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Journey's End

by

Marly Mathews

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Journey's End

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Chapter One

The Thirteenth Realm of Fey

"To get to the end of our lovers' story, we must first travel back to the beginning."

"What happened at the beginning, Master Hawthorne?"

"The tale of our two lovers is one of heartache, strife, and longing ... so much longing. They were separated a thousand human years ago, which would only translate into ten of our faerie years."

The gasps of the gathered children thrilled the storyteller. Lily Fairchild stepped out of the forest, and walked to the story stone that her old friend sat on. Faerie and Elvin children gathered around him, hanging on his every word. Her heart, so filled with sorrow, lightened at the peaceful sight.

"What force of evil separated them?"

"A force so great that even Princess Lily can't find him. She's been searching through the human realm, to no avail. He's been cursed by a wicked sorceress into another form—a form that is not fey or human."

More shocked gasps rang through the clearing.

"Why do you persist in telling this story to the young ones, Hawthorne?" Her strong voice faltered.

The children turned their heads to stare in reverence at their faerie princess. Light shone down upon her, making her look like an angel. Her golden hair flowed in cascading waves around her shoulders. Her eyes were the color of the violets

growing in the meadow. Lily's faerie wings added to her beauty—the sunlight sparkled off them. They said a faerie's glamour was their own true magic, and Lily overflowed with it.

"I tell the story so it will one day have an ending. Have you been to see the council of the seers again?"

She sighed, sinking down to the ground. Tucking her legs beneath her, she drank in the tranquility of her home realm.

"I have. They tell me I must return to the horrid human realm called Earth. For only there will I be able to find Leo. I rail against it, but my heart is true, if Leo is indeed on Earth, I will find him."

"Leo must be in a purgatory of his own making. I simply don't understand why the bond the two of you share will not lead you to him."

"They say the curse cloaks him in the mists of time. Shadows surround him—he has been stripped of all his powers; the only charm he still possesses is of invulnerability. He can't be hurt, in any way. They will not tell me what he has been transformed into—they only say it is not biological. He exists in this form, aware of what is going on around him, yet unable to physically affect his surroundings; however, they say that he does retain a hint of his magic. If he has figured out how to harness it, he might be able to have influence over mortals. He can't help himself in any way, though; his magic will not serve him at all. They say he stands in a cold room, shrouded in white mist, with only a mirror to give him a view of the outside world. He is in limbo.

I can only imagine the depths of his despair. To be alone—with no love—"Her voice cracked with emotion.

The children gazed at her sympathetically.

"My mother says that faerie love can move mountains; it can even move worlds," one young faerie girl proclaimed, nodding her head empathically.

"Indeed." Princess Lily smiled at the child. Hope and innocence reflected back at her. She prayed that the child would never have to experience her sense of hopelessness. She ached for Leo. The emotional pain had turned physical over the years. She would not truly be whole again until she could feel the gentle caress of his magical touch, to have him hold her in his arms, to feel his wings wrap around her in a protective cocoon. Her mouth went dry, and she forced herself to swallow the large lump forming in it.

She'd lived too long without Leo. He must believe she's given up on him—for she had been on her quest for far longer than she'd anticipated. Something had to give in her favor. Something had to break the evil curse that had turned him into a foreign form of matter. When she found the evil bitch that had done this to him, she would make her pay. She would make her pay a thousand times over.

"When do you return to the human world?"

"In a few hours. I shall wait until twilight and then revisit the human realm. I must confess I shudder to think of going back there. The humans are so cold and calculating. They dabble in the wicked sides of nature. It is a rough and unforgiving world. Sin abounds—they do not know how to live with their hearts, they only live by their need for more."

"Do they not love and care for each other like we do?"

"Not the last time I was there. They were killing each other in terrifying ways ... lawlessness ruled their land, and their leaders were merciless. I dread going back into that darkness. Only for Leo would I brave it."

"Yes, you go back for Leo. The love you two share is admirable. It is strong, and it can't be broken by any force of nature in the known realms. I have faith that you and Leo will stand united once again."

She took a shattering breath. "I will walk to the ends of time and beyond to find him. He never should have gone to that bloody party in his honor. He disappeared right after that. If only I had convinced him to come with me. If only I had kept him from going ... so many acts can turn tragic in a heartbeat. Never did I dream that something so gay could turn out so horribly."

"Do you think he was in the realm of Earth when he disappeared?"

Why was Hawthorne fishing for information like this? She'd always suspected he'd had a hand in Leo's disappearance, though she'd never been able to fully prove it. Now, with his questions, she knew he had more of a part in it, than she'd originally suspected. Had he caused Leo to fall into the hell he existed in? If he had, could she forgive him? Forgive perhaps, but never forget.

The children hung on every word spoken between them. She drew in a large sharp breath. Studying Hawthorne's face closely, she gave him the answer he craved.

"I should think so. He did have a certain affinity for Earth. He loved the Celts. He kept telling me that they honored our ways." She locked gazes with Hawthorne. Guilt flickered in his green eyes. She had not imagined it! Now, she had to find out what role he had played without upsetting the children. She could not cause a spectacle, to do so would shame her family.

"Perhaps they did." Hawthorne nodded his head.

"Mayhap. Either way, I must travel back to Earth, find him in whatever form he's been transfigured into and free him."

"Do you dream of him? They say in the dreamscape that you can actually feel the touch and hear the thoughts of your loved ones. The bond that the two of you share would ultimately, transcend into the sleeping realms. Perhaps, you should dream-walk and see if you can meet with your beloved."

She cleared her throat. Telling Master Hawthorne her innermost thoughts hadn't been on her agenda for the day. She'd only sought him out at the suggestion of one of the Eldest Seers. She'd told her that Hawthorne had a role to play in finding Leo, and so she would listen to the wise one.

"My dreams are none of your concern, Hawthorne. I am here to ask you a great favor."

"Anything, my lady."

"I ask that you accompany me to Earth."

The quick intake of his breath, and the way his face contorted told her that convincing him to accompany her would be a difficult task indeed.

Dead silence engulfed the peaceful meadow.

"Earth?" His face pinched up even more. "I can't. I mustn't. It is, as you say, a most foul realm. I can't leave my darling mother and sister—neither would the instructors here at the Academy allow me to travel off-realm."

"Your darling mother and sister will understand. As for the instructors here at the Academy, I'm sure they could be persuaded to part with you."

Hawthorne hesitated, "I am still needed to instruct the students."

"I am quite certain that you could get Master Cloud-Dancing to fill in for you."

"Not as certain as I. He doesn't have the same love for the storytelling ways that I do. This is our only way of keeping our history alive."

"Our history is recorded in the Halls of Magical History. I'm quite certain that if you were to take a short sabbatical—"

"Out of the question. I do not think my nerves could take being away from home. You must be strong and brave to face the uncertainty that Earth holds. No. I am much safer here. You will be much safer. I am no warrior, Princess Lily. When faced with impending danger, I balk. I am, as they say, an avoider of conflict. I agree with everyone because I truly do not have the stomach for an argument. My nerves just aren't made of steel as yours are. No ... no." He shook his head emphatically. "I am certainly no warrior."

"Neither am I ... or at least, I wasn't before my Leo was taken from me. You must fulfill your destiny, Master Hawthorne."

"I must remain here, where I belong."

"Oh, no, Master. You must go with the Princess. If I went home today and told my mother that you wouldn't go..." The child looked up at him with her protuberant blue eyes.

"You will say nothing to your mother. My youngest sister always did have an uncanny habit of pushing me into things I didn't want to do. I do not wish her to do so this time around."

"I must tell her. My mother always asks for an accounting of my days. She is most interested in learning about my lessons with you. I know she would tell you to go. To not go would be to disgrace the honor of our family."

"It is your duty, Master," another child chirped up. "You can't leave Princess Lily to return on her quest without you. She is looking for her true love. He is her husband. How could you keep them apart for any longer than they've already been separated? My father must leave home to help out in the magical realms torn asunder by war—don't feed the Princess's suffering. We all deserve to be with the ones we love."

"I—" Hawthorne looked at her, she could see by the frantic glint in his eyes that he was distressed, and yet, she knew he would still drag his feet when it came to joining her in her quest.

"I will forge ahead on my own, then." She turned to leave.

A bolt of lightening streaked across the sky. Hawthorne jumped up. "I can see my services are needed. Indeed, I think that exploring an unknown world will be a fascinating adventure, one I'm sure I'll be able to glean many stirring tales from."

"Yes, don't forget your magical quill. You'll need to record everything strange that you come into contact with," Lily advised, enjoying the nervous twitch of Hawthorne's left eyebrow. She snapped her fingers, and the quill that was on the grass by Hawthorne's feet levitated in the air. She conjured a traveling bag and placed it in the bag along with his other belongings. She handed it to him. He took it with a grunt and held it against his chest. He looked besieged.

"These particular humans ... they don't possess magic, do they?"

"No."

"Their realm isn't enchanted in any way? How sad for them." He heaved a pregnant sigh.

"I do hear tall tales that some enchanted mortals and immortals call Earth their home. In it's past, they have had Witch Hunts." At her proclamation, Hawthorne shuddered.

"One of my dearest friends is a witch." Hawthorne paled.

"Perhaps, I was too hasty to agree to coming with you. If
they are that unenlightened, they will hardly allow us to walk
amongst them in our current form."

"You'll have to hide your wings."

"Hide my wings?" he gasped. "My wings are my pride and joy." He flapped them to accentuate his meaning.

"Nonetheless, they will have to be camouflaged. The humans will not be able to accept you as you are. You'll also have to hide your ears."

His eyes bugged out. "First my beautiful wings and now my ears ... my mother and sister will have a fit when I tell the two of them."

"Speaking of Lady Violet, why don't you ask her to come with you? I must confess your eldest sister has always been far more capable than you when it comes to certain matters of a more serious nature."

The children stood up, fluttering their wings. "It's time for us to go to our next lesson, Master Hawthorne. We wish you a most blessed day." They bowed to him in unison and then some of them took to the sky while others simply vanished into thin air.

"I will be able to use my magic, won't I? I can't take abstaining from magic. It will be my undoing!"

"You must take care to not be discovered."

He nodded his head. "Where do you get all of this information about the Earthly realm from? You have only been there a few times, hardly enough of an experience to be a seasoned Earth traveler."

"I have put out the mystical call for a guide. Anything else I know has been taken from stories I've heard over the years. There are quite a few about Earth and its inhabitants. I don't know how you haven't heard them before—you shall lose your top place as a Master Storyteller if you're not careful, Hawthorne."

"Oh, great. Do you know what you could possibly get? I've heard of guides to the mortal realm coming in all shapes and sizes. Unless, you specifically requested someone, it will be a shot in the dark as to who they send you. You're playing with fire, Lily."

"I'll take my chances, and leave it up to fate."

"Fate was the thing that got you in this mess!"

"What do you mean?"

Hawthorne smoothed his robes out. "Did I say something?" Curiosity prickled at her, "Aye, you did."

"What did I say?"

"You said something about fate being the factor that got me into this mess."

"Indeed." He sighed. "I was sworn to secrecy."

"By whom?"

"You shouldn't be asking me questions like this when I'm in such a state of disarray. I'm on the precipice of something terrifying. I don't even know if my nerves will take traveling to that wretched realm."

"You haven't even been there. Stop casting judgment."
He fell silent. "I told Leo not to go there. I told him that
the *human* didn't deserve his assistance."

"What human?"

Hawthorne swallowed thickly. Sweat beaded across his brow.

"Hawthorne, so help me! You have been keeping this knowledge from me for ten years! Ten long years. If I wasn't so anxious about finding my husband, I would have you up for review! If I had my way, I'd see you stuck doing laundry for the rest of your life! Or worse, I'd have you shunned! I have searched the known worlds, fruitlessly! You knew all along where my husband was—you knew he had gone to the Earthly Realm. Why don't you walk me through what happened? If you don't, I just might think about turning you into a frog!"

"No need to get your wings rustled, my dear, Lily. You know as well as I do that our word is bond. I took an oath. To break it, even if it meant helping out Leo, would be to betray our honor! But, seeing as you are Leo's wife, and this has gone on long enough ... well..."

They walked toward the lake. "It happened on the night of All Hallow's Eve. A human slipped through the *long thin veil* and wandered into Lady Maeve's country-dance. She was so confused. She was frightened when she saw us, and kept muttering something about the bloody Danes, killing everyone and everything she knew."

"And it took you this long to tell me this?!"

"I told you, I was sworn to secrecy!"

"By Leo."

"By Leo." He nodded his head empathically.

"Leo had no right! He knows it's not up to us to interfere in the world of the human mortals. It only leads to heartache for our kind."

"He interfered all right. He shouldn't have done it, but you can't cry over spilled milk, as they say! What is done is done."

"And when he interfered, I take it that he came into contact with the evil sorceress the seers foresaw?"

"Indeed. He must have been caught off quard."

"My Leo always was one to have a kind, albeit gullible, heart. Do you know what he was turned into? And why didn't you help him?"

"I couldn't help him. When he was attacked, the *long thin* veil was closing between the worlds. Unlike you, I do not

know how to conjure a stable gateway between the worlds. All I could do was watch helplessly."

"And keep your mouth shut for ten years!" She shouted. "I can't believe this. So, what form did the little bitch trap him in?"

"She turned him into something that is certainly not biological."

"I can't believe you. I will never be able to forgive you, Hawthorne."

"You know I am a foul wretch when compared to Leo. I could never aspire to be such a great faerie. I just reveled in all of the attention I was getting when he wasn't around."

"You were selfish, and cruel. I should turn you into something that even your darling mother and sister wouldn't recognize. I had thought a frog would be suitable, and now, I'm thinking it's far too good of an animal for you! Perhaps, I should turn you into something that isn't even a living creature! How would you like to be a chair for the rest of your days?"

"Why do you think I have decided to teach the children? My guilt weighs heavily on me. My days and my nights are haunted with what happened to him." He sighed heavily. "The person that cursed Leo was a member of the Unseelie Court."

Her pulse quickened. A lump lodged in her throat. "Are you certain?"

"I am, quite. That is truly why I have remained quiet for so long. To tell would possibly invoke their wrath."

"You are safe in our realm. Ancient magic protects us from their sort of evil."

"Ancient magic that has been known to fail from time to time. I can't take that risk. I am no hero."

"That's appallingly apparent." She sighed. "I demand you tell me what happened to my husband. Only then, if I can cast a spell through your memories, might I be able to locate him."

"You don't want to go wandering around my mind ... there's way too much clutter in there, you're bound to hurt yourself."

"I will go in there, unless you want to volunteer the images yourself."

"We could simply traverse back in time. I'm sure that's not beyond your awe inspiring powers."

She regarded him carefully. "We could. But we would only be able to stay there for a brief amount of time. To linger for much longer, could have dire consequences for all of the realms."

"We could just undo what has been done."

"Maybe. To gamble with the threads of time, is to take a chance in angering the Timekeepers. You know how infernally stubborn they are in keeping order when it comes to the fabric of time. Many catastrophic fallouts have been avoided because of their diligence."

"You know ... this is why I love teaching the children. The world of our elders is just far too complicated, and complications give me a roaring headache."

She sighed. "First you will tell me what sort of object my Leo has been imprisoned in, and then, you will give me the memory so we can magically slide through time."

"My mind just isn't what it used to be."

"We are immortals ... our minds only get keener with the passing of time."

"They do? Thank you for reminding me."

"Stop stalling, Hawthorne. What is Leo's prison?"

He paused. "I don't think you should know—it will break your heart."

"Trust me, my heart will heal. If this is the only way of finding him, I must know all of the details."

"His prison is—"

"Yes ... spit it out, Hawthorne. As the faerie philosophers say, 'only the truth shall set you free.'"

Hawthorne started to slowly inch his way away from her. When he'd placed a comfortable amount of distance between them, he conjured a shield. Holding it in front of him, he peered over the rim, dragged in a large breath of air, and then finally spoke.

"A Celtic Brooch."

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Chapter Two

"Come again?"

"I said he's trapped in a Celtic Brooch. I'm sure he's gotten around over the last ten centuries. Just think of the possibilities!"

"That isn't funny. And it's been ten years. Long and tortured though they have been, it's only been ten years. A decade is nothing for our kind."

"You forget, my dear princess, he has been stuck in the human realm. Their time goes by far quicker than ours. He has been away from you for what he thinks is one thousand years, give or take a few days."

"Give or take a few days." She twirled around in frustration. "I can't take this any longer. I miss him! He must think I've given up on him! I will not allow his suffering to continue."

"He has been suffering for millennia. A few more days will not make a difference to him."

"A few more days in our time, won't be a few more days in his time. I am going whether you want to help me or not." She took a threatening step toward him. "If you don't want to willingly give up the information I need, I have no compunction about taking it for myself."

"Okay, cool your wand there, Lily. I mean, Your Highness." He dropped into an impromptu bow. "I am, as always, at your service."

He flourished his hand in the air. Mists swirled, slowly coalescing into a memory of his.

Her heart skipped a beat when she heard Leo's voice conjured from the living memory of Hawthorne's.

"I won't be long. When Lily arrives, tell her I've gone to see Celestia. She won't question me on that. She knows I have to go and see my sister from time to time, especially when it's my birthday."

"This isn't a good idea, Your Highness. Dabbling in the world of the Earth Humans never has brought joy to our kind. They are cruel, they are shallow, and they crave power. They have none of the values we cherish and hold so dear to our hearts. They do not love their mates for an eternity as we do. They are fickle when it comes to love and so many other things."

"This woman has lost everything. She has lost her husband, her children, and she has been hurt in the cruelest of ways. The Danes she speaks of must be punished. If I do not help her, who will?"

"King Arthur was supposed to keep the Danes out of England ... I heard tell that he was a great King ... for a halfbreed that is."

"You know as well as I do that King Arthur has retired to the Isle of Avalon. England is swiftly changing. It is turning into something that both of us would not want to see. The mortals are suffering in the direct of ways."

"Let them continue to suffer. They must learn to help themselves. Our ways, can't fix the problems with their society. I implore you to see some sense in my words of

caution. If Lily knew that you were about to traipse into the unknown, she would definitely know how to knock some sense into you."

"Lily would help me. She's off in another magical realm right now, trying to bring happiness to others. She knows how much we are needed. She realizes how dim the light has grown in some worlds. She would applaud me for attempting to help."

"Attempting ... even you realize you walk into peril ... do not do this!"

She saw Hawthorne reach for Leo, but it was too late. He had walked through the *veil*.

Sighing, Hawthorne followed him.

The scenery changed dramatically. She drew in her breath sharply at the rugged landscape of England—so untamed and wild ... so dangerous.

Screams of women rent the air. Smoke billowed through the clearing; the attacking Danes had demolished a village, and now were enjoying the spoils of their pillaging.

Her heart sank. She knew what would come next. Soon, she would see her husband's fate. She couldn't look upon it—she knew seeing it would almost destroy her but she had no choice.

Her body trembled.

"If seeing this is hurting you—"

She put her hand up. "I am Leo's wife, his suffering is my suffering. I don't understand why the two of you didn't feel the dark magic drawing near. I don't understand how you could have been taken by surprise."

"I don't know how it happened either. There was a most odd feeling in the air. It made both of us feel on edge. Leo said that he felt as if something was clouding his senses. I agreed with him. I couldn't feel the threat of black magic anymore than he could."

The images froze before them. "Continue showing me your memories. Allow it to flow freely. Once we come to the time of transfiguration, I will take us through time to that moment."

"Why not just take us back now? You will save Leo from everything that he is enduring as we speak."

A bright flash of light cracked through the sky. Two figures dropped from the clouds and appeared before them.

"You must stop before I take you to the Highest Court this land knows." An unknown male voice boomed through the meadow.

"Our guide has arrived."

"Not your guide. I come from another sector of Magical Operations."

"Ah, the Timekeepers."

She turned to rest her eyes on the man that stood to her left. He had a companion with him.

"You can't disrupt what is about to happen. It was written in the scrolls of destiny long ago."

"You lie. I would have known about that facet of Leo's destiny."

"Indeed, you would not. As a member of the warrior class, you aren't always privy to everything that happens in our realms. We know more than you do—and in turn there are

ones that know far more than my partner and I do. We are not all seeing, Princess Lily."

"Tell me how to save Leo."

"I can't."

"You must, or I will take extreme measures. I am fully capable of manipulating the threads of time with or without your assistance. I had asked for a guide for the human realm, instead, I got the lot of you."

"My partner and I have names."

"Good. I don't need to know them since I will not be staying here for long. I have a quest to continue."

"Your love for your husband blinds you. In the journey ahead, clarity will be your only advantage. He needs you, aye ... but this was supposed to happen. Important events have been put into motion ... his imprisonment has not been all for naught."

"Since you seem to know so much more than I ... where is he?"

The female Timekeeper stepped forward. "We are not at liberty to divulge that information to you."

"Not at liberty?" Her voice rose an octave. "I can't believe any of this—my husband goes into the human realm to ease the suffering of a mortal—and you repay him by leaving him in his living hell? I will have your badges of authority for this injustice!"

"It is not an injustice. Through his curse, he has brought love to many."

"I care not for whatever has happened while he's been trapped. All I want is Leo to be set free. If I sound selfish,

then, excuse me. We faeries prize love above all else. I will not forgive this crime against my husband and myself. It is most grievous and in my opinion, unforgivable!"

"There has been no crime. He was not put into his prison by a source of good."

"Evil—yes, I've already been filled in on the details by Master Hawthorne. He tells me that an evil sorceress from the Unseelie Court damned him into that prison. I will deal with her if the need arises as well."

She settled her hand on her sword.

The male Timekeeper sighed. "Ah, yes, you bring pride to your ancestors, with your thirst for a fight. For years before Leo disappeared, you refused to embrace your warrior instincts, only when he left a hollowness in your heart and in your life did you own your destiny."

"I only pick a fight with the hellish creatures of darkness. Do not accuse me of anything else. You and your masters and mistresses are the ones at fault here."

"Magical beings such as you and I must bow to a higher power, even if we don't agree with it—in the name of balance within all of the realms, magical and non-magical."

"I grow tired of this. My husband has waited long enough for me to rescue him. Do not try to stop me."

She started to conjure a portal to Earth.

"Don't even think about traveling back in time, Princess."

She ignored the female Timekeeper. "I will do as I please."

"We will have to reroute you if you try."

She turned to face the woman. "What is your name?"

"I am known as Evelyn to my friends."

"Evelyn, do not seek to stop me. You will be most surprised by what I am capable of in the name of love."

"And you will be most surprised at the power that we Timekeepers hold. You have lived in a world where you get your own way for far too long. It is time for you to learn that there are forces beyond our control. We may hold magic within our bodies, but we are not Gods."

Now more than ever, she knew she had to twist time so she would arrive a split second before Leo was cursed. There was no other way. The Timekeepers could try to tell her what to do, but she didn't have to listen to them.

"I am going to save my husband."

A magical swirling vortex appeared before her. She lunged for it, tucking her wings in as she sped through the portal. Halfway through, she knew something was terribly wrong.

The Timekeepers hadn't been bluffing. She lost consciousness before arriving at her destination.

* * * *

"What did you do to her?" Master Hawthorne whirled on the Timekeepers.

"We did as we promised. She has been rerouted. She will arrive on Earth, but not in the year she wanted to travel to. Instead, she will arrive in the year, 2008."

"You can't be serious. That's over one thousand years later than what she wanted to travel to. You've put her in danger. What sort of magic did you use to reroute the time portal?" "We used our magic."

He shook his head. Fear gripped his heart. "This could be bad. You hit her portal with your magic, and she's a faerie—what are you?"

"We are both of the magic kind."

"A witch and wizard, then?"

"How did you know?"

"You don't have wings, and you don't have pixie ears.

That's a good indication that you aren't Elvin or Fey."

Evelyn cleared her throat. "She will be able to fend for herself once she gets to Earth."

"I wouldn't be so sure of that, Timekeeper. You will have the wrath of some pretty mighty faeries gunning for you, if she comes to harm."

"She won't come to harm. We will send someone to help her. Unless, of course you would like to do the honors yourself."

"I..." He looked to the portal that slowly collapsed in front of him. He had to help her. "I will go." He took a step toward the portal. Evelyn stepped forward pulling him back.

"You can't use that portal. It has become destabilized. You are right, our magic did sort of bounce off each other. We might have miscalculated."

"Miscalculated? How could this miscalculation have affected her?"

"She might have been rendered unconscious."

"No." He bunched his hands together. "You aren't telling me your actions caused her harm? She's my friend—you will have to answer for this."

The male Timekeeper patted Evelyn on the shoulder. "We are being called back—we must return to Headquarters."

"You will have to go at it alone." Evelyn waved her hand.

"This gateway will take you to the drop off point. You should find your Princess within a small radius of where you end up."

"I'm not a hero."

"You might not be a hero yet, but by the time this story ends, you will be." Evelyn winked at him, and then in another bright flash of light, the Timekeepers were gone.

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Chapter Three

The Celtic Brooch Leo was trapped in had changed ownership once more. This time, the woman that had bought him had given him to an old lonely woman. He spent most of his time watching her knit or crochet, while she in turn enjoyed her favorite television programs. She loved to make things for children.

He sighed. The room that served as his prison had grown colder year by year. Even though it could not affect him, he still yearned to feel the warmth of the sun on his face, to feel the fresh air tickling his cheeks—but most of all—most of all, he yearned to feel his wife's arms around him. He yearned to be with her again.

A knock sounded on the old woman's door, followed by the sounds of someone inserting a key in the lock and opening it. Placing her knitting back in her bag, she stood up and walked out to greet the visitor. She lived out in the country, in an old farmhouse. He had been across the globe, and now, he was somewhere in a province called Nova Scotia in the country called Canada.

"Aunt Poppy!" He recognized the voice, before they turned the corner into the front entryway. The young woman was always visiting; indeed, he knew that his owner wanted her grand niece to move in with her for company. He could understand her loneliness. Every time he'd gotten used to a particular owner some twist of fate had caused him to switch hands once again.

"Goodness, it's cold out there. Why don't I make us a pot of tea?" Poppy asked, shivering, as the gust of cold air Mia brought in with her whipped around them.

He licked his lips. No drink of any sort had touched them in eons. He collapsed in the lone chair inside his prison. Something tickled the back of his mind. Magic drew near. It wasn't black magic ... he'd felt that before—one of his owners had been a blood drinker. He hated the foul vampires, and his time with that owner had disturbed him greatly, as a faerie of light.

"That sounds delightful, Mia."

He was attempting to magically affect the woman known as Poppy. She fancied herself to be a clairvoyant and in her younger days, she'd worked as a Psychic Medium. Now, he hoped that she truly was genuine when it came to her craft. He prayed that she would be able to sense his presence. Every time she touched the brooch, an electric jolt rippled through her. That had never happened before. Even now, she was picking up on the psychic resonance attached to the brooch, he just had to bide his time and hope for the best.

"I've been asked to work for the government again, Aunt Poppy."

"Truly? Oh, that is a noble profession. I've heard tales of women like us working for the law enforcement and government agencies of the globe. I do believe you would be fit for such a position. Your talents have always far exceeded mine."

"I was drawn into buying that brooch for you at the Celtic Fair, did I tell you that? It seems these weird sorts of things

have been happening to me lately. I'll be somewhere and just have this odd compulsion to do something. That's the way it hit me with the brooch—I knew I just had to buy it for you."

"Well, thank you for thinking of me. It was meant to be. The odd set of circumstances that led you to the vendor's booth had to be orchestrated by another force. You said she was a kooky woman."

"Indeed. She wanted to unload the brooch as soon as possible. She kept muttering something about it moving places every time she went to find it to show to people. She said it wanted to be owned by me."

"And you could feel the energy attached to it."

The two women sat down at the dinner table and started to drink the tea; calm invaded the house.

"I've read antiques before—and this one, this one has a tale of sorrow to tell. I think in order to contact the spirit attached to it, I'm going to need your help. In order to fall into the trance needed to pull the spirit out of its prison, I'll need someone of your talents to pull me back from the edge, in case I get in too deep."

"I will be here for you, Mia. But are you quite certain you want to contact the spirit? I sense black and white magic attached to this brooch. What if the spirit is a dark one?"

"It isn't a dark one—I can tell that much. The spirit is trapped and all of his power has been taken from him."

"You know it's a he?"

"Yes. I've dreamt about him. I know he's tortured and he needs our help."

Leo sucked in his breath. They were talking about him—he had finally found two owners that could solve the mystery. Thank the Graces.

Poppy sniffed the air. "Did you bring in some Lily of the Valley with you, Mia?"

"It's March. They haven't bloomed yet."

"And still, I can smell it."

"Well, I'm not wearing Lily of the Valley scented perfume—it's violet for me today."

"Most unusual."

Lily.

His heart quickened. If they could smell Lily of the Valley when it wasn't in season—that could mean only one possible thing—Lily could be in the area. Had she finally figured out where he was?

He leaned toward the mirror. Poppy took off the brooch and held it toward Mia. "You should be the one to hold it. The psychic echoes might help you to get into the trance."

"Indeed."

"Wait." Poppy stood up and reached for a sage bundle. "We should burn some sage while you're in the trance. If something dark is attached to it—"

"I know. Thank you, Aunt Poppy, you do think of everything."

Mia was about to meditate herself into the trance, when a loud knock sounded at the door.

"I'll get that." Mia jumped up and walked to the door.

"I'm not expecting anyone, Mia! Do take care. Look out the window before you unlock the door!"

"I will." A pause. "It's a man."

"I don't know. I really don't think we should allow anyone strange to come calling, not when we have an unfinished job ahead of us."

"He's wearing a poppy on his coat."

"Well, maybe he's a veteran. You should probably open the door—he might have been a friend of your grandfather. If he's an older man, I don't think he could give us much trouble."

"That's just it, he's got silver hair, but he doesn't look that old."

"Open the door."

He knew it was Hawthorne, and since Poppy now held the brooch, he could give her subconscious messages. She was getting thoughts from him, and she wasn't even aware of it.

Finally. His curse was at an end. The only problem that could arise was if the Unseelie bitch that had cursed him was still alive. If she was, she would feel his salvation coming near, and she would be back to make certain he didn't live much longer after being let free.

That could be a serious problem. When they finally released him from his prison, he would be disoriented. Coupled with the fact that he hadn't used his powers for a thousand human years ... well, he would be hard pressed to protect himself, not to mention Hawthorne, Poppy and Mia.

[&]quot;What sort of a man?"

[&]quot;Someone I've never seen before!"

[&]quot;You don't know him from town?"

[&]quot;No."

He couldn't allow that to happen. He didn't want anyone dying because of him.

Hawthorne would be no match for a seasoned Unseelie sorceress. He would have no idea how to counteract her evil magic.

"I'm looking for my younger sister, her name is Lily. She was headed this way."

Hand it to Hawthorne to completely lose sight on how humans interacted. No greeting, no introduction ... he'd just gunned right for his point.

If he was looking for Lily, then that meant she was lost.

Paralyzing fear struck him. He stood up and started pacing. If she was in the human realm, maybe he could reach out for her.

'Lily!' No thought answered him.

She had to be somewhere confused.

He watched as Hawthorne started to inspect Poppy's knickknacks in her living room.

"Humans have such strange tastes," he spoke aloud.

Idiot. He had to keep quiet.

"What did you say?" Poppy sidled up behind him. "I don't know why I've even let you in."

"Ah, well, I know you." Hawthorne's eyes dropped to the Celtic Brooch. "Leo." His eyes lit with happiness.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I know that brooch."

"Did you own it before it went to the woman who sold it to my niece?"

"I was there when it was created."

"Impossible. This brooch is very old."

"You can say that again," Hawthorne snorted. Leo wanted to hit him. His cousin never did know when to keep his mouth shut. "Would you allow me to hold it for a moment?"

Mia popped back into the room. "I was just looking out the window, and I could have sworn I saw a woman standing outside. It must have been a trick of the eye."

"It could have been one of the spirits of the land. Don't worry yourself about it, Mia. You know that I stay here because of the spirits attached to this land."

"I know. None can harm us."

"Exactly."

"Spirits? Then the two of you know of The Otherworld?" Hawthorne sounded hopeful. "When I was drawing up the lane, I ran into a woman that was talking about having to churn more butter."

"That would be my great-grandmother. She likes to visit every so often when I need my reminders. I still make my own butter." Poppy smiled.

Leo sighed.

Hawthorne looked hungrily at the brooch. "I don't know why I didn't meet up with Lily. She should be here."

"Maybe she had something come up," Mia suggested.

Leo didn't like the way things were going. If the Unseelie sorceress was on her way here, bad things were about to happen. As it were he was already using the full force of his limited abilities by placating Mia and Poppy into allowing Hawthorne into their home. It had taken him about a hundred

years to figure out how to influence the people that owned him. Now, he was a well-seasoned veteran at it.

The ringing of Mia's cell phone broke the uneasy silence. "I should really get that." She went out into the hallway and started to talk on her phone. A few moments later, she reappeared in the doorway with a frown lingering on her lips.

"I needed to take that. Apparently, Richard's cousin is in town, and he's determined to bring her over here. He keeps insisting that she meet Aunt Poppy. I really don't feel like getting into another argument with him, so she's coming back here."

"You and Richard are arguing a lot lately."

"He wants to take that job overseas. I would rather stay closer to home. You know how it is."

Poppy sighed. "Actually, I don't. I was never lucky enough to find someone to be able to argue with."

"What is this?" Hawthorne held up a crochet hook. Both women looked at him in surprise. "It's not a wand..."

Leo groaned. "Just get to getting me out of here, you imp!"

Hawthorne's head snapped to the side. He dropped the crochet hook on the coffee table. His eyes bugged out of his head as he stared incredulously at the brooch.

"If you would be so kind, Lady Poppy, I would be immensely grateful to be able to have a look at that brooch. It is most intriguing."

"I..." Poppy faltered. "Why do you want to look at it?"

"You know the spirit that's attached to it!" Leo shouted, hoping that Hawthorne could hear him. He'd heard him the

first time, so he could only hope that he would hear him this time around.

"I know the spirit that's attached to it," Hawthorne repeated without missing a beat.

"Thank you!"

Hawthorne inclined his head to the brooch in a silent understanding of Leo's gratitude.

Hawthorne stared at the brooch eagerly. "I can ease the spirit's suffering if you allow me to hold it." He held his hands out for Poppy to relinquish the brooch into his keeping.

Could he? He didn't even know if Hawthorne had the magic at his disposal to break the curse.

Lily would know what to do. He had one idea, but he knew it wouldn't work with Hawthorne. Since Lily was his true love, her kiss just might break the curse and set him free.

Lily. Again, his heart felt heavy. How many couples had he led to each other? How many times had he seen love blossom between two compatible hearts? He'd brought soul mates together, and he couldn't even be reunited with his own.

"At any rate, Richard and his cousin should be here within ten minutes," Mia spoke slowly. Leo could see that she was trying to figure out how to get rid of Hawthorne.

"Mia, perhaps, he could help the spirit. You know I feel his frustration. You admitted to sensing it as well!"

"I know ... but we should be able to get him to move into the light without this poor man's help."

"Poor? Me?" Hawthorne suddenly seemed to snap out of his daydream state. "As for leading this spirit into the light, I should think that will never happen."

"Why? Is he anchored to his world somehow?"

"Aye. He's anchored to the world by an ancient evil curse." Poppy and Mia both gasped.

Leo groaned.

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Chapter Four

Lily felt out of place. The clothing she wore and the absence of her wings gave her a sense of discombobulating discomfort. "This is the safest way for you to appear to everyone in this world." The Timekeeper known as Richard gave her a keen look of approval. "You'll do until we can get Leo set to rights."

"Had you allowed me to implement my own plan, he would have already been set to rights. This plan is imbecilic. I must say, for being a lauded Timekeeper you really do fall short in the intelligence category. Using our magic would make both of our lives simpler, and it would expedite my reunion with my husband."

"Listen, my wife doesn't know what I am. Indeed, she is quite talented for a human, but her potential as a future witch hasn't quite blossomed yet."

"Well, don't let me get in your way. All I want is my husband back. As for blowing your secret wide open, my lips are sealed. Just as long as you don't go and tell her I'm a faerie princess."

"Not a chance."

"Has Evelyn gotten a fix on the Unseelie sorceress that cursed Leo?"

"She's hiding. As soon as our magical radar pinpoints her, Evelyn will track her. If she goes after Leo, we'll be the first to know."

"Why did she curse him? I must know everything—in this case, knowledge it seems is our only advantage in finding a way to break the curse."

"According to our sources, she cursed him because he got in her way. Apparently, the woman Leo saved had sparked her ire. In retribution for saving her, Leo was cursed."

"What happened to the woman?"

"She went on to give birth to a king."

"Ah." Her head felt muddled. "I need to sit."

"No. You need to come with me. You can sit in the car."

"Car? Why don't we just use..."

"No magic. Not in this realm. I use it only in extreme circumstances. It's too easy to get careless. If Mia ever caught me using magic, I'd have to tell her about my other life. My life with her is complicated enough as it is. Introducing magic into the equation would just ruin our marriage."

"Secrets in a marriage are dangerous. You're about to set off the spark that will eventually burn down your house of marriage."

"I will take care to keep Mia safe from everything."

"She probably already thinks your having an affair on her. I'd bet she doesn't think it's with your job. You owe her more than this. She is your life partner—to not share with her your whole self is to deny the beating of your own heart. Love is acceptance. The love between two soul mates is unconditional. Obviously, you do not love Mia enough to tell her the truth."

Richard gave her a stern glance. "You need to curb that wayward tongue. Do take care around Mia and her aunt. The two of them are eccentric in some ways, but I don't want you giving them bloody fits."

"You need to come to terms with who and what you are, Richard."

He snorted. "You shouldn't be giving me marital counseling. Not in your situation. You've been apart from Leo for such a long time—how do you even know the two of you will still love each other?" The sharp and triumphant look he gave her caused goose pimples to rage across her skin. He did have a point.

Her heart sank. How could he ask such a question of her? Of course Leo's love still burned brightly for her. Didn't it? The seed of self-doubt was planted. It had been ten years for her. In that time, she hadn't thought of another man. She walked to the ends of all of the known realms that she could think of—never believing that he'd been trapped while on Earth. She never should have overlooked Earth as a serious possibility. Leo had been waiting for her for over one thousand years. She could only imagine the wear and tear that wrought on his heart in that large chunk of time.

"Come on. You look the best that I can do. It's out of my hands now; you'll have to step up to the plate in order for us to both pull this off without a hitch."

"I don't like the way that I feel." She stared down at the trousers he'd given her to put on. "These are far too constricting."

"Live with it."

She bristled. "I could use my magic." "Don't."

"I really can't figure you out. You do not have the authority to tell me what to do."

"Here on Earth, I have the authority. If you'd like to take it to the council, we could go there, but then, that would waste precious time that you don't have."

"I don't think I like you. I do believe that you are intentionally trying to rub me the wrong way. If that's the case, here's my impression of you. You aren't worthy of the office you hold. You aren't worthy of the love your wife bestows upon you. And you only seem to care about yourself. I could never like someone as selfish as you."

"That's fine. You don't have to like me, and come to think of it, I don't have to like you. Regardless, you need me in order to get around Earth without sticking out like a sore thumb. The last time you were here, King Arthur ruled over Camelot. You've missed out on a lot."

"I get it. I need you."

"Exactly."

"What about Hawthorne? I don't see him with a guide."

"Hawthorne has a charm on him. He should be able to muddle his way through. Besides, he just looks like a man that is in dire need of some help. I can tell you that Mia's Aunt Poppy will take to him like a mermaid to water."

"Then, onward, unkind sir. We have a quest to finish. I'm nearly crawling out of my skin with the thought of looking upon Leo again. I want to hold him so badly."

"Save the loving sentiment for someone that will care. I'm quite certain that Leo will be more than happy to hear you moon over him."

"You need to melt the ice encasing your heart. I don't know why your wife married you."

Richard settled into the automobile and gave her a startled expression. "She married me because she is in love with me."

"Are you certain of that? You don't seem to be the type of man that would inspire love in any person. You don't even talk about Mia as if you love her. You talk about her like she's a big pain in your—"

He held his hand up. "Stop it. Again, we aren't here to talk about my marriage. We're here to talk about yours."

"If Leo could see the way you talked about Mia, he'd give you a good kick up the backside. He was always a romantic at heart—he said that love was the only force strong enough to make a man into a man. He said it was better than magic."

"He sounds like a bloody poet." Richard gave a disgusted snort and rolled his eyes.

"He was a great faerie. He had the respect and awe of many of his kind."

"Then, I'll be happy to shake his hand when we free him."
"How can he be freed?"

"No one knows. I assumed that he would be released as soon as a faerie pure of heart touched the brooch."

"Has he been able to use his powers to any extent while trapped in the brooch?"

"We have had our Watchers observing the brooch's travels."

"Why didn't any of them come and get me?"

"Because, this was meant to be. His destiny and the brooch are written in stone. We couldn't change it. We had to let it play out its course."

"And has it?"

"Indeed."

"I don't like that. I wish someone had told me sooner."

"Like it or not, it is done. You can't change what has happened. Leo has been able to use some sort of magic in his silver prison."

"What do you mean?"

"Everyone that ever owned the brooch found their perfect love match. Look at Mia ... she owned the brooch before she gave it to her aunt."

"Hmm ... perhaps, she should have worn it a bit longer; Leo might have led her to her perfect lover as well. It seems he missed the boat on that one. You really can't blame him, no one can be totally perfect, not even Leo."

"Ha, ha." He chuckled, and then turned onto a winding driveway that led up to a large house. Smoke billowed from one of the many chimneys.

She sat forward on the seat, straining against the seatbelt. An uneasy sensation took root in the pit of her stomach and slowly traveled upward. Her heartbeat quickened, her palms grew sweaty and her skin crawled. She inhaled a large breath of air. She felt putrid.

"There's something wrong."

"I don't understand."

"You should. Do you completely siphon off your magic when you're in this realm? Shame on you, Richard. There is dark magic afoot here, and it's headed straight for the house."

"Mia."

"Leo." Their voices rang in unison. Each carrying mirrored fear in their hearts for the ones they loved.

"Can I use my magic now?"

He gave her an angry glance and then, snapped his fingers.

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Chapter Five

Richard's magic transported them into the house.

"Where is she?"

"In the lower region of the house." Lily reached out with her senses and headed toward the lower level.

"You should go to where Leo is. He'll be with Aunt Poppy in the living room."

"I should go to intercept the sorceress that did this to my husband."

"I will deal with the Unseelie Hag. You free Leo."

"I can't leave you to fight her alone. You are ill matched. Her magic will be beyond your powers."

"I've fought a member of the Unseelie Court before."

"Alone?" She raised an eyebrow.

"I'll be fine. Besides, you said yourself that you didn't like me."

"I'd also rather see you live to fight another day. I will free Leo and then we will both help you."

"Good. Get to it, then."

She darted toward where she could feel Hawthorne and the other women.

"Do you smell Lily of the Valley again? It's becoming awfully pungent ... oh!"

Two women turned to look at her in shocked amazement.

"Lily!" Hawthorne moved forward. Her eyes pinned on the brooch. Her heart skipped a few beats. In that moment, fear and euphoria washed over her. Elation the likes of which she

hadn't felt in ten years assailed her, only to be dampened by her approaching feelings of dread.

"Leo."

"That's the second time someone has said this Leo's name. He must be a very important spirit."

"This spirit is my husband. Please, give me the brooch. I must have it."

"I must say, everyone is quite fascinated with this particular brooch."

Mia looked at her. "Give it to her, Aunt Poppy. It didn't cost me that much, don't worry about it."

"Mia." Lily smiled and then extended her hand toward Poppy. "I will make sure you are compensated. Do not worry." Her fingers reached for the brooch. Would she be able to break the curse just by holding the brooch in her hand and reciting a standard reversal spell? "Please, I beg of you, you must give the brooch to me."

A crash in the basement jolted the entire house. Hawthorne caught Poppy when she lost her balance. Poppy quickly handed her the brooch. "Take it, and do whatever you need to do to quiet the restlessness of the spirit."

Leo held his breath. Pounding footsteps raced up the basement steps. All she had to do was hold the brooch and kiss it. Then, hopefully, he'd be set free. But would Lily figure it out in time? He knew her first inclination would be to recite a standard reversal incantation. But it wouldn't do the trick. This curse had to be broken with a kiss—a kiss of true love. He could feel it in his bones.

"I will kill the bitch that is trying to free the foul faerie that pissed me off so many years ago! No creature of the light shall mess with my curse! She shall feel my wrath!"

Lily's hands enclosed around cool silver. She could hear the Unseelie Sorceress approaching. Whispering the words of the incantation, she waited. Nothing.

"I don't know what to do, Hawthorne." Her voice turned plaintive. Her heart sank. She could feel Leo's presence so keenly that it made her want to weep.

"Now would be a good time to summon your blade, Lily. She comes." Hawthorne didn't seem scared in the slightest.

Lily pinned the brooch above her heart and then turned. "Get behind something sturdy. Do not come out unless I tell you it is safe. Hawthorne, you should be able to erect a fairly stable force field around the three of you."

"I'm on it, Lily. That sort of magic, I can do."

"What's going on?" Mia demanded.

"In a nutshell, I'm a faerie princess here to save my husband who has been trapped in the brooch I'm currently wearing. Your husband, Richard, could be wounded terribly in the basement. That's why I must end this battle before it begins. The two of you must stay quiet unless you want to feed the Unseelie. She will take sustenance off of your fear and anxiety."

"Richard! I can't leave him, I must go to him." Mia bolted forward. Gasping with fear, Poppy moved forward and pulled her back.

"No, my dear. You must listen to ... Lily, is it?" Lily nodded.

"You must heed Lily's warning, I'm quite certain that Richard is still alive. If he'd been killed we would see his spirit."

"Your aunt is right. And from what I know of Richard, he would want you to stay safe. Hawthorne, get that force field up, she's nearly here."

"Be ready," Leo whispered. He could feel the change in her when she heard his voice.

"Leo?" Her voice cracked with emotion.

"Don't get distracted. Just do what you've been trained to do. Fight and win."

"I don't know how to free you."

"I know how."

He fell silent.

They both looked at the same terrifying sight. "I am here. Now finish this, Lily my love."

Lily's heart thrummed. She watched the Unseelie hag transform before her eyes. Her stomach rolled, at the dark creature she'd shifted into.

Calling upon her wings, she transformed back into her native form.

"Faerie. I shall imprison you into a necklace, or perhaps a bracelet. You can travel the world on a human, as their possession." She cackled with glee.

"I don't think so."

Lily called upon her sword, but the Unseelie sorceress blocked her summoning magic. "You are innovative when it comes to using your magic in this realm." Her voice was breathless. She hadn't expected the hag to be so cunning.

She should have; after all, she'd gotten the advantage on Leo.

"I've been using magic here on Earth for far longer than you. You haven't mastered the elemental power this world is endowed with. It will be your downfall, just as it was Leo's. He thought he could handle me. He was mistaken."

Lily screamed, and conjured her magic forth. It flowed around her, haloing her in a brilliant light.

"You are quite showy. Pity the man downstairs hadn't been like that. He was easy to take down. Right now, he's hopping around the basement on four legs. He makes a very interesting looking rabbit. I shall have him for supper!"

Her heart flipped again. "You need to be stopped now."

"And you honestly think you have what it takes to stop me?" She laughed.

If she could find a mirror, it would reflect the Unseelie's terrible power back on her.

"Use me."

"What?"

"Whom are you talking to?" The hag looked at her, dropping her eyes to the Celtic Brooch in sudden understanding. "I see. Most unexpected, indeed. I hadn't bet on your magic even transcending the curse. Faerie love, how quaint."

"There's nothing quaint about it."

"You think that you're going to be able to get close enough to me to get me with that sword? Unlike some of my friends, I don't care for sparring. I never have had a liking for fencing. It's so gauche."

She could hear Hawthorne doing something in the background. Why he just wouldn't wait for it to be over, she didn't know. Didn't he realize he could get himself killed acting so foolishly?

"Use me!" Leo repeated more urgently this time. "I should be able to reflect her magic back upon her."

"I don't think so!"

"Do it!"

His emphasis on his last word made her think.

Projecting a bubble of magic around her entire body except where the brooch was pinned, she waited.

The Hag hit her with a bolt of black magic, though it made her tingle, the magical field around her body protected her from harm.

The brooch, however, was lambasted with the magic. Her heart stopped beating for the briefest of moments. Images of Leo flitted through her mind, making her heart ache. His wavy black hair that always looked windswept. His piercing emerald green eyes that constantly sparked with the magic contained in his soul. That heart-stopping smile that made her forget about everything else...

The Hag's magic went arcing back at her. The scent of flesh burning filled her nostrils. When she opened her eyes, the Hag was gone.

"Holy Shit, that was some standoff!" Mia breathed, coming up to stand behind her. "Where's Richard?"

"Downstairs."

Mia booted it past her, straight for the basement staircase. "Leo?"

She dropped the shield of magic around her body. Hawthorne walked up to her pulling Poppy along behind him.

"My rug!" Poppy exclaimed. Shock lined her face.

They looked down at the burnt hole in the antique rug.

The rug could be repaired, the question was, how had Leo fared?

She touched the brooch, and pulled back when heat struck her fingers.

"I'm fine." He coughed. "It's a little smoky in here though. I'm invulnerable in this form." He coughed again. "I could do with some fresh air!"

"I'm about to fix that for you, my love."

She unpinned the brooch, and longingly traced her hands over the Celtic knot work on it. "How do I release you?"

"Kiss the brooch."

She passed her hand over the brooch, to cool it off. "That's better. Now instead of it being insufferably hot in here, it's back to normal. I haven't felt the elements in a thousand years."

She laughed. She couldn't help it. The quest was almost over. Her heart was nearly whole again.

"You really are a faerie princess!" Poppy's tone was matter of fact.

"Aye, I am. I'll be happy to give you a full explanation of what just happened here once I release my husband."

"You'll be releasing him so he can cross over?"

"My dear Poppy, no one is going into the light today. Granted, I'm certain Leo will be overjoyed to see the light of love in his wife's eyes again after being parted for so long."

Poppy gazed up at Hawthorne. Lily turned her attention from them, back to the brooch she held. Relaxing her furiously beating heart, she raised it to her lips and touched it softly with a kiss.

In the next blinding instant, magic shook the house, once again. The brooch disappeared. She fell into Leo's waiting arms. He pulled her into his embrace and held her close. Their lips met in the longest and sweetest kiss she could ever remember. She was in heaven.

"Oh, my!" She heard Poppy's sigh. She didn't care—all that mattered was Leo. They had waited for centuries to finally feel this way once again. She tightened her hold on him. When they finally parted, she drank in the full image of him. He looked tired. As if the weight of many worlds rested on his broad shoulders. She couldn't completely release him. They needed to return home, so they could become more intimately reacquainted. Thoughts of Leo in her bed once again, made her flare up with passion.

He grinned at her. She found herself smiling back, like the besotted fool she was.

"Hatred created that brooch but love shaped its destiny."
He snapped his fingers, using his magic outside of the brooch for the first time in a thousand years. She grinned again. He was back and fully restored to his former glory.

When the bright sheen of his magic activating dimmed, she watched him relax the hand he had clenched into a fist. In his palm rested a perfect replica of the Celtic Brooch.

"Why did you recreate that? It was your hell for over one thousand years, Leo."

"It is a reminder, and a gift to Poppy."

"I can't accept it. You should keep it." Poppy shook her head, adamantly. She was misty eyed.

"No. It is yours, Poppy. I'm sure we'll see each other again. I know it."

"What are you talking about, Leo?" Lily asked.

"Even as we speak, Hawthorne and Poppy are falling in love. I can sense it."

"You are no Cupid, Leo."

"I might not be, but while I was cursed to be a prisoner of the Celtic Brooch, I witnessed many couples finding true love. I happen to think that I was the defining factor in all of the love matches, I helped them to fall in love and it was the only blessing in my dismal existence. I might have been stripped of most of my powers, but there was one thing that Unseelie bitch could not take from me."

"Your love for me."

"Aye. Our kind loves for all time. When we find our perfect mate, our soul mate if you will, that flame of love is never extinguished. I think that the humans could feel my love for you. And it in turn led them to their own true mates."

She nodded her head. "I can't understand why you are not bitter, but I don't care. I'm just thankful to have you back with me. I will never allow you out of my sight again."

"Trust me, Lily. I don't want you to ever leave me again. We've been apart long enough. An Eternity is awaiting us, and I want to spend each and every moment with you by my side."

"I don't understand. Why were you trapped in the Celtic Brooch? I knew a spirit was attached to it..." Poppy shook her head, obviously still confused.

"Thank you, Poppy. Thank you for your belief that you could help me. You never would have been able to lead me into the light, but your companionship for the last few weeks has been quite enjoyable."

"The house has been filled with a certain tranquility since Mia bought me the brooch. It must have been your soothing spirit. Thank you for touching my life with your special kind of faerie magic, Leo."

He smiled. "The brooch was created by dark magic, but the hag didn't know that my white magic would overcome her dark magic and in turn make the brooch an object of hope and love. Wear this replica with pride, and no matter what happens in the future, never forget the message of love that it has brought to so many men and women."

"I need some help here!" Mia screamed. She sounded terrified.

They all turned to see Mia dashing in, clutching a bunny against her chest. "I think this is Richard ... can someone break the spell on him?"

"I..." Lily smiled. Leo frowned at her. "Just try kissing him. It worked in Leo's case."

"Leo was in a brooch ... Richard is the rabbit!"

"If you truly love him, it won't matter what he's been turned into." Lily watched Mia do an inward battle.

"I love him ... but I know he's hiding things from me."

"I already told him that wasn't a good ingredient in the recipe of love. Why don't I fill you in while he's currently voiceless?"

The rabbit started to squirm frantically in Mia's arms. "I'd like that." Mia nodded her head, clutched the rabbit to her chest once more and smiled. "There, there," she said, stroking the rabbit.

"Your husband is a wizard. He's a part of a mystical Order called The Timekeepers. They basically watch over the threads of time to make certain that nothing catastrophic happens in the numerous timelines of the realms, magical and non-magical."

"I see." Mia's voice was clipped.

"He does love you."

"He's hidden what and who he is from me."

"Indeed. But deep down, he loves you with all of his heart. He might have kept other things from you, but he never kept his love from you."

Mia looked at the rabbit. "When I turn you back, you'll be telling me everything!"

The rabbit nodded his head.

"Well, I think that's good enough. You should free him from his furry coat. Give him a break. He is your husband."

"For now." Mia's eyes hardened. "He won't remain my husband unless he stops hiding things from me."

Mia went silent and kissed the rabbit. Before their eyes, Richard transformed back into a human male. A naked human male.

"Why does he come out with his clothes on and I get to be naked?" Richard looked up in annoyance at Leo.

Poppy grabbed an afghan from the couch and tossed it to Mia. Mia handed it to him with a smirk.

"I think we should return to our home realm, Leo. Mia and Richard have things to sort out between them."

"I would like to take Poppy back with me," Hawthorne said, slowly reaching for Poppy's hand. The spark of new love glimmered between them.

"Keep an eye on the time passing ... you'll have to have her back before a more than a year goes by." Richard smiled. "Have fun, Aunt Poppy."

Richard seemed to have had some of the pomposity knocked out of him. Maybe the hag had done a favor for them all.

"I'll keep an eye on the time, don't you worry!" Hawthorne smiled blissfully.

Lily nodded her head. "Give me one second and I'll have a gateway between the worlds opened."

The doorway materialized in front of them. Taking Leo's hand, they walked out of the Earthly realm and back into their faerie realm. As long as they were together, they would always be home. For their hearts were whole again.

* * * *

"Prince Leo had lost over one thousand human years, and yet he had left a legacy of love for an entire world of lovers. From one world to another, one era in history to another, one constant remained. Love. The Legacy of the Celtic Brooch was

Leo's gift to the mortal world. Reunited with Lily their love story had a happy ending."

"And what happened to Poppy?" one child asked.

"Poppy decided to become my wife—proving to me and to her that it's never too late to find love. And that my children, is the end of The Legacy of the Celtic Brooch fairytale ... it is our Journey's End."

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