

Chapter One

The Christmas market is crowded. It's always stressful. My brother and sister, Indigo and Violet, are hard to manage. Even at the best and calmest times. But at the Christmas market it's nearly impossible. They get distracted by tinsel. They poke their fingers into the cotton-candy machine. They want to buy everything.

“Look, Blue!” Violet says. “They have butterfly wings. Can I get some?”

I stare at her. Indigo snuffles with laughter.

“Why would you want fake plastic butterfly wings?” I ask. I lower my voice. “You have *real* wings.”

“Oh yeah,” Violet says.

Violet and Indigo are ten years old. They’re twins. They’re Faeries. They have magical powers. That’s where most of my problems come from.

Indigo starts to wander away. Rosa, my dog, barks. She’s magical too. I haven’t figured out yet how magical. She can’t talk. So she can’t tell me.

“Indigo!” I snap after him. “Stay with us.”

I don’t like to get angry with the twins. But the last time they wandered off, I nearly died. So I’ve learned to be careful.

“We’re just looking for a present for Mom,” I say firmly. “That’s it. We can’t afford anything else.”

“Why can’t we use Faerie money?” Violet asks, pouting.

Faerie money is just leaves or scraps of paper. Faeries can use magic to make it look like money. That’s called glamouring.

All Faeries use glamour when they’re around humans. They use it to make themselves look human. The twins use it to hide their wings. Mom is okay with that. But Faerie money is forbidden. Paying with Faerie money is like stealing. It turns back into leaves or scrap paper in about an hour.

Violet drifts toward a handmade-lollipop display. I yank her back by her hood. I have Rosa on a leash. I wish I could put the twins on a leash too.

Rosa sniffs a puddle. Indigo trips over her and falls on his face. Violet laughs. Little sparkly bubbles come out of her mouth. That’s new. She covers her mouth and stares at me. Her eyes are wide.

“I didn’t know I could do that!” she says.

I look around. I don't think anyone saw the bubbles. No one here knows that the twins are magical. No one knows about magic at all. And Oren, the twins' Faerie brother, wants it to stay that way.

Humans can't find out about Faerieland. They would only ruin it.

That's why the twins aren't allowed to do magic here in the Overwood. That's what Faeries call the human world. There's a whole other set of woods that makes up Faerieland. There's the Crosswood. You have to go through the Crosswood to get anywhere. Then there's Nearwood and Farwood. And the Wherewood. And my friend Salix's wood, Merwood.

It's complicated. Everything about Faerie life is. Especially when you're an ordinary human boy like me. And you have a Faerie brother and sister.

Violet's magic is growing and changing. She is the queen of Nearwood. The wood gives her power.

She doesn't know how to control it yet. Her older brother, Oren, is king of Farwood. He takes care of the twins during the week. They stay with me and Mom on weekends.

"Be careful!" I say to Violet. "Cover your mouth when you laugh."

I put my arms around both of them. We head toward the candle-seller.

Mom loves candles.



We spend nearly an hour in the candle shop. Violet and Indigo have to smell every candle. Violet says the one called Ocean Mist should smell like fish.

"Why would anyone want a candle that smelled like fish?" I ask.

"A cat might," Violet says.

Rosa barks as though she agrees.

Indigo likes the candles that smell like food.

"Can we get donuts?" he asks.

I glare at him. Mom feeds us organic food. But the twins eat everything else when they're in Faerieland. I mean *everything* else. Cakes. Pies. Roast rabbit and deer. Pigeon soup. Tiny blue eggs scrambled with dandelion stems.

Faerie food is very bad for humans. Last week I ate a magical candy Indigo gave me. I saw sparkles for hours. Indigo got a time-out.

Whenever we're in town, the twins want to eat junk. I'm not supposed to let them. But I still have to get them home in one piece. I think I need to bribe them.

"What about a lollipop?" I ask. I know the lollipops here are all natural and organic. "If you behave, we can get one each."

"Yay!" they both shout. Violet shoots one tiny flame out of her left thumb. Indigo snuffs it out with his mitten.

"Nice save," I say. His mitten is only a little bit singed. I'm calling that a win.

We leave the market. At last. The twins are quiet. That's one good thing about the lollipops. Just as we walk through the market entrance, I see something. Something out of place. I turn quickly. A woman is staring at us.

This is a small town. I know almost everyone. But I don't recognize her. She has long brown hair in braids. She's dressed all in black, old-fashioned clothes. I tug the twins through the gate quickly.

"Violet," I say, leaning down to whisper. "Do you see that woman by the cheese stall? The one all in black? Is she Fae?"

Violet can see through Faerie glamours. She glances back.

"No," she whispers after a second. "She's a human."

I turn just in time to see the woman duck around a corner. Maybe I panicked for nothing. But I'm always on edge now. The first time I went

to Faerieland, Violet and I defeated the evil queen Olea. Violet took her place as Queen of Nearwood.

So Olea hates us. And she's already tried to kill me. More than once.

We hurry down to the bus stop. We don't have any snow. It rarely snows here. But it's cold. Indigo actually zips up his coat. He almost never does that.

We don't have to wait long for the bus. It will take us out of town and drop us at the top of our driveway. Driveway? It's more like a road. It's a ten-minute walk from the highway to our cottage.

We live in the middle of the forest. Mom calls it "off-grid." I guess I'm used to it. But that doesn't mean I like it. I'm older now. And I'm in high school. I need the internet. Or TV even. Or a phone. But Mom won't let me have any of that stuff. She likes us to live like cavemen. And all the trouble we've had with Faeries lately has just made it worse.

As the bus arrives I see something out of the corner of my eye. It's the woman from the market! She stands on the corner, staring. I shove Violet and Indigo onto the bus. Then I pick up Rosa and carry her on.

As the bus pulls away, the strange woman is still on the corner. Watching us.

Chapter Two

I feel uneasy when the bus turns onto the highway. The twins are sitting quietly. Rosa curls up at their feet. I sit across from them. By habit I check that we still have everything. The twins still have their coats. That's a miracle. I have the shopping bag with Mom's candle. I have my wallet. As I tuck my bus pass away, I feel something in my pocket. It's a marble.

I pull it out with a sigh. It's a simple glass marble with a wisp of gold inside. Indigo must have put it in there. Not long ago he and I got lost in the Wherewood. We met a witch there. She helped us. She also gave me this marble. I never knew why.

Indigo thinks the marble is magic. But lately I'm trying to keep magic out of my life. So I'd put the marble in my sock drawer. Indigo must have taken it out and put it in my pocket. He does that. I should be thankful it's not a spider or a worm. He's done that too.

It's just a possibly magic marble. It seems a small thing, but...

Once Faeries touch your life, nothing is the same. I love the twins. And I like my Faerie friends Salix and Finola. I even like King Oren. But everything else about Faerieland is dangerous and scary.

I've tried to talk to Mom. I think she understands. But it's hard for her to talk about it. Olea saved my