



*"Like all
dreams, well,
I'm afraid this
can't last forever."
-Fairy Godmother,
Cinderella*



chapter

1

Tale as Old as Time

If Mal had to pick what she liked most about Auradon, it would be hard to choose just one thing. She could probably spend a whole day cataloging everything that didn't stink about her new school. For one, it wasn't housed in a smelly, damp dungeon like Dragon Hall back in the Isle. For another, it was a surprise to find she actually enjoyed learning about a variety of subjects instead of just plotting evil schemes. She was particularly fond of her art classes, where she happily painted canvases full of mysterious foggy landscapes and gloomy dark castles instead of the peaceful sunsets and still lifes of fruit favored by the rest of

the class. Why anyone would want to paint something as boring as a bowl of fruit, Mal would never understand.

She was sitting at a long table in the great room in Auradon Prep's library, a cheerful, bright space with high ceilings and banners with the school colors hanging from the ceiling. Mal was trying to do homework for a change, but was too distracted by the people-watching as students kept filing in and out between classes. Plus, her Goodness Appreciation essay was putting her to sleep. So she looked out the floor-to-ceiling library windows instead, at the manicured lawns where she played croquet (well, made fun of people playing croquet might be more accurate) and the patch of shady oak trees where she and her friends often ate lunch.

Yeah, life in Auradon was good; better than an unexpected makeover before midnight, or an endless feast presented by dancing plates and cutlery; better even, than being invited to a baby princess's christening.

"Happy?" a voice asked, snapping her out of her uncharacteristically dreamy reverie.

She blushed and smiled across the table at the handsome boy who smiled back at her from behind his swoop of golden-brown hair. "What makes you say that?" she asked.

"You look . . . positively delighted," Ben said, tapping his pencil on her nose to show he was teasing.

She raised an eyebrow. "I was just thinking what a

scream it would be to glue a fake nose on Pin,” she said, meaning Pinocchio’s son, who was a nervous first-year.

Ben chuckled, his eyes shining. He was a good sport.

Okay, so if Mal had to pick what she liked *most* about Auradon, she would probably have to admit it was the boy sitting across from her. Ben, son of Belle and Beast, was not only the kindest person she had ever met, but was easy on the eyes (um, make that *very* easy) and smart too. More importantly, while Mal was the polar opposite of Auradon’s many perfect princesses, he liked her anyway. This made her feel as warm and cozy as her favorite beat-up patchwork leather jacket, which was much more her speed than ruffles and sequins. While she’d rocked a ball gown for his Coronation, she was glad she didn’t have to wear one all the time. Talk about itchy.

Ben smiled and went back to doing his homework, and Mal tried to do the same, except she kept getting interrupted by friends who came by to say hello when they saw her in the library.

“Hey, Mal! Love your outfit today!” said Lonnie with a big smile. Ever since she’d learned the truth of the villain kids’ deprived childhoods on the Isle of the Lost, Mulan’s daughter was especially sweet.

“Mal!” cried Jane. “Will you stop by later and help me with my Fair Is Fair homework? I can’t get the equation right.” Jane was often nervous about doing things correctly,

especially after the disaster she'd caused at Ben's Coronation. It was a lot to live up to having Fairy Godmother as your mother, especially when she was also the headmistress of your school.

"Thanks, and sure!" said Mal. "Anytime!"

"Look who's so popular," teased Ben, when the girls were out of earshot.

Mal gave a dismissive wave. "Everyone's just glad my mom didn't turn them all into dragon toast." She nodded toward the guarded, double-locked doors at the end of the room that led to Maleficent's new prison. "Not that I blame them." Joking helped assuage some lingering guilt about her mother's behavior; not all transfer students had to deal with things like having their parents try to destroy everyone at their new school.

Where was the new student manual for that?

"All thanks to you," Ben said with a serious look on his face. "We didn't stand a chance otherwise."

"Don't worry, I'll figure out how you can all pay me back later," Mal said airily. She couldn't help but smile. "Although another rousing vocal performance in front of the entire school where you happen to mention your ridiculous love for me might just do the trick."

Ben smiled broadly. "Done! There's a tourney game this weekend for Castlecoming. I'll practice my dance moves."

"I can't wait." Mal laughed, tucking a strand of her bright purple locks behind her ear.

“Sure you won’t be too embarrassed to be my date at the dance after?” he asked, beginning to hum the catchy melody.

“Yeah, I’ll probably have to hide my face behind one of Mulan’s masks,” she said, then the floor underneath their feet suddenly began to vibrate and the whole room began to shake. Mal grabbed her books before they fell to the floor, and Ben gripped the edge of the table, trying to keep it steady.

“Another earthquake,” Mal said. “That’s the third one this week!” Out of habit, she looked over her shoulder again at the door to Maleficent’s prison. Until recently, Mal had only felt the ground rumble like that when a great big dragon stomped around during the Coronation attack, so Mal couldn’t help but associate earthquakes with her mother.

“Heard it’s happening all over, not just Auradon City,” said Ben with a frown. “But it’s a natural phenomenon, don’t worry. Tectonic plates rumbling underneath the ocean and all that.”

“Well, I wish they’d stay still,” said Mal. “They make me queasy.”

“At least they go away quickly,” said Ben.

Unlike some people, Mal thought, forcing herself not to look back at the prison door.

There were no aftershocks to this one thankfully, and an hour later Mal had already forgotten about it. Ben began

to put his books away in his satchel and she glanced at the clock. It wasn't time for the dinner bell yet. "Leaving already?" she asked. "King duties?"

"Yeah, I have to cut the ribbon at the opening of the new Sidekick Recreation Center. Don't want them to feel overlooked." Ben shrugged into his blue blazer with the embroidered royal beast-head crest on its right-hand pocket.

"Don't you mean kick the ribbon?" Mal teased, but Ben didn't laugh back. She knew he took his royal responsibilities very seriously, and he meant to be a king for all of Auradon—sidekicks and villainy offspring included.

"Text you later?" Ben tugged at a lock of her hair.

"Not if I text you first," she promised.

Mal did a little more work, but stopped when she heard her phone buzz in her backpack. Thinking it was Ben, she picked it up, but it was a text from an unknown number instead. Strange. She clicked it open and read the message.

Go back where you belong.

Excuse me? she sent. *What's this all about?* She looked around suspiciously, but the library was full of Auradon students diligently working on their Virtues and Values term papers on computer terminals or else absorbed in their Kindness and Decency reading. This week's assignment was Snow White's *How to Keep a Happy Home for a Family of Seven (Dwarfs Optional)*.

Mal looked back down at her phone, waiting to see what would happen next, a pit growing in her stomach. There was no reply for a long time, then the little wand at the bottom of her screen began to show sparks, which indicated that the recipient was typing a reply. Finally it appeared on her screen:

You must return to the Isle of the Lost at once! Before the new moon rises!

Who is this? she texted back, more irritated than scared.

You know who I am.

I'm M . . .

There was no more. Just “M.” Who was M? Mal stared at the screen. Who demanded that she return to the Isle of the Lost? And why did she have to return before the new moon rose? And when would that be, anyway?

Mal could think of a few M's in her life, but there was only one M that mattered the most. The big one. Maleficent. Could her mother be communicating to her through text? She might be sitting in her lizard-size prison right now, but she was still the greatest evil fairy who had ever lived. Anything was possible, she supposed.

Of course Maleficent would want Mal to go home. Her mother had only planned to escape the Isle of the Lost because its invisible barrier kept her from her magic. She despised Auradon and its pretty forests and enchanted rivers. If Maleficent had succeeded in her vengeful plot, the

entire kingdom would be as gloomy, dark, and wretched as the Forbidden Fortress by now. In other words, darker than anything her friends at Auradon Prep could imagine. . . .

That was not something she could ever let happen.

Mal read the mysterious text again, apprehension making her heart beat faster. She collected her things, determined to find her friends so they could help her figure out what was going on.

Mal had a feeling that her sweet life in Auradon was about to turn rotten.



chapter

2

Fighting Knights

Jay was used to dodging angry shopkeepers and furious bazaar merchants as they watched their precious wares disappear into the hands of the fast-moving thief in the red beanie and purple-and-yellow vest, so playing tourney was *much* easier than that. At least he didn't have to dodge rotten tomatoes and threats of dismemberment as he zigzagged his way to the goal, trying to keep away from the red-and-white-striped painted "kill zone" in the middle of the field. It was a perfect afternoon for practice, the sky a cloudless blue, the trees bordering the field lush and green. The stands were empty save for a few students hanging out with friends or doing homework, and the cheerleaders in

their yellow T-shirts and blue skirts were having their own practice by the sidelines.

When the ground beneath him began to shake, Jay ignored it and ran left, caught the puck in his stick, and ducked past the loaded cannons, tumbling as he whipped the puck right into the net. He raised his arms in victory, skidding to a stop on his knees just as the rumbling vibrations ceased. A slow, satisfied smile grew on his face. His long dark hair was plastered to his forehead and neck, and sweat drenched his uniform. Earthquakes didn't scare him; nothing could stop him from running as fast as he could toward a goal.

All his life, he'd had to use his fleet feet and lightning-quick reflexes to nab items to fill the shelves of his father's junk shop, at the expense of others. But here at Auradon Prep, his talents got him a coveted varsity spot on the tourney team, and Jay was getting so used to riding his teammates' shoulders at the end of every victory that the novelty had almost worn off. Aladdin's son, Aziz, even teased that Jay should lay off the pumpkin juice a little or else he'd get too heavy to carry.

The cheerleaders practicing on the sidelines screamed Jay's name in appreciation. He jumped up and doffed his helmet to them, causing the girls to giggle and shake their pom-poms even faster.

Jay was walking over to the sidelines to grab his water from his gym bag when he noticed a crumpled piece of notebook

paper among his things. What was this? He opened it up. In purple ink, someone had scrawled, *Run back to where you came from! Return to the Isle of the Lost by moon's end!*

What was that all about? And what about the moon? Huh?

"Hey, man, good play," said Chad Charming. The golden-haired, pampered son of Cinderella usually wasn't very nice to Jay, but maybe there was more to this handsome prince than a headful of carefully coiffed hair. Chad held out his hand. Jay took it, albeit suspiciously.

"Thanks, man," he said, stuffing the strange note in the back of his pocket.

"Then again, anyone can score off Herkie." Chad laughed, squeezing Jay's palm and nodding toward Hercules's son at the goal. "All brawn but flat feet, know what I'm saying?"

Herkie was as strong as his father and had the muscles to prove it, but he wasn't the fastest on the field. Even so, Chad was lucky he wasn't within earshot.

"You're saying you could have done it?" asked Jay, his hand still clasped in Chad's grip.

"Blindfolded," said Chad, still shaking Jay's hand forcefully up and down and smiling through his teeth. "See, the thing is, Jay, it's easy to dodge a cannon, but in tourney, you've got to watch out for what you never see coming." And with his trademark sneer, Chad twisted his wrist and flipped Jay over, sending him sprawling on the ground face-first. *Oof.*

“See what I mean?” Chad smiled. “Consider it a little coaching between friends.”

“Oh, Chad, you’re too hilarious for words!” Audrey, who had come up from the sidelines to coo at her boyfriend, tittered.

“*Hilarious* isn’t the word I’d use,” grumbled Jay, spitting out dirt. Did he say he was tired of being lifted on his team’s shoulders? Well, he much preferred that to being thrown on the ground at the feet of an annoying prince.

“Are you okay, Jay?” Audrey asked, concerned.

“He’s fine, babe,” said Chad, slinging an arm over her shoulders, the smile on his face as cloying as the pastel sweaters he usually wore. “Come on, there’s nothing to see here but garbage. Isn’t that what you guys used to eat on that island? Our leftovers?”

Audrey gasped. “The poor things, did they really? That’s disgusting.”

“On Charming’s honor,” said Chad, leading her away. “Let’s go, Princess, nothing to see here.”

Chad used to be one of the best players on the team, but not since Jay arrived. The prince wasn’t taking his displacement from the starting lineup very well.

Jay sighed, looking up at the blue sky. He had traded a life of skulking and thievery to play good guy at hero prep. Back on the Isle, Chad wouldn’t be laughing quite so smugly if he knew how easily Jay could have swiped his watch, wallet, and keys during that handshake. But Jay was

in Auradon now, and they frowned on those things, so he'd left them alone, even though the temptation had been great. It would only get him and his fellow villain kids in trouble, which is what Chad really wanted.

"Are you planning on lying there forever? The dinner bell's rung," said a voice. He looked up to see Jordan standing above him, holding out a hand.

"You came out of nowhere."

"Genie trick." She winked, looking down at him with a hint of a smile. She wore her dark hair up in a swoop, and her blue pantaloons were striking with her yellow leather jacket. She was soon joined by two other girls, the three of them looking concerned over his fall.

Jay took Jordan's hand and used it to help himself up. "Thanks."

"Don't worry about Chad, he's like that to everyone. Isn't that right, Allie?" Jordan said to the blond girl standing next to her.

The girl nodded. She wore a blue pinafore over a white blouse and had delicate features and a genteel manner. "He's almost worse than Tweedledum and Tweedledee."

"Definitely worse. My dad would have things to say about him, that's for sure," said Jordan, whose father, Genie, was a famously talkative fellow. "Are you sure you're all right, dude?"

"Nothing bruised but my pride," Jay told them, feeling better already.

“Then he did us a favor.” The third girl laughed, fixing the tiny hat she wore sideways on her head. Freddie Facilier was one of the newer Isle kids, who had transferred over as part of the ongoing program to assimilate the villains’ kids into the Auradon mainstream.

“Thanks a lot, Freddie,” grumbled Jay.

“You’re welcome,” said Freddie.

“We’re not all like Chad,” said Jordan. “Some of us know that without you guys, all of Auradon would be Maleficent’s minions right now.”

“Goblins,” said Jay. “Maleficent’s minions are goblins.”

“That would be awful,” said Allie. “Green is quite a horrendous color on me.”

The four of them walked companionably over to the dining hall, bumping into Ben, who was headed the other way. The girls swooned and curtsied at the sight of the young king.

“You missed practice,” said Jay, bumping fists with his teammate. He and Ben worked well together, Jay usually setting up the shots that Ben would send flying into the goal.

“I know, I know, next time, I promise,” said Ben, looking harried. “Coach is on my case.”

“Our defense is really hurting. Offense too.”

“Yeah.” Ben sighed, craning his neck at the tourney fields longingly.

“Well, you better be back on deck when we play the Lost

Boys,” Jay said. They were up against a strong Neverland team that weekend.

“I’ll do my best.”

Jay nodded. It occurred to him while talking to Ben that if his father, Jafar, was in Auradon, he would probably figure out a way to smooth-talk Ben into handing over not just the crown, but the entire kingdom. Whereas Jay only wanted to play tourney and hang out. Just went to show that sometimes the apple can fall far from the tree—or maybe in his case, that the baby cobra can slink away from the nest?

He wasn’t sure, but he hoped it was true.

“Hey,” Ben said, noticing Jay’s face for the first time. “Hold on. What happened at practice? Did Chad do that?”

Jay shrugged. He touched the skin around his eye and felt that it was swollen. He wasn’t a tattletale, but Chad must have flipped him harder than he thought. “Eh, it was an accident. I’m sure he didn’t mean for my face to meet the ground *that* hard.”

“I’ll talk to him,” said Ben, frowning.

“Nah, leave it. You’ve got bigger problems,” said Jay. “I can deal with Chad.” The last thing he needed was Chad telling everyone he had to go running to Prince Ben every time he ate a little dirt.

Ben looked as if he wanted to argue. He exhaled. “Fine.”

“Headed to dinner?” asked Jay, motioning to the dining hall, where the tantalizing smell of Mrs. Potts’s cooking filled the air.

“No, I’ve got king stuff.”

“Your loss,” Jay teased. “What’s the use of being king if you can’t even stop for a decent meal?”

Ben laughed. “Tell me about it. Catch you guys later. Take it easy.”

“Bye, Ben!” the girls called.

“Ladies?” asked Jay, leading the group to the building and opening the door for them like the gentleman he was. For a moment, he remembered the anonymous note he’d found in his gym bag earlier and wondered what that was all about. Who wanted him to return to the Isle of the Lost?

But he didn’t let it bother him too much as the girls fussed over his injuries. Allie promised to brew him a cup of her favorite tea as well as ask her mother for any of the Mad Hatter’s crazy cures. Jordan cheered him up with fanciful stories of traveling via carpet, and how he should really try it for longer trips sometime, and Freddie suggested ways to get even with Chad. “I’d substitute whipped cream for a tube of his hair gel. That would show him, don’t you think?”

Jay felt better already. Who cared about a cryptic note telling him he didn’t belong in Auradon? And for that matter, who cared about caves full of molten gold and treasures as vast as the eye could see? As he entered the cafeteria in the company of his friends, Jay felt as rich as the Sultan of Agrabah.