



prologue



Once upon a time, during a time after all the happily-ever-afters, and perhaps even after the ever-afters after that, all the evil villains of the world were banished from the United Kingdom of Auradon and imprisoned on the Isle of the Lost. There, underneath a protective dome that kept all manner of enchantment out of their clutches, the terrible, the treacherous, the truly awful, and the severely sinister were cursed to live without the power of magic.

King Beast declared the villains exiled forever.

Forever, as it turns out, is quite a long time. Longer than an enchanted princess can sleep. Longer, even, than

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an imprisoned maiden's tower of golden hair. Longer than a week of being turned into a frog, and certainly much longer than waiting for a prince to finally get around to placing that glass slipper on your foot already.

Yes, forever is a long, long, long time.

Ten years, to be specific. Ten years that these legendary villains have been trapped on a floating prison of rock and rubble.

Okay, so you might say ten years isn't *such* a long time, considering; but for these conjurers and witches, viziers and sorcerers, evil queens and dark fairies, to live without magic was a sentence worse than death.

(And some of them were *brought back* from death, only to be placed on this island—so, um, they should know.)

Without their awesome powers to dominate and hypnotize, terrorize and threaten, create thunderclouds and lightning storms, transform and disguise their features or lie and manipulate their way into getting exactly what they wanted, they were reduced to hardscrabble lives, eking a living selling and eating slop, scaring no one but their own minions, and stealing from each other. It was hard even for them to imagine they once had been great and powerful, these poisoners of forest apples and thieves of undersea voices, these usurpers of royal powers and owners of petulant mirrors.

Now their lives were anything but powerful. Now they were ordinary. Everyday.

Dare it be said? Dull.

So it was with great excitement and no small fanfare that the island gathered for a one-of-a-kind event: a six-year-old princess's wickedly wonderful birthday party. *Wicked* being something of a relative term under a dome that houses a bunch of powerless former villains.

In any event, a party it was.

It was the most magnificent celebration the isolated island and its banished citizens had ever seen, and tales of its gothic grandeur and obnoxious opulence would be told for years to come. The party to end all parties, this lavish occasion transformed the ramshackle bazaar and its rotting storefronts in the middle of the island into a spookily spectacular playground, full of ghostly lanterns and flickering candles.

Weeks before, a flock of vultures had circled the land, dropping invitations on every shabby doorstep and hovel so that every grubby little urchin from every corner of the island would be able to partake in this enchanting and extraordinary event.

Every little urchin on the island, that is, *except for one malicious little fairy*.

Whether her invitation was lost to the winds and torn to tatters or devoured by the hungry buzzards themselves—or—gasp!—*never even addressed* in that looping royal scrawl, as was suspected, we will never know.

But the result was the same.

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Above the tumultuous bazaar, up high on her castle balcony, six-year-old Mal pulled on the locks of her thick, purple hair and pursed her lips as she observed the dark and delicious festivities below. What she could make of them, at least.

There she saw the tiny princess, the fairest of the (is) land, sitting on her rickety throne, her hair as blue as the ocean, eyes as dark as night, and lips as pink as roses. Her hair was pulled back from her face in a pretty V-braid, and she laughed in delight at the array of marvels before her. The princess possessed a darling giggle that was so entrancing, it brought a smile to haughty Lady Tremaine's face, she of the thwarted plans to marry her daughters to Prince Charming; the ferocious tiger Shere Khan was practically purring like a contented kitty; and for old times' sake, Captain Hook bravely stuck his head between Tick-Tock's open jaws, if only so he could make her laugh and hear that lovely peal again.

The princess, it would seem, could make even the most horrible villains smile.

But Mal wasn't smiling. She could practically smell the two-story cake made of sour apples, sinfully red and lusciously wormy; and try as she might, she couldn't help but overhear the screeches of the parrot Iago as he repeated, over and over again, the story of talking caves that held riches beyond measure, until the assembled villagers wanted to wring his feathered neck.

Mal sighed with green-eyed jealousy as the children gleefully tore into their baddie bags. The crumpled containers held a variety of evil sidekicks to choose from—pet baby moray eels akin to the slinky Flotsam and Jetsam swimming in tiny bowls; little spotted, cackling hyenas who were no quieter than the infamous Shenzi, Banzai, and Ed; pouncing and adorable black kittens from Lucifer's latest litter. Their badly behaved recipients screamed with excitement.

As the party escalated in feverish merriment, Mal's heart grew as black as her mood, and she swore that one day, she would show them all what it meant to be truly evil. She would grow up to be greedier than Mother Gothel, more selfish even than Cinderella's stepsisters, more cunning than Jafar, more deceptive than Ursula.

She would show them all that she was just like her—

"Mother!" she yelped, as the shadow of two looming and ominous horns made their way toward the balcony, and her mother appeared, her purple cape fluttering softly in the wind.

Her mother's voice was rich, melodious, and tinged with menace. "What is going on here?" she demanded as the children below tittered at the sight of a highly inappropriate shadow-puppet show mounted by the frightening Dr. Facilier.

"It's a birthday party," sniffed Mal. "And I wasn't invited."

“Is that right?” her mother asked. She peered at the celebration over Mal’s shoulder, and they both took in the sight of the blue-haired princess giggling on a moth-eaten velvet pillow as Gaston’s hairy and handsome young twin sons, Gaston Jr. and Gaston the Third, performed feats of strength—largely balancing their enormous booted feet on each other’s squashed faces—to impress her. From the sound of things, it was working.

“Celebrations are for the rabble,” her mother scoffed. Mal knew her mother despised parties of any kind. She despised them almost as much as she did kings and queens who doted on their precious babies, chubby little fairies with a knack for dress design, and obnoxious princes on even more obnoxious valiant steeds.

“Nevertheless, Evil Queen and her horrid progeny will learn soon enough from their spiteful little mistake!” her mother declared.

For her mother was the great Maleficent, Mistress of Darkness, the most powerful and wicked fairy in the world and the most fearsome villain in all the land.

Or at least, she had been.

Once upon a time, her mother’s wrath had cursed a princess.

Once upon a time, her mother’s wrath had brought a prince to his knees.

Once upon a time, her mother’s wrath had put an entire kingdom to sleep.

Once upon a time, her mother had had all the forces of hell at her command.

And there was nothing Mal desired more in her heart than to grow up to be just like her.

Maleficent stepped to the balcony's edge, where she could see out to the whole island all the way to the sparkling lights of Auradon. She raised herself to her full height as thunder and lightning cracked and boomed and rain began to pour from the heavens. Since there was no magic on the island, this was just wickedly good coincidence.

The party came to a halt, and the gathered citizens were paralyzed at the sight of their leader glaring down at them with the full force of her wrath.

"This celebration is over!" Mal's mother declared. "Now, shoo, flee, and scatter, like the little fleas you are! And you! Evil Queen and your daughter! From now on, you are dead to the entire island! You do not exist! You are nothing! Never show your faces anywhere ever again! Or else!"

Just as quickly as it had gathered, the group dispersed, under the wary eye of Maleficent's frightening henchmen, the boar-like guards wearing aviator caps pulled down low over their hooded eyes. Mal caught a last glimpse of the blue-haired princess looking fearfully up at the balcony before being whisked away by her equally terrified mother.

Mal's eyes glittered with triumph, her dark heart glad that her misery had caused such wondrous maleficence.



Ten Terrible Years Later



*"Magic Mirror
on the Wall,
who is the fairest
of them all?"
—Evil Queen,
Snow White*



chapter

1

This Is the Story of
a Wicked Fairy. . . .

It has to be a dream, Mal told herself. This couldn't be real. She was sitting by the edge of a beautiful lake, on the stone floor of an ancient temple ruin, eating the most luscious strawberry. The forest all around her was lush and green, and the sound of the water rushing at her feet was soothing and peaceful. Even the very air all around her was sweet and fresh.

"Where am I?" she asked aloud, reaching for a plump grape from the gorgeous picnic set before her.

"Why, you've been in Auradon for days now, and this is the Enchanted Lake," answered the boy seated next to her.

She hadn't noticed him until he spoke, but now that she had noticed, she wished she hadn't. The boy was the worst part of all this—whatever *this* was—tall, with tousled honey-brown hair, and painfully handsome with the kind of smile that melted hearts and made all the girls swoon.

But Mal wasn't like all the girls, and she was starting to feel panicked, like she was trapped here somehow. In *Auradon*, of all places. And that it might not be a dream—

"Who are you?" she demanded. "Are you some kind of prince or something?" She looked askance at his fine blue shirt embroidered with a small golden crest.

"You know who I am," the boy said. "I'm your friend."

Mal was instantly relieved. "Then this *is* a dream," she said with a crafty smile. "Because I have no friends."

His face fell, but before he could answer, a voice boomed through the peaceful vista, darkening the skies and sending the water raging over the rocks.

"FOOLS! IDIOTS! MORONS!" it thundered.

Mal awoke with a start.

Her mother was yelling at her subjects from the balcony again. Maleficent ran the Isle of the Lost the way she did everything—with fear and loathing, not to mention a healthy supply of minions. Mal was used to the shouting, but it made for a seriously rude awakening. Her heart was still pounding from her nightmare as she kicked off the purple satin covers.

What on earth was she doing dreaming of Auradon?

What kind of dark magic had sent a handsome prince to speak to her in her sleep?

Mal shook her head and shuddered, trying to blink away the horrid vision of his dimpled smile, and was comforted by the familiar sound of fearful villagers begging Maleficent to take pity on them. She looked around her room, relieved to find she was right where she should be, in her huge, squeaky, wrought-iron bed with its gargoyles on each bed-post and velvet canopy that sagged so low, it threatened to fall on top of her. It was always gloomy in Mal's room, just as it was always gray and overcast on the island.

Her mother's voice boomed from the balcony, and the floor of her bedroom rattled, causing her violet-lacquered chest of drawers to suddenly spring open, disgorging its purple contents on the floor.

When Mal decided on a color scheme, she stuck to it, and she had been drawn to the layers of gothic richness in the purple continuum. It was the color of mystery and magic, moody and dark, while not being as commonplace in popular villainswear as black. Purple was the new black, as far as Mal was concerned.

She crossed the room past her grand, uneven armoire that prominently displayed all of her freshly shoplifted baubles—trinkets of cut glass and paste, shiny metallic scarves with trailing strands, mismatched gloves and a variety of empty perfume bottles. Pushing the heavy curtains aside, from her window she could see the whole island in all its dreariness.

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Home, freak home.

The Isle of the Lost was not a very large island; some would say it was but a speck or a blight on the landscape, certainly more brown than green, with a collection of tin-roofed and haphazardly constructed shanties and tenements built on top of one another and more or less threatening to collapse at any moment.

Mal looked down at this eyesore of a slum from the tallest building in town, a formerly grand palace with soaring tower spires that was now the shabby, run-down, paint-chipped location of the one and only Bargain Castle, where *slightly* used enchanter's robes were stocked in every color and *slightly* lopsided witch's hats were always 50 percent off.

It was also the home of some *not-so-slightly* bad fairies.

Mal changed out of her pajamas, pulling on an artfully constructed purple biker jacket with a dash of pink on one arm and green on the other, and a pair of torn jeans the color of dried plums. She carefully put on her fingerless gloves and laced up her battered combat boots. She avoided glancing at the mirror, but if she had, she would have seen a small, pretty girl with an evil glint in her piercing green eyes and a pale, almost translucent complexion. People always remarked how much she looked like her mother, usually just before they ran screaming the other way. Mal relished their fear, even sought it. She combed her lilac locks with the back of her hand and picked up her sketchbook, stuffing it into her backpack along with the spray-paint cans she

always carried with her. This town wasn't going to graffiti itself, was it? In a perfectly magical world it would, but that wasn't what she was dealing with.

Since the kitchen cupboards were bare as usual, with nothing in the fridge but glass jars full of eyeballs and all sorts of moldy liquids of dubious provenance—all part of Maleficent's ongoing efforts to whip up potions and conjure spells like she used to—Mal headed to the Slop Shop across the street for her daily breakfast.

She studied the choices on the menu—black-like-your-soul coffee; sour-milk latte; crusty barley oatmeal with a choice of mealy apple or mushy banana; and stale, mixed cereal, dry or wet. There were never many options. The food, or scraps, more like it, came from Auradon—whatever wasn't good enough for those snobs got sent over to the island. Isle of the Lost? More like Isle of the Leftovers. Nobody minded too much, though. Cream and sugar, fresh bread, and perfect pieces of fruit made people soft. Mal and the other banished villains preferred to be brittle and hard, inside and out.

“What do you want?” a surly goblin asked, demanding her order. In the past, the disgusting things had been foot soldiers in her mother's dark army, ruthlessly dispatched across the land to find a hidden princess; but now their tasks were reduced to serving up coffee as bitter as their hearts, in tall, grande, and venti sizes. The only amusement they had left was to ruthlessly misspell each customer's name,

written with marker on the side of each cup. (The joke was on the goblins since hardly anyone could read Goblin; but that never seemed to make any difference.) They kept blaming their imprisonment on the island on their allegiance to Maleficent, and it was common knowledge that they kept petitioning King Beast for amnesty, using their flimsy familial ties to the dwarfs as proof they didn't belong here.

"The usual, and make it snappy," said Mal, drumming her fingers on the counter.

"Room for month-old milk?"

"Do I look like I want curds? Give me the strongest, blackest coffee you've got! What is this, Auradon?"

It was like he'd seen her dreams, and the thought made her ill.

The runty creature grunted, wiggling the boil on his nose, and pushed a dark, murky cup toward her. She grabbed it and ran out the door without paying.

"YOU LITTLE BRAT! I'LL BOIL *YOU* IN THE COFFEEPOT NEXT TIME!" the goblin shrieked.

She cackled. "Not if you can't catch me first!"

The goblins never learned. They had never found Princess Aurora either, but then again, the dimwits had been looking for a baby for eighteen years. No wonder Maleficent was always frustrated. It was so hard to find good help these days.

Mal continued on her way, stopping to smirk at the poster of King Beast admonishing the citizens of the island

to BE GOOD! BECAUSE IT'S GOOD FOR YOU! with that silly yellow crown on his head and that big grin on his face. It was positively nauseating and more than a little haunting, at least to Mal. Maybe the Auradon propaganda was getting to her head, maybe that's why she had dreamt she was frolicking in some sort of enchanted lake last night with some pre-tentious prince. The thought made her shudder again. She took a gulp of her scalding, strong coffee. It tasted like mud. Perfect.

In any event, she had to do something about this blister on the wall. Mal took out her paint cans and sprayed a mustache and goatee on the king's face and crossed out his ridiculous message. King Beast was the one who had locked them all up on the island, after all. That hypocrite. She had a few messages of her own for him, and they all involved revenge.

This was the Isle of the Lost. Evil lived, breathed, and ruled the island, and King Beast and his sickly sweet billboards cajoling the former villains of the world to do *good* had no place in it. Who wanted to make lemonade from lemons, when you could make perfectly good lemon grenades?

Next to the poster she sprayed a thin, black outline of a horned head and a spread cape. Above Maleficent's outline, she scrawled *EVIL LIVES!* in bright green paint the color of goblin slime.

Not bad. Badder. And that was *much* better.