

Chapter One

I made a deal with a Faerie. A Nixie, to be exact. That's a water Faerie. I should have known better. My mother told me not to make deals with Faeries. She said they never turn out well. She was right.

I accidentally made a deal with a Nixie called Salix. We're sort of friends. Salix says friendship with Faeries is always a bit tricky. Now, because of that deal, I'm on my way back into Faerieland. Faeries

call their lands “woods.” Salix and I are heading to a place called the Crosswood. It’s where you cross over from the human world to the Faerie world. And it’s magic, in case you were wondering.

A month ago I had no idea magic or Faeries even existed. I thought I was just a normal kid with a pretty normal family.

Ha! Wrong!

It turns out my younger brother and sister are adopted, kind of. Indigo and Violet are their names. They’re nearly ten, and they’re twins. My mother, Jules Jasper, has raised them since they were babies. I was about four years old when they came into our lives. Now I’m fourteen. Indigo and Violet’s real mother is Olea. She used to be a Faerie queen.

I know. Weird, right?

A month ago, Olea’s rival, a Faerie king called Oren, kidnapped Indigo and Violet. Then, because of magic, I had to go rescue them.

I had no choice. It was the kind of magic that kills people. I went into the Crosswood to look for them. That’s where I met Salix. I asked him for help finding the twins. He tricked me into making a deal. He said he would help me if I gave him something. I thought he meant a juice box! But he didn’t. He was saving that “something” for later.

Turns out that “something” is my going on a quest with him. It’s going to be dangerous. And I will be missing school. And my mom is going to be mad at me.

But that’s what happens when you make deals with Faeries. You have to stick to them—or else.

And by the way, crossing from the human world to the Faerie world is very uncomfortable. It feels a bit like how it must feel to be swallowed. You get sucked down into the earth. You slither around underground like a worm. If you’re not careful you get mud in your mouth. Then you pop out the other side. For a

few seconds everything is upside down. You feel like you're walking on the ceiling. But after a moment or two something clicks in your brain. Then everything is right side up again.

That's what just happened to me.

Salix and my other Faerie friend, Finola, brush dirt off me as I stand up. Salix looks a bit like a frog. His hair and eyes are bright green like grass. His skin is slightly green too. Maybe all Nixies look like him. I don't know. He's the only one I've met so far.

Finola looks a bit like a swan. Actually she used to be a swan. A witch cursed her. I helped undo the curse. Long story. Her skin is very pale, but her hair and eyes are shiny black. She also has a crown made of white feathers, a leftover from the witch's enchantment.

Salix carries a small lantern. Finola has a sword. All I have are my backpack and some cupcakes. Doesn't seem like quite enough for a quest.

Our quest is to find the way into Salix's home wood. That's why I'm here in the Crosswood again.

I should be mad at Salix for dragging me along. But I'm not. A Faerie quest is a lot better than chores and school. To be honest, I'm not enjoying high school very much. I keep getting into trouble. I'm not good at making friends. And there's a lot of homework. It's stressful. I've even been having trouble sleeping.

"What is this wood of yours called anyway?" I ask as we set off. "If I'm going to help you look for it, I should at least know what it's called."

"Merwood," Salix says.

"Merwood," I repeat. "And you said it's a few days' walk from here?"

"At least," Finola says. Salix nudges her. I can tell they aren't telling me everything. That's just the way Faeries are. I'm getting used to it.

"We should go over the rules again," Salix says. "Since you'll be here in the Faerie Woods for a while."