



New York Times Bestselling Author

JULIE KAGAWA

SUMMER'S CROSSING

AN IRON FEY NOVELLA

Summer's Crossing

The Iron Fey

Julie Kagawa

**HARLEQUIN®
TEEN**

A Midsummer's Nightmare?

Robin Goodfellow. Puck. Summer Court prankster, King Oberon's right hand, bane of many a faery queen's existence—and secret friend to Prince Ash of the Winter Court. Until one girl's death came between them, and another girl stole both their hearts.

Now Ash has granted one favor too many and someone's come to collect, forcing the prince to a place he cannot go without Puck's help—into the heart of the Summer Court. And Puck faces the ultimate choice—betray Ash and possibly win the girl they both love, or help his former friend turned bitter enemy pull off a deception that no true faery prankster could possibly resist.

An ebook exclusive novella from Julie Kagawa's Iron Fey series.

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Chapter One

And as I am an Honest Puck

Names.

What's in a name, really? I mean, besides a bunch of letters or sounds strung together to make a word. Does a rose by any other name really smell as sweet? Would the most famous love story in the world be as poignant if it was called *Romeo and Gertrude*? Why is what we call ourselves so important?

Heh, sorry, I don't usually get philosophical. I've just been wondering lately. Names are, of course, very important to my kind. Me, I have so many, I can't even remember them all. None of them are my True Name, of course. No one has ever spoken my real name out loud, not once, despite all the titles and nicknames and myths I've collected for myself over the years. No one has ever come close to getting it right.

Curious, are you? Wanna know my True Name? Okay, listen up, I've never told anyone before. My True Name is...

Hahahaha! You really thought I would tell you? Really? Oh, I kill me. But, like I said, names are important to us. For one thing, they tie us to this world; they ground us in reality somewhat. If you know your True Name—not everyone in our world finds it—you're more “real” than if you don't know who you are. And for a race that has a tendency to fade away if we're forgotten, that's kind of a big deal.

My name, one of many, is Robin Goodfellow.

You may have heard of me.

Once upon a time, I had two close friends. Shocking, I know, given my natural charm, but there are those who just don't appreciate my brilliance. We weren't supposed to be friends, the three of us, or even friendly with each other. I was part of the Seelie Court, and they...weren't. But I'd never been one for following the rules, and who knew Queen Mab's youngest son could be such a rebel as well? And Ariella... I'd known Ash a long time before Ariella came into the picture, but I never begrudged her presence. She was the buffer between us; the one who could calm Ash when he slipped too far toward his ruthless Unseelie nature, or advised caution when one of my plans seemed a little... impulsive. Once upon a time, we were inseparable.

Once upon a time, I did something stupid. And lost them both in the process.

Which brings us to...now. Today. Where, once more, it was me and my former best friend, getting ready to head off on another adventure. Just like old times.

Except, he still hadn't forgiven me for what had happened all those years ago. And he hadn't really invited me along, either. I sort of...invited myself.

But if I made a habit of waiting for an invitation, I'd never get to go anywhere.

“So,” I said brightly, falling into step behind the brooding prince. “Grimalkin. We're going to find him, right?”

“Yes.”

“Any idea where he is?”

“No.”

“Any idea where to start looking?”

“No.”

“You do realize that doesn’t constitute much of a plan, right ice-boy?”

He turned to glare at me, which I considered a small triumph. Ash usually ignored my goading. Anytime I could poke through his icy indifference was a victory. Of course, when poking the Winter prince, one had to proceed with caution. There was a fine line between irritation and having icicles hurled at your face.

He glared at me a moment longer, then sighed, raking a hand through his hair—a sure sign that he was frustrated. “Do you have any suggestions, Goodfellow?” he muttered, sounding reluctant to even ask. And for just a moment, I saw how lost he was, how uncertain of the future and what lay ahead. Anyone else wouldn’t have seen it, but I knew Ash. I could always catch those tiny flashes of emotion, no matter how well he hid them. It almost made me feel sorry for him.

Almost.

I grinned disarmingly. “What? Are you actually asking for my opinion, ice-boy?” I taunted, and that doubt vanished, replaced by annoyance. “Well,” I went on, leaning back against a tree trunk, “since you asked, we might want to check if anyone around here owes him a favor.”

“That narrows things down,” Ash said sarcastically. I rolled my eyes, but he did have a point. If we started naming everyone that might owe our feline friend a favor, the list would fill several books.

“Well, then.” I crossed my arms. “If you have a better suggestion, Prince, I’d love to hear it.”

Before he could answer, a ripple of glamour shivered through the air. Glitter and streamers of light swirled around us, and a chorus of tiny voices sang out a single note. I winced, knowing there was only one person who thought a normal entrance, like walking through a door, wasn’t good enough for her; she had to announce her presence with sparkle and glitter and St. Peter’s choir.

“Darlings!”

Sometimes, it sucks being right all the time.

“Leanansidhe,” Ash grumbled, sounding about as thrilled as I felt as the Queen of the Exiles stepped out of the glitter and light and smiled down at us. She looked like she was going to a party where the theme was Most Sparkly Evening Gown, or maybe Quickest Way to Blind Someone. She paused a moment, striking a dramatic pose for her sadly unimpressed audience, before waving her hand and dispersing with the fireworks.

“Lea,” I echoed, smirking at her. “This is a shock. To what do we owe the pleasure of your company, away from the Between and all?”

“Puck, darling.” Leanansidhe gave me a smile that was about as welcoming as a viper eyeing a mouse. “Why am I not surprised to see you here? It seems I just got rid of you, pet, and here you are again.”

“That’s me.” I raised my chin. “The bad penny that always pops up. But you didn’t answer my question. What do you want, Lea?”

“From you? Nothing, darling.” Leanansidhe turned to Ash, and he stiffened. “Ash, darling,” she purred. “You *are* a trooper, aren’t you, pet? I was certain, after you made your knightly oath, that you and the girl would go all Romeo and Juliet on me. But you survived the final battle after all. Bravo, pet, bravo.”

I snorted. “So what am I, chopped liver?”

Leanansidhe shot me an annoyed glance. “No, darling,” she sighed. “But the Winter prince and I have unfinished business, or didn’t he tell you?” She smiled and looked at Ash again. “He owes me a

favor—a rather large favor—for helping him out, and I have come to collect.”

A bargain with the Exile Queen? For a second, I wasn’t sure I’d heard right. “Ice-boy.” I shook my head, exasperated. “Really? You made a deal with *her*? Are you crazy? You, of all people, should know better.”

“It was for Meghan.” Ash’s voice was low, defensive. “I needed her help.” He looked at Leanansidhe, quietly pleading. “Can this not wait?” he asked in a calm voice, and the question surprised me. Ash rarely made deals, but when he did, he was religious about upholding them. It was a point of personal honor, I guessed, to keep his bargains without fail, without complaint, even if he’d managed to get the bad end of one. This was the very first time I’d heard him ask for more time, the first I’d heard him plead for anything.

But he’d find no sympathy with the Exile Queen. I could’ve told him that. “No, darling,” Leanansidhe said briskly. “I’m afraid it cannot. I know you and Goodfellow are about to go tromping off after Grimalkin, and that, I fear, might take a long time. A very long time. Time I do not have. I am calling in this debt *now*, and you will help me *now*. Besides, darling.” Leanansidhe sniffed, making a dramatic gesture with a gloved hand. “After you are done with this, I might be able to help. Finding Grimalkin if he does not wish to be found is a near impossible task. I could, at least, point you in the right direction.”

Ash sighed, looking impatient, but there was nothing he could do. Even I couldn’t wiggle my way out of a contract, though if I had to strike a deal, I always left myself *some* kind of loophole. You’d get screwed eight ways from Sunday, otherwise. In the courts, the nobles all loved this game, each one trying to pull a fast one on the other, though most of them knew better than to make a deal with me anymore. Especially after the fiasco with Titania and the donkey ears. Being a legend does have its advantages sometimes.

Ash knew his way around the fey courts, too; he’d grown up having to watch his back. I was surprised he’d allowed himself to strike a bargain with Leanansidhe; he should’ve known it would come back to bite him.

As if he sensed what I was thinking, Ash glared at me, proud and defiant, daring me to say something. He did know, I realized. Mr. Cold, Dark and Broody might be a lot of things, but he wasn’t stupid. He knew Faery always came to collect, he knew the dangers of bargaining with a dangerous, exiled faery queen. But he’d done it anyway, because of her. Because of the girl we were both crazy for, who was now far away, beyond our reach.

Meghan.

“Fine.” Ash faced the Exile Queen again. “Let’s get this over with. What do you need, Leanansidhe?”

Leanansidhe preened. “Just a small request, darling,” she smiled. “A teensy favor, hardly worth mentioning. You’ll be done in no time.”

Which was Faery speak for “huge, ginormous, dangerous ordeal.” I frowned, but Leanansidhe continued without looking in my direction.

“I’m afraid I’ve lost something,” she continued with a heartfelt sigh. “Something I prize most dearly. Something that cannot be replaced. I would like you to get it back.”

“Lost?” I broke in. “Lost how? Lost like you dropped it down the sink, or lost like it walked out the door and ran off into the woods?”

Leanansidhe pursed her lips and shot me a glance. “Puck, darling, I don’t mean to sound rude, but why are you still here? I made a bargain with the Winter prince, and it does not involve you in any way. Shouldn’t you be off annoying Oberon or his basilisk of a wife?”

“Ouch.” I mock grimaced. “Well, it’s nice to feel so wanted.” The Exile Queen narrowed her eyes, looking a bit more dangerous, and I grinned back. “Sorry to burst your bubble, Lea, but I was here first. If ice-boy wants me to leave, he can say so. Otherwise, I’m not going anywhere.”

I wasn’t anyway, and they both knew it, but Leanansidhe looked at Ash. When he didn’t say anything, she huffed. “You both are impossible,” she stated, throwing up her hands. “Oh, very well. Stay or go, darling, it makes no difference to me. In fact...” She stopped then, mid-gesture, regarding me with a faint smile that made me nervous. “Now that I think of it, this might be for the best. Yes, of course. This will work out nicely.”

Ash and I exchanged a glance. “Why do I get the feeling I’m not going to like what’s coming next?” I muttered. He shook his head, and I sighed. “Okay, enough dancing around. For the ten million dollar question—what exactly did you lose, Lea?”

“A violin,” Leanansidhe exclaimed, as if that were obvious. “It is most upsetting, and I have been a broken wreck because of it.” She sniffed, clutching at her heart. “My favorite violin, stolen right out from under me.”

“A violin?” I echoed, making a face. “Really? You’re calling in a favor for that? What, you don’t want to wait until you’ve lost a pipe organ or something?”

Ash regarded her solemnly. “You want us to find the thief,” he said, and it wasn’t really a question.

“Well, not really, darling.” Leanansidhe scratched the side of her face. “I have a good idea who the thief is, and where they took my precious violin. I simply need you to go there and bring it back.”

“If you know who the thief is, and where they took the violin, why do you need us?”

Leanansidhe smiled at me. It was a very evil smile, I thought. “Because, my darling Puck,” she crooned, “my precious violin was stolen by Titania, your Summer Queen. I need you and the Winter prince to go into the Seelie Court and steal it back.”

Oh, fabulous.

“Well,” I said cheerfully, “is that all? Steal something back from the Queen of the Seelie Court? I was just thinking we needed to go on a suicide mission, right ice-boy?”

Ash ignored me, typical of him. “*Queen Titania* has your violin?” he asked, incredulous. “Are you certain it was her?”

“Quite certain, darling.” Leanansidhe pulled a cigarette flute out of the air, puffing indignantly. “In fact, this was right after you went back into the Nevernever. The jealous shrew made quite sure I knew who was responsible. She *still* believes I stole her wretched golden mirror, all those years ago, and has never forgiven me for it.” Lea paused then, and looked right at me. “I do not know how she has come to think that, pet, do you?”

I blinked innocently. “Why are you looking at me, Lea?” I asked, batting my eyelashes. “Is this the face of such a dastardly villain?” Leanansidhe sighed.

“Anyway,” she continued, turning back to Ash, “that is the situation. And as I cannot go into the courts any longer, I need someone who can. That’s where you two come in.”

“I cannot just walk into Arcadia,” Ash said. “I will be trespassing, and by law the Summer King may have me executed if we are discovered. You know this.”

“I know, darling,” Lea placated. “But I suspect you’ll be able to come up with something. Especially if you have Master Goodfellow with you.” She smiled and puffed a smoke rabbit at me. “Unless, of course, he is not up to the challenge. Unless he’s *afraid* of his terrible Summer Queen.”

“Oh, please. Don’t think I don’t know what you’re doing,” I told her, raising an eyebrow. “I’m not dumb enough to fall for that, Lea. Who do you think you’re talking to, anyway?”

“I would think this is right up your alley, darling,” the Exile Queen returned. “Sneak the Winter prince into Arcadia, right under Titania’s nose? Steal something from the bitch queen’s room, only to hand it over to her rival? It has ‘Robin Goodfellow’ written all over it.”

Yeah, it did, didn’t it? This sounded exactly like one of my pranks, and truthfully, under other circumstances, I’d be more than eager. Titania wasn’t fond of me, and the feeling was mutual. Any chance I got to annoy, irritate, or piss off the Summer Queen, I’d jump at the opportunity. It wasn’t that I *hated* her, she was my queen after all, but she really needed to lighten up. Besides, I’d heard about what she did to Meghan the first time they met, and that needed a little payback. No one turns *my* Summer princess into a deer and gets away with it, even if it is the Seelie Queen. Even if Meghan would never know that I’d defended her.

Right now, however, I understood Ash’s impatience. The vow he made to Meghan, his promise to return to her, didn’t really have an expiration date, but I figured it would be a long, arduous adventure without all these annoying side quests. We needed to be searching for a certain obnoxious furball, not pranking the Seelie Queen, no matter how entertaining that sounded.

Except, Lea really wasn’t giving us a choice.

“So, if you two could get right on that—” she smiled, waving her cigarette flute at us “—I’d be ever so grateful. When you have the violin, just meet me back here, darlings. I’ll have my spies monitor your progress. But now, you must excuse me. I’m afraid I left Razor Dan in charge of security while I was gone, and I must return quickly before he or his motley eats someone. Good luck, pets! Don’t get yourselves turned into a rosebush!”

Another swirl of glitter and lights, and the Exile Queen was gone.

Ash sighed. “Don’t say anything, Goodfellow.”

“What? Me?” I grinned at him. “Say something? I’m not the type who would point out that, for once, this absurd situation isn’t *my* fault. Of course, *I* know better than to make deals with crazy Exile Queens with goddess complexes. And if I did, I would *expect* them to call in the favor at the worst possible time. But I’m certainly not one to rub it in. That would just be wrong.”

Ash pinched the bridge of his nose. “I’m beginning to regret inviting you.”

“You wound me deeply, Prince.” I laced my hands behind my head, enjoying myself. “Especially since you’re gonna need my help to get into Summer. Don’t think Oberon and Titania won’t notice a Winter prince strolling right into the heart of Arcadia. You’d stick out like an ogre in a china shop.”

He scowled, whether from the seemingly impossible task of sneaking into Arcadia or because I just compared him to an ogre, I didn’t know. “I assume you have a plan?” he muttered, crossing his arms.

I shot him an evil grin and was rewarded by his brief look of trepidation. “Please. Did you forget who you’re talking to, ice-boy? Just leave everything to me.”

Chapter Two

For Oberon Is Passing Fell and Wrath

It was twilight when we crossed the barrier from the mortal realm into the wyldwood. Then again, it was always twilight beneath the wyldwood's huge canopy. Sunlight couldn't penetrate the thick branches of the trees rising hundreds of yards into the air. Unlike the vivid brightness of Summer and the frigid harshness Winter, the wyldwood was eternally dark, tangled, and dangerous. It was constantly changing, so you never knew what you'd run into next.

I loved it. Even though I was Summer, this felt more like home than anywhere else.

"Here we are," I said, stepping beneath a pair of cypresses twisted together to form an arch between the trunks. Around us, the murk of the wyldwood closed in, though a few lone will-o-the-wisps bobbed through the leaves, looking for lost travelers. Thick black briars crawled between trunks, creeping along the ground as they strangled the life from all other vegetation. "Arcadia isn't far. I would've used the trod that takes us through the quartz caverns, but I'm afraid a lindworm has taken up residence since the last time I was there."

Ash looked around, always alert, and raised an eyebrow. "You do realize you've brought us right into the middle of hedge wolf territory."

Inwardly I winced. I was hoping he wouldn't notice that small fact. "Well, we'll just have to sneak through nice and quiet."

"Hedge wolves don't have ears," Ash continued. "They hunt by sensing the vibrations in the ground. And in the air. They're probably listening to us right now."

"Do you want to reach the Summer Court or not, princeling?" I challenged, crossing my arms. "This is the quickest way."

A rustle in a bramble patch drew our attention, and we caught a glint of a baleful green eye as something huge and bristly drew away into the shadows.

"And...there it goes to alert the rest of the pack." Ash glared at me. "Why do things always happen when I'm around you?"

"Just lucky, I suppose," I said cheerfully, as we hurried away before the rest of the pack could arrive.

It didn't go as well as I planned. Hedge wolves were ambush predators, though certainly not the nastiest monsters we'd ever faced. But they were tricky bastards, and had the bad habit of looking exactly like an innocent briar patch until you were right up on them and then *boom*, you had this big, wolf-shaped bush lunging at your face. We dodged, ducked and slashed our way past the first dozen or so, avoiding the spiky bushes of death that leaped at us with no warning, or lunged out from the briars. Unfortunately hedge wolves also had the audacity to learn from past mistakes, and they started using strategy and group tactics against us.

We stepped into a clearing just as one of the bristly creatures slid into the brambles ahead of us. As we eased forward, tense and wary, four bushes around us sprang to life and charged. Ash and I spun, going back-to-back instinctively as the spiky creatures lunged from all sides. Ash's sword lashed out, slicing one from the air as I stabbed upward with my dagger, caught a hedge wolf under

the jaw and hurled it into its friend. The last wolf met a sudden end on Ash's blade, but then without warning, *another* pair of brambles unfurled and lunged, catching us by surprise this time. I felt the spiky body of a huge wolf slam into me, knocking me flat, as the second wolf chomped down on the prince's sword arm.

I felt a flash of cold behind me and winced. Ice-boy's temper had finally snapped. From the corner of my eye, I saw the prince step forward, pushing his arm farther into the wolf's jaws. There was another flash, and the hedge wolf stiffened as icicles burst out of its muzzle, punching through its jaws like giant needles. Ash grabbed the wolf's muzzle with his free hand and yanked it down with a loud crack, snapping its jaw like a frozen twig. The wolf yelped, curled in on itself and stopped moving.

I scowled at the wolf above me, holding those nasty teeth away from my face. "Ugh, my friend, you really need a breath mint," I told him, sending a pulse of glamour into the brambly monster above me. "Let's see what we can do about that doggie breath."

Vines grew from the wolf's thorny head, slithering over its face. They wrapped around its jaws like a muzzle, clamping them shut, and the wolf's eyes got huge and round. Whimpering pathetically, it leaped away, clawing at its face, and ran off, disappearing into the woods.

Dusting myself off, I climbed to my feet. "Well, that was...interesting," I ventured, deliberately ignoring Ash's glare. His sleeve was tattered, and blood smeared his forearm up to his elbow. "I don't remember hedge wolves ever doing that before."

"If I didn't need you to get into Summer..."

"Oh, but you do," I reminded him, grinning. "Let's not forget that, huh, ice-boy?" His expression darkened even more, but he turned away.

"Come on," Ash said, his voice even colder than normal. "We don't have time for your idiocy now."

"That's what I like about you Winter fey...you're all such scintillating wits, such clever purveyors of words, such wise and frolicsome—"

I ducked as a pinecone zipped by my head with enough force to have done more than muss my hair. A chuckle escaped me. "Always good to know you care, ice-boy." With a quick laugh I sprinted ahead, hoping to get out of range of any colder—and sharper—missiles that might be coming my way.

After the fiasco with the wolves, we separated for a bit, with the frosty prince vanishing into the surrounding woods to clean and bind his arm while I made camp. We couldn't wait for a later time. It was never a good idea to tromp through the wyldwood bleeding; you'd attract everything—and I mean *everything*—in the area. Besides, night was falling, and if we ventured any farther, we'd cross into the Fen Marches. Barghests and bog wraiths roamed those swamps at night, looking for victims, and though I wouldn't mind the challenge of crossing the swamps without being eaten or drowned, we had a mission to complete.

So, I found a grotto surrounded by glowing blue and orange fungi and carpeted in moss, cleared out a space and made a fire. Spearing a couple wild mushrooms I'd found earlier, I held the stick over the flames, leaning back contentedly. Ash hadn't returned, but knowing ice-boy he'd probably go hunting once he was done with his arm. I wasn't worried; he'd find this place when he was ready.

I snorted, rolling my eyes. Unless the stubborn idiot decided to strike out on his own again. Hopefully he'd learned his lesson the last time he'd tried something like that.

A weight settled in my gut. I hadn't meant to think of that night, but now that I had, there was no

use trying to forget. I gazed into the fire, letting my eyes unfocus, and the memories came creeping back.

It was an evening much like this one, in a place surrounded by glowing flowers, except it was Winter's territory and not the wyldwood. They hadn't seen me, hadn't known I was awake, but I had watched Ash and Meghan that night; listened as he told her he was leaving, alone, to retrieve the Scepter of the Seasons. I'd listened as he told her to go home, back to the mortal world, to forget him. I'd watched both their faces, Meghan's streaked with tears as she tried to be brave; Ash's torment carefully sealed away. I'd said nothing, done nothing, as he'd broken her heart, turned away and walked out of her life.

And...I'd been glad.

I scrubbed a hand over my face, disgusted with myself. I'd been *glad*, because Ash had crushed my princess's heart, because he was gone, and perhaps I could finally get her to look at me. I had been too patient, biding my time, waiting for the day the princess would open her eyes and see her faithful Puck as something more than a goofy friend. I would be more than her guardian and champion and the jester who made her laugh. I would be her everything, if I could.

With a sigh, I yanked the mushrooms from the fire and bit into them aggressively. After Ash had left, I'd tried to mend my princess's shattered heart, the one the stone-cold ice-prince had broken so efficiently. And for one blissful moment, I'd thought I had a chance. The memory of Meghan's kiss was seared into my brain, and I would never forget that day, one of the happiest moments of my life. But, against all odds, Meghan and Ash had found their way back to each other, defying every court of Faery to be together, and I was left behind. In the end, I'd lost her.

So why the hell am I still here?

"Goodfellow."

I jerked up. The deep voice wasn't Ash's; it was far too low and powerful to belong to the frosty ice-prince. I knew it instantly; it was a voice that could command entire forests and woodlands, a voice that I had obeyed long before I ever met the mercurial prince of Winter.

Oberon stared at me over the fire, his eyes glowing amber in the shadows, the expression on his narrow face making the very ground quake in fear.

"Hello, Robin," Oberon murmured, unsmiling. "I fear we must have a little talk."

Aw, crap.

I stood warily, careless grin firmly in place, lacing my hands behind my head. Anyone else would've bowed or knelt or curtsied or at least nodded respectfully, but I'd known the Seelie King for such a long time, such formalities between us were completely useless. If I made any show of respect, Oberon would *know* something was up. As well as I knew him, the Summer King knew *me* just as well.

"Why, Oberon." I nodded, still smiling. "What are you doing here?" I eyed his armor and the great bow across his back. "Out for a little hunt? All by yourself? And you didn't invite me along? I'm hurt."

"Dispense with the foolishness, Robin." The Seelie King waved a hand, and thunder rumbled in the distance. Between us, the campfire flared like it wanted to jump out of the pit, and the plants surrounding us went nuts, writhing and twisting and dancing like they were ecstatic to see him. Such was the immense power of the Summer King. "We both know why I am here, I think. Where is the Unseelie prince?"

“Prince?” I frowned, though my heart started racing under my shirt. How had Oberon learned about Ash so quickly? We weren’t even in Arcadia yet. “Why would you think I know anything about the Unseelie prince?” I asked, adopting my best innocent expression. “We’re supposed to be enemies. In case you haven’t heard, he made this teensy little oath to kill me someday.”

None of that was a lie. Live as long as I have, and you become an expert at “dancing around the truth,” as some put it. Unfortunately Oberon was no spring chicken, either.

“Robin.” He gave me a patient look. “I know. I know what you are planning to do. Do you think I have no inkling of what goes on in my own court? Titania is completely enamored of her new plaything. I know she stole it from Leanansidhe—she makes no secret of where she got it. I was wondering how Leanansidhe would react. Then I hear word of you and the Winter prince entering the wyldwood, heading for Arcadia. Do not think me a fool, Goodfellow. I know you plan to take Leanansidhe’s toy back to her.

“However,” he went on, before I could think of a new plan, one that would get me out of this without being turned into a bird or a rat for who knew how long, “you may relax, Robin. I am not here to stop you.”

I didn’t relax. In fact, this just made me more wary. I crossed my arms, raising an eyebrow. “Oh?”

“My lady wife has become quite distracted of late,” the Seelie lord continued. “She dotes on her new toy and pays no attention to her court, her subjects, or her king. I dislike it.”

Aha. And the truth came out. Oberon had always been the jealous type. Anything that took Titania’s interest off him was cause for huge arguments between the two Seelie rulers. The last time something like this had happened, Titania had refused to give up a little Indian changeling, and Oberon had ordered me to put a love potion in her eyes so she would forget all about it.

We all know how *that* turned out.

I sighed, knowing where this was going. “Let me guess,” I said. “You’re going to be ‘conveniently absent’ from the Summer Court for a while. During which time, Titania’s newest toy will mysteriously disappear, and you will have no knowledge of where it could have gotten to.”

“I am going hunting with my knights and hounds,” the Erlking replied with great dignity. “I care not what Titania does while I am away. However...” He stepped closer, filling the small grotto with his presence. His tall shadow loomed over me as he met my gaze. “I want you to think on something as well, Robin. Remember these words, when you go into Arcadia with your plan, whatever it is.”

Oberon leaned in, his voice low and dark, whispering to me over the fire. “If your companion was suddenly...gone,” he murmured, and a cold hand grabbed my stomach. “If the Winter prince were no longer here, how long do you think it would be before Meghan Chase came to you?”

I felt the breath whoosh out of me. I stared at Oberon, aghast. He gazed back calmly, unmovable as an oak. “What...are you...?” I couldn’t even finish the thought. “Why would you think...?”

“I know you love her,” Oberon went on, undeterred. “My daughter. I know your feelings for Meghan Chase, Robin. And I am here to tell you that I approve. I would rather see the two of you together, than her with the son of my ancient enemy.”

“Don’t ask for much, do you?” My voice came out harsh and raspy, and I turned away from him. All pretense of not knowing Ash had fled, along with most of my composure. Oberon’s gaze followed me as I took a few steps forward, grabbing the boughs of a small pine as I stared into the night. The fire crackled and popped behind me, and the heat of Oberon’s gaze burned between my shoulders like the hottest flame.

“What do you want me to do?” I muttered, gazing out into the night. “Stick a knife in his back

when he's not looking? Is that what you're ordering me to do now?" My gut clenched at the thought. "You don't think Meghan will have something to say about that? I'd never be able to hide that from her."

"You need not do anything," Oberon continued quietly. "Only expose the prince when you are in the Summer Court. Titania will do the rest. His blood will not be on your hands—you would only be doing what a true servant of the Summer Court would do. When the prince is gone, Meghan Chase will come to you for comfort. And all will be as it should."

I couldn't answer. I could almost feel Meghan against me, shaking with sobs as she mourned her Winter prince. I could feel my arms around her as I whispered that it would be okay, that she still had me, and I would never leave. And then I wanted to kick myself in the head for thinking that.

Oberon watched silently. "Robin Goodfellow," he murmured. "Despite our past differences, I consider you my most trusted servant. We are old, older than the Winter prince. We have known each other a long time. But sometimes, I wonder if you realize you are still part of the Summer Court. It is your home. You do not need anything else."

I clenched my fingers, feeling the branch splinter under my touch. If Oberon saw, he wasn't concerned.

"My daughter is truly one of us now," he went on. "Immortal. A queen of the fey. You have all the time in the world to make her fall in love with you. It would not be hard—the two of you are already very close. I know you would find a way to be with her, even in the Iron Realm. Once you put your mind to something, Robin, there is no stopping it. But you must be rid of the Winter prince before she can see you."

I didn't answer. I felt the Seelie King draw back, preparing to go. "The choice is yours, of course," he said as the fire died down and the plants around us stopped their crazy writhing. "My hunt will take me far from Arcadia, far from the whispers of mischief plaguing the Summer Court. Do what you will, Robin, but remember, if you love my daughter, this could be your only chance to be with her in the end. Otherwise, you will lose Meghan Chase to the very one who has sworn to kill you."

A warm wind hissed through the grotto, stirring the fire and the leaves. When it faded, the space was empty, save for me. The Erlking was gone.

Chapter Three

My Mistress with a Monster Is in Love

Ash returned a few minutes later, sweeping into the grotto without preamble, carrying a brace of rabbit, which showed he had indeed been hunting. He tossed one at my feet, and without a word we began cleaning them, working in silence as the night closed in around us.

Kill Ash? Betray him to the Summer Court? What was Oberon thinking? As if I could do anything like that, even if it was technically Titania who would strike the fatal blow. And she would, too. Ash might be a prince, but Titania was a queen. You did not screw around with the queens of Faery; at least, you didn't go toe-to-toe with them, especially in their own court. Even I knew that. And with Oberon conveniently absent, Titania wouldn't spare the Winter prince. She would utterly destroy him.

I couldn't do that to ice-boy. Even after all the years of bad blood and fighting between us, even though he probably *would* try to kill me someday, and actually go through with it, I couldn't leave him to the mercy of Titania.

But...if I didn't, Meghan would never love me. My princess, the girl I'd do anything for, would never see me, never look at me the way she did Ash.

What made him so special? What did he have that I did not?

"You're awfully quiet."

I blinked and looked up from skinning the hare. Ash knelt a few feet from the fire, bent over his task, his hunting knife working with smooth efficiency. "W-what?" I blurted, a little too quickly. *Oh, that was brilliant, Goodfellow. Fix it, now.* "Me?" I continued, feigning shock. "Why, ice-boy, whatever do you mean? Could it be that you're actually concerned?"

He didn't look up as he continued. "You're hiding something," Ash said calmly. "If I can hear myself think through your chatter, that means something is up. Or about to go very, very wrong. Anything you want to tell me, Goodfellow?"

Damn, when had ice-boy become able to read me? That was something I was going to have to work on. "Yes," I answered, forcing a grin. "I think turning you into a squirrel is the easiest way to sneak you into Arcadia. What do you think? Or, if you prefer, I could probably turn you into a mouse. Or a bird. Or a rabbit!" I looked at the skinned carcass in my hands. "Though that might go badly if Titania has her hounds anywhere about..."

"Never mind." Ash sighed, shaking his head. "I'm sorry I said anything."

"Ooh, I know!" I snapped my fingers. "A chameleon! That way you can perch on my collar and blend right in. It's brilliant! And you'd make a very handsome chameleon, don't you think, ice-boy?"

Ash rolled his eyes and bent lower over his task, tuning me out. I kept talking at him, useless, idle words that neither of us took seriously. It was a shield, a barrier for my real thoughts, which I couldn't shut away no matter how hard I tried.

Why are you here?

For Meghan. That was the obvious answer. I was here for Meghan. Because I loved my princess and I wanted her to be happy. Even if her happiness meant she was with someone else. Even if that someone else was my arch rival. I wanted her to be happy.

Don't you think you could make her happy?

I could. If she had picked me, I would've given her everything. I was the one who could make her laugh, who showed her the wonders of Summer magic, who had taken a bullet for her without question. (Which, by the way, hurt like a mother.) I was the one who protected her from her cruel human classmates, who walked her to and from the bus every day, who remembered her birthday when everyone else, even her own family, forgot. *Princess, why couldn't you have chosen me? Wasn't I good enough? Or is this my fault for waiting? For not making a move sooner?*

Damn. I'd thought I was over this. I'd thought I was fine in the friend zone, but I couldn't get Oberon's words out of my head. The Erlking, though he could be a manipulative, heartless bastard sometimes, was right. As long as Ash was around, Meghan would never see me as anything more than a friend.

So, you have to ask yourself, Goodfellow, who is more important? The woman you love and would do anything for, or the rival who has vowed to kill you one day?

I watched Ash, brooding into the fire, his back to me as he poked at the flames. My once-friend turned enemy. What would the ruthless Unseelie prince do, were he in my position?

Abruptly I stood, making Ash glance back warily. "Going somewhere, Goodfellow?"

"Just for a walk, princeling. But I'm touched that you care." I smirked at him, and he turned away, back to the fire. I made a face at his shoulder blades. "You know, I'm getting a little tired of talking to a stone wall," I continued, walking to the edge of the grotto. "I think having a conversation with a dead fish would be more rewarding than yapping at you."

"It's never stopped you before."

"See? That's what I'm talking about." I rolled my eyes. "But you'll have to excuse me for needing some time alone, Prince. I have to figure out how I'm actually going to smuggle your icy carcass into the Summer Court."

He looked up sharply. "I thought you had this planned out."

"Oh, *now* we're interested in a conversation, are we?" I chuckled and laced my hands behind my head. "Don't worry, ice-boy, I'll figure something out. I always do."

He watched me, silently. I stared back, still smirking, daring him to say something, to argue. Finally he sighed and turned back to the fire.

"It's your court," I heard him mutter. "You know it better than I."

Yeah, it is, I thought as I drew back and left him, walking into the forest. *It is my court; I'm part of Summer, and you're supposed to be my enemy, Ash. Do you ever think about that? How you're walking into enemy territory with someone who is supposed to be loyal to the Seelie Court?*

I hadn't been entirely straightforward. I already knew how I was going to sneak his royal iciness into Arcadia, right under the nose of Titania and the Summer Guard, without anyone knowing he was there. It would be challenging; Ash was a Winter prince through and through. You couldn't just slap a fake mustache on him and hope for the best, not with his glamour aura. Fortunately I'd been doing this a long time. If anyone could get a Winter gentry into the Summer Court unseen, it would be yours truly.

No, I just needed time alone. Time to think. Time to plan.

Time to figure out what I really wanted to do.

"No."

I rolled my eyes. "Ice-boy, come on. I least I'm not turning you into a lemur. This is the only way to get into the Summer Court without everyone knowing you're...you."

“There has to be another way.”

“There isn’t.” I crossed my arms and glared. We had reached the border of Arcadia, and stood at the edge of the wyldwood, gazing across the river to the Erlking’s lands on the other side. A wooden bridge, blooming with wildflowers, spanned the gulf, and two Summer Knights guarded the far side. Ash and I stood in a cluster of pine trees, watching them across the river, the churning rapids masking our hissed conversation.

“It’s a *disguise*, Ash,” I said again. “An illusion. We have to mask your Winter glamour with my Summer glamour, and we have to change your appearance so that people don’t freak out the second you walk into the court. Really, it’s the only way. How did you think this was going to go?”

Ash sighed, tilting his head back. “You’re enjoying this far too much.”

“Well.” I shrugged, biting down a grin. “I can’t say anything there.” He glared ice-daggers at me, and I raised my hands. “Do you want to get into Arcadia, or not?”

“Fine.” He made a frustrated, helpless gesture. “Do it. Let’s get this over with.”

“Thought you’d never say so.” I pulled him farther back into the trees, calling my magic as I did.

“Hold still,” I told him as he crossed his arms and tried to look bored and annoyed. “This won’t take long, but I have to weave Summer glamour into the illusion so that it’s strong enough to hide your Winter aura. If you were a redcap or an ice-gnome, it wouldn’t take very much, but you’re *you*, so this is going to be considerably more challenging.” I felt my Summer magic settle over him, felt it recoil from the icy chill of the Winter glamour surrounding him like a suit of armor, and frowned. “Ice-boy, stop fighting me. If you want to get this stupid favor over and done with, this is the only way. You have to let me help you.” He snorted, and the protective cloak of Winter glamour vanished.

I drew more Summer magic to me and sent it toward the prince, weaving the illusion over and around him. His magic resisted me—say what you want about the Winter prince, at his core, Ash was incredibly strong. He knew who he was, and someone of lesser skill couldn’t have turned him into something he was not, even if it was just an illusion.

But I’m not your average trickster, either.

Ash’s outline shimmered and started to change. He didn’t grow, or shrink, but his hair lengthened, falling down his back, and went from jet-black to the color of wheat. His pale skin turned golden-brown, as if he’d spent a lifetime in the sun, and his cold silver eyes flashed before turning a bright, glittering blue.

His clothes changed as well, the long black coat vanishing into mist, replaced with armor of gold and green, the proud head of a huge stag adorning the breastplate. A fancy gold cloak settled around him, the edges trimmed with leaves, something Ash wouldn’t be caught dead in. When it was done, no trace of the Winter prince stood in the spot beneath the pines. A Summer sidhe waited in the shadows, only his scowl bearing the faintest resemblance to the youngest son of Queen Mab.

I put a hand to my mouth in mock delight. “Oh, ice-boy, it’s...it’s...so you!”

“I’m going to kill you for this,” Ash growled, then winced at how his voice sounded, high and clear. I bit my cheek to keep from howling with laughter. If he drew his sword, it would shatter the illusion, and then we’d have to go through all this again.

“Yeah, well, do it later, ice-boy. Remember, you can’t use any Winter glamour in there at all, or the spell will unravel. That includes drawing your sword and throwing icicles at me, so let’s not start any fights with any Summer gentry while we’re here, okay? We just want to get in, grab the violin and get out again.”

Ash nodded. I stepped back and tossed the same illusion over myself, making a pair of almost identical Summer Knights. Glancing at my fellow guard, I grinned. “Ready?”

He sighed again, raking his fingers through his now unfamiliar hair. “Lead the way.”

The two knights guarding the bridge nodded politely as we crossed, but other than that didn’t even glance at us. I caught one of them hiding a smirk as we passed, but that was understandable, given the circumstances. I didn’t think ice-boy had seen it, but I was wrong.

“Who are we supposed to be?” Ash asked as we continued into the lands of the Erlking. Past the bridge, the heat of the summer sun blazed down on us, warming my skin and making me sigh with pleasure. Of all the things in the Seelie Court, I missed the sun the most. The wyldwood was too dark and Tir Na Nog was too cold; only in Arcadia did the sun shine full and bright, and the sweetest apples grow on the trees over the thorn fence, always ripe for the picking. If you could get past the two cranky giants who owned the orchard, that is.

“Oh,” I said, grinning. “Right. Names. Well, you’re Sir Torin, and I’m Sir Fagan, and we’re two hedge knights who travel all over the Nevernever on quests of glory for our king and court. You know, we right wrongs and slay dragons and search for mythological treasures, stuff like that.”

“So, they’re well respected.”

“Well...” I scratched the back of my head. “Not exactly.”

Ash stared at me. “What do you mean, not exactly?”

“Ever read *Don Quixote*?” I asked. And Ash closed his eyes, indicating that, yes, he had read it. I snickered. “They’re very eager,” I continued, trying not to laugh at the look on his face, “and they do have very noble intentions, I will give them that. But those two couldn’t find their way out of a broom closet without a map. It’s sheer dumb luck that they haven’t gotten themselves killed or eaten by now. They keep begging Oberon to send them on noble, important quests to prove their worth, and Oberon ends up giving them some ridiculous mission just to get them out of his hair.”

“And, of course, these are the identities you stole for us.”

“It’s perfect, don’t you think?” I flung my arms out grandly. “Sir Torin and Sir Fagan are almost never at court, the other knights usually avoid them and we have a reason to go see Queen Titania, to announce the completion of our most recent quest.”

“And if the real Torin and Fagan happen to be there?”

“Well.” I shrugged, annoyed with his logic. “Then we’ll improvise.”

I could tell Ash didn’t like it; he was always the plan-for-everything type, and usually found my play-it-by-ear tactics annoying and disturbing. But he didn’t say anything more, and it wasn’t long before we came to the huge mound of grassy earth that marked the entrance into Oberon’s court. Thick brambles surrounded the rise, though they parted easily before us, letting us through, and we walked toward the side of the hill without breaking stride.

“Anything else I should know about?” Ash muttered as we approached the mound side by side. “Any small detail you conveniently overlooked that might come up while we’re here?”

“Um...” I shot him a sideways glance. “Just one more small thing.” He raised an eyebrow, and I chewed my lip. Oh, he was not going to like this. “Torin and the queen are rumored to be...um... involved.”

“What?”

But then we were through the side of the hill and stepping into a courtyard teeming with Summer fey—the heart of Arcadia.

Music played, one of my favorite tunes about sun and shadows and growing things, and lying at the bottom of a cool stream while the fish whispered to you. Trees lining the edge of the courtyard

sighed softly, moving their branches to the song, and the thousands of flowers blooming everywhere swayed gently in rhythm. Dryads, satyrs, gnomes and other Summer fey milled about the open space, sitting on benches, talking, or dancing together in the grass. Yep, I was definitely home.

I could feel Ash's glare on the back of my head, and knew he was ready to kill me, but the fey closest to the edge of the courtyard spotted us and leaped to their feet.

"Be nice, ice-boy," I said through clenched teeth, plastering a grin on my face as the crowd came forward. "They're coming, so smile and don't stab your partner. It's showtime."

"Sir Fagan!" a female satyr exclaimed, skipping up to us. Her hooves clopped daintily over the cobblestones. "Sir Torin! You've returned, and you're alive. Welcome back!"

"How were your travels, Sir Fagan?" asked a nymph, giving me a sly smile. "Did you manage to get the Treasure of the Moonbeast this time? Did you slay the dreaded Worm of the Fellswamp? Tell us of your adventures."

"Yes, yes," echoed a brownie. "What happened?"

"Yes, tell us!"

"Tell us your story!"

I raised a hand. "Enough, fair people, enough! There will be time enough for stories and songs and tales of daring-do, but that time is not now." They quieted down, looking disappointed, and I gave a tired sigh. "Sir Torin and I have traveled far and wide, and we are weary. We have many tales to tell, yes, but first we must speak to our lord."

"Lord Oberon has left court for a time," the satyr explained, watching me with big hazel eyes. Her gaze abruptly flickered to "Torin" beside me, and she grinned. "But Queen Titania is here, and I'm sure she would be pleased to receive you. Would you like me to find a messenger to announce your return?"

"That would be much appreciated, fair lady," Ash said at my shoulder, startling me. The satyr beamed and skipped off, and we made our way toward the gate separating the courtyard from Oberon's inner sanctum. Summer fey smiled at us and nodded or hid grins and whispers behind their hands. We ignored them. So far, so good. Step one, getting into the Summer Court, had gone off without a hitch. Now all we had to do was find Leanansidhe's violin and get out of Arcadia without blowing our cover. And, knowing the Summer Queen and her obsessive tendencies, it would probably be somewhere in her private chambers. That was going to make things...challenging.

I glanced at Ash. I could think of *one* way to get into the queen's bedroom, but he would probably flip out if I suggested that, so I kept my mouth shut.

"What?" Ash sighed. I blinked.

"Huh?"

"You're giving me that look," he continued as we stopped several yards from the gates, which were guarded by two massive trolls in red and brass uniforms. "That look that says you have a plan and I'm not going to like it. At all."

"Well...yes, I do have an idea..."

"And?"

"And...you're not going to like it. At all."

He sighed again, rubbing his eyes. "I think I already have an inkling of what you're going to say," he muttered, looking pained. I shrugged.

"It *would* be the easiest way to see if she's keeping the violin in her chambers. You could even offer to serenade her."

"If Titania discovers me, I'll be dead before I have a chance to draw my sword."

And wouldn't that be a tragedy? "Ice-boy," I said, grinning, "please. As if I would let that happen. Your disguise is foolproof. Just don't use Winter glamour, and you'll be fine."

Ash ran his fingers through his hair and leaned closer. "Puck," he said in a harsh voice. "I...I can't do it. This isn't a game anymore. You're asking me to seduce the queen of the Summer Court. This is high treason and besides..." He looked away, his face tightening. "I'm still Meghan's knight. My vow..."

"Do you want to get the violin back, or not?" He actually looked stricken, and I felt a little sorry for the guy. "Look, ice-boy," I whispered, "I don't expect you to take her to bed, or even kiss her. Just the thought of that...ugh!" I shuddered and pushed the thought away, drawing my dagger in a smooth, furtive motion. "Oh, great, now that image is stuck in my head forever. Just...flirt a little. Be charming. Tell her about your 'adventures.' Then if she gets too touchy-feely, excuse yourself and get out. I'll take care of the rest."

"I don't like it."

"I didn't think you would. Hold still." Swiftly I brought the dagger up, cutting a strand of his long hair before he could react. It dropped into my palm, and I curled my fist around it. "Perfect. Much obliged, ice-boy."

Ash reared back, eyes flashing, fingers going to his sword. I shot him a warning glare, and he remembered himself, dropping his hand from the hilt.

"What are you doing, Goodfellow?" he snarled.

"Keep it down, Prince." I studied the strand between my fingers, watching it change from pale blond to jet-black, and smirked. "It's all part of the plan, don't worry."

With a loud creak, the gates swung open and a satyr in a herald's uniform padded through, beckoning to us urgently. "Well, here we go, ice-boy. Try to keep it together in front of the queen."

Chapter Four

Ill Met by Moonlight, Proud Titania

We walked through the gate into the flowering tunnel of thorns on the other side. I breathed in deeply and sighed, loving the potent, fragrant smells of the forest. Beside me, Ash did not look as enamored. His posture was stiff, tense. I guess I couldn't blame the guy, walking into the heart of enemy territory, surrounded by Summer fey, unable to use his magic or his weapon. I might've felt bad for him, if the whole thing wasn't so darn amusing.

The tunnel ended in a curtain of vines. Dark shapes and a haunting, eerie tune filled the air on the other side. The melody pulled at my stomach, a sad, sweet sound, before I shook it off. Looking at Ash, and the pale determination on his face, I gave him a savage grin.

"No turning back now, ice-boy," I muttered, and swept through the curtain into the room beyond.

Oberon and Titania's throne room was a massive clearing with cathedral-size trees creating a vaulted ceiling overhead. Thick moss carpeted the floor, and briars hemmed in the edges of the clearing. A waterfall trickled into a crystal pool, where will-o-the-wisps and piskie lights danced, bobbing through the clearing like drunken stars. Summer gentry, in their ridiculously fancy outfits, sat or stood around a pair of thrones in the middle of the clearing, one empty, but the other quite occupied.

Oberon wasn't here, of course, but Queen Titania sat on her throne with the smug, lazy grace of a cat overseeing a flock of mice.

Everyone says the Summer Queen is stunning, beautiful, absolutely captivating. Yeah, I guess she is, but so is a volcanic eruption, and probably less volatile. Working in the Seelie Court is certainly interesting at times, to say the least. The Summer rulers have caused floods and wildfires in the mortal world with their arguments, and Titania once threatened to sink an entire village into the mud because of a misunderstanding over a missing hairpin. Fortunately Oberon can usually calm her rages and temper tantrums...when he decides to involve himself, that is. Many times, he turns a blind eye to his wife's activities—until they affect him, of course.

None of the nobles in the clearing seemed to notice us as we came in, their attention riveted to Titania, or something at the foot of her throne. Ash took in the room in one smooth, practiced glance, and his eyes suddenly widened. I followed his gaze, and my heart sank.

The music we'd heard in the tunnel, the slow, lilting melody that was haunting and dark and beautiful, wasn't played by any of Titania's harp girls or servants or faery musicians. The melody had been strange at first, because it was of a kind not normally heard in the faery courts. It wasn't a harp, or a flute or any of the strange magical instruments found only in our world.

It was a violin. Being played by a mortal girl no older than eight, her small body taut as she sawed and ripped at the strings. She wore a simple black dress, and her long, mahogany hair was the same color as the instrument in her arms. Her eyes were closed as she played for her inhuman audience, her thin body swaying back and forth, ignorant of the queen's dainty white hand resting atop her skull.

And I knew. Leanansidhe's prized possession, and Titania's newest plaything, wasn't the instrument in the girl's tiny, skillful fingers.

It was the girl herself. This was our "violin."

Well, things just got a lot more complicated.

The song came to an end, and the girl's eyes opened, dark and serious and a tad bemused, as if she wasn't quite sure if this was a dream or not. The gentry tittered, clapping their hands and breathing small sighs of admiration, while Queen Titania gave a small, pleased smile.

"That was beautiful, Vi," she purred, combing the girl's hair with her fingers. The small human blinked and gazed up at the faery queen with solemn eyes.

"The ending was flat," she said regretfully. Her voice was reedy and breathless, as if the violin had taken all the volume from her. "And it was rushed in the beginning." She sniffed and bit her bottom lip. "I'm sorry, I wanted to play it better."

"Oh, my dear, it was perfect." Titania smoothed the hair back from the girl's face. "Wasn't it?" she added, looking fiercely at the nobles, who tittered and nodded and made appropriate noises of agreement. Beside me, Ash muttered something inaudible and shot me a sideways glance.

"A child," he muttered. "Leanansidhe's 'toy' is a child. How are we going to get her out, Goodfellow?"

"I'm thinking."

"Think faster."

"Now," the queen continued, tugging at the girl's dress, straightening it, "would you like something to eat, my darling? Then, if you want, you can play for us again after you've eaten."

Vi sniffled. "Can I have cake?"

"Of course, my dear." The queen smiled indulgently. "Would you like that?"

The girl nodded eagerly. Titania bent down and kissed her cheek. "Then I will have Cook bring you the sweetest cakes she can find."

The child beamed. Titania snapped her fingers, and a brownie appeared at her arm. "You heard her," she told it. "Tell Cook we want her best and sweetest cakes, as quickly as possible."

"The little strawberry ones," Vi added, smiling up at the queen. Titania nodded at the brownie, who bowed and scampered off, fleeing into the hedge. The queen chuckled and patted the girl's head like she would a favorite small dog.

"Isn't she darling?" she mused, and the nobles were quick to agree. "Such talent, and at such a young age. I don't know how Leanansidhe could stand to give her up."

She laughed, and the gentry laughed with her. The girl sat there with her hands in her lap, gazing vacantly at the faeries surrounding her. As the chuckles died down, the queen finally spotted us at the edge of the clearing, and her blue eyes lit up with delight.

"Oh, but my dears, we are being very rude." The queen sat up, raising a slender hand to us. "We have esteemed visitors, returned from yet another impossible quest. Sir Fagan, Sir Torin, please step forward."

I saw Ash draw in a quiet breath, steeling himself, and bit down my anticipation. "Here we go," I whispered, throwing out my chest. "Just follow my lead."

Chin up, chest puffed out, I raised my head and swaggered toward the waiting queen.

Titania laced her fingers together and watched us approach, a small smile on her perfect lips. But her gaze wasn't fastened on me, but the "Summer knight" at my side. Ash, much to his credit, was playing his part, keeping his head up and a faint, proud smile on his face, his gaze only for the queen. *Good*, I thought as we reached the foot of the throne and bowed. *Keep looking at ice-boy. Pay no attention to the buffoon next to him. Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.*

"Sir Fagan." Titania spared me a cursory glance. "Sir Torin." She smiled widely at Ash. "Welcome back. I apologize for my husband—he is away from court at the moment and I am not sure

when he will return.”

“We are sorry to have missed Lord Oberon,” Ash said, his voice confident and clear, and slightly pompous. He took the queen’s outstretched hand and brought it to his lips. “But to be in your presence, my lady—that is worth all the blessings of our good king.”

I resisted the urge to stare at him, biting down a grin. *Well, look at you, ice-boy. Playing the part, after all. I forgot you know how to do this, too, if pushed hard enough.*

“Oh, Sir Torin.” Titania blushed, somehow managing to look embarrassed and self-conscious even as she preened. “You are such a flatterer. And we are so glad that you have returned. You must have stories to tell, my dear Sirs. The court is most anxious to hear your newest adventures.” She clasped her hands together. “I simply insist you join us in the Grand Dining Hall tonight. Let us toast your noble quests, recognize your great deeds and you can hear my newest acquisition play for you.” She stroked the girl’s hair again, but Ash didn’t even glance at the human.

“That would please us greatly, your majesty.”

“It is decided, then.” Titania nodded regally, dismissing us. “We will meet again tonight. I am most anxious to hear what you have been up to in the time you’ve been gone.”

We bowed, and Ash reached down a second time and brought the back of the queen’s hand to his lips. “Until tonight, my lady,” he murmured, and we left the queen’s court, feeling her eyes on us until we ducked back into the tunnel.

I held in my laughter until we were well away from the throne room, before turning on Ash with a gleeful cackle. “What was *that*, ice-boy? Since when did you get to be such a charmer? I didn’t think you had it in you.”

His face flamed. “I did what I had to do,” he said, crossing his arms and looking away. “We got close to the queen and saw what Leanansidhe sent us for. Now the question is, how do we get her away from Titania? How do we get her out of the Summer Court?”

“Worry not, ice-boy. I already have a plan.” I flashed him my best impish smile, rubbing my hands together. “One brilliant Goodfellow prank, coming right up.”

The Grand Dining Hall wasn’t really a hall, more of a marble courtyard underneath the stars, surrounded on all sides by a giant hedge maze. In the very center, surrounded by hedgy unicorns and lions, the Summer Queen held her most extravagant parties at a long white and gold table, very reminiscent of a certain Mad Hatter’s tea party. To be invited to one of these affairs, you had to be a personal favorite of the queen, or the next one on her figurative chopping block. Needless to say, Oberon never attended.

The labyrinth was easy for “Sir Torin” and I to navigate, despite a couple statues that tried pointing us in the wrong direction, and all too soon we reached the table in the center of the maze. It was surrounded by Seelie gentry in their fanciest clothes, gowns of feathers and rose petals, cloaks of baby’s breath and spiderwebs. And at the head of the table, her golden hair braided with flowers and sparkling moonstones, the Summer Queen smiled and waved us over.

Vi, the mortal child, sat in a chair on the queen’s right, solemnly plowing her way through an impressive fountain of pink and blue cake. Her violin sat on a pillow, held by a waiting satyr behind the girl’s chair. She didn’t look up as we approached, but the queen gave us a welcoming smile.

“Now,” Titania purred after introductions were made and the rest of the gentry were settled, “let us hear of your latest adventures, knights. Sir Torin, would you like to regale the court with your mighty quests and deeds?”

Beside me, Torin lowered his head. “Ah, my lady, nothing would make me happier.” He nodded to me with a small frown. “However, I believe Sir Fagan has won the right to sing of our adventures this evening. We made a bet on who would have the honor, and I lost. If it pleases you, I will leave the storytelling to him.”

Titania pouted a bit then brightened. “Very well, then, Sir Torin. I insist you keep me company for the evening. It is the least you can do.” She gestured to the empty spot on her left. “Do sit, Sir Torin. Relax for a while. Let my servants attend you for a change.”

“My lady, it is not proper—”

“I will decide what is proper in my court or not, Sir.” Titania’s voice was like a velvet coating over steel. “As you can see, my husband is not here, so I have the need to be protected from the riffraff at court. What better protection than having a famed knight errant at my side?” She gestured to the seat, more firmly this time. “Sit, Sir Torin. That is an order from your queen.”

Sir Torin sat. Vi stared at him over the table, frosting covering her mouth, but Titania didn’t even glance at the child. Her attention seemed to have completely shifted to the knight sitting at her elbow. Torin met the queen’s gaze and gave a hesitant, furtive smile.

“Well, Sir Fagan,” Titania said without looking at me, “it seems we are to listen to you sing of your adventures tonight. I do hope it will prove entertaining.”

Oh, you have no idea. “Certainly, my queen.” I grinned. Spinning away from the happy couple, I marched to the center of the courtyard, pulling out a lute as I did. Sir Fagan—the real Sir Fagan, that is—could do a fair job of strumming a tune, but tonight would be his most memorable performance yet.

My fingers flew over the lute strings, and I sang about two knights, sent by their king to retrieve the Treasure of the Moonbeast, only neither of them knew what it was. After weeks of searching and getting no answers, it was decided that the Treasure of the Moonbeast must be on the moon itself, and they needed the great pearl at the bottom of the Mermaid Queen’s ocean, rumored to be able to draw the moon down from the sky if taken from water. Both knights nearly drowned, fighting off waves of sirens and mermen as they fled back to dry land, but they did manage to steal the pearl. However, when they held it up to see if it would really capture the moon as the legends stated, the pearl slipped from their fingers, rolled off a cliff and fell back into the ocean from whence it came.

The Summer gentry roared with that tale, laughing and clapping, calling for more. I glanced at the head of the table and saw Torin and the queen, deep in conversation, paying little attention to me. Titania was leaning close to the knight, speaking in whispers, and Torin was nodding solemnly. Perfect.

“This next song,” I announced, as my audience fell silent, “is a tale about lost love, and how we must never take for granted what we have right now.”

This time, the song was soft and slow, full of yearning, about a knight who loved a noblewoman but feared expressing his love because of their difference in rank. It was a sad tune, and I made it as heart-wrenching as I could, weaving a bit of glamour into the notes for a bigger impact. I noticed two gentry who listened, enraptured, then stood and wandered away into the maze together.

I kept my gaze on Torin and the queen as I sang. They didn’t look up, but Titania’s head moved closer and closer to the knight, until only a few inches separated them. Sir Torin didn’t shy away once, capturing her hand as it reached up to his face, pressing it to his lips.

Abruptly the queen stood. Beckoning to a servant, she whispered something to him, pointing to Vi as she did. The satyr bowed his head and returned to the girl, taking away the cake and motioning her to follow. As the human and the satyr left the party, I grinned to myself.

Stage one, complete. Guess Vi isn't going to be entertaining us this evening, after all. Now, my Summer Queen. You've sent away your little pet; are you going to take the bait?

Titania stretched luxuriously, then stepped up and lightly touched Torin's shoulder, bending down to whisper in his ear. Yes, she was. Trailing her fingers down his arm, the queen stepped away, gave him a sultry look and sauntered off into the hedge maze.

Torin waited a few heartbeats, then looked up at me. I nodded.

Casually the knight rose, glancing warily around. No one was paying attention to him, their focus riveted on me, or each other. Several nobles were dancing now, in groups of twos and threes, their expressions dreamy and dazed. No one saw the Summer knight step away from the table and wander into the hedge maze after the queen. I kept the song going for several stanzas after he disappeared, then finally brought it to a close.

And that's stage two. I gazed around at my handiwork. Yep, you still have it, Goodfellow. Amazing what one teensy love song can do to weaker minds. Too bad we don't have more time; it's been a while since I've made anyone dance for three days straight.

Now, on to the last stage.

I bowed to my audience. "Everyone!" I called as Summer gentry looked around in dazed confusion. "You've been a fabulous audience! But I'm afraid I really must dash! When the screaming starts, try not to stampede all at once. You all have a wonderful rest of the evening!"

They blinked at me, not really hearing a word I'd said, still caught up in their swirling emotions. I bowed once more and hurried, unchallenged, into the maze.

I knew where Torin and the queen would be. I'd been through this maze countless times, usually to crash the queen's party or spy on the queen's guests. Sometimes it was at Oberon's request, sometimes it was for my own amusement. But I knew where I would find the wayward couple: at the hidden spring in the northeast corner of the maze, where Titania took all her "prospects."

I heard their voices as I approached, slipping past the countless lions, hounds and unicorn topiaries lining the paths. Peeking around a mermaid fountain, I spotted the queen and the Summer knight near the edge of the pool. Titania was very close to Torin and had a slender hand on the knight's chest, leaning close.

"My lady," the knight was saying. "I...I cannot do this...anymore. What of your husband? Lord Oberon—"

"Lord Oberon," Titania murmured, putting a finger against his mouth, "is not here. And what Oberon does not know—" she leaned in closer, her lips parting "—will not hurt him."

I took a deep breath. *Well, here we go.*

"You are so right, Queen Titania!" Dropping my disguise, I stepped out from behind the fountain. "What Oberon doesn't know will not hurt him. Why, I tell myself that almost every single day. It's so nice to know we have so much in common."

Titania jumped, stepping back from Torin, her eyes going wide as she saw me. "Robin Goodfellow!" she spat, curling her lips into a grimace of hate. For just a moment, she hesitated, then rose up to her full height, glaring down her nose at me. "How *dare* you! How dare you come here uninvited, especially when my husband is away from court! Or...did he put you up to this?" She gave me a look of black contempt. "You've always been his little spy, his good little watchdog, always there for the tasks he finds too distasteful to do himself. Pathetic. You both are pathetic!" Lightning flickered overhead, streaking down to smash into a bush, setting it aflame. I resisted the urge to wince. In the flickering shadows, the Summer Queen's eyes blazed blue-white. "Perhaps the great Robin Goodfellow will meet with an unfortunate accident," the queen mused, the wind snapping at

her hair as she raised a pale hand. “Something that will silence him completely for a few centuries.”

“Now, now.” I wagged a finger, giving her a fearsome smile. “I would think you’d want to reward me, my good queen. After all, I just stopped you from making a highly embarrassing mistake. You’ve been duped, my lady. Taken advantage of. You have an enemy right under your nose, and you didn’t even realize it.”

Torin glared stonily. I ignored him and faced Titania, who was watching me with wary, but curious, distrust. “What trickery are you playing at, Goodfellow?” she asked.

“Believe what you will,” I continued, staring her down. “Call me what you want, hate me if you will, but I’m still a faithful servant of the Summer Court. This is my home, and I would do anything to protect it. And when it comes to my attention that we’ve been invaded by an enemy, I can’t sit by and do nothing, even if it means warning *you*.”

“What are you—” The queen straightened abruptly. “Leanansidhe,” she hissed, narrowing her eyes. “She sent someone. Someone to steal my human pet. Where—”

“Right under your nose, my queen. Just like I told you.” And before either of them could react, I spun on Torin and stripped away glamour, shredding his Summer disguise and revealing the form of the Winter prince to the Summer Queen. “*There’s* your enemy, Queen Titania. Do with him what you will.”

Chapter Five

If We Shadows Have Offended

Betrayal.

That was the first look Ash turned on me, his silver eyes wide with shock and disbelief. I grinned at him, crossing my arms, as Titania's outraged shriek rose above the howl of the wind. Before Ash could do anything, she swept her arm down, and a streak of lightning slammed into the prince's chest, hurling him away. He smashed into the mermaid statue and crumpled at the base, dazed.

"Ouch." I winced. "That looked painful. Hit him again, just to make sure he stays down."

Titania spun on me. "You!" she raged, her eyes seriously scary now. I blinked at her innocently and took a step back. "I do not know how you did this, or why, but this is one of your pranks, I know it! What foul mischief do you have up your sleeve this time?"

"Me?" I grinned and laced my hands behind my head. "You give me too much credit, Queen Titania."

"I am not a fool, Robin Goodfellow." Titania loomed over me, lightning flashing threateningly overhead. "The Winter prince is cunning and strong, but he could not have acted alone. You snuck the prince into Arcadia—you are the only one whose glamour is strong enough to hide him from me. Before I make the son of Mab beg for mercy, I want to know why you did this! You were *friends* once, long ago. Why this sudden change of heart?"

I stuck my hands deep in my pockets, looked the Seelie Queen right in the eye and muttered, "Because. He fell in love with *my* princess."

Silence for a few heartbeats. At the base of the fountain, Ash stirred, but the Queen's attention was solely on me.

"Ah." Titania actually smiled, the scary look in her eyes fading slightly. "And now, it makes sense. Robin Goodfellow, you *do* have a bit of a nasty streak in you, after all. Oberon's little dog has some bite." The queen tittered, giving me an appraising look. "I'm almost proud of you."

"I didn't do it for you," I replied. "I did it for Meghan. And I did it for me. And if you want to make ice-boy pay for your humiliation, you'd better do something about him real soon. He's on his feet already."

Titania spun. Ash stood beside the fountain, glaring at me as he backed away, his sword drawn. The Summer Queen sent another bolt of lightning at him, but Ash ducked behind the fountain and the bolt smashed several fish into marble fragments. The queen hissed in fury, and I gave Ash a lazy smile.

"Better run, ice-boy!"

The Winter prince was already going. Diving away, he rolled behind a lion shrub as another bolt came slashing down, barely missing him. Leaping to his feet, he tore off into the maze.

"Stop him!" The Summer Queen raised her arms, glamour whirling and snapping about. "Stop him!" she called again, as the hedge lions, hounds, unicorns and other topiaries stirred, then leaped off their bases with howls and roars. "Go!" shrieked the queen, flinging out a hand. "Find the Winter prince. Hunt him down and tear him to pieces!"

The bushes roared and scattered into the maze. I heard yelps and screams coming from the center

of the courtyard as the nobles' party was rudely interrupted. Titania waited a moment, and then turned on me.

"I will find him!" she snarled, eyes flashing electric blue in the darkness. "He will pay for this humiliation! Goodfellow, call the guards, the knights, the servants. Alert the rest of Arcadia. The Winter prince will not leave this court alive!"

I bowed. "Certainly, my queen," I drawled. "And may I suggest squads of at least four to six knights if you're going to have them looking for ice-boy? Unless you want to find frozen shish kebabs littering the halls all the way to the wyldwood. Ash is pretty handy with that sword."

Titania's eyes glowed as she raised her hand. With a flash of lightning, the smell of burned earth and smoke rose up from the ground, and the Summer Queen was gone.

I took a deep breath and clenched my fists to stop the shaking. *Final stage, complete. That was easier than I thought. Now...if only the other part went off without a hitch...*

"Nice performance, Goodfellow," said a voice at my back.

I turned wearily as Ash stepped out of the shadows of the maze, still wearing his disguise as a Summer knight. He carried a sleeping child, held tightly to his chest. Vi snored softly, smears of blue frosting around her mouth. With the amount of sleeping powder she'd gorged on tonight, she would probably be out for several hours. All that flirting with the huge troll cook in the kitchen, just to sneak the powder into the frosting mix, hadn't gone to waste at least.

"Oh, good, you found her." I tried to grin at him, but I was feeling oddly tired at the moment. "Yeah, it *was* quite the performance, wasn't it? Good enough to fool a faery queen and the entire Summer Court. This will probably go down in history." Ash didn't smile, and I sighed. "So, how much of that did you hear?"

"Enough."

"That so?" I gave him a half-weary, half-challenging look. "And do you have anything to say about that, ice-boy?"

"No." He shook his head solemnly. "You said what you had to. You did what was required to get the job done."

"Oh? That's awfully generous of you, Prince."

"None of it was a lie, Goodfellow." Ash gave me a hard stare. "Nothing you said or did was against your nature. That's why Titania believed you so quickly. I would have believed it, too."

I sighed. "Good to know where I stand," I muttered, and scrubbed a hand over my eyes. "Well, come on then, ice-boy. Let's get out of here before Titania catches your doppelganger and finds nothing is holding him together but twigs, string and a bit of your hair. With all the commotion going on, it should be easy to sneak out nice and quiet."

Not entirely. Thanks to my little Ash clone, the Summer Court was in chaos, scrambling over each other looking for him, but our escape wasn't entirely without problems. We ran into a lion topiary that needed to be cut down, and ice-boy's disguise finally shattered when he drew his sword to battle the creature. Of course, right after that, we ran into a squad of Summer knights and played a rousing game of catch-me-if-you-can before we finally escaped into the hedge. With the knights hot on our heels, I led us down a twisting tunnel of bramble that got smaller and smaller until it abruptly came to an end.

Ash muttered a curse and looked around as the sound of booted feet crashed toward us through the branches.

"Did you take a wrong turn, Goodfellow?" he growled.

"Relax, ice-boy. I know what I'm doing." Fishing under an old log, I pulled out a simple green

cloth, ripped and torn with use. Shaking it open, I hung it on a pair of thorns then peeled it back to reveal a narrow hole in the brambles. Ash ducked through carrying Vi, and I followed, tearing the cloth away as I did. The wall of thorns vanished, and the sounds of pursuit cut out as suddenly as if you flicked off the TV. As darkness closed in, I sighed in relief.

“Where are we?” Ash whispered close by.

I snapped my fingers, and a cheerful fire leaped up in a stone fireplace, illuminating a small log cabin with wooden floors and pillars made of live trees. A thatch roof covered the ceiling, and small animals peered at us from the corners, more curious than afraid.

“Welcome,” I said, grinning at Ash, “to my humble abode.”

Ash gazed around the tiny cabin in wary amazement. “This is *your* house, Goodfellow?”

“One of several.” I shooed a fox out of an armchair and sank down into it with a sigh. “I like to have a little place I can retreat to, to escape the craziness of the court, to relax without anyone knowing where I am.”

“To hide out when Oberon is ready to kill you.”

“Ouch, ice-boy. Be nice in my home, will you? Don’t make me regret bringing you here.” I leaned back in the chair and propped my feet on a nearby footstool, crossing my legs. “Don’t worry, this place is in the mortal world—no one from court can sense where we are anymore.”

Ash looked relieved. “So, we’re out,” he murmured, glancing back at the wall where, a few seconds ago, we had supposedly come straight through the wood. “We found the ‘violin’ and got out of the Summer Court.” He looked at the sleeping girl in his arms and sighed. “So, I guess the only question is, what do we do now?”

I pointed to a bed in the corner. He approached and laid the mortal atop the covers, surprisingly gentle for a Winter prince. I didn’t remember him being so careful before he met Meghan. Vi stirred a little and muttered “Mommy” in her sleep, but didn’t wake up.

“Leanansidhe will be waiting for us,” I said as the fox jumped into my lap and curled up again, wrapping its bushy tail around its nose. I absently stroked its short red fur. “She’s probably on her way right now.”

“Yeah.” Ash sighed, crossing his arms as he watched the girl. “How do you want to do this, Goodfellow?”

I thought a few moments, then swung my feet off the stool and rose, dumping the fox to the floor again. It gave an annoyed bark and trotted out the door. “Don’t worry, ice-boy,” I said cheerfully, and walked upstairs to grab something. “I have one last little trick up my sleeve.”

Chapter Six

And Robin Shall Restore Amends

“Darlings!”

Standing in the long grass in front of the cabin, Leanansidhe beamed at us as we stepped outside, the girl still fast asleep in the prince’s arms. “You found her, darlings! I knew you would. I had complete faith in your abilities. Oh,” she sighed, bringing a hand to her chest, “I wish I could see the look on Titania’s face when she discovers her little toy is missing.”

Ash stepped forward. “Our deal is finished,” he said firmly. “We found what was stolen and brought it back to you. I’ve upheld my end of the bargain. I owe you nothing else.”

“Of course, darling.” Leanansidhe smiled at him. “You’ve done a marvelous job. So, if you would just set her down there, dove, my servants will take her off your hands.”

Ash didn’t release the girl. I felt him hesitate, then take a furtive breath. “Now,” he continued in a quiet voice, “what will it take for you to let her go?”

“What?” Leanansidhe blinked, staring at the Winter prince, who faced her calmly. “*What* did you say, pet? I’m not quite sure I heard you correctly.”

I quickly stepped up beside him.

“She’s a kid, Lea.” The Exile Queen spun on me, bristling like an enraged cougar. “You can’t keep her like this. She has a family, somewhere. She needs to go home.”

“I am her home, pet.” Leanansidhe swelled indignantly, her copper-gold hair whipping madly around her. “And the girl belongs to me! Ash, darling.” She glanced at the Winter prince. “I cannot believe this. Your own queen does far worse to the humans in her court. And you—I know what *you* have done to mortals over the years, you and Goodfellow both! How dare you judge me? Have you gone soft, darlings? Have you forgotten that we are fey?”

Jeez, pissing off two volatile faery queens in one day. We must hold some kind of record. I stepped up before Lea could turn Ash into a harpsichord.

“Not at all,” I said quickly, smiling in the face of the enraged Exile Queen. “Calm down, Lea. It’s not like we’re going to take the kid and run. We’re prepared to offer a trade.”

Leanansidhe calmed somewhat. “A trade, darling?” she mused, feigning disinterest, though I knew she was curious. She couldn’t help it; it was part of our nature. “And what, may I ask, could you possibly offer for the girl’s freedom? The price will be high, my pet, just so you know. The girl is one of my favorites, after all. I’m afraid that your offer will have to be quite—”

I reached into my shirt and held up a mirror, letting it flash in the sun. A small, golden hand mirror, with jeweled flowers around the rim and silver vines curled around the handle. It sang as I brought it out, a sweet, piercing note that made all the nearby birds start chirping and drew a curious pair of deer out of the forest.

Leanansidhe’s eyes went wide. “That...that is...” She blinked at me, astonished, then threw back her head and laughed. “Oh, Robin, you naughty, brilliant boy. You *did* take it, after all. How in the world did you manage?”

“That,” I said, “is a very long story. One that should be told another time.” I tossed the mirror in the air and caught it again, holding it out to Leanansidhe. “So, Lea, do we have a trade, or not?”

“Take the girl back to her family, pet.” Leanansidhe plucked the mirror from my hand with

obvious delight. “I found her in some tiny little town in the Ozarks. She can probably tell you where she lives...I haven’t had her for very long. In any case, I believe our business here is concluded.”

“One more thing, if you would.” Ash stepped forward before the Exile Queen could depart. “Grimalkin. We need to find him. You said you knew where he was.”

“No, pet.” Leanansidhe admired herself in the mirror’s surface, pleased as a full cat. “I said I could perhaps point you in the right direction.”

“And what direction would that be?”

Leanansidhe tore her gaze away from the mirror, smiling at us. “Well, darlings,” she said, waving an airy hand, “there is a trio of witches who live somewhere in the Wraithwood. I would start there. It is as good a place as any. Now, my pets, I really must dash. I have a violin to replace. Good luck finding Grimalkin. If you do manage to catch up to the devious creature, be a dear and tell him I said hello. *Ciao*, darlings!”

A swirl of glitter and light, and we were alone.

Ash sighed. “The Wraithwood,” he said, shifting the girl into a more comfortable position. She mumbled and snored in his arms. “That’s...unfortunate. I was hoping we’d never have to go back.”

I grinned at him. “What, you mean because of the ogre tribe we pissed off, or the giant dead god we accidentally woke up?”

“*You* accidentally woke up.”

“Details.” I waved my hand. “So, are we going to get this adventure started, or what?”

Ash shook his head, but I saw the shadow of a smirk on his face. “You know I’m probably going to kill you soon, right?” he muttered as we headed off into the trees.

“Old news, ice-boy.” I chuckled, falling into step beside him. “And you know I wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

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The Iron Knight

Julie Kagawa was born in Sacramento, California. But nothing exciting really happened to her there. So, at the age of nine she and her family moved to Hawaii, which she soon discovered was inhabited by large carnivorous insects, colonies of house geckos and frequent hurricanes. She spent much of her time in the ocean, when she wasn't getting chased out of it by reef sharks, jellyfish and the odd eel.

To pay the rent, Julie worked in different bookstores over the years, but discovered the managers frowned upon her reading the books she was supposed to be shelving. So she turned to her other passion: training animals. She worked as a professional dog trainer for several years, dodging Chihuahua bites and overly enthusiastic Labradors, until her first book sold and she stopped training to write full-time.

Julie now lives in Louisville, Kentucky, where the frequency of shark attacks are at an all-time low. She lives with her husband, two obnoxious cats, one Australian shepherd who is too smart for his own good and the latest addition, a hyperactive papillon.

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Summer's Crossing

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