

Chapter One

Dark Hollow.

Even the name gave him the creeps. Kayle straightened his back and cast a steely glance toward the curtain of fading sunlight that slid through the heavy overgrowth. Kayle's gaze shifted to the long black bag laying on the granite outcropping, nestled among the dense foliage.

With its old legends, Dark Hollow was certainly morbid enough to host such a macabre package.

“You're done then?”

Kayle nodded and turned to the detective waiting patiently behind him. Sergeant Donaldson of the Porta Negra Police Department leaned against his unmarked car; the fading sunlight glinted off his dark sunglasses as he waited for Kayle's attention to shift back to the present.

“Yes, I got everyone. It took me some time to reach all of the Boston FBI, but I think that I was able to get to those who saw the body. Everyone else can be allowed to believe that the discovery of the body in Dark Hollow was just a hoax.”

The sergeant nodded and glanced back at the black body bag lying in the shadows. “Well, I would rather have to deal with a hoax than the real thing. So you are taking her back to her family tonight? Back to...that place...” His voice trailed off.

A slight smile crept across Kayle's stony visage. “Yes, she will return with me to ‘that place.’ The less you know about it the better.”

The detective nodded. “And you are sure I won't have anything else to worry about? No other fairies posing as FBI or crazy-ass dragons coming from that place?”

“They are Faye, not fairies. And we don’t have any dragons.” Kayle inhaled deeply. “At least we didn’t when I left. Who knows now?”

Detective Donaldson laughed. “Well, I wish you safe travels.” He glanced over again as the gloom began to hug the long, dark body bag, “Please send my condolences to her family. Whoever she is.”

“I will.” Kayle nodded. “Watch over Tabitha and Doni’s family. I do not anticipate any trouble, but I am not sure if this might escalate.”

“I thought you said that you reinforced this...” the detective wiggled his fingers in air quotes, “‘magic net’—or whatever it was that was supposed to keep out clowns like our fake FBI fairy.”

“I did reinforce it, but he was able to slip under while Doni and I were away. Of course, it keeps magical folk like myself out, but that does not mean that humans cannot come and go,” Kayle cautioned.

“Why humans? I thought that the magic people would present most of the problem.”

“That should be so. But if the magic are not allowed on the island, it would make sense that anyone looking to stir up more mischief might seek to use humans,” Kayle commented.

“You know, when you started telling me all this bullshit, I was kind of under the impression that your plan was to clean this up. Now you are telling me we may have more to worry about?” Detective Donaldson walked toward the door of his unmarked car.

Kayle extended his hand in farewell. “You think that if I hadn’t shared this with you, you wouldn’t have come up with something else to worry about? The offer is still open. I can still wipe your memories, as I did with the others.”

Donaldson shook Kayle’s hand and responded with a wry grin. “What, and miss out on the ongoing saga? Besides, with the tourist season in full swing I just didn’t have enough to worry about. I was hoping you could dish out some new excitement to keep me up at night.”

“Take care, my friend.”

Kayle turned to head back toward the portal, his thoughts already focused on his return to Caska.

As the sun began to set behind the Caskan mountains, Doni gazed out the door. She wrapped the robe tighter around her slim waist before she lifted her cup of tea and stepped onto the balcony. The humid air was still warm after the sticky day, but after a cool shower, the darkening skies now gave the evening a cool, misty feel. Her nerves began to settle. She intentionally made her mind blank to allow the calm from the expanding pink skies to seep into her soul and soothe the turmoil there.

The door below slammed, and heavy footfalls echoed as they made their way up the stone stairs toward her circular chamber.

So much for peace.

“Doni?” Kayle’s voice sounded harsh.

“Out here.”

He joined her, his gray eyes taking in the steaming mug and her long robe. “Early to retire, isn’t it?”

“Perhaps I am not retiring but returning from a shower, lover. And hello to you too,” she snipped.

He took the mug from her hands and swallowed a mouthful of the hot tea. As he choked down the burning fluid, she lifted a sardonic brow at him. “It’s hot, by the way.”

He growled in response and walked back into the cool room, stripping off his shirt. Without further comment, he stepped into the adjoining chamber. Doni heard the hiss of water. She wandered into the room and picked up his discarded shirt and pants.

“Is everything settled?” she asked.

Kayle’s face was lifted to the spray; he turned to let the water stream down his hair. Doni leaned against the sink and quietly sipped her tea while he released a long, drawn-out sigh. “Yeah, she is back,” he said quietly. “The DesChamps family was waiting for me on my return from Dark Hollow.”

Doni remained silent. He gave her a moment to grieve before he quietly spoke. “You should have been there. She was your best friend.”

Doni nodded.

“She gave her life to see you safely away.” A soft sob escaped Doni; Kayle’s gaze did not relent. “You owed her at least that much.”

“I know, dammit! I know!” Doni cried. She swept out of the room with a swirl of her long robe.

Kayle’s voice followed her. “I cannot keep cleaning up your messes!”

Kayle finished his shower. He dried off and slipped into a comfortable pair of pants and fresh shirt as he joined her on the balcony. “You know I am right.”

Doni lifted a delicate shoulder but did not respond. They stood in silence, each lost in thought. Doni stared off into the distance. The sunset had become a deep violet onset of night, and she gritted her teeth with the strain of the ongoing task.

“I spoke to Tabitha.”

Kayle glanced over in surprise. “Did you? And? Has she left Antoine’s care? Were you able to get her away?”

Doni shook her head. “No. Since you departed, things have deteriorated. Antoine is keeping her prisoner. In fact, he has gifted her to Luc DesChamps in return for his loyalty.”

“What?”

“And Luc has apparently killed Katie Hennessy, on Antoine’s orders. My father has been moved to Antoine’s estate, and Cole is also a prisoner, but I have not heard how he is. I cannot contact him as I do Tabitha,” Doni reported. As she lifted the cup for another sip of tea, her fingers tightened to white claws.

Kayle exhaled. “Luc DesChamps? Killed Katie? I have not met the man, but knowing Marcus and Bertòn as I do, I cannot believe that he would do such a thing. Who told you this? Tabitha?”

“Yes.”

“How did you speak with her? I assume you did not go back into the viper’s nest.”

“I drew her out with separation, much like Larissa did when she was at Bertòn’s home,” Doni replied.

“And she was able to maintain it?”

“Kayle.” Doni placed a hand on his arm. “You would not have known she was not physically there.”

Kayle’s brows knit. “How can that be? Any Faye doing a separation has a hazy shape at best. Larissa is one of the best I have ever seen, and even she is not fully substantial.”

“I have spoken to the elders. The ability was lost to us many generations ago. When the Faye opted to discontinue breeding with the Caskan and humans, it was thought we needed to strengthen our bloodlines to regain former abilities. We lost so many abilities when we let the inferior blood of the Caskans and humans leech into our lines.”

Kayle smiled mockingly. “Inferior? Doni, you have lived among the humans all your life. After a short time here, you are now becoming an elitist?”

Doni brushed him off with an irritated wave of her hand. “I am speaking of blood purity only when it comes to the magic that we Faye carry. Obviously, as I grew up human, I harbor no prejudice.”

“I see. So when you discussed this with the elders, what was their response? Did they understand Tabitha’s bloodlines?” Kayle asked pointedly.

Doni nodded slowly. “If you are asking if I was truthful about her true parentage, I was. I never told Antoine that she and Cole were his children.”

“But you never told him they were not,” Kayle countered.

“How could I? You know how perilous my situation was there. You know I was in fear for my life and for the lives of my children. For God’s sake, Kayle, you were the one who came to train me and help me get out. You were there in my darkest hours. You saw the marks on my body from his style of love. Did you honestly think I would have told him about us?” Doni demanded.

“But even now, Tabitha does not know the truth. You let this lie become reality to all, including your children,” Kayle snarled.

“I never told them Antoine was their father!”

“You never told them that he was not! Now, he has them both.”

“While he believes they are of his blood, they are far safer than they would be if he knew the truth.” Doni shot back.

Kayle leaned forward, his eyes shards of steel, as he released the words between clenched teeth. “You could have told Tabitha many times in the past eighteen years. For the love of the One God, Doni, she grew up knowing me. She lived three miles from my house. I saw her every day. You could have informed her, and then we could have told her about our world and what we ran from. She would not now be a prisoner of that madman.”

Doni stepped back as though she’d been struck and stared at him. “Are you serious? How could I have told her? After so many years, how could I suddenly just blurt out the truth? One day suddenly say, ‘Hey, honey, how was your day? By the way, you know that fisherman, Kayle? Well, it’s a funny thing...’”

He slammed his fist on the railing. “Dammit, Doni, it could have been that simple. It could have been as simple as starting that conversation. I watched her for eighteen

years, and I could not reach out and talk to her or even ask her about herself without looking like some kind of pedophile. I am her father, Goddammit, and if you had the sense to have had that discussion with her, I may have been able to help her. Now she is in the hands of that madman. And he has handed her over to a man who killed on his order and allowed him to rape your daughter. This could have been avoided.”

Doni spun around. “How dare you! This is no game! We are talking about telling our daughter she came from a different world. How do you tell a child she has magical abilities? That her parents are not even human? What would she think? She needed to find her own way in our world!”

“That is not *our* world. We don’t belong there anymore than Tabitha does.” Kayle hissed.

“She does. She grew up in that world, and she can make a life for herself there. No impending war, no parent who would hold her prisoner for her healing...”

“Doni, by all that is holy, she is a full-blooded Faye, with abilities that we have barely scratched. She cannot remain in that world with those abilities.” The fight faded from Kayle’s voice. “You knew she would come here. You left her that damn note.”

“How could I have known she would come here? How could I have guessed that she would find the portal?”

“Because Antoine’s spies were watching her. They were waiting for you to leave and let the net weaken. I told you to stop coming over. What were you thinking, leaving her that note? What did you think would happen?” Kayle demanded.

Doni shook her head. “I thought that after I left that small detail, I would tell her when I returned.” She slid her hands into her long white hair and let her fingers run

through the silken strands as she stared out at the scenery. “I could not bear to have her think I had been committed yet again.”

Kayle turned from her, realizing the game she played with his emotions. With her full arsenal of wiles, she knew how to get beneath his anger. “Damn your pride, Doni. Tabitha’s life may be forfeit for your selfish ends.”

Doni let her hair drop and glanced back at him. “Pride? My daughter grew up thinking her mother was nothing more than a fragile little egg who would break apart as soon as things got difficult.”

Kayle turned back to her. “No, I think Tabitha thinks her mother is a frightened mouse who runs every time things get tough.”

“I thought this was what you wanted, for me to tell her the truth!”

“Yes! Back before she showed up in Caska! You knew she was here when she arrived in Calais. You could have met her and turned her back, yet you let her fall into his clutches,” Kayle accused. “Now how many lives will be lost trying to get her out again?”

“No lives need be lost. She can get herself out of there, as I did.”

Kayle’s short laugh was caustic. “If you recall, you had a full-blood Faye to assist and train you. Tabitha is there on her own.”

Doni turned to him and placed a gentle hand on his arm. “Kayle, I am trying to tell you that she is even stronger than I am. She can get out. And when she does, she will be that much more powerful. When she returns home, she can hone those powers. And then she will be unstoppable.”

“Unstoppable? Exactly what is your plan for her?” Kayle asked suspiciously. He lifted her delicate hand, observing the well-manicured fingers resting in his work-roughened hand.

“That she be able to face any who would again threaten the life she chooses,” Doni whispered. “And she can, with a full-blooded Faye trainer to help her. To train her as he trained me.”

“Don’t you think it might be too late for that?”

“Kayle, the past is the past. I know you do not agree with what I decided, but it is done. Now we must get her home. After you return with her, you can teach her to control her powers so she can make a life for herself in a safer world.”

“Safer? Have you read a paper lately?”

Doni shrugged. “Let us find some dinner and speak to the elders. I think you will find their theories interesting.”