

## Chapter 2: Chapter Two

11:34 p.m.

I should have already left.

Not sure what's making me delay.

I take a deep breath and glance at my reflection with a sick feeling in my stomach. Did I look mentally stable? I frown and take in my discolored gaze staring back at me in my cracker box bathroom. Definitely, probably, not really. Not when you really take a good long look, past my cute face and long black hair. I used to think my oh-so-blessed exotic looks would get me far in life, but I would like to honestly say it has produced adverse effects. Now, before you get the wrong idea of me, I do appreciate them. I do. I thank the mother who left me at the Water Crest nursing home in Houston, Texas, for them. But in a way, I think it has made me lazy in areas I should have been strong in, like common sense? Street Smart. I would tell my younger self that getting involved with a known drug dealer's handsome son should be avoided at all costs.

Because they do not take breaks up that well, they want to send you and bring you back to talk.

11:49 p.m.

"Oh noooo," I hiss to myself. My heart starts the crazy drum roll again as I run to snatch my purse and iPhone. I grab the now dim letter and stupefiedly open my leopard pack and say a prayer as I run out the door. I really hope the glowing letter was not a gift of my imagination, or I will never let myself live this down. I am going to need help if I'm going to send this guy in eight minutes. My violet romper says that I'm cute and approachable, I could use some defenseless guy to help me look Luckily, I live one block from the French Quarter. I should be able to find help. I'm only 5'5 for crying out loud like I'm adorable.

Damsel in distress.

5 minutes later...

Wrong.

"Excuse me—" I am aggressively shoulder checked by what appears to be a vampire in a bright purple cape and excessive costume makeup. "Hey!" I get out and shoot him poison-death-rays out of my eyes. He will die a painful death tonight. Or, maybe karma will at least graze him with explosive diarrhea. Somebody must know something! I run up to a group of middle-aged tourists that seem to be well into their cups, all sporting tall hurricanes, and loud laughter. "Hi, could you help?" I try and show them my golden letter. "I need to find a Charming man, I know sound weird, but it's kind of for a game show." I wave my hand as I explain, "I would guess he would be wearing a suit—"

They push past me like I'm the crazy one?! I grit my teeth in embarrassment.

That man with the camera is wearing white socks with his velcro sandals.

A true crime to humanity.

Karma really has her work cut out for her tonight.

I am on my own.

Two and a half strained minutes have passed without luck. I see no signs saying, "Over here looney ladies! Fairy Godmother Inc.!" What the heck was I thinking only leaving myself ten minutes to find this mystery man? What does that even mean? I'm a horrible procrastinator, always waiting until the last minute to make up my mind. I just like to think it keeps things interesting. I kept telling myself that and not panic. I'm bumping into people left and right, and I manage to step on some hot gum that now makes a slicky sound every time my black wedge heel hits the ground.

Perfect.

I check my phone.

11:59

"I'm a pumpkin!" I yell in defeat, feeling failure seep into every inch of my body. I read over the letter again, and it gave no clear directions. Son of a monkey's uncle! I'm a rotten pumpkin, I mean to myself.

Cue crazy tears.

I'm probably going to start Mrs. Flow. I'm usually not this emotional.

Lies.

A lady with her gummy faced child ushers him to move past me faster as if I might reach out and grab him like oozy boogie!

"Oh great!" I get out as they pass. "I'm a child-scarer!" I moan. I snicker, but what kind of mother keeps her kid up this late anyway?

I feel a hand touch my arm. I whip around to stare at a tall, lovely redhead, her hair cut to an A-line at her shoulders. Her white summer dress is pretty, and her smile even prettier. She looks like a Southern Belle. "May I help you?" I say more angrily than I want.

I'm not in a good mood, lady.

"I noticed the letter you're holding." She nods to the paper, "I stepped into my grasp." "It would seem that we both are having trouble finding Mr. Charming."

What?!

Relief washes over me like a waterfall, so I'm not the only idiot present tonight. "It's midnight," I say in defeat.

"Well," she begins as she glances around the busy streets. "They can't be mad if we are late with directions like that. I mean, this is silly anyway," she laughs and looks at me as if desperately seeking to confirm her thoughts.

And really, this is silly. I guess I feel a little ashamed even searching for Charming, curiosity got the best of me."

She giggles and blew out a big breath and starts to fan her face. "I know, and it's so hot tonight. I bet they're lining us right now. We're probably the only two who showed up."

I join in because there was nothing else to do than to make fun of our way and pointing. But what I was not expecting was to see a very handsome man dressed in a crisp white suit. Standing not too far from us, in the alleyway across the street. Our laughter dies as we both sober and stare at him.

I swear I looked in that direction earlier, and he was not standing there with a brilliant smile directed at us. Is this him? I'm light-headed and that tingling in the pit of my stomach is back, my pulse pounding. "You see him too?" I barely ask. "The man."

"Sure do."

"What do we do?" I risk a glance at her, my pulse hammering.

"Make kissy faces at him? I have no clue," she orders breathlessly, her voice wavering.

I'm too shocked to grin. Glancing back at the man, my brain realizes that this man is incredibly handsome, standing there with one hand casually tucked into his suit pocket. He is leaning against a door, just staring at us with an amused smirk that was utterly charming. "You think he's into that?"

"Into what?"

"Kissy faces."

She grabs my hand at looks down at me, pulling me. "We should go over there."

I think I said something, but it was lost in the humid night air.

Walking up to him did not ease our nerves, I can tell because Tall Redhead is grabbing my hand in a death grip. He smiles brightly at me, then to her, and shifts his weight. His gaze lands on me again, and something odd sparkles in his perfect blue eyes that makes a shiver slither down my back.

"You girls are late." His voice is smooth and lovely. His blond hair is combed back perfectly, and his face was that of a prince.

I open my mouth to speak, but nothing comes out.

My mind is at-lining.

"Please, come in. The Fairy Godmother hates to be on schedule," he says like we were talking about the weather, something completely normal. He opens the wood door that descends upstairs and beyond.

It's dark up there.

Are we going to a mental institution? Will men in white medical coats seize us and place us in a padded room and shove pills down our throats?

"Hey, are you going to "" us?" I ask then blush. Filter? Redhead blanches beside me then looks back to him. I just gave him the idea, didn't I? Though let's be honest, being raped by him might not be so bad. I might play-act at first, but then I would be totally into it.

I'm a sicko.

He turns his shocked face towards me and laughs loudly but didn't say anything, disappearing up the stairs. "Come on, ladies."

She shrugs and proceeds after him.

"Was that a yes?" I whisper as I blindly follow them, feeling my skin prickling.

She turns to face me as we walk up the dark stairway. "I think that was a maybe."

I bet I can outrun redhead if shit hits the fan. Hey, I have never claimed to be noble, it's a personality flaw that I'm working on. We make it to the top, and he opens a large silver door, and I tense, bracing myself. Immediately cool, unusual, wondrous air hit us. The sight before me steals my breath clean out of my lungs.

What the...

The room is spacious and completely beautiful, jaw-dropping. I think I hear Redhead gasp, placing a hand over her mouth. Everything is white and sky blue. The floors are glistening white marble with light blue glittering swirls throughout it. The ceiling is vaulted with shimmering bits of glass, and the seating area is exquisite with blinding white couches and sapphire accents. The whole thing didn't look real. I take a shaky breath and try to count to ten in my mind.

"Welcome to Fairy Godmother Inc., ladies. Please check-in at the front desk." Mr. Charming says in a sing-song voice. "Please make haste."

I glance at Mr. Charming, my mouth hanging open. "Check-in?"

He points to a large U-shaped desk with a beautiful woman smiling at us. She is typing away at a computer and has an earpiece in, talking to someone on the other end. She is wearing an all-white dress, fitting for luncheon at the great castle.

Her golden hair bounces as she types, apparently enjoying her job with royal enthusiasm. I'm getting a creepy Stopford wife vibe. I tap down my hysteria, eyeing everything for a potential threat. We walk up to her, and she points at the sparkling paper and pen then keeps talking.

"Yes, they have just arrived—uh-huh," she pauses, listening, "of course, I know they're late." She glances up at us with a stern look. "I will get them checked in quickly then—I understand. I will usher them back, my lady. I know time is of the essence." She glances up at us and forces a smile. "Please sign in and take a seat over there, then Pierce will bring everyone into the arena."

Arena?

What the hell?

This place is not big enough for that, and even I'm not that gullible. I sign my name and notice several other names on the list. Seven girls? I thought the letter said...ve? Hmm, fascinating. I was expecting more for an advertising stunt, though. I walk around a corner to see several lovely women sitting on white couches, looking just as nervous as I feel. Redhead does a little nod to them, and we sit together on the only empty couch next to a refreshment table. Okay, this is weird.

"What is this place," Redhead whispers.

I swallow and shrug, glancing around the beautiful sitting room. "This is getting weirder by the second," I whisper.

Redhead speaks to the other girls. "Hi." She clears her throat. "My name is Cherie, did you all receive a letter this morning?" Her name is Cherie, noted.

They all nod and murmur something that is inaudible.

A snobby blond-haired girl snickers and stands up to look around, her rose heels clicking on the marble. I say snobby because she has that mean-girl look about her. Perfect blond hair, Barbie body, pink sundress, and a perfected resting-bitch-face that is even better than mine. She must have had years of practice. Bravo.

"My name is Laura Rogers. I'm sure you heard of my brother, Luke Rogers? He's the pitcher for the Red Socks." She beams, looking way too smug. Laura examines her manicure and walks around the room, listening to everyone's praise. "I hope this is something to do with T.V."

"I don't watch baseball, so boring," I moan, before my smile turns bitter. In I feel Cherie shoot me a glance then a grin, covering her face with her hands.

Laura's gaze pins me and takes her time to look me up and down. She raises a thin brow and walks over to me, lips pinched. She has very long legs. I notice, that when she walks out into a line. "And who are you? A vampire? Madame Darkness?" She laughs lightly.

That is not even funny.

I resist an eye roll. "My name is Viola Spear, and I'm here out of pure curiosity." I murmur. Not sure why I just gave her a bogus last name.

"Whatever," she shoots back. "Arnt we all?"

A black girl who sits on the couch opposite of me leans forward. "Hi, I'm Destiny. This place gives me the creeps—too sterile. Anyone else feelin' this way?" She adjusts her jeans and white tank-top. She has one cute silver pumps I take note.

The girl next to Destiny, with short platinum hair, nods in agreement. She raises her hand, "I'm April. I am a little nervous about this setup. I hope there is no auditioning or anything like that. I'm not good in front of crowds, like, I will have a panic attack."

"We are in a documentary or movie set," Laura chimes in soundly annoyed by everyone's incoherence.

A tall brunette laughs. "Let's not forget how hot Mr. Charming is," she whispers loud enough for all of us to hear and looks around the corner. "Oh, and I'm Ivy, a former Marine."

We all murmur something about her exceptional service to our country.

The last girl with Carmel skin and a Cuban bun raises her hand to introduce herself, but Mr. Charming comes in. Everyone's mouth shuts, and eyes widened. My heart pulses to life, like a drunken tap dancer who just pounded over Red bulls.

He grins and places a hand in his white suit pants. "Ladies we are ready for you all to move into the Arena where all of your questions will be answered. We are a little bit behind schedule, so please let's not let the Fairy Godmother wait another second."

I hear a muted giggle to my left.

He glances at all of us. A severe look crosses his handsome features as he studies us. "Please take this seriously. What you are about to see is real. You all are chosen for a reason by Fate's hand, and before you enter, you must take a deep breath and find your inner calm."

I frown, not liking the sound of that at all.

If we walk into a sex dungeon like that girl form 50 Shades, I'm tripping Laura and running. Not even kidding, the survival of the fittest. I can fight like a wildcat if need be.

We all line up and proceed to follow Charming through a large sliding door made of glass.

Okay, I need to explain this slowly so you understand what I see as I pass through the door. We walk into a large U seating area, like something you'd see at a university, a lecturing room with high seating. I calm my pounding heart as I grab to steady myself on the back of a chair.

The problem is ...

The problem is that where a chalkboard and wall would be, there is nothing. There is nothing behind the large white desk and podium. No, I don't mean nothing. What the hell am I saying?!

I might throw up.

Behind the desk was outer F-ing space.

In case you didn't understand that, behind the desk where a wall should be is OUTERSPACE. I am looking at the big black abyss that is our universe. Like someone cut a spaceship in half, and we are standing on the edge. There are distant shooting stars, comets, and an enormous planet that is far, far away in the distance that you can see the atmosphere moving around it. Oh, and there is this breeze, I can see little pieces of my hair blowing with the air current.

I feel Cherie's hand on my arm, squeezing, her fingers turn white as her arm shook. I'm numb to the pain of her death grip. I slowly look up and see Charming walk down the pale marble stairs to the bottom level, where the large desk sat. Dear goodness, even a red shiny apple lay on top of it, like we were in grade school.

"Ladies!" Charming booms with his hands out-stretched. "Please see a seat where ever you like. I know what you are seeing does not seem real, but you need to understand that this room is the least of your worries. I say this with the deepest part of my heart. Welcome." He eyes everyone in the room as we look seats on our shaky legs. His eyes land on me for a second longer than everyone else.

I get a bizarre feeling that he knows something concerning me, but I'm too overwhelmed to give it any thought.

"A drink will be passed around to allow you all to take this in, in a much calmer state of mind. You may pass if you like, but I strongly suggest you take it." He motions for two women in white clothing to come in with trays and ladies, so please drink up. We do not have time for panic attacks or fainting spells."

Destiny has her head in between her legs, bracing hard, and April is feeling her pulse on her neck, looking sweaty. Laura sits in silence, her eyes wide and unblinking.

"Viola? May I offer you a drink?" She leans down to hand me a water glass without even waiting for a reply.

"Yes," I barely say more so to myself. I am already down the rabbit's hole, so I might as well fall without screaming. I look to my right, seeing Cherie and everyone else drinking the water. I suspect that I deserve gulps. "Is anyone scared of the date ""?" I continue, not even sure if I spoke that out loud. "It's a real thing, people."

I see a distant shooting star probably miles and miles away, making my breathing hitch. Okay, I'm losing it fast. I feel my left eye start to tick. Bottoms up. I down the fruity flavored drink and repress a burp from the burn of the carbonation. Welp, there is no going back now, I just took the blue pill, and it's coursing through my system. I can feel my body humming, my muscles relaxing.

I will now enter the matrix.

Cue the electronic computer sound as I get sucked into a different reality.

"You all should be feeling calmer in about two minutes," he says as he grins at us all, his arms crossed over his chest. His shining blue eyes watching us. "Let me know when you all feel like you can focus, and we will begin." Charming leans against the desk and lit a cigar like he was at home sitting before the replace. Or at a high-end lounge.

I take a breath and feel my nerves settle; a wave of warmth spreads through me like a slow-moving river of lava. I take another deep breath, and my arms stopped shaking, and my eye went still.

Okay...

Okay.

I can do this. I glance around, seeing everyone else visibly relaxing, sitting up straighter in their chairs. Around was in that drink? I feel great. Now I can enjoy the brilliant view before me. This is real, unbelievable. All this time the letter was genuine.

"Alright, I can see that all of you are ready to get started." He speaks with a smile and holds out his arm towards the universe. "Ladies, may I present you to her Fairy Godmother."

All of a sudden, a door opens, and a stunning woman walks through the archway. Is the Stars and planets just an illusion then? Amazing technology. Her midnight blue gown glittered, and her silver hair is up in a bun on top of her head. She looks like a nineteen fifties celebrity. The dress flows out at the tight waist and stops under the knee like she wore petticoats. The one-shoulder neckline was elegant, probably the envy of every trophy housewife.

She looked like a version of Meryl Streep in the movie, Devil Wears a Prada. She looks just as intimidating.

Her expression as she walks was one of utter seriousness. I can't believe I'm looking at the legendary Fairy Godmother. Our reality is stranger than fiction.

There is still no smile, no happy greeting like Mr. Charming. She glances at Charming with an all but pleased look on her face. "Pierce, are we ready to begin?" She asks as she scans the room, her gaze resting on mine.

I hold my breath.

Did I have something on my face?

She tilts her head, and I thought I see a hint of a smile. The Fairy Godmother looks back to Charming, and he gives her a wink and blows out a trail of smoke. "The floor is yours."

The Fairy Godmother nods and takes a couple of steps toward us, her gown twinkling and her black pumps clipping. She takes a moment as if gathering her thoughts. "I will have all of your undivided attention."

No one says a word.

We will now find out why we are here.

"I will assume you all read your letter sent to you this morning. Each one of you has been chosen to partake in the Fairytale Challenges as our agents." She continues as we all hung on every word. "I'm afraid that this time, things are going to be a little different, do you to unfortunate circumstances."

I frown.

She takes a breath and places a hand on her shoulder of her nose. "I have been running Fairy Godmother Incorporated for two-hundred years, always providing a happily-ever-after." She pauses again as if she is having trouble saying what she wants.

Charming steps forward and places a hand on her shoulder and whispers something in her ear. She shakes her head and whispers something back, very upset.

What's going on? I shift in my seat and glance Cherie a look, noticing everyone appears concerned. Cherie shrugs and gives back at the two. We see Pierce give her a hug, and the Fairy Godmother leaves the room with her hand over her mouth, very distraught. Charming walks her to the door, then he turns back to us and exhales.

"I'm sorry for the delay." He saunters over to the desk and sits on the edge. "I will be leading the discussion today; the Fairy Godmother has a lot on her plate, and she has appointments that she cannot miss. I will be taking questions shortly, but for now, just listen." His blue gaze lands on me then everyone else. "If everyone here agrees to the terms, then all of you will be transported to another world, a kingdom if you will. And yes, ladies, we can do that, there are many different dimensions, thus having many different planets with functioning worlds just like Earth. Believe it, because it is very true." He moves to stand behind the desk and starts typing then waves his hands up in the air as 3D images came out.

In one instant, the view of the universe changes.

I gasp.

I see some insanely high technological PowerPoint display here. On the 3D screen, I will call it is planets in a list from number one to a thousand and some. The top half is labeled in white, the middle blue, and the bottom red for the bottom.

"As you can see, these are the planets currently under contract with the Fairy Godmother Inc. This is not the normal speech we give our agents, and for that, I apologize. We need help, desperation is an understatement here. The fairy Godmother Inc. is on the verge of being out of business. This is the best way I can describe it, so you'd understand. I will explain why, and you're the first group to hear behind the scene information. The entire purpose of her company is to control and maintain peace within the universe. The Fairy Godmother answers to a higher authority, who gave her the responsibility to keep a certain level of peace between all worlds." He pauses as he gazes around.

"All the planets are invisibly connected, and when one harbors evil, it affects the others like dark oppression, a chain reaction of negativity. This evil is not wicked, and it needs to be managed. The Fairy Godmother believes that this wickedness can be healed by love; this has always been her slogan. She is an amazing woman, always thinking that redemption can be a part of the most corrupt." He pauses at our still confused expressions. "We need to keep each planet above fifty percent—evil VS. good. We can never eliminate evil altogether, but we can keep it manageable with this system we have been using for hundreds of years. We are talking about the people who inhabit them, their souls combined for a total percentage. If we cannot do this over a period, we are out of the business, and a different power will take over."

I raise my hand.

He looks at me, then nods.

All eyes on me. "So, I clear my throat," I'm guessing that the Fairy Godmother is going out of business because she is having trouble with keeping evil below fifty percent? I am trying to understand this complex dilemma. I blush, hoping I didn't ask a stupid question.

He takes a moment. "Yes, we are having a problem with one planet. Keep in mind that each planet is judged separately." Charming continues as he points to the 3D screen. "The last world on the bottom is the one in question, the one that is bright red. As you can see, the other planets above it are being elected by it, starting to turn red as well. It's like an infection, spreading unless we can cure it, fast."

"I get it," Laura blurts loudly and looks around. "You want us to make the leader of a kingdom fall in love with one of us. To cure their evil souls. He looks romantically heroic of us." Her eyes are lit with excitement. "So we are like heroes—love heroes."

"To change the heart of the corrupt," I say quietly, ignoring Barbie.

"Yes," He glances at us. "This one planet is out to destroy us. We have tried three times already and failed. This has never happened before. Heroes, you all will be, these are not easy missions."

"Three groups like us?" asks April with a frown.

"Correct." He takes some steps towards us and exhales. "This is our last chance, so you can imagine how distraught the Fairy Godmother is. She will lose everything we have worked for. We were very close to the last mission, getting to forty percent. But sadly, almost doesn't cut it, we need to be above half. The fairy council is very strict about sticking to the rules that keep this universe in balance. Our Fairy Godmother will be replaced with another. A fairy that I shall not say any names—that does not believe in what our Fairy Godmother does. The woman is a vile creature and happens to be our Fairy Godmother's sister."

"Does our Fairy Godmother have a name?" Destiny asks. "Or all they all called Fairy Godmothers."

Charming smiles. "Her name is Zora, and you didn't hear that from me." He leans back on the desk. "Her bitch sister is Mildred. And yes, she sounds just like her name."

I couldn't help but giggle. So, we have a family feud led with jealousy, how very human of them.

No pressure.

But this confuses me. What's this talk of missions? I thought we were going on an adventure to find love. "So, what do you mean you were close? He almost fell in love with a girl in the last mission?" For some reason, that didn't sit well with me.

He chuckles and rubs the back of his neck. "Not even close." Charming looks up at us and exhales. "The best way I can describe it, in this short period of time is this. Think of this as a video game, where certain things you do gives you points. Having the main ruler fall in love for the right reasons is like a forty percent boost. Everything else is minor. Like getting rid of the bad guys, solving hunger issues, slavery, and the lists go on. We only have three months; that's all Fate will allow us to intervene. So, if you choose to solve their world issues instead of falling in love, that is a tough road to follow in three months. And not to mention dangerous. Don't get me wrong; falling in love is also hard but much more plausible." He continues, "And generally when you succeed the ruler, you x all of the smaller issues as well. It's like a chain reaction of joy and happiness. Therefore Zora believes so much in true love because it fixes everything else along with it."

Wow, this is complicated.

Much different than Disney movies, but kinda the same.

"So, the last mission they tried to fix the world, not their leader?" I ask, my mind spinning in all different directions.

"They had no choice, for their leader was not interested in any of the women we sent. They just tried to make the best of their time and tried to help out Zora the best they could." He looked down like he is lost in thought.

Laura laughed and shook her head. "This guy is picky, I like my men picky, and I like a challenge."

Charming looks up and stares at her, probably trying to figure out if she was serious. "I guess you can say that he is picky. I have a feeling he is onto us, knowing something about what we are doing." I pushes on the desk and starts clapping his hands. "This is the time to tell you the rules. We have very little time to do this in because the council gave us only today to send out another team."

I thought I hear him use profanity under his breath. Yeah, he did, this Pierce Charming is not happy about this.

"You each will be in the hands of Fate. That's how this works, to keep the balance, we must follow what Fate dictates for us." He holds out his hand, and the ground vibrates.

I sit up in my chair and watch as a stone bird bath? Raises out of the ground, and in the bath is a metallic-like liquid. How very curious. "What is this?"

"This is simple ladies, and again I am sorry we are rushing through everything. You each will place your hands into the Bowl of Destiny and Fate will determine what you will be in this challenge. A princess or a pauper. This is crucial, for you may not change this once a title has been given to you."

My eyes widen, so it's like the Harry Potter hat.

I hear murmurs all around the room, some excited and some worried. I, myself, have very mixed emotions coursing through my body like crowd lunatics escaping from the institution. But I am mostly...excited. I am glad Fate gets to pick, it makes it more exciting. Because we all know everyone would choose to be a princess. Duh.

"After you get your title, we will talk briefly about Delonith, the world you will be traveling to. Then you will be able to change three things about yourself to help you ensnare the heart of Apollo Augustus Garthorn. You may choose to change appearances or to master an ability. This choice is yours and yours only."

"Wow," I whisper. Cherie turns towards me with wide eyes and whispers an OMG. I smile and glance back. Apollo Augustus Garthorn. He sounds hot and powerful, and I am so curious to see what his dark ruler looks like. Cute? Handsome? Average? Sexy? I ponder this, he's got to be easy on the eyes, right? Maybe he wasn't, and that's why no girl has worked. Crap. That would be difficult. Maybe he was funny. I could do funny.

"Alright, we will talk more after titles." He stands up just as Zora, the Fairy Godmother walks in. She looks composed, unlike earlier.

Standing by Charming, she speaks, "Please let us begin, there is no turning back now. There is the door if you wish to leave now. If not, let's not waste Fate's time."

I just got very nervous, sick even. This is real. There is no turning back, no turning back. I swallow and stand up with everyone else, taking a nervous breath.

Well, Viola looks like you're going to take the blue pill and escape the matrix. Bring it on.

COMMENT