

*Bo*

*&*

*Eve*

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# Prologue

You have heard this story before—at least, you think you have.

There's a simple explanation for that. Every story has been told before. That doesn't mean they're all the same. There are differences, nuances, changes, tweaks, plot twists, and mashups. It's easy enough to explain how you can know and not know a story—there is more than one universe, but there is always one constant.

And that is that: where there is life and language, there is a story being told. And some of those universes? Well, they have overlapping worlds.

Such is the case for this one.

Picture it—a globe, a sphere. Now flatten it out into a circle. Duplicate it. Overlay both those circles, and then slide them apart so that they just overlap. (Yes, it does look like a venn diagram). One of those circles, those worlds, is one you're familiar with. In fact, it's almost impossible to differentiate that world from yours. (Almost).

We'll call the first one the mundane world. The second circle is functionally the same as the first, except where it isn't at all. We'll call it the magical world. It is a world where all those figures of myth, lore, and fantasy belong, real as you or I.

Now pull back. See the two worlds, see how they touch, interlock, mingle. Because they do. That crossover—we'll call it the Gate. And like any gate, it can be opened and passed through. It's not even hard to do. Sometimes it's just a matter of finding the latch and lifting it. Sometimes the Gate is open and someone crosses through without meaning to, especially if they aren't paying attention.

(Are you paying attention?)

Like all gates, the Gate is not a one-way thoroughfare. In this universe, the mundane tend to travel the most, and the magical tend to prefer their world, made for them as it is. (Tend to, I said. There are magical beings who traverse the mundane world as easily as you do).

The two worlds are aware of each other. This might be the biggest difference between your universe and this one. But as in your universe, there are rules and several governments. As in your world, there are law breakers, outlaws, and criminals. One of the biggest rules that all the magical governments can agree on?

*Thou shalt not curse a mundane.*

(Subsection a: not without a proper license attained through the appropriate channels.

Subsection b: never if the mundane is in their own world.)

And this is where our story begins. With a curse.

She deserved it, some might say. The fae who cursed her certainly believed so.

It went like this...

# Chapter 1

We begin our story at a mansion, a sprawling, luxurious, contemporary monstrosity. There are cars pulling into the crescent shaped driveway, their passengers exiting with smooth assurance, handing their keys to the waiting valet without thought before sweeping inside and into the glittering party within.

The guests are business moguls, b-list celebrities, minor politicians and up-and-comers in the fashion industry, the tech industry, and more industries besides.

The crème de la crème, some might classify them. It's easier to just call them the self-proclaimed elite, those wealthy and self-important folk split evenly between old money, new money, and lots-of-money, and there is one in particular we shall be focusing our attention on.

Come, move past these drinking, laughing, rich little peacocks, and we shall see their princess. Oh, they don't call her that, but she is the fairest of them all, with a bloodline ancient and rich and noble, and thus she's the jewel, whether they will it or no.

Not unlike another figure of story, she is to be found in front of a mirror. Hush now, let us watch what is about to happen...

\*

Eve touches up her lipstick with precise dabs of Cherry Wine that compliments her golden skin perfectly, steps back, and raises a finely arched brow at her reflection. She looks fantastic—of course she does, she made sure she did, though she doesn't have to try to look good like half the people at this terrible soirée do.

Her dark hair is swept up into an artfully messy up-do, tendrils curled and dangling to frame her face, to kiss the long line of her neck, to brush against her clavicle, drawing the eye to the plunging, lace-edged neck of her dress, which matches her lipstick exactly and hugs her every curve.

She'd felt a burst of short-lived triumph when she'd walked in and seen Maura's face curdle before she'd composed herself and swanned over to greet Eve in her own far inferior dress. (The cut of it wasn't quite flattering, and she overcompensated with too much jewellery. A rookie mistake).

Any positive emotion Eve had felt then has long since withered. This party is *boring*. It's all the same people as ever, entitled and cutting and false as their lashes and their lip fillers and all their other cosmetic procedures.

They're dressed to the nines, some of them tastefully, most of them without an ounce of creativity. They're just following the trends blindly, whether it suits them or not, because they can afford to, just like they can afford their gold and their diamonds and their luxury cars and magazine-catalogue mega-homes lacking all personality and their private jets and personal staff.

All of them smile at her to her face and whisper about her behind her back because they hate her, some of them, or don't have any opinion on her either way, except to think she's a hot bitch. Which is worse. Indifference is a curse.

(In about twenty minutes, Eve is going to recall this thought with a bitter laugh).

The food isn't even good—something catered and expensive, obviously, but clearly a complete rip off. Nothing has flavour, and everything's too small and too dry and too...boring. The drinks aren't anything worth contemplating, but they keep her hands busy, keep her sipping as she nods along to whatever inane comment Mr. Patek Philippe Watch besides her is making, pretending she doesn't noticed him staring down her dress.

She doesn't even *care*. She's so bored she's tempted to tip her champagne flute over his ostentatious watch just to see if that will garner any sort of amusing reaction from the mindless, petty drones surrounding her.

It's her predominant emotion—boredom. She thinks she's been bored for most of her nineteen years. Still, she takes another sip of her champagne, instead of upending it. It wouldn't do to make Daddy mad, now would it? Then he'd have to talk to her, god forbid.

Eve stops her lip from twisting contemptuously and maintains her politely engaged mask through sheer force of will. It's more likely Daddy would just make some pithy excuse that would have everyone tittering at his wit and swarming around him as though proximity alone will give them his charm, his wealth, his natural good looks, the association of his vaunted lineage. And she'll be left...forgotten. No, worse. *Dismissed*. Like a naughty, embarrassing child.

So.

Not worth it.

Mr. Watch answers a hail from some business friend or other, and Eve is left momentarily alone in the crowd of people. She turns to stare out the french windows at the infinity pool, mood-lit a peachy purple to match the dusky skies, her gaze drifting over the trees strung with tiny, glowing lamps, the swathe of sterile lawn that starts where the expanse of grey basalt slabs end, the noise of conversation and jazz washing over her.

She's going to leave in fifteen minutes. She's been here long enough, showed her face long enough, for her presence to have been noted, and for her absence to be ostensibly missed. She raises her flute to her mouth again—but it's empty.

Turning, Eve lifts it, and a server swans out of nowhere to take it and offer her another. She waves it off—she's had enough of subpar alcohol.

"Eve!" someone calls, and with nothing better to do she follows it to a group of three women around her age and allows herself to be drawn into a conversation about someone's indiscreet dalliance with an Uber driver, of all people.

She says something cutting, makes them laugh, doesn't even know what, exactly, she said, because making these people fake laugh is an endeavour that doesn't require any sort of higher thinking and—someone is tugging at her dress.

No, seriously, tugging.

Someone has a hold of her midi length, expensive, tailored dress in their ugly little paws and is trying to get her attention in the most gauche way possible. She feels her expression freeze, sees the others stop mid-snicker to stare at whoever's drunk enough off of terrible champagne to put their hands on her, and she turns.

It's worse than a drunk ass.

The bent figure looking up at her is the ugliest creature she's ever seen, and Tanya bought a Chinese Crested dog two weeks ago.

"Excuse me," the...person...says, in a horrible croaking old voice. "Excuse me, but could you give me hand? I can't manage those stairs anymore, and I need the facilities."

This time, Eve allows her lip to curl. "Do I *look* like some sort of servant to you?" she asks him, "Or your misplaced *walker*?"

The man blinks at her, rheumy eyes—*ugh*—bewildered, nonplussed.

"Maybe you're too blind and senile to tell, so let me make this clear. I'm neither of those things. Get one of the waiters to help you."

So saying, she pulls herself free of his trembling grip, and turns back to the women, who are smirking, or trying to. (Denise hasn't been able to move her lips since her most recent botox appointment).

"It's a small favour," the man says, voice quavering, because somehow he's missed or is foolishly ignoring her clear dismissal. "Just a moment of your time..."

Eve sighs. Turns. "I don't know who you are, and I don't care. But I know who I am—and I don't do favours for *anybody*. Least of all people like you."

Someone titters, someone else mutters something disparaging, most people haven't even noticed this ridiculous little tête-à-tête, but Eve is just so *done* with this pointless night. She can't even be bothered to cast the man a withering look—he just doesn't *matter*. She's leaving.

"Maura," she calls, and makes sure her voice carries, as she signals to one of the waitstaff to fetch her her coat. "Screen your guests a little better next time, sweetheart. The least you could do when you hold one of your engagements is to make sure the people here matter. Or are at least pretty to look at."

Maura looks furious enough to crush her flute in her french manicured grip. It's almost enough to make Eve laugh.

"Excuse me."

Oh god, it's that gremlin again. Ugh, she's not giving him another *second* of her time. He can piss himself where he stands, for all she cares. Eve's stride doesn't falter.

*"Excuse me."*

And that's an altogether different voice, something musical and deep and discordant all at once, crawling up her bones and shuddering in her chest, and all at once everything is pin-drop quiet.

Eve turns.

The amused, chattering guests have all gone pale, have all stopped talking or eating or drinking or flirting, are all staring at the little man.

Only it's not a little man anymore.

"Evelyn Catherine Monet," rings out in terrible, resounding tones, hooking into Eve's very *being*, and she can't move, can't breathe, can't do anything but stare.

It's one of the fae, obviously. It's beautiful, the way broken glass is beautiful for all that it'll make you bleed, standing taller than everyone in sight, all too long limbs and too high cheekbones and blazing eyes and hair like the night rippling in a breeze that isn't there, its mouth a bloody slash in its snow-white face.

"You're a cold thing, right down to the core," it says in its horrible voice, and that's when Eve realizes, belatedly, that it's standing where the old man was, but there is no more old man, and there never was. But she's not afraid. Not then. There are *rules* governing interactions between the fae and the mundane, even if it does know her name in full. It can't hurt her, not in this world. Her world.

She lifts her chin—it takes every scrap of will she possesses—and meets it's stare head-on.

"Cold, cruel, and vain," the fae continues, "You don't care about anyone but yourself, do you? You live to sharpen your claws on everybody who has the misfortune of crossing paths with you."

Eve doesn't answer. She couldn't even if she wanted to.

"You're practically inhuman." The fae smiles, revealing sharp teeth. "I should know." It cocks its head—an awful sight, like it has too many joints in its spinal cord.

"I curse you to become the beast that you are inside, until you learn to love someone more than you love yourself, and they love you in return. You have a year and a day, Evelyn Catherine Monet, or this becomes a permanent transformation."

Eve manages to unglue her jaw in an attempt to say that it can't curse her, it isn't allowed—

—but her world, her everything, is nothing but tearing, rending, searing agony.

She screams.

Her scream is a roar.