means the Silver Pentacle Key, doesn’t she? She’s trying to tell us the key is in this tower. I’m sure of it!’

‘But where?’

We all gazed around us as if the key would magically dangle from the ceiling in front of our faces.

Then it seemed one thought seemed to occur to us all at the same time.

‘The second floor,’ Killian said. ‘You said you could never find it, but what if...’

‘How?’ Keely asked. ‘How do we get up there?’

‘It has to be down to you, Wulfram,’ I said. ‘Come on, you’re the Great Guardian. If anyone can do this it’s you.’

‘But how?’

‘I don’t know.’ I shrugged, even as a thought struck me. ‘How do we transport ourselves? Fae, I mean.’

‘We think the words,’ he said. ‘It isn’t difficult.’

‘Then maybe you could try that?’ Jethro suggested. ‘Just think the words: second floor.’

Wulfram nodded. ‘Okay,’ he said. ‘I’ve thought them. Now what?’

‘Maybe,’ Star said drily, ‘we should check the staircase.’

‘Good idea,’ Killian said laughing, and we scurried out of the classroom onto the landing. This time there were stairs going down *and* up.

‘They weren’t there before,’ Sky said, stating the obvious. ‘Do you think you’ve done it? Do you think the second floor is really up there?’

‘Well I can’t see any other reason for a flight of stairs, can you?’ Star said witheringly. ‘Wulfram, you should go first. You did this. We’ll be right behind you.’

Wulfram headed slowly up the stairs and turned to us. ‘There’s a door,’ he said in hushed tones.

‘Well,’ Killian said, an excited gleam in his eyes, ‘it would be really useful if you could open it.’

‘Sorry.’ Light flooded the stairs as he pushed the door open, and we heard him gasp. ‘You’d better come up.’

We all followed him as he walked into the room, but we quickly drew to a halt as we saw what was in there.

‘How...’ Jethro rubbed the back of his head in bewilderment. ‘How does this even fit in here? How is this room so much bigger than the one below it?’

‘Look at it! It’s beautiful,’ Harley breathed.

‘You know what this is, don’t you?’ Killian said, watching Wulfram closely.

Wulfram moved forward slowly and stretched out a hand, lightly touching the polished wooden table, a look of pure reverence on his face.

‘I know,’ he whispered. ‘And look what’s waiting for us.’

A large, carved dragon adorned the centre of the table, and lying on top of it the Silver Pentacle Key gleamed brightly. It had been right here all the time. Lyrica hadn't let us down after all. Carefully, Wulfram picked it up and held it for a moment, before putting it in his pocket next to the Golden Chalice Key.

'We've found it,' Sky breathed. 'The second key. It's over!'

'And this,' Killian said, nodding at the table. 'I mean, would you look at it? I can't believe what I'm seeing.'

'But it can't be *the* table,' Star said. 'Surely not? After all this time?'

'Look at the symbols on it,' Celeste said. 'What else can it be?'

She was right. As we gazed at the huge, round table, we saw four more beautiful carvings surrounding the dragon: a sword, a wand, a pentacle, and a chalice.

'It's the round table, isn't it?' Jethro said. 'It's Arthur's round table. Can't you feel it?'

We could. There was no mistaking it. And I could see by the look on Wulfram's face that he knew it instinctively. It was like it already belonged to him. No longer Arthur's round table but Wulfram's round table. I felt a rush of pride for my brother and a sudden certainty that, no matter what might happen in the future, he would make everything all right.

This was what he'd been born for, after all.



# Chapter 56

## *Wulfram*

The winter solstice wedding of Aidan O'Brien and Derwa, one of the Nine Sisters of Avalon, took place in a candlelit ceremony at dusk in An Teach Bán in Ballydraiocht.

Anyone who was anyone was there, including Derwa's aunts and the full complement of the High Council of Witches. Sirius and Elinora were warmly welcomed by the Shining Ones and their fae guests, and both fae and witches agreed that their brave announcement regarding Bob's betrayal heralded a new era of accountability and openness, which could only be another positive step in the peace process.

Aidan, who barely knew his bride, behaved impeccably, and made his vows firmly and with no hesitation. It was generally agreed that he looked incredibly handsome with his dark hair and green eyes, and privately the witches admitted how relieved they were that the O'Briens had deigned to attend the wedding in their human form, rather than as Shining Ones.

Derwa, who was unquestionably a beautiful bride with her long dark hair and blue eyes, made her vows quietly and with no fuss. If her heart sank as she did so she gave no outward sign. As Elinora and Orlagh pronounced them man and wife, Aidan dutifully kissed his bride, and everyone congratulated them, and each other, on a job well done.

Sweeney played the harp as the happy couple signed the register, and afterwards we were treated to a spectacular feast, prepared with love by Mammy Ryan and her assistants.

'Well,' Killian said heavily, as we sat watching the guests mingle, with champagne flutes in their hands that never

seemed to empty no matter how many times they sipped from them, 'it's done then.'

'You're still not happy about this?' I asked.

He raised an eyebrow. 'Do you really have to ask me that? Look at us. We're lucky, Wulfram. We have women in our lives that we love and adore, who love and adore us in return. Don't you think I want that for my own brother? It's not fair on him. It's not fair on either of them. And I really don't know what Derwa's going to do with herself living here. She's going to be out of her depth. This is going to be a disaster.'

'They'll make it work,' I said, more in hope than certainty. 'They're both determined so...'

He gave me a sad look and I couldn't offer him any further reassurance. Deep down I worried he was right, but the decision had been made and it was too late now. I could only hope that both Aidan and Derwa would find a way to bring happiness to themselves, if not to each other.

'It's a lovely wedding,' Sky said, dropping into a chair next to us, Jethro hovering beside her.

'I'm sorry you had to cancel yours,' I told her.

'Oh, don't worry about it. It's actually worked out for the best. Jethro and I have been talking and we've decided we're going to wait until next December to get married. But this time, we're going to be married in the church at Castle Clair, just as we originally intended. It will be the wedding of our dreams, and we'll have a whole year to plan it.'

'That's great,' I said. 'I'm so pleased for you.'

Sky nudged me. 'Maybe it's time you thought about getting married yourself,' she said. 'You and Keely—you're made for each other. Anyone can see that.'

'Sky, don't bully the poor man,' Jethro protested, but I laughed.

'It's okay. I've been thinking the same thing myself. Keely and I have talked about it, and now things are calmer at last, who knows? Watch this space.'

‘Ooh, how lovely!’ Sky said. ‘Maybe we’ll end up having a double wedding. That would be amazing.’

‘Would you look at that,’ Killian said softly. ‘It’s snowing! How perfect is that?’

We gazed out of the window, entranced to see snowflakes falling from the navy-blue sky.

‘You’re right,’ I said. ‘It is perfect.’

We all looked up as Sirius and Trinity came over to join us, Sirius leaning on the silver cane Emrick had presented him with.

‘Isn’t this lovely?’ Trinity asked. Her eyes were sparkling, and she giggled as Sirius took her hand and pulled her onto his lap. ‘Mind your leg,’ she reminded him. ‘You’re not healed yet!’

‘I’m doing fine,’ he assured her. ‘And nothing’s going to stop me from cuddling my wife, thank you very much.’

‘Ewella tells me the plans for the school are going well,’ Killian said. ‘You’ll be thinking about opening it soon, I expect?’

‘We’re thinking maybe in the spring,’ Trinity told him. ‘We have to think about the design of Peloryon House. It will have to adapt itself to make room for all those children!’

‘But don’t worry,’ Sirius said hastily, ‘the tower will always remain. And it will be safe.’

I should hope so, considering the secrets it held. The round table was still standing on the hidden second floor, and we’d carefully placed Excalibur and the Golden Chalice Key in the room, too, knowing it was undoubtedly the safest place they could be—at least for now. The Silver Pentacle Key and the Sword of Feidhlim, meanwhile, had been placed in the crypt under the chapel. Emrick and I had decided it would be wiser to keep them apart. If, in the unlikely event, one key was discovered, at least whoever had found it would still be unable to locate the dimension box without the other. I felt a lot easier that way.

‘Perhaps,’ Killian said slowly, ‘we could have a chat? There are some things Harley and I would like to discuss.’

Trinity and Sirius looked surprised. ‘Of course. Any time.’

Killian got to his feet. ‘I’ll go and find Harley,’ he said.

‘What was all that about?’ Trinity asked, sliding off Sirius’s lap and sitting on the next chair.

‘No idea,’ I admitted. ‘I’m sure it’s nothing to worry about, though.’

‘Oh, I’m not worried,’ she said lightly. ‘I find, these days, I hardly worry about anything. After everything we’ve been through there doesn’t seem any point in making a fuss about the everyday obstacles any more. Funny how your perspective changes, right?’

I gazed at Keely who was currently dancing with Killian’s younger brother, Rian. She looked so stunningly beautiful she took my breath away. Yet she’d fallen in love with me when I was just a shy, awkward man with no idea of my true identity. How had that happened? How had I ever got so lucky?

True love, I thought. Maybe, in the end, finding the person you were meant to be with was the greatest destiny of all.

‘Come on,’ Trinity said, holding out her hand, ‘let’s you and I have a dance. My poor husband’s currently incapacitated, but there’s no one I’d like better to take his place than my big brother.’

I smiled and took her hand. ‘It would be my pleasure.’

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The party was winding down, but a few of us hardy souls remained. I think Killian was reluctant to leave Aidan alone with Derwa, but I knew he’d have to at some point. Whatever happened between his brother and his new wife was between them now. No one else.

We found ourselves sitting in a beautiful room—white like all the others, naturally—with tall windows dressed in



white drapes, looking out over a snowy garden.

Killian and Aidan looked slightly the worse for wear, but Aidan seemed cheerful enough. Trinity and Sirius were cuddled up together in an armchair, and I thought they'd never looked closer. Harley and Keely were sipping coffee, having decided they'd had more than enough champagne. Star and Benedict were reluctantly discussing the fact that they ought to go home, because it wasn't fair to leave the children with Castor and Mrs Greenwood, even though both adults would probably be fast asleep in bed by now. Sky was humming a tune to herself while Jethro watched her, a sleepy expression on his face. I thought she ought to get him home soon before he fell asleep on the spot. Celeste and Hector were sitting on a sofa chatting quietly to each other. Everyone seemed relaxed and happy. Like they had nothing to worry about. Like everything was okay.

‘Can I talk to you about something?’ I asked tentatively.

They all looked at me in surprise.

‘You sound serious,’ Keely said dubiously. ‘Nothing’s happened, has it?’

I saw anxiety in their eyes and hurried to reassure them. ‘It’s okay, nothing’s happened. But,’ I added reluctantly, ‘that doesn’t mean nothing will.’

‘Meaning what?’ Trinity asked worriedly. ‘Wulfram you’re scaring me now.’

‘Don’t be scared,’ I said. ‘But I need to say this now, while we’re all here together. The thing is...’ I hesitated, reluctant to frighten them more than necessary but knowing I had to be honest with them, ‘the thing is, Havok might be gone, but Spite and Siofra are still out there somewhere.’

‘But now the fae know for sure you’re the Great Guardian, and you have the keys and the sword to prove it, they won’t listen to those two,’ Sirius said. ‘That was the whole point of finding them, wasn’t it?’

‘It was,’ I agreed. ‘Even so, we can’t take anything for granted. And the thing is, there are other threats out there.’

Creatures I didn't even know existed until recently.'

'You mean vampires,' Sky said in a small voice.

'Vampires, werewolves, who knows what else? I didn't even realise there were such things as reapers, did you? Not,' I added uncertainly, 'that reapers are a threat. I don't think they are anyway.'

They were all watching me with suspicion in their eyes.

'What are you saying, Wulfram?' Hector asked eventually.

'I'm saying, I think it's time. I think we found the round table for a reason. Arthur didn't just rest on his laurels when the sword and Excalibur presented themselves to him. He went out into the world with his knights—'

'Who weren't really knights at all,' Celeste reminded me.

'No, they weren't,' I said. 'They were members of the Pendragon Alliance, dedicated to keeping the peace and making sure everyone was safe from magical threats. And that's what I think I need to do. Reform the Alliance. Be prepared for any threats that may occur in the future. Make sure we keep the peace so that none of us has to go through, ever again, the kind of anxiety we've had to face these last few months.'

'You're restarting the Pendragon Alliance?' Keely said slowly.

'I know it's a lot to take in,' I said apologetically, 'but I honestly feel this is what I'm meant to do. And what I want to know is, would any of you like to join me?'

There was a stunned silence as they all absorbed this information.

'Well,' Keely said, 'I'm in, naturally.'

'You don't have to,' I began but she gave me an exasperated look.

'Of course I do! I told you, I have your back and you have mine. We're in this together and we always will be. If you're

determined to do this then I'm with you. Don't even think about trying to talk me out of it.'

I shook my head, amazed as always by her loyalty and love. 'Thank you,' I said softly.

She looked over at Harley. 'You're in, too, right?'

Harley exchanged glances with Killian. She looked a bit embarrassed, and I had a feeling Keely was going to be disappointed.

'I'm sorry,' she said, addressing me rather than her twin. 'I don't want to let you down, but Killian and I have plans of our own.'

'What sort of plans?' Keely demanded.

'The school,' Killian explained. 'We've been talking it over with Sirius and Trinity, and well, they're looking for a fae teacher, and I guess I fit the bill.'

'You, a teacher?' Aidan gasped. 'Wow!'

'All right, all right.' Killian grinned. 'Time for me to be the responsible married man, I reckon.'

'We both love the island,' Harley said, a faint plea for understanding in her voice. 'We've spoken to Sid and Betty about it, and they're thrilled. Sid's looking forward to a long and happy retirement in the little cottage we're planning to set up there. Killian loves being on his boat and we both need to find a purpose. You know how much I've missed my job. Well, Sirius and Trinity have said they'll need a school librarian, and that I'm the perfect person for the role.'

'I'll be teaching, taking the kids on boat excursions, and running errands to the mainland when necessary,' Killian added. 'It's the perfect solution for us. Harley needed a more normal life, which scared the pants off me at one point, but this... Well, it sounds like the kind of life I could really enjoy, too, and I know Harley will be happy with all those books.' He grinned. 'Besides, I can't think of a more worthy cause than teaching fae kids to trust witch kids, can you?'

‘No,’ I said, smiling. ‘I really can’t. I think it will be perfect for both of you. I wish you both every happiness.’

‘I can’t believe it,’ Keely said. ‘You’re serious? You don’t want to be part of the Pendragon Alliance?’

‘If you ever need us, we’ll be there,’ Harley promised quickly. ‘You know that, right? But we want a different sort of life now. Please be happy for us.’

Keely was speechless for a moment. ‘I—I—’ She put her arms around her twin. ‘Of course I’m happy for you. It will be amazing, and I know you two will love life on the island.’

‘Thank you,’ Harley said gratefully.

‘Trinity and I will be busy with the school,’ Sirius said regretfully. ‘And to be honest, I don’t think I’ll be much use with this leg anyway.’

‘You’re a gifted witch,’ I told him. ‘You’d be a lot of use. Even so, I can see you have other priorities now and that’s fine. You’re a member of the High Council as well as setting up this school. I didn’t really expect you to join me. Don’t worry.’

‘And next year,’ Trinity said, her eyes shining as she gazed at Sirius, ‘we plan to have our own child, so I’ll be kinda busy. Now I have my magic back there’s no reason to suppose things won’t go well next time. We’re going to set the school up and then see how it goes.’ She turned to me, suddenly looking guilty. ‘Is that okay, Wulfram? I don’t want to let you down.’

‘You haven’t let me down,’ I assured her. ‘As long as you’re happy, I’m happy.’

Star and Benedict had been very quiet, but now Star cleared her throat. I saw the anxious look on Benedict’s face and waited.

‘It’s a wonderful idea,’ Star said hesitantly. ‘And, honestly, I do believe it’s what you’re supposed to do. But the fact is, I have two young daughters. They won’t be little for long, and I want to spend every spare moment I can with them.’

I want to make sure I'm around to see them grow up. They must be my priority. I'm sorry.'

'Don't be sorry,' I said, seeing the relief in Benedict's eyes. 'I think you've made exactly the right choice.'

'But if you ever need an expert fire witch,' she added, 'just call me. I'll be there.'

I smiled. 'I'll be sure to remember that.'

My heart, though, was sinking. So far only Keely and I were up for this. My vision of us all banding together to form the Pendragon Alliance was disappearing rapidly. What if no one wanted to join? Where would we find other members?

'I suppose I ought to be brave and say this out loud,' Sky said miserably. 'The thing is, what I've realised is, I'm not brave. Not really. I like my nice, quiet life in Castle Clair. I like my lovely house in Hornbeam Close. I like helping Star in the magic shop, or helping Celeste at the museum or the Mother Clipson Experience. I like helping Jethro research his books. I like having cake in Mrs Greenwood's teashop. And I've got a wedding to plan, too, now. I don't really want to be worrying about threats and danger. I'm just not that sort of person. I'm so sorry, Wulfram.'

'You don't have to be sorry,' I told her. 'It sounds like the perfect life.' I sighed heavily. 'I wouldn't mind that sort of life myself, but I have a feeling I'm meant to do this. But don't feel guilty, Sky. I want you and Jethro to be true to yourselves.'

'Thank you,' she said gratefully, grasping Jethro's hand.

Celeste and Hector were sitting quietly together, listening. Celeste reached into her handbag and pulled out a card, staring at it intently for a moment.

She raised her eyes to mine.

'You know, ever since we first arrived on that island I've wondered what this meant,' she said, waving the card at me. I realised it was the invitation that Meri had sent her. 'You will find your true purpose in unity,' she read. 'What did that mean? And why did the wording never change when everyone

else's seemed to? But when you asked us to be part of the Pendragon Alliance, Wulfram, I checked again. It's finally changed. Now it says, *Your battle is done. You have found your purpose.* I guess that's clear enough. I'm meant to be part of this.'

'Are you sure?' Sky asked worriedly.

'What about the museum and the Mother Clipson Experience?' Star pointed out. 'You can't do everything!'

'But Sky is perfectly capable of taking over from me. I've felt a restlessness for a long time now,' Celeste admitted. 'Like I was meant to do something else with my life. I just didn't know what. It's hard being married to a Guardian.' She turned to Hector who gave her an understanding smile. 'Not that I'd change him for the world. He's everything to me and he knows that. But knowing what he can do, knowing he's out there changing things that none of us have any idea about, making a difference without anyone being even slightly aware of it... I've felt useless, inadequate. Like I should be doing more.'

'It's not a competition,' Trinity said. 'You don't have to feel inadequate, Celeste. You're an amazingly powerful witch.'

'Yes I am,' she agreed. 'That's not me being boastful. I'm just stating something I'm finally starting to accept. I do have powers that most other witches don't, and they're growing stronger all the time. I don't know why. But the point is, I can't waste those powers sitting behind a counter at the museum, however much I love the place. I should be doing more.'

She smiled at me. 'What you're suggesting—reforming the Pendragon Alliance—I think it sounds perfect for me. It's a way I could make a difference. If my purpose is in unity, as it said on the invitation, then what better way to fight for unity than this? I'm in.'

I looked doubtfully at Hector, wondering if he'd raise any objection, but to my relief he seemed perfectly happy with her decision.

‘As a Guardian,’ he said, ‘I can’t officially be involved with the Alliance. You realise that?’

I nodded, understanding all too well.

‘But,’ he added with a twinkle in his eye, ‘if there’s ever anything I can help you with—unofficially naturally—I’ll be there. You only have to say.’

‘Thank you, Hector. Celeste, welcome aboard.’

‘Welcome aboard what?’

We all looked up and shuffled awkwardly as Derwa walked into the room. I eyed her worriedly. I may have been mistaken, but I was almost certain she’d been crying. Her eyes were slightly puffy and red-rimmed, and her previously flawless skin looked a bit blotchy. My heart went out to her, and I saw from Keely’s face that she was thinking the same thing.

‘Come and sit down, Derwa,’ she said, patting the seat next to hers. ‘We were just talking about our new venture.’

Derwa gave Aidan a quick glance, and I saw the sympathy in his eyes and knew he understood how she was feeling all too well. Maybe he was feeling the same way. Maybe I should have fought harder to get their families to call this wedding off. Had I been a coward? Had I let this couple down? I just didn’t know.

‘So what’s going on?’ Derwa asked, trying to sound cheerful.

‘Wulfram has decided to reform the Pendragon Alliance,’ Celeste explained. ‘He’s just been recruiting some of us. Keely and I are going to join him.’

‘The Pendragon Alliance?’ Derwa’s eyes widened. ‘After all this time? Oh! What a wonderful idea!’

‘Is it?’ I mean, obviously I thought it was, but I hadn’t expected her to sound so enthusiastic. Then again, she was one of the Nine Sisters. Their history with Arthur was undisputed. She would know all about the original Alliance, of course.

‘Yes! It sounds amazing. I wish...’ Her voice trailed off and she stared down at her hands, resting in her lap. Her brand-new Irish gold wedding ring sparkled on her finger, and I thought it must feel like a manacle to her, a symbol of the life she was now trapped in. A life she hadn’t asked for and didn’t want.

‘You’re going to need a fae representative in the Alliance,’ Aidan said suddenly. ‘You can’t claim to represent all magical beings if you only have witches on the team. Killian’s got his own life to lead now, and that’s fair enough, but what about me? I’ll happily be part of it if you’ll have me.’

Derwa’s head shot up. ‘Is that right?’

Aidan’s eyes widened. ‘Well... Why not?’

‘So we’ve been married a few hours and already you’re planning a whole life without me?’ There was a distinct spark of fury in her eyes, and I thought hopefully that maybe she wasn’t going to be the submissive wife I’d feared she would be.

Aidan looked flabbergasted. ‘I’ve had to give up my job in The Green Man,’ he said awkwardly. ‘What would you have me do? I can’t just sit around at home all day, doing nothing. I’d go crazy!’

‘But it’s all right for me to stay here, I suppose?’ she said angrily. ‘Stuck in a house that feels strange and unwelcoming, with people I don’t even know and a lifestyle I can’t begin to comprehend. Meanwhile, you’ll be out every day saving the world. Thanks very much.’

‘Do I have to report to you then?’ Aidan gasped. ‘You’re not my keeper!’

‘No,’ she retorted. ‘I’m your wife, may the gods and goddesses help me. Well, I won’t have it.’ She turned to me, defiance in her expression. ‘I’d like to join the Pendragon Alliance,’ she said.

‘You? You can’t!’ Aidan turned to me, a plea in his eyes. ‘Tell her she can’t, Wulfram.’



‘Why can’t she?’ Star demanded icily. ‘She has a right to her own life. She’s not your property.’

‘Did I ever say she was?’ Aidan threw up his hands in despair. ‘It could be dangerous, and you’re...’

‘I’m what?’ Derwa demanded.

‘Well...’ Aidan shrugged helplessly. ‘I mean, look at you.’

‘What do you mean by that?’ Derwa’s chin lifted, and she gave him an angry look.

‘I just mean, well, you’re so graceful and elegant. And you’re one of the Nine Sisters and they just...’

‘Just what?’

Uh-oh. I recognised that tone. I’d heard it in Keely’s voice a few times when I’d annoyed her. Aidan, I thought with some amusement, had better think carefully before he said anything else.

‘Well,’ he said uncertainly, ‘you just sort of drift around Avalon, don’t you? Being all delicate and gentle and—’

‘You really know nothing about me at all, do you?’ Derwa said. ‘That’s what you think I am? That’s all you think I’m capable of? Drifting around? You’re going to get a real shock, Mr O’Brien.’

‘Well,’ he said, somewhat crossly, ‘I’m very sorry I’m sure, *Mrs* O’Brien. If you think you’re up to being part of the Pendragon Alliance who am I to stop you?’

‘Oh, you won’t stop me,’ she said. ‘And I’m more than up to it.’

‘Go, girl!’ Star said gleefully.

‘Wulfram,’ Derwa said, ‘will you accept me as part of the team? Or do you think I’m incapable, too?’

*I wouldn’t dare!* ‘You’re my cousin, Derwa. You’ll always be welcome on my team.’

Her eyes softened and she gave me a grateful smile.  
'Thank you.'

Aidan shook his head, clearly dazed by this turn of events.  
'Well,' he said, 'do I have permission from my wife to join this team, too, or is it family only?'

Derwa shrugged. 'It's fine by me,' she said flatly.

'You're more than welcome,' I told him, meaning it.  
'You're absolutely right. We can't just be a team of witches. This must be a true alliance of magical beings. Having a Shining One with us can only be a positive thing. Eventually, I hope we'll recruit fae, and maybe other beings, too.'

'Not vampires I hope!' Sky said with a shudder.

I laughed. 'I should think that's highly unlikely,' I said. I looked round at them all. 'Thank you. Thank you all so much.'

Star looked embarrassed. 'You don't have to thank us,' she said.

'You really don't,' Trinity added. 'I feel we've let you down. So many of us have declined your offer, you should be angry with us if anything.'

'Angry with you?' I shook my head, amazed they could possibly feel that way. 'You've stuck by me through all this. I haven't always been easy to live with. It was hard, finding out who I really was, what was expected of me. I was scared, afraid of failing. But you all stayed by my side. You did everything you could to make this easier. I may be the Great Guardian, but I couldn't have done any of this without your help. You each played a part, and I'll be forever grateful to you all. You may not be part of the Pendragon Alliance, but you're part of my heart, and part of my family. Always.'

'Oh, Wulfram!'

I don't know how it happened, but suddenly I found myself in a group hug that almost took my breath away.

It was true. We *were* family. We always would be.



## Chapter 57

### *Wulfram*

I sat alone on the garden bench and pulled my coat tighter, gazing up at the dark skies and the gently falling snow. New Year's Eve. The end of a year I would never forget. The year that changed everything. What, I wondered, would the next year bring?

We'd celebrated at Castle Lodge—our new home. So much had happened, even in the days since the winter solstice wedding, that I could hardly believe it.

As soon as the rest of the family heard about our plans to revive the Pendragon Alliance, a meeting had been called to discuss the future.

Emrick had been delighted to hear what I'd decided, and promised to help us in any way he could. I wouldn't have expected anything less. As Merlin, he'd guided and mentored Arthur, and been at his side throughout the life of the first Alliance. I couldn't have been happier or more grateful to have him at my side now.

'We can't stay on this island,' Keely had mused, as we sat around the table in Peloryon House. 'It's just not feasible.'

'I didn't like to say so,' Sirius admitted, 'but with us running the school from here...' He looked at Ewella. 'I mean, obviously, this is your island, your house. If you want the Alliance to remain here it's your call, not mine.'

'It's okay,' I said hastily. 'Keely's right, and so are you. We don't want to get in the way of your school. We'll find another base for the Alliance, and another home.'

'But surely,' Iliana said, frowning slightly, 'it's obvious? You must come home to Castle Lodge. Castle Clair is the perfect place to set up the Pendragon Alliance.'

I wasn't too sure about that.

'But it's your home,' I protested. 'And what about Castor, and Hector and Celeste?'

Castor had held up his hand. 'You'll get no protests from me,' he said. 'After everything you've done to clear my ancestor's name and drag my family from the mud I'll do anything I can for you. If you want to set up the Alliance at Castle Lodge you'll be very welcome as far as I'm concerned.'

'And it's not as if we'd be tripping over each other,' Celeste pointed out. 'The house is huge. There's plenty of space for you and Keely to live there. Why not?'

'And Aidan and Derwa, too, naturally,' Iliana added, looking at our other recruits.

Aidan didn't look too sure about that, and I understood what he was thinking. Aidan was, after all, a Shining One. Working with witches was one thing. Living with them was another. He might have a witch wife, but maybe that was enough for him for now.

'You know, our house is still standing empty,' Sirius pointed out. 'Trinity and I won't be living there any time soon, if at all. Our place is here now. You and Derwa would be welcome to stay there as long as you like.'

Aidan brightened. 'Are you sure?'

'Absolutely,' Trinity said. 'You'd be doing us a favour. We really want someone in the place, keeping an eye on things.'

Fortunately, Aidan remembered in time that he was now a married man. He turned to Derwa.

'What do you think?'

She hesitated, then nodded. 'I think it's a great idea.'

'Brilliant!' Aidan beamed at Sirius and Trinity. 'Thank you so much.'

Killian grinned. 'Can't wait to hear what the folks back home think about that.'

Derwa's expression revealed she really didn't care, and Aidan merely shrugged.

'They can't deny I'll be doing something useful,' he said. 'They have to let me live my own life, and that's all there is to it. After all, I did what they wanted. So did Derwa. They owe us this.'

'What about the artefacts?' Hector asked. 'Do you intend to leave them here on the island?'

I considered the matter. 'I think they're probably safest here,' I decided. 'The Pendragons won't be able to land on the island. It will make quite sure of that. And if we're ever betrayed again, by witch or fae, it's unlikely they'll find the second floor of the tower, or the crystal cave.'

'But the table,' Sky said. 'Surely you want that with you?'

'I expect we can squeeze it in somehow,' Iliana said airily. 'You know, our house has a way of adapting itself to our needs. I think one of the rooms will expand if necessary.'

'I'm not sure that's such a good idea,' Jethro said. 'You don't know how many members of the Alliance you'll end up with. You could recruit lots of people for all you know. Do you really want them turning up here at all hours for meetings? Surely you'd be better off finding a secure base for that; somewhere you could safely store the table?'

'He's right,' I said. 'Castle Lodge is your home, and if it's going to be our home, too, we want it to feel that way. If we hold our meetings there it will be like we're never off duty. We need to find somewhere we can put the table and meet up in peace and safety.'

'I think I know just the place,' Celeste said, smiling. She looked round at us all. 'The castle.'

'The castle?' Benedict said doubtfully. 'But it's in ruins!'

'The dungeons aren't,' Star pointed out. 'Well, half of them are in excellent condition anyway.'

'Yes,' Benedict said, 'and in the summer tourists go down there, remember? It's hardly secure.'

‘But the other half of the dungeons are blocked off,’ she reminded him.

‘And buried under rubble, thanks to Jenet,’ Sky said. ‘She destroyed them to bury Blaise’s work, and there’s no way through any more. Not that we’d be able to get in there anyway. And the other sallyport is blocked off so how would we even try to get in from the other side?’

‘It really wouldn’t take much doing,’ Hector said. ‘Look at you all. You’re witches and Shining Ones! There’s a Great Guardian among you, for goodness’ sake. Do you really think you couldn’t clear a bit of rubble from a dungeon?’

‘A bit of rubble?’ Sirius laughed. ‘Have you been down there, Hector?’

Hector smiled. ‘Not for hundreds of years, no. But I don’t need to see the damage. I can see you. Your powers and abilities. If you want to make this happen you can. You just have to work together.’

‘Of course you’re right,’ Celeste said. ‘We can clear the rubble, spruce up and repair the other part of the dungeon, make it safe, and open the other sallyport so we can enter from that side.’

‘But then visitors to the dungeons will be able to...’ Trinity sighed and clapped her hand to her forehead. ‘I have to start thinking like a magical being, don’t I?’

‘You do,’ Star laughed. ‘We can easily put a magical barrier in place and make it look like a wall. And the sallyport will still look, to all intents and purposes, as if it’s bricked up. Only we will be able to see that it gives access to the dungeon.’ She smiled at me. ‘The new headquarters of the Pendragon Alliance.’

So it had all been decided—with Frey’s and Runa’s approval, naturally—and after spending Christmas on the island, Keely, Derwa, Aidan and I had moved to Castle Clair. We were going to start work on the dungeon in a few days, and then Emrick had promised to transport the table to its new home.

He wasn't coming with us to Yorkshire, having found a home at last on Peloryon Island.

'I've travelled enough in my life,' he told me. 'Who knows where I'll be called in the future, but for now I'm happy with Ewella in my own little corner of the world. And I'm looking forward to the school opening. It will be good to have little ones about the place. And Killian and I have always been great friends, so I'll have him to talk to. Don't worry about me, Wulfram. I'll be fine.'

'You deserve to be,' I said warmly. 'If anyone deserves peace and happiness it's you, Emrick.'

'Well, not too much peace, I hope,' he said, a twinkle in his brown eyes. 'I'm not retiring just yet. Like I told you, if you need me you can count on me. I'll always be there for you, Wulfram. I swear it.'

He didn't have to tell me that. I already knew it. The man who'd brought me up rarely bothered with me these days, too busy with his new wife and child and his life in Truro, which was fine. And, sadly, I'd never known my real father, Ashen Pendragon. Emrick was the closest I had to a father, and I really couldn't wish for a better one.

I heard a door opening and a short burst of music and laughter, then the door closed again, and all was silent except for footsteps crunching through the snow.

'All alone, Wulfram?'

I smiled as Emrick sat beside me on the bench. 'Just needed a moment to think.'

'To think, or to worry?'

Oh, he knew me so well!

'It's going to be all right, you know,' he said gently. 'I have every faith in you.'

'What if I let everyone down?' I asked. 'It seemed like such a good idea when it was just that, but now we're actually here living in Castle Clair, and work's starting on our



headquarters soon, and then the Pendragon Alliance will be up and running. What if I can't make it work? What if—'

He laid a hand on my arm. 'All you need to do is believe in yourself,' he said firmly. 'As I believe in you.'

We were quiet for a moment, then he said, 'I'm not the only one who believes in you either.'

I looked up as he got to his feet, surprised when he handed me a folded piece of paper.

'This is for you,' he said. 'I think you need to see it. She asked me to give it to you when I felt the time was right, and this is the moment. I've hung on to it for so long, Wulfram. I'm glad to finally be able to pass it to you, with her love.'

'Her love?' I asked, frowning. 'Whose love?'

He smiled. 'I'll leave you to it.'

As he returned to the house I stared down at the paper, then waved a hand over it so lights gently shone on it, making it easy to read.

It took me a few moments, but by the time I'd finished tears were rolling down my cheeks. Emrick had been right. This was exactly the right moment to give the letter to me. It was all I needed.

I stood up, folded the paper, and put it in my coat pocket, then gazed up at the sky.

'Thank you,' I whispered. 'We've got this.'

Because I knew I couldn't fail. I had my team. I had my family. Whatever challenges came our way we would face them together, and we'd succeed. We would bring peace and unity to the magical world.

It was, after all, our destiny.



## Chapter 58

### *Wren*

*My dear Wulfram*

*As I write this it has been many, many years since I last saw you. I wonder how long it's been since you last saw me? Not long, I suspect.*

*I have missed you! I think of you every day, wondering how you're doing, and how Harley, Keely and Trinity are, as well as the rest of the family. It seems like another lifetime ago to me now, and indeed, it was.*

*I'm an old lady. You wouldn't recognise me, Wulfram. I hardly recognise myself when I look in the mirror. I'm no longer a redhead! My hair is now as white as Phoenix's was, can you believe?*

*Sadly, I lost Phoenix three years ago. I miss him every single moment of every single day, but I take comfort from knowing that he loved me dearly, and I loved him so much in return.*

*I think, when I look back on my life, that's what I remember most: how lucky I've been to be loved. By Ewella, the woman I knew as "Mum". By Keely and Harley, who I've always thought of as my sisters, no matter what our genes might say. By you and Trinity, my blood siblings. By my darling Phoenix, and our family.*

*Don't worry about me. My son, Bevil (yes we named him after his uncle, how could we not?) inherited his father's magical gifts, and he's made sure that I continue to be well cared for and provided for. I've wanted for nothing, and I'm so grateful that Phoenix and I were blessed with such a wonderful son.*

*I have a grandson, too! Don't blush, but my son and his wife named him Lowen, after you. I think, really, you will always be Lowen to me. I remember you as that shy, uncertain young man who arrived on this island clutching a briefcase to your chest as if your life depended on it. And you brought a tent with you, do you remember? You'd heard there was no shelter on the island. Your face when you saw Peloryon House!*

*Oh, I have such happy memories of those times, and of the short time we spent together in this house—you, me, Phoenix and Emrick. What an adventure we had! Phoenix did as he hoped, you know. Not only was he an excellent leader of the High Council, but he did so much good for the local community. He set up an educational facility for the children of Polkayne and Gerrenporth, and he gave so much to the poor families, ensuring they received warm clothes and good food. Everyone here loved him so much.*

*I'm so proud of him and I know you would be too. He truly made peace with his past and died a contented man.*

*One day I'll be reunited with him, and I know that day isn't too far away now. I thought I'd be afraid as the time approached, but you know, I'm not. I'm certain, in my heart, that I'll see my beloved husband again, and I'm happy about that, I really am.*

*My only regret is that I don't know for sure how things are going for you in your time. But I know, Wulfram, that whatever's happening, you've done your very best. I have every faith in you. You never did believe in yourself, but Phoenix and I always believed in you, as does Emrick.*

*We know you're going to be a wonderful Great Guardian, just like Feidhlim, just like Arthur. Trust in yourself, Wulfram. It's all going to be okay. You'll go on to do great things. I know it. You have so many people around you who love you and will support you.*

*Be happy with Keely. Live a good life. Tell my sisters and my mum how much I love them and always have.*

*My part in this story is long over, but yours is just beginning.*

*Until we meet again, my dear brother.*

*Your loving sister,*

*Wren xxx*

Thank you for reading *Destiny of the Witch*.

If you'd like to find out more about Sharon Booth and her books sign up to her newsletter:

[www.sharonboothwriter.com/newsletter-sign-up](http://www.sharonboothwriter.com/newsletter-sign-up)

## Irish Terms and Names Used in This Book

*NB: I am not an Irish Gaelic speaker (sadly) and have had to rely on multiple internet searches and YouTube tutorials to get the pronunciations of these. Huge apologies if I have misheard or misinterpreted any. No offence is intended.*

Mo ghrá (moh grow) — *My love*

Ballydraiocht (Bally dree acht) — Place of magic

An Teach Bán (An Tach Bawn—Connacht pronunciation) The White House

Killian (Kill-ee-un)

Aisling (Ash-ling)

Aidan (Aid-an)

Rian (Ree-an)

Ailill (A-lill)

Suibhne (Siv-nuh)

Siofra (Shee-fra)

Eithne (Etna – can also be Ethna or Enya)

Feidhlim (Fay-lim)

Tuatha Dé Danann (Too-ah Day Dan-an)

Daoine Sidh (Deena Shee) — People of the Mound



Books by Sharon Booth

Kearton Bay

There Must Be an Angel

A Kiss from a Rose

Once Upon a Long Ago

The Whole of the Moon

Skimmerdale

Summer Secrets at Wildflower Farm

Summer Wedding at Wildflower Farm

Home for Christmas

Baxter's Christmas Wish

The Other Side of Christmas

Christmas with Cary

Moorland Heroes

Resisting Mr Rochester

Saving Mr Scrooge

Bramblewick

New Doctor at Chestnut House

Christmas at the Country Practice

Fresh Starts at Folly Farm

A Merry Bramblewick Christmas

Summer at the Country Practice

Christmas at Cuckoo Nest Cottage

The Witches of Castle Clair

Belle, Book and Candle

My Favourite Witch

To Catch a Witch

Will of the Witch

His Lawful Wedded Witch

Destiny of the Witch

The Other Half

How the Other Half Lives

How the Other Half Lies

How the Other Half Loses

How the Other Half Loves

Tuppenny Bridge

Summer in Tuppenny Bridge

Second Chances in Tuppenny Bridge

Snowflakes and Surprises in Tuppenny Bridge

## About the Author

Sharon Booth writes romantic fiction, featuring family, friendship, and community. Her stories are set in pretty villages and quirky market towns, by the sea or in the countryside, with a guaranteed happy ending.

Among other things, Sharon loves Doctor Who, Cary Grant films, salt and vinegar crisps, cake, books, and her family—not necessarily in that order. She admits to being shamefully prone to crushes on fictional heroes.

If you love flawed characters doing the best they can, beautiful locations, and warm, witty, feelgood stories, you'll love Sharon's books.

Find out more on her website: [www.sharonboothwriter.com](http://www.sharonboothwriter.com)

Or sign up for her monthly newsletter at:  
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## A Note from Sharon

Thank you so much for reading *Destiny of the Witch*. I really hope you enjoyed it, and that you feel I've done justice to the series with this final story. I'm so grateful to the readers of these books who have supported them, and who have championed my lovely witches. Your encouragement and kind comments have meant the world to me.

I'd like to say a big thank you to [www.derangeddoctor.com](http://www.derangeddoctor.com) for giving The Witches of Castle Clair series such wonderful covers. I've loved every single one of them.

Thank you hardly seems adequate when it comes to my patient husband, who barely saw me while I was writing this. Even so, I mean it! I couldn't do any of this without him. I don't think either of us expected it to take so long as I never intended it to be such a whopper of a book. The story just kept getting bigger and bigger. That's been the theme with this entire series, to be honest.

I started back in 2018 with a vague idea that I called my "magical mishaps" book. I had a vision of a young witch, arriving back in her home town for Christmas. Except, she wasn't aware that she was a witch. And her home town was a bit out of the ordinary.

The town of Castle Clair was born—inspired by the beautiful North Yorkshire town of Knaresborough, with its ruined castle, market square, river, and legends. It even had a museum in its castle grounds, a cliffside shrine, a beautiful old shop that was perfect for *The Broom Closet*, and its own famous prophetess, Mother Shipton.

The story practically wrote itself!

As soon as I started writing Sky's story, *Belle, Book and Candle*, I knew her sisters needed to tell their stories, too. Soon I had three books, each of them becoming more complex and magical. With the third book, *To Catch a Witch*, I believed I'd told the tale, and my work was done. Except...

I had several messages asking me to bring the witches back, and I must admit I'd missed them. But I'd completed the story, hadn't I? Everything was tied up neatly. Wasn't it? Gradually, those nagging thoughts began again. *What if?*

No writer can resist that question and I began to wonder what happened next. Had everything really been resolved, or was trouble merely biding its time, waiting?

Now there are six books in this series and it's most definitely complete. The story is told. The loop is closed. The destiny of the witch is resolved.

But, you know, that doesn't mean there might not be more stories in the future. Different stories. After all, those St Clairs do have a habit of getting into bother. And when the Pendragon Alliance is up and running, who knows what they might get involved in?

Perhaps, one day, we'll find out...

Love Sharon xxx