

# THE QUARRY

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## Chapter Two, from *Fae's Labyrinth*

*'Everything is simpler than you think and at the same time more complex than you imagine'*

– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

*Bonnie is the new school councillor after the usual one 'disappeared'. Sarah must routinely visit the councillor, due to her home situation. Hayley is Sarah's mum's best friend. For the past five years she has been the carer of both Sarah, and her mum.*

*Harry holds his distance from Sarah in social situations, but is aware of her every move. We don't know his true intentions yet. He is fairly good-looking, but has dulled down his looks in an effort to appear more human. He has half-human blood (as does Sarah, which she has yet to discover) and half-Fae blood, from an elfin bloodline. Harry is Scottish and Sarah is English. The setting so far, is London.*

## SARAH

I couldn't believe I was actually doing this. After talking to Bonnie, the school councillor, at my redundant weekly session, I was convinced the weekend holiday was not a good idea. Then after seeing Harry, talking to Harry, I felt strangely.... adventurous. It wasn't much like butterflies in my belly, more like a whole bunch of beetles wiggling for space till I could barely stand it anymore. A blend of nerves and excitement I hadn't felt since I was a kid going away on holidays. Long before Mum got sick. I arrived home from school, the front door creaked, and Hayley's dogs barked from the back garden.

'I'm doing the dishes!'

I walked to the den of a kitchen where Hayley stood facing the window.

'Hi Hayley, looks like rain this weekend. What are your plans?'

Man I was talking fast. Hayley stopped washing the dishes, her pink-gloved hands still in the bubbles. She glanced back over her shoulder. I knew she was onto me.

'Could you look after Mum?' It was lame, but I pouted anyway.

'Do you mean the *whole* weekend?' Hayley went back to the dishes.

I lent my elbows on the kitchen bench next to Hayley and fiddled with the silver locket on my chain. 'Some friends are going to the countryside. We'd be staying in their Auntie's house, honestly.'

Hayley made a tutting sound with her tongue. She was always doing it. When she watched bad news on T.V, she tutted. If the newspaper was delivered late, she tutted. At the rising price of fuel, she tutted a lot. It was her way of disapproving of bad things, and occasionally her way of teasing the good.

She looked out the window as she washed the dishes. I followed her gaze. Mum was sitting at the table on the lawn. Her hands in her lap, her body completely still. Hayley's two golden retrievers dozed at her feet.

'No trouble at all Hayley. Go, pack, don't worry about your Mum, we'll be fine.'

I was relieved at how quickly she agreed, after all, it meant giving up her entire weekend to cook meals, bathe, walk, *and* put Mum to bed.

'Thanks, I owe you,' I replied, and squeezed my arms around her.

Hayley smiled and pulled the sink plug.

‘You can pay me back by doing your own dishes sometime!’

I grimaced as I bounced up the stairs behind her.

I didn’t pack much. Two changes of clothes, toiletries, and a book called *Little Women* to read for the umpteenth time. I turned the first page and read Mum’s birthday message inside. I was 11 years old then, the last birthday before she got really sick. A week later Hayley moved in.

I walked back down the stairs and that seed of guilt began to grow in my gut. How could I leave my Mum?

They were sitting at the kitchen table, the room now smelly from a slow cooked dinner. Mum stared at a wall with her hands around a cup of tea that would be cold and untouched. Hayley was chatting away about the cafe she was planning to visit for lunch the next day. Her cup was long empty. I knelt beside Mum.

‘The bus comes in ten minutes so I’d better get going... Mum?’ She looked like a fragile porcelain doll, except for the roots of silver in her hair, and the wrinkles that dolls never get.

I rested my hand on the back of her chair. Mum didn’t respond, so I touched her shoulder. She glanced over, looking at me, but her expression genuinely blank.

‘Mum, I’ll be back on Sunday. Will you be okay without me?’

She stared at me for a long moment; her blue eyes had tiny dots for pupils. Her eyes didn’t look like they even worked. Then her lashes flickered.

‘Sarah.’ She confirmed softly.

I froze. Mum hadn’t spoken in weeks, let alone recognised me.

‘Yes Mum....will you be okay here, with Hayley?’ My throat grew tight. Somehow this stopped tears.

Mum looked across the table to where Hayley sat, silhouetted by the window. Hayley was smiling back.

‘Yes.’ Barely a whisper. Then I could see in her eyes, she was fading again.

‘Pinkie promise?’ I reached my hand up, offering her my arched pinkie like I had done so many times when I was little.

Mum raised her hand and linked her finger with mine. Her mouth twitched at the corners. Then she looked to me and in the slowest motion ever, placed a warm, frail hand on the side of my face, cupping my cheek and chin.

‘I *know* you,’ her voice was hoarse, leaking with confusion.

I could only nod and place my hand over hers. It hurt when she was lost inside herself, and it hurt when she wasn't.

'I'll be back soon. I love you Mum.'

As quickly as she had returned to the land of the living, her eyes glazed over and the porcelain doll face returned to the window. She was gone, somewhere deep inside her mind, somewhere out of my reach. I looked to Hayley, calm and collected, Mum's best friend; and the only reason I had stayed out of foster care all these years.

'Go Sarah, we'll have fun, and so should you.'

I didn't move.

'Tut tut tut. *Go.*'

I nodded, and wrapped my arms around her; my throat was feeling tight again.

She was right, and it was in this moment that I realised just how wrong Bonnie was. I wasn't being selfish like she had said. I was just trying to be like a normal teenager with something that resembled a social life.

'Thanks Hayley.' I pushed my chair back. Mum didn't react in the slightest to the scraping noise. Hayley leaned forward and gave me her serious face. She played the role of Mum, in Mum's absence.

'Be safe, have fun, and please *don't worry*. She will be safe as long as she's with me. I promise'.

I looked back one last time as I left the kitchen. For a moment I thought Hayley's face seemed sad and worried, even though she gave me a smile and a wink. I hoped I wasn't making a huge mistake.

## **HARRY**

There she was, Bonnie, the school councillor, standing in the shadows to the rear of the platform. She was dressed in a full-length black dress; her hair fell about her shoulders, her pretty face painted with pretty make-up. She watched the small crowd entering the train station. Even in the dark she looked beautiful, and if I didn't know better, I would have found her striking. But I *did* know better. I knew exactly what she was. And she was waiting for Sarah.

A water witch cleverly transformed. Naturally grotesque webbed feet, much too wide for human footwear; Bonnie wore long dresses all the time. That was my first clue. But the biggest give away was the smell leaking from her flesh.

A smell like clothes left to go damp in a laundry basket. The first time I met her, the smell was so subtle, but that odour and her feet were enough to give away her disguise. And yet, as clever as her disguise was to the inexperienced, this witch sure wasn't good at spotting others in camouflage.

I looked at the clock on the wall above the platform. Bonnie hadn't seen me yet, and the train would be here in five minutes, and that meant Sarah would also be arriving at any moment. I needed to get rid of the witch before she could get her claws into Sarah's mind and convince her not to get on the train.

I knew what had to be done. It wouldn't be the first time, and there really wasn't any other choice. My job was to protect Sarah and bring her to the manor where the others waited, no matter what it took. I walked lightly on my feet towards Bonnie, adjusting my backpack over my shoulder as I went. Bonnie was hidden in the dark, and distracted by her goal.

She didn't notice me until I was standing close to her, just behind her right side. I glanced around; no one was looking our way. I pulled my dagger from my jacket pocket, and held it out of sight, but ready nonetheless. It would take only one strike through the heart, and she would be finished quickly, and quietly.

But Bonnie turned and I was caught.

'Harry! What are you doing here?'

Bonnie smiled in a friendly sort of way, but I noticed her mouth twitch. I had caught her off guard. 'Waiting for Sarah,' I replied.

Her smile disappeared. She eyed me up and down with suspicion. Her eyes tore at my skin like invisible fingernails, as she tried to see if anything lay beneath my outer appearance. Is he human? Or is he not? Her eyes questioned.

I took a step closer and gripped my hidden dagger. It had to be done, *now*. Suddenly, Bonnie's eyes widened, and she stumbled back.

'Romus! I can see you... No, please Romus, no. I will leave her alone. Please don't do anything.' Bonnie began to cower and shrink before my eyes.

This was murder. This was not how my clan had raised me. I had only done it once before, cornered in a cave by a pissed off red-cap goblin. It had to be him or me. Today, it was me or Bonnie.

Maybe I could let this witch walk away? I hesitated, my dagger still by my side, but Bonnie embraced my hesitation as her opportunity. Her pretty face turned grey, her smile transformed into a jagged, diseased grin of teeth.

My arm twitched.

Bonnie whipped a hand up to the spot behind her neck and drew a long thin knife, concealed by her blanket of hair. She cocked her head, cracking her neck.

‘Oh, it feels good to be me.’

My fingers tightened around my dagger.

She was fierce in her lunge as her jaw clenched, but I was faster, and my dagger dug deep up through her ribs, destroying her heartbeat. The witch dropped to her knees as I withdrew my dagger, and in her final breath, she transformed to her true appearance. Her body was grey all over, with gills carved up and down her throat, a hunch back, twisted bony arms, and a face and chest wet as though coated in Vaseline. Her eyes were hollow now, and black, cocooned by a drawn and sagging human-ish face.

Bonnie’s knife fell to the ground with a tinkle, followed by her limp, grotesque body. No one noticed a thing tucked away in that dark corner.

I managed to control my shaking enough to wipe the grey blood matter from my dagger, onto the witch’s dress. I couldn’t help but wonder if this kill was just the beginning. There was still a long way to go. I pushed her body back against the wall. It was already shrivelling, and soon she would be just a pool of dark water and wet clothes. In my stomach, and in my head, I was queasy, and there was sweat beneath my clothes. It might have been easier if I hadn’t known her, and it didn’t help to see the gruesome corpse transformation. Then I heard the train approaching, and as I did, I watched Sarah step onto the platform, her eyes searching for friends.

I moved along the wall, concealed by the shadows. I approached Sarah far from where the witch lay.

‘Hey! I’m real happy you came,’ I smiled, and shoved my sweaty hands in my pockets.

‘Hey, Harry. So, where are the others?’ Sarah asked, glancing around.

‘They’re catching the morning train. Dunno why, they didn’t go into detail.’

I knew I was talking too fast. I was sounding contrived. I imitated a yawn.

‘Thanks for meeting me. I probably would have gone home if no one was here.’ Sarah shrugged; I thought I saw a small smile.

The train doors slid open as we talked. People were beginning to find their seats.

‘Come on. It’ll be warmer on the train.’ I reached out my hand, but I knew I shouldn’t have, not to her. It wasn’t my place, even though we were on the human side. I could hardly believe I was about to succeed in bringing Sarah back. I didn’t want to let her go. The others would be waiting. She took my hand, and we stepped inside the train.

## **SARAH**

We sat in a strange, easy silence. The train seats were like lumpy rocks. They smelt of feet, or bad food, or both, and were structured in rows, dappled, with people all facing the wrong way. By the time the train left the city, it was so dark that I could barely see a field or a tree. Harry and I piled up our backpacks and propped our feet on them like footrests. I glanced at Harry’s reflection in the window. He looked so deep in thought. I hardly knew him, even though he’d been hanging out with my group for most of term. I’d see him at the shops and movies, or whatever was going on that weekend.

Most of the time he just sat with the boys, not that he was anything much like them. He was...kind of weird, polite in an old fashioned way, holding doors open and saying, ‘After you.’ And he always looked so serious.

‘I heard about your mum.’

‘Heard *what?*’ my words cracked like a whip. ‘You heard she’s brain damaged? Gone crazy? A vegetable? A retard? *What?*’ Oh god shut up Sarah.

Harry was staring, his mouth parted.

‘Forgive me, I didn’t mean to –’

‘Don’t. Don’t pretend you understand.’ It was so dark outside I could only see my face in the window.

I looked back at Harry.

‘I didn’t think you had green eyes.’

Harry was staring ahead. He dropped his eyes, and turned to me.

‘I don’t. They’re brown.’

As the train rolled on, Harry got a message on his phone. I pretended to stare through the dark window, but I was carefully watching his reflection. He looked worried at first, but when his phone beeped with a reply message, he smiled.

The motion of the train was winning. I closed my heavy eyelids; it was what they wanted. I didn't know how long I slept for, but when I woke, my head was on Harry's shoulder, and the train was slowing.