



*Thorn Apple*  
*A Wicked Spell*





*Thorn Apple*  
*A Wicked Spell*

*Underwood Series*  
*Book Two*

*By*  
*Andaleigh Archer*

Thorn Apple

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Dedicated with love to my family



*By the pricking of my thumbs,  
something wicked this way comes.*

*Shakespeare, Macbeth*

## *Prologue*

Misty rain covered my skin in fine droplets of glistening jewel-like dew, while the surroundings, heavily laden with oak and ash trees, teased me as though emerging from the dusty recesses of a long-forgotten memory. The area was devoid of woodland sounds, and yet, I could hear a single crow ominously cawing "now," "now," overhead. Its call produced a tingling sensation in the center of my back, and when I looked over my shoulder, I saw a pair of transparent wings sparkling in the moonlight. A vision appeared before me of a magnificent throne and a bejeweled golden crown, and from it, I could feel a small mirror radiating a strange luminescent glow between my breasts. It was a peculiar trinket and one I couldn't remember putting on, yet it was there, all the same, beckoning me to look. When I raised it upward, the reflective surface momentarily blinded me until I blinked and saw a face beautifully framed with fiery red hair and brilliant green eyes. I'm not mortal, nor have I been for a very long time.

*You are Lillianna Underwood, Queen of Elysia. You rule over the entire Realm of the Fae. You are beauty incarnate.  
All envy you.*

"Yes," I said, touching my face. However, the word caught in my throat as the image of perfection melted, revealing a face deeply lined with age. My hair twisted and knotted around itself, forming a brittle nest of dried twigs and vine. The green glow of my eyes faded to a milky blue hue while my flesh blistered and broke, spewing dark red liquid from every pore. I cried out but was silenced by a low moan emanating from beneath the depths of a soupy bog now surrounding me. Its rancid stench turned my stomach, causing me to vomit.

*"You cannot destroy  
what is a part of nature."*

My mind began buzzing with the sound of angry bees. "I know you," I replied, wiping away the sickness from my mouth.

*"Lillianna, you betrayed me.  
"You will pay in blood."*

"Father?" The image of his death immediately flooded my memory. "Where are you?" I asked, looking around in fear.

A terrible cracking sound ensued as the center of the mirror split in half, followed by a sickly



echo of laughter reverberating off the trees. The sound grew thunderous like the roar of stampeding horses, and the ground below me shook and rippled the surface of the bog, causing hundreds of writhing snakes to break free. They coiled up my legs and over my arms as white light emanated from the cracked mirror, beating in rhythm to the sound of the muddy earth, sucking me toward a watery grave.

*"I am a part of you."*

"No! This isn't real! You're dead! I killed you!" I screamed, scrapping and clawing handfuls of the soupy mire that only hastened my impending descent. My mouth filled with the fetid brown soup choking me and pulling me under as I heard the caw of his name on the wind. Suddenly, all became silent, and the last remnants of the mirror's light sank beneath the deathly morass, extinguishing it forever.





*One*

## *The Nightmare*

I awoke, trembling and dripping with sweat. Dappled moonlight cast ghostly figures against the wall, and I drew in a sharp breath of icy fear before clarity swept the shadows from my mind. I was alone.

This was the third and most sinister nightmare about Devligant I had suffered since Kailen's departure to Denmire two full moons ago. I had told no one about them for fear of what they might mean, but now I began to regret my nondisclosure.

It didn't seem possible; I killed him long ago, and the Realm of the Fae was at peace after returning the sacred book of the Fae to Elysia. Any possible remnants of evil stayed quietly in the Shadow Realm. However, something had shifted, and I was the conduit.

I walked to my chamber window and looked out over the Elysian garden. As the memory of my dream began to fade, so did my trembling. Still, being plagued by nightmares was abnormal for any Fae. It was a mortal malady. Fairies did not dream; they created dreams as a portal for humans and fairies to communicate, and nightmares came from the Shadow Realm. At least, that's how Kailen had explained it to me.

A light breeze blew over my skin, and I thought of Kailen. I missed him. The truth was, I disliked his travels to Denmire, which were more and more frequent of late. While he had previously pushed away his Kingship, his father's death left him little choice, and he assumed his duties with honor and without hesitation. His recent absences felt like an eternity, and fairy time was something I never managed to master.

Despite his commitments, I was sure his extended stays had more to do with the Elysian Nobles decision not to unite Denmire and Elysia upon our marriage. Understandably, it never sat well with either of us. Still, I was their Queen, and the Nobles were reluctant to relinquish their traditions. Despite Denmire being an ally, the Nobles felt betrayed by Kailen's father. His hand in Kailen's mother and sister's death, both of Fae descent, sent

shockwaves through Elysia. It was a crime for which saw no forgiveness. They did not blame Kailen, but his father's betrayal was a wound that seemed impossible to heal. Furthermore, the Nobles felt that should the Elves of Denmire be allowed freedom within the Elysian walls, their Elysian blood would become tainted, a bias that left a sour taste in my mouth because our children were half-Fae and half-Elf. This was an irony, as the Realm was a mixed bag of fairies, elves, and strange creatures. I repeatedly tried to convince the Nobles we needed the Elves of Denmire to ensure our survival, but they were stubborn and placed the highest value on their blood purity. Somehow, I couldn't help but think Elysia mirrored much of my old life before Fairy. Rules and traditions that never made much sense.

The truth was my marriage to Kailen wasn't as welcoming as I had hoped. Many frowned upon it and spoke in hushed whispers of disdain whenever I broached the subject of co-rulership. The Nobles and Elysians made it very clear, although they respected Kailen, he wasn't one of them, and therefore, he couldn't share the throne with their queen.

Some suggested if I was determined to marry Kailen, I should take a pureblood lover to ensure a pure heir. Of course, I vehemently refused this suggestion and kept it hidden from Kailen. I loved him and wasn't about to succumb to their blood lust. I knew if I disclosed their wishes to him, he would view it as a personal betrayal. Kailen had called Elysia his home since the death of his mother, daughter to Eldon, High Noble of Elysia, and Kailen's grandfather. Kailen was Elysian in his heart,

but I also knew he struggled with their view of him. Perhaps he was trying to reconnect with his own kind. Either way, I felt a distance forming between us that I found impossible to repair.

Kailen wasn't the only one affected by the traditions of the Elysians. Our daughters, Diana and Shaylin, could never take the throne because of their impurity. Shaylin loathed her elfin blood, thus harboring resentment against Kailen. They fought incessantly, and if she wasn't fighting with him, she ignored him altogether. She was of an age to mate, and while beautiful in her own right, the Elysian males shunned her and called her 'faeceus,' which meant impure. Diana, the youngest by only a few minutes, lived to serve Elysia. She was agreeable, mild-mannered, and giving. Much like me, she hoped to change the minds of the Elysians. Until then, she would abide by their traditions, even if they were unfair and unkind. Shaylin, on the other hand, made it her quest to defy everything and everyone. I honestly couldn't blame her. However, she was headstrong and prone to fits of rage.

Another breeze blew in the chamber window giving me a noticeable chill. I dismissed this as a side effect of the nightmare, even though I knew it was unusual for any Fae to feel physical discomfort from the elements. Still, I put on a thick robe and made my way down to the garden for a walk.

It was late, and all of Elysia was resting peacefully. Being alone in the great hall, especially at night, felt like I was sneaking off to do something illicit. As queen, I could go wherever I pleased; but my escape from the Manor entered my memory, and

I felt like a disobedient child on the verge of being caught with their hand in the cookie jar. I laughed at the thought of Eldon or another Noble scolding me for being uncharacteristically out of bed. Luckily, I encountered no one and was relieved by the peacefulness of my surroundings.

I made my way over to my favorite bench and sat down. It didn't seem to matter how much time had passed; I still felt safe and at home in the garden's familiar surroundings.

I often wondered what became of my sister, Josephine, the man I knew as my father, my brother, and even Richard. Was the Manor even standing? I imagined if I journeyed back to the Mortal Realm, those I once thought of as family would long be in the grave.

I pulled my robe tightly around my shoulders and gazed at the night sky. The roses were in bloom and gave off a lovely intoxicating fragrance. Like everything in the Realm, they possessed magic and could change colors at will. Tonight, they were a deep plum, almost black, reminding me of Denmire wine. Everything, whether animate or inanimate, came alive at will.

I was beginning to feel calm once more. If I didn't have Kailen to turn to, at least I had the peaceful solace of the garden to comfort me. But as I sat quietly, reflecting, I could detect the sound of hushed voices. I stood and made my way through the labyrinth of statues and trees, suddenly realizing the sounds came from the area to the back of the garden. I stopped when the nature of what I was hearing became clear. Exploring pleasures of the flesh wasn't

uncommon for the Fae. They did so openly and without restraint, but this was my private garden, and it bothered me anyone in my court would take such liberties.

As I moved closer, ready to reprimand their insolence, I abruptly stopped upon the scene. The woman, whose face I couldn't initially see, was almost entirely nude, except for a diaphanous white dress resting below the swell of her hips. Her long black hair was just above her shapely torso. I turned away, suddenly embarrassed and conflicted. Just as I turned to leave, her companion spoke, causing a wave of nausea to fill my stomach. I turned back around and walked on shaking legs toward the couple. The woman suddenly turned, and her eyes met my gaze. I didn't recognize her as a courtier of Elysia, and I was sure she wasn't of Fae descent. Her features were elfin, and her eyes were as wild as the forest glen. A wicked, knowing smile crossed her face, causing me to stumble backward. "I'm sorry, I heard noises," I said.

The woman moved ever so slightly to her right, revealing the face of her lover. When his eyes met my own, the moment froze like an image in a painting.

"Kailen?" I said, my voice catching in my throat. The expression on his face wasn't shocked, nor remorseful, just indifferent, causing my heart to break. He reached his hand up toward the raven elf, drawing her down to his mouth. The nearby roses, which smelled pleasant moments ago, were now cloyingly sweet like over-ripened fruit, causing my stomach to turn again. Then everything around me



began to spin in a blind fury of color, causing me to swoon, and I fell, hitting my head on a large rock. The last thing I saw before my eyes closed was Kailen and the woman still locked in the heat of their kiss.



*Two*  
*The Secret*

"And you say you found her like this, in the garden?" Eldon asked.

"Yes, I went to her chamber to help her dress. When I saw she wasn't there, I thought perhaps she was in the garden. I found her lying on the ground in her bed bedclothes, unresponsive," Bree replied tearfully. "Will she be alright?"

"Yes, my dear. I believe she will be fine. However, we must get word to Kailen."

"No," I said quietly.

"She awakens. Are you alright, my Queen?" asked Bree.

"Yes," I whispered. "But don't get Kailen. I don't wish to see him right now," I added, opening my eyes.

"Nonsense," Eldon replied. "He should be made aware you are not well," he added, sitting down next to me. "Are you with child again?" he asked, taking my hand.

"No, I'm not. Please, Eldon, abide by my wishes. I don't wish to see him now," I said.

Eldon let go of my hand and looked at me in confusion.

"Perhaps I should gather Diana and Shaylin," Bree said.

"No!" I replied with more command in my voice than was needed. Bree looked at Eldon and me with shock and concern. I took a deep breath and softened my tone. "I don't wish to worry them. I'm alright. Please, don't fuss over me," I said, sitting up. But my reassurance was cut short by a sharp pain in my head, causing me to lie back down.

"Bree, please leave us for a moment," Eldon said. "And, speak of this to no one."

"Yes, of course," Bree replied. "My Queen," she added, nodding her head.

When Bree left the chamber, Eldon turned toward me. "What on earth were you doing in the Elysian garden at such an hour? Clearly, you are not well. You must have fallen. Why do you not wish to see Kailen?"

"Eldon, please, stop," I said, unable to hold back my tears. "I can't bear to see him." My voice broke into an uncontrollable sob.

Eldon looked at me with deep concern. I wasn't prone to displays of emotion, even to him. In fact, I couldn't recall a time where I had ever cried in front of him.

"Lilly. I have always thought of you as a daughter. What troubles your heart, my dear? What's wrong?"

I looked up into Eldon's eyes. He was older than anyone I had ever known. The Fae did not believe in God, but much of my mortal upbringing taught me otherwise, and looking at him was like looking into the face of God. I trusted him above all others, perhaps even more than Kailen. My mother did as well, and I knew I could confide in him any secret my heart kept locked away.

"Nightmares have plagued me," I replied.

"Nightmares? Are you certain? You shouldn't suffer from nightmares."

"I know. I don't understand. They are so terrible. It's Devligant. He calls to me in my dreams. He tells me as long as I live, he lives, and I will pay for my betrayal in blood. I haven't thought of him for so long. What do you think it means?"

Eldon's face was suddenly ashen. "How long have you suffered in silence?"

"Since Kailen's departure. It's not only the nightmares. I'm feeling the elements again. And, when I was in the garden--." I looked away, unable or perhaps unwilling to share the rest with him.

"What is it, my dear?"

I closed my eyes around the image frozen in my mind. "I went to the garden after the nightmare

because I needed to clear my head. I heard voices and saw two people sharing intimacies."

Eldon released a soft laugh of relief. "Well, my dear," he said, patting my hand. "They certainly should not have been taking such liberties in your garden, but you know the ways of the Fae. They are amorous by nature. I'm sure they meant no disrespect," he assured.

"No. Eldon. It was Kailen. I saw Kailen with another woman. And when he saw me, his reaction was cold indifference. It cut me to my soul."

Eldon's eyes furrowed in confusion. "You must be mistaken, my dear. Kailen is in Denmire."

"I know. I don't want to believe it was him, but it was so real."

"Perhaps, the stress of your nightmare brought it on. You miss him. However, you need not worry about his loyalty to you. He loves you above all life. You must push such thoughts away. They do no service but to foster a wedge between you and Kailen."

I nodded my head in agreement, despite the sting of betrayal in my heart. "Yes. You are so wise. I'm ashamed of having such false visions."

"Certainly, it isn't your fault, but I am concerned. The nightmares are very distressing."

"What do you think they mean?" I asked.

"I don't know. I think it best to call a council meeting with the nobles to discuss the matter."

I sat up again despite another sharp pain. "No. Eldon, I don't wish to involve them in this right now. You know it will just cause alarm."

"Yes, but you destroyed Devligant long ago. I don't understand why you are having such dreams now. It seems important we try to decipher what may be happening to you."

"I don't wish it at this time," I replied sternly.

"Have you tried communing with your mother?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"Perhaps, you should. I think it wise you try and counsel with your mother and perhaps Queen Faylinn if possible."

"Perhaps," I said, looking away. "Please don't say anything to Kailen. He has so much to concern himself with right now. I don't wish to add this drama to it."

Eldon looked at me. I knew he was thinking otherwise but reluctantly agreed.

"I will do as you request. I will always honor you. But should these nightmares and visions return, I must respectfully request you understand I may not abide by your wishes. I cannot jeopardize the lives of Fae."

I was about to argue with him but decided perhaps he was right. "I understand. It wouldn't be my intention to harm anyone," I replied.

"You have always been a good queen. I know you will do what is best. Do you need anything further?"

"No, Eldon," I replied. "Thank you. I wish to be left alone now if you don't mind."

"I shall see you at the meeting?" Eldon asked.

"Yes, of course," I replied with as reassuring a smile as I could muster.

Eldon nodded and left the room. The moment my chamber door shut, I turned my head toward my pillow and let out a painful sob. The truth was, I was more distraught over my vision of Kailen's betrayal than I was of the nightmares of Devligant. Eldon's words made sense, but the visceral images betrayed any logic I could comprehend. I knew Kailen's return to Elysia was imminent, and I couldn't face him after what I had envisioned. I understood the root of my emotions far better than when I lived in the Mortal Realm. Everything had purpose and meaning as a Fae, and as a Fae, I was more in touch with my feelings. What I was experiencing now wasn't Fairy.

I sat up and wiped my tears away. This is nonsense, I thought, shaking my head. Another sharp pain caused me to draw in my breath, and I steadied myself before standing. I carefully made my way to my dressing table, and once there, gazing into the mirror, I saw a large bruise forming on my forehead. Closing my eyes, I placed a hand over the mark. After a moment, I removed my hand and opened my eyes. The bruise was no longer visible; however, the pain still existed. Glamour had its benefits. It was the only way a fairy could lie.



## *Three*

### *The Nobles*

I didn't want to keep the Nobles waiting, so I decided to dress, knowing Bree wouldn't return unless summoned. Any delay would cause concern or talk, and I wished to keep my recent spell quiet for the time being.

The nobles met once a week to discuss various Elysian issues such as food supply, entertainment, tithes, and reports on the border between the Realm and Shadow Lands. Of course, the latter issue was of little concern since Devligant's demise, but they still made a point of addressing the subject. The current conversation centered around



Samhain, which coincided with our daughter's rite of passage. The ceremony sparked a memory of my coming-of-age celebration that occurred one year before I entered the Realm of the Fae. Our daughter's Rite of Passage, in fairy terms, simply meant they had achieved certain fairy qualities. They had wings, could participate in various rituals and were of an age to mate. I hoped the celebration might pose an opportunity to change the Elysian's mindset about the purity of the bloodline.

I was grateful the pain in my head was beginning to subside. I didn't need it to distract me from clarity. The strength of my convictions was of the utmost importance despite the defiance I often faced with the nobles. The truth was, my mother was a reluctant queen, allowing the Nobles to rule in her stead. They tended to forget their place and were often overzealous in their positions. The Nobles were all men and elected by the Elysian Court. Despite my attempts to recruit a woman to a Noble's rank, I found the process difficult as many Fae women simply wanted to live their lives in the Court's frivolity and extravagance. My mortal upbringing in a world dominated by men shaped my perception of the Queen I wanted to be, but I frequently found myself at odds with the Nobles. Ultimately, I would prevail, but I knew this was due in part to Eldon taking my side. Eldon was the highest and eldest member of the council. He was the only one who always showed me unwavering respect and kindness, and I loved him like the father I never had.

I opened the door to the council chambers to see all were present, Eldon, Welvare, Avery, Deacon,

and Ayden. Ayden was the newest member elected to the council after Aubrey's death. While I knew little of him, he was very respected and admired among the Elysians. However, he was Welvare's son to whom I had always had a problematic relationship. I hoped his position might mend the bridge between Welvare and me. If nothing else, it warmed our communications with each other.

Eldon stood and escorted me to my seat. This was an unnecessary gesture, but I did not discourage it. His nature was gentlemanly and sweet, certainly not the least bit condescending. The Nobles remained standing until I took my seat at the head. The Sacred Book of the Fae and mirror sat in front of me, which was customary should I need to refer to them; otherwise, they remained in a carved niche within my throne. Only Eldon or I were privy to how the items were accessed. These objects in the Elysian Court's hands ensured a balance to the Realm of the Fae. The pages remained blank until the mirror illuminated the sacred text, which usually appeared in riddles or strange pictures. It was something only a Queen, a pureblood descendent, or should the Queen deem necessary, one of her choosing could summon. The latter was only possible through great magic and training. Today, I quietly wished it wasn't present.

"Greetings and fairy blessings to our Queen. Long may she reign," said Welvare.

"Blessings to our Queen. Long may she reign," they all repeated.

"Fairy blessings to you all," I smiled. "Shall we begin?"

They all nodded. Deacon was the first to speak. He was one of the more agreeable nobles within the Elysian council. He had remained a follower more or less, but I noticed him taking a more active role in the council meetings since Ayden's presence.

"The celebration rapidly approaches. I imagine your daughters must be very excited about their rite of passage," he said.

"Yes. They are excited," I replied with a smile. Diana was undoubtedly eager and even took a role in the preparations, but Shaylin had little interest. She couldn't see the point in celebrating their rite of passage since they were not heirs to the Elysian throne.

"I have been coordinating the event with Timian of Denmire. He indicated everything is moving along smoothly," Deacon said.

"I understand congratulations are in order for him. He was recently made elder. Please extend my warmest wishes to him at your next meeting," I said.

"Certainly. However, I'm sure Kailen would do the same since Timian is his most trusted advisor," Deacon replied.

"Yes," I said, looking away.

"Are you well, my Queen? I couldn't help but notice the mention of Kailen's name has caused you distress," Ayden said.

I looked up at him, surprised by his statement. "You take liberties; you should not," I replied.

"A thousand pardons, my Queen. The mention of his name seems to have troubled you," he continued again.

If I had thought to keep my anger in check, I was now finding it impossible. "Again, it isn't your place to presume my feelings or ask me personal questions."

"You must excuse my son," Welvare added. "I'm sure he didn't mean to pry."

Ayden lowered his head apologetically.

I nodded at Welvare, still irritated, and was about to look away when Ayden raised his head, and his eyes met my own.

My head throbbed, and in a flash, I saw a vision of the two of us kissing. It was as though I was looking into the sacred mirror. The image was so clear I felt the heat rise to my face. I immediately raised my hand to my head, and in an instant, the vision disappeared.

"Have we heard from Kailen?" Welvare continued, appearing not to notice.

I lowered my hand and looked around. No one had noticed except Eldon, who eyed me with silent concern. Ayden was now looking at his father.

"No. I haven't heard from him in three full moons. Before he left, he assured me he wouldn't be gone long. I would imagine he will return any time now," I replied, trying to steady my response.

"When last I spoke with Timian, he indicated Kailen would remain in Denmire for another five moons," said Deacon.

"That's strange. Do you not find that odd, my Queen?" Welvare asked.

I looked over at Eldon, who appeared unusually pensive.

"I'm sure there is an excellent explanation. Perhaps it has something to do with his daughter's rite of passage," Eldon replied.

"Yes. I'm sure that is the reason," Welvare said.

My attention shifted back to Eldon, who suddenly looked pale. "Eldon, you don't look well. Are you alright?" I asked.

"Now that you mention it, my Queen, Eldon doesn't look at all well," added Deacon.

"I'm fine. Don't fuss. I just--," Eldon stopped, his breath suddenly shallow and labored.

"Eldon!" I exclaimed, moving to kneel by his side. "What's wrong?"

Eldon leaned his head back, his breath finally returning to calm, and touched my hand gently. "I'm fine, my dear. You mustn't worry. I think I just need some fresh air. I will take a turn in the Elysian garden and return momentarily."

"I'll walk with you," I replied, standing with him.

"Nonsense. Continue the meeting. I'll be fine," Eldon replied.

"I won't hear of it," I said sternly. "I will walk with you and hear no more refusals. Welvare, you may continue with anything that pertains to the celebration. We will return momentarily."

"As you wish," Welvare said.

Eldon and I exited the council chamber and made our way toward the atrium. It was alive with courtiers, but upon entering, all merriment stopped.

"As you were," I said, and the conversations resumed.

Shaylin, who was with a group of fairy courtiers, began to walk toward us, but I held up my hand, motioning her not to approach. She frowned and continued to follow close behind. As we opened the garden gate, I turned toward her. "Don't follow me, Shaylin," I said in my mind. Shaylin's eyes narrowed, and she angrily turned back toward the atrium.

I didn't have time for her dramatic displays and turned my attention back toward Eldon. Once he was comfortably sitting, I looked at him with concern.

"Please stop fussing over me now, my dear," Eldon said, taking a deep breath.

I knelt before him. "Are you well?" I asked.

"You should never kneel before me, my dear. It's especially not wise to do so in front of the Nobles. You are the Queen, lest you forget," Eldon said, patting my hand.

"I am, first and foremost, your friend. As Queen, I will kneel before whomever I choose. Now, tell me, what's wrong? As your Queen and friend, I command it," I said.

Eldon smiled. "I am old, Lilly, older than any Fae alive. My time is nearing," he replied.

I leaned back slowly, surprised by his candor. Fairies lived longer than humanly possible, but I had never entertained the thought of him dying. "No. This isn't true. I won't allow it."

Eldon let out a soft laugh. "Won't allow it? Oh, my dear, if you only had that kind of power. All fairies die in due course of time. It's nature's will. I

cannot change it, and neither can you. However, you need not worry. I will not die just yet."

I felt a tear roll down my cheek and looked away.

"You don't need to hide from me," Eldon said, turning my face back toward him. "Your feelings for me are touching, and we have always been honest with one another. I must ask you to be honest with me now. You must tell me what happened at the council meeting."

"I'm sure I don't understand your meaning," I replied and looked away once more.

"Ah, Ah, Ah, my dear. We cannot lie. You had another vision, didn't you?" he pressed.

I looked back into Eldon's eyes. They had always been the most beautiful blue shade, like the calmest sea. Now the color was suddenly pale, almost grey. His time was drawing near, and this broke my heart. I wanted to talk about anything else, and so I answered him.

"Yes. I had another vision. This time it involved, Ayden."

"Ayden?"

"Yes. He looked up at me after his apology, and when he did, I felt a pain in my head, accompanied by a vision. It was like looking into the sacred mirror. I saw the two of us sitting in a mossy glen. I believe we were kissing."

Eldon's eyebrow rose questioningly.

I immediately took his hand. "Oh please, don't think ill of me. I would never betray Kailen. I don't have feelings for Ayden. I don't understand why I would see such a vision. Please help me understand

what I'm feeling," I begged as the tears flowed from my eyes.

"Hush now," Eldon said, patting my hand. "I don't understand what is going on, but let me assure you I could never think ill of you. However, I do fear there is something amiss, but I'm not sure what. You must keep me abreast of these visions."

"Will you keep them a secret?" I asked.

"As long as I can. However, I do think you should look upon the sacred book and call upon your mother as I instructed."

I nodded in agreement. "The vision of Ayden. Why would I see this?"

"I don't know. Ayden is a good man. I don't think he would do anything to dishonor you."

"He covets me; I can feel it."

Eldon looked at me in surprise. "Covets you? Why would you say such a thing?"

There was something in Ayden's demeanor that made me feel uneasy. "It's something I sense. I see him watching me. You witnessed his behavior in the council chambers. It was highly inappropriate."

"You are beautiful and the Queen. While I believe he admires you, Ayden is his father's son and is loyal to the Court. I don't believe he would do anything to jeopardize his position as a Noble. I'm sure he understands your commitment to Kailen."

"Does he?" I asked in disbelief.

"You *question* yourself?"

I stood and faced the other direction. "I know I shouldn't, but these visions and nightmares have caused me confusion. I know this is a mortal feeling, as are the nightmares. I don't know what to think."



"Then, you must not delay. You must look upon the book. Have you told me everything?"

"Yes. I wouldn't hide anything from you," I said reassuringly.

"Very well, my dear. Walk me back to my chamber. I wish to rest."

I helped Eldon to his feet. "Eldon, I forbid you to die," I said with a teary smile.

"I am your servant, Lilly. Whether in this Realm or another, I will always serve you. Now, no more of this talk. Sing to me one of your mortal songs."

I searched her memory but found it absent of anything cheerful. I chose a song about remembrance and began to sing softly, trying my best not to focus too much on the words for fear I would start crying again.



*Four*  
*Book & Mirror*

Once Eldon was resting comfortably, I made my way back to the council chamber. As I neared the door, I stopped and listened to the conversation within.

"We cannot suggest it to her again," Avery said.

"But I feel it's time. Elysia will never see her daughters on the throne. She must produce an heir of pure fairy blood," Welvare replied.

"You saw Eldon. His time draws near. I'm sure he would agree with us. If we can convince him, I'm sure he can convince the Queen. She is acting strangely. I fear she is hiding something from us," Welvare continued.

"I'm sure she isn't," Avery interjected.

"What do you propose we do?" Welvare asked.

The conversation suddenly became quiet. My hearing had always been exceptional in the Realm, but now it failed me when I needed it most.

"Eavesdropping, Mother?"

I jumped, startled by the sound of Shaylin's voice. I turned to see her standing with her arms folded across her chest. The elf blood in her gave her the ability to move silently and often undetected. Kailen tried in vain to teach me this, but I never mastered the skill. While Diana looked like me, Shaylin resembled Kailen. Looking into her eyes filled me with a strange sense of guilt and anger. "I could ask you the same. Have you been following me again, Shaylin?"

"No, Mother. But I do wish to speak with you", she said tersely.

"I don't have time for this, Shaylin. You will have to speak to me later. I have your rite of passage celebration to think about."

"That is why I'm here," Shaylin replied.

"Very well, Shaylin. Tell me what's so important, but keep your voice down," I replied in a quiet warning.

"Fine," she whispered. "I won't be attending. They don't consider me an heir to the Elysian throne, and therefore, I won't give them the satisfaction."

"Now you listen to me, Shaylin. I have endured this topic for the last time. You will attend, and you will be gracious. If you showed one ounce of respect to the Elysians, perhaps they would

reconsider their rules and traditions," I said in frustration.

"I doubt it," she replied, crossing her arms in front of her chest.

"Even if I were able to convince them, what makes you think you will ever be fit to rule with such an attitude? Do you think I would just hand you, my crown?"

"What are you saying? I hope you aren't suggesting you'd give it to Diana!" Shaylin roared. "I'm older!"

"Lower your voice," I whispered through clenched teeth. "And might I remind you you're only older by a few moments."

Shaylin released an exasperated breath.

"Out of my sight, Shaylin! I'm in no mood! This topic is pointless. I'm not willing to step down to hand it to either one of you. I shall rule until my death."

"So be it," Shaylin said, drawing her face into a cold, familiar smile.

I immediately felt my blood run cold as the image of Devligant's face entered my mind.

Shaylin's smile faded, and her expression became pained. "So that's who I am to you, Mother?" she replied, her eyes suddenly filling with tears.

While I had always loved our ability to communicate through thought, it was something I deeply regretted at that moment. I reached out toward her, but it was too late. She pulled away, turned, and ran back toward the atrium. I called out to her in my mind, but she blocked me and disappeared from my sight. I barely had time to gather myself when the

door to the council chamber opened. I turned and saw Ayden looking at me.

"Are you alright, my Queen?" he asked, placing a hand on my arm.

I immediately recoiled and looked away.

"Is Eldon alright?" Deacon asked from within the chamber.

I moved past Ayden and entered. "Yes, please be seated," I replied, taking my place at the council table's head. "I'm sure you all made significant progress concerning the solstice celebration. Am I correct?"

"Oh, yes, my Queen. We have everything under control," Deacon replied.

I looked down and saw the book and the mirror resting as I had left them. "If there is nothing else to discuss, I wish to adjourn our meeting."

Welfare looked at Deacon.

"Do you have anything to add, Welfare?" I asked in a warning tone.

Welfare opened his mouth as if to speak but shook his head in response.

"Good. Now, I wish to be left alone," I replied.

The nobles all stood and left the chamber respectfully. Ayden was the last to leave, glancing at me before closing the door. I immediately looked away from him, and once the door shut, I looked back at the book.

"You are up to something. I shall find out what it is," I said, picking up the mirror.

I opened the sacred book of the Fae and quietly centered my thoughts. When I felt calm, I

moved the mirror's reflective surface over the book's blank pages until images formed like ink spilled over fresh parchment.

*Unwilling is the betrayer who  
plants the seed of evil that  
rests within the womb*

*Betrayal is not without regret  
Regret is not without pain  
That which is sought is not what it seems  
That which is sacrificed is not without love*

"What of Devligant?" I asked aloud.

*On the wings of a black crow  
A child of evil is born  
The Serpent grows stronger when it is fed*

A few moments later, the images began to swirl and disappear. When this happened, it was an indication the book had nothing more to say on the subject. I closed it and flipped the mirror over, so the reflective surface was now facing me. The mirror was a powerful tool in which to scry and always revealed the truth. Its ability to display the riddles within the book of the Fae was just one of its secrets. It was also a powerful portal to the past and immediate future. Keeping the riddles in mind, I looked at my reflection and focused on my eyes until a swirl of color began to form. The council chamber faded around me, and I began to see the mirror's images.

"You know this is right. It's what your people want," Ayden said.

The mirror pulsed again, revealing Kailen in the arms of the raven-haired woman from my vision in the Elysian Garden.

"Don't fool yourself into believing you are one of them, Kailen. They will never accept you. You are King of Denmire. You deserve a queen who will give herself completely to you," the woman said.

I needed to keep searching for the riddle and the meaning behind the images but could bear no more. "Underwood," I said, causing the images to swirl backward until the chamber surrounded me once more. I placed the mirror on top of the book and sat in silent contemplation. This isn't possible, I thought. Still, even though the future is in a constant state of flux, the mirror doesn't lie. If these are images of things to come, a trip to Denmire was in order.