



Chasma ShadowMoss

ON THE NIGHT the realm believed itself safe, the sky listened. Some residents of QuillSnap drifted into deep slumber while others danced beneath the glow of the Night of the Purple Moon. From the swirling shadows, a solitary white bat emerged. Green lightning split the thunderhead clouds, casting flickering flashes that illuminated its delicate wings.

The bat soared through the tempestuous sky, its eyes fixed on the distant horizon. Each powerful beat of its wings brought it closer to its assigned destination: the Faery Realm—a place of magic hidden beyond mortal sight. It furtively flew over the Toadstool Terrain, a desolate landscape dotted with toadstool homes of varied shapes and sizes, strewn across the mulched ground.

The stature of the toadstool house directly reflects the rank of the faery who inhabits it. The taller the toadstool, the more esteemed the faery.

Its piercing gaze was fixed on the tallest toadstool on the hill. The bat swooped down and circled the tower of Chasma ShadowMoss's home. Its wings beat erratically as it spiraled around the inky black stripes dripping from the tower's peak. The bat's presence cast a foreboding shadow over the terrain, instilling fear in anyone who dared to cross its path or glimpse it in flight.

Yet, it remained unseen.

Chasma was not asleep, nor would she sleep. Her eyes, sparkling like turquoise gemstones, were alert. Word traveled faster than a shooting star across the land of QuillSnap.

She waited.

Her jaw clenched. Black lipstick stood out against her chiseled, alabaster face. Her snowy-white tresses were expertly coiffed atop her head. Her wings were tucked into the folds of her spider-web lace bodice, and her black gown—in haute couture fabric—shredded in stylish ripples to her feet.

She watched.

The green-speckled door burst open, crashing against the wall with a deafening thud. The strained hinges creaked as the bat swooped through the doorway, its eyes gleaming. Its leathery wings flapped furiously, sending dishes and furniture tumbling across the room. It dropped a ragged black scroll on the floor, its seal glowing with the familiar, dreaded, embossed crest. It turned and disappeared into the night.

The door swung wildly in the wind, slamming against the wall with a series of bone-rattling thuds. Chasma picked up the scroll with a trembling, black-gloved hand, stripped of the ring it had once carried. A surge of heat coursed through her body. She recoiled in pain. Looking down at her hand, she saw that the glowing seal had branded her skin, leaving behind a smoldering mark.

Its message was unmistakable.

As she read the last word, her beautiful home plunged into darkness, as if its very soul had been siphoned away.



An invisible hand propelled Chasma through the air while her surroundings dissolved into a blur. The frigid wind whipped around her face with a biting chill for what felt like hours. She stopped abruptly in midair, suspended for a moment in the

suffocating blackness. She was unceremoniously released and plummeted onto the ash-covered ground that crunched beneath her weight.

Her body thudded down into a cavernous expanse. It was larger than the legendary Penache Pond, as far as she could see in the shadowy light. She stood on shaky legs to get her bearings, feeling as though her limbs had been pulled apart and snapped back into place.

She studied a towering structure of caves that dominated the cavern, each layer higher than the last, as far as her eyes could see into the infinite darkness above her. The cave walls were jagged and rough.

Chasma turned to survey her surroundings. There were hundreds of caves, each with its own entrance framed by ragged stone. On the cavern floors, mesmerizing clusters of small white flames with purple tips flickered to life, dancing like ethereal spirits. Their fire illuminated the cave walls, highlighting the intricate patterns of twinkling mineral deposits.

She listened.

A hushed, mournful melody emanated from the flames, wrapping around her like a haunting lullaby. Elongated, distorted shadows emerged from the flickering light and took on beast-like forms that writhed and swayed within the caverns. The flames seemed alive, growing and shrinking in perfect harmony.

She knew where she was. She had been transported to the depths of hell—the Dark Realm.

A blinding explosion of searing white fire erupted at the center of the room, sending a thunderous shockwave through the air and illuminating every hidden corner in a blaze of impossible light.

She sprang backward, her eyes widening.

The fire swirled upward until it rivaled the Majestic Maple Tree in height and width, its white and violet flames twisting around one another like living serpents. Heat rolled from it in relentless waves. Chasma's skin prickled as beads of sweat gathered along her brow.

The fire blazed, piercing the decaying room's damp, fetid air, revealing every crack, stain, and creeping shadow. Grotesque shapes stretched and writhed across the walls as though struggling

to escape the stone itself. Beyond the reach of this hellish glow, darkness waited; only scattered flickers deep within the tunnels hinted at what lay hidden.

She couldn't see the source of the towering column of flames. It danced and twisted upward from somewhere deep within the dark, unyielding abyss beneath the floor.

What else was down there?

As her eyes adjusted, she noticed it. Movement flickered beneath the black stone ring encircling the flames. The polished ledge, as wide as her wingspan, circled the blazing column at her head level. A gelatinous neon-green ooze slid across the ledge, dripping at irregular intervals into the open abyss. Each drop struck with a violent hiss, spitting sparks as though the cavern itself recoiled. A bitter metallic scent hung in the air.

A gut-wrenching dread immobilized her as she noticed a shadowy figure hunched on the ledge. Gradually, he rose to his full height, his back deliberately turned toward her, casting a tall silhouette. She recognized that figure all too well: the Grand Wizard Chard.

A cold ripple ran down her spine, her damp hair bristling.

She had not seen or spoken to him in a faery lifetime. The mere thought of confronting him filled her with dread, but after last night's events, she knew it was inevitable. It was wiser to wait, hold one's tongue, and accept his wrath and punishment.

Fae-forbid!

The fortunate never spoke of what happened, and the unfortunate never returned.

She felt the heat from the floor seeping through her slippers. Sweat trickled between her shoulder blades, and her wings itched. She straightened, her face expressionless as she brushed away the powdery ash that had settled on her gown after landing.

She waited for him to speak.

Her eyes darted across the cavern, searching for any other sign of life, but she was alone with him. Her fingers traced the tender wound in her palm—the branded crest burning through her glove and into her skin, a mark of his possession she could never escape.

He twirled dramatically to face her. His full-length, silver-

lined magical cape of invincibility flowed onto the ledge where he stood like a stage. She raised her eyebrows, noting that the rare web of the Cirachider made his cape magic-proof against most faery magic wherever it covered his body, shielding him from the intense, scorching heat emanating from the column behind him.

The once-chiseled features of his handsome face had not aged well. White, bushy, caterpillar-like eyebrows shadowed his deep-set eyes. A mustache extended from under his nose to well past his ears, and a beard had grown the length of his neck, brushing the top of the Star of Distinction displayed on his chest. In the middle of the star, a single black stone absorbed and mirrored the flickering tongues of the surrounding flames.

A hard crease split his tall, once-majestic wizard's cap, halving its height and bending its tip downward. The tiny crest at its end dangled, weighted heavily with memories of sinister tales from the past.

Beneath his flowing cape, the silver robe caught the fire's glow, shimmering with life at every movement. He leaned heavily on his intricately carved walking stick, designed to resemble a jagged lightning bolt—a revered emblem of admiration. His eyes bore into her with unwavering intensity, an unbridled storm brewing within them, betraying a complex blend of anger and deep-seated hatred.

Her heart thumped.

The flames orchestrated a rhythmic crackling and moaning that crescendoed into a deafening roar, synchronized with the flapping of bats' wings as they swarmed around Chasma. The haunting musical score was complete.

His voice was low, velvet-smooth, and deliberate.

"Surely you understand the position your granddaughter has placed us in—the risk she has taken with our survival."





Tansy WaterSprite

“I WILL BE with you as soon as possible,” Ariella told Tansy. She pulled Tansy close, holding her longer than usual. “I just need to talk to Miss Vivi.”

“What do you need to talk to her about?”

“Faery business,” Ariella replied, giving Tansy a look that promised answers later. Tansy watched her mother walk over and whisper to Miss Vivi—still the same Mama, yet somehow entirely different now that she knew the truth.

“Meet you at Sprout Chalet at Pre-Dawn?” Ariella asked. Tansy nodded, not yet trusting her voice.

Ariella touched a gentle finger to the tip of Tansy’s nose—the way she always did. The remaining students in Tansy’s First-Year class, known as the Sprouts, were taken to the Sprout Chalet by their instructor, Miss Twigg SugarFluff, to get ready for bed. It was well past midnight, the dark hour, and Tansy had an early class at dawn after meeting with her mother.

“Tansy, are you okay going by yourself to the Sprout Chalet?” Mama asked.

“I will escort her to the Sprout Chalet,” Bertie—Lady Beetle Extraordinaire—said in a clipped British accent. “Can we get a little magic lift here?” She tipped her head, antennae bouncing.

Ariella nodded.

She studied her daughter's face. "I will magic-port you and Bertie. I will be over in a bit." She smiled. Tansy nodded, and they were gone.



The intoxicating scent reached them first. It was the white 'Princess of the Night' flower, blooming only once each year beneath the deepest hush of moonlight. Tansy lingered beneath the glow of the Purple Moon, its light pooling softly around her. They stood there, breathing in the hush that follows survival—the silence that feels almost sacred. Bertie fell into step beside Tansy—or rather, flew in tight, self-important loops just above her shoulder, which was her version of a formal escort.

"I will walk you to the Maple," she announced.

"You're flying," Tansy pointed out.

"I am escorting," Bertie corrected, with the air of someone whose methods were not open for discussion. "There is a difference. Do keep up."

Tansy kept up.

Bertie straightened her glittering black beret, smoothed the front of her turquoise jeweled shell, and cleared her throat with great ceremony as they moved through the Purple Moon night.

"I will say this once and will not repeat it, so do pay attention." She held up a hot pink-gloved arm for emphasis.

"You did well tonight. Extraordinarily well, actually. Under impossible circumstances, with no training, no wings, and frankly, questionable footwear."

Bertie cast a withering glance at Tansy's booties.

"Yes, yes, I know. Faery Academy of QuillSnap. FAQ issue. Vivi has explained it to me no fewer than seventeen times."

She flicked a wing.

"And despite all that, you somehow managed not to ruin everything. That is considerably better than some faeries with years of experience."

Her antennae twitched. “I won’t name names.” She wiggled her sparkling spectacles at Tansy. “Their initials are Tempest ShadowMoss.”

Tansy bit back a laugh.

They reached the base of the Majestic Maple. Bertie hovered at eye level, her pink rhinestone spectacles catching the moonlight as she fixed Tansy with a look of great scrutiny—the kind usually reserved for suspicious pastries and improperly folded scrolls.

“May I see it?” she asked, nodding at the ring.

Tansy held out her hand. The gold gem glowed softly against her skin. Bertie peered at it over the top of her spectacles. Then under them. Then she tilted her head forty-five degrees for a third opinion.

“Hmm,” she said.

“Hmm good or hmm bad?” Tansy asked.

“Hmm *interesting*,” Bertie said, which was somehow more unsettling than either. She clasped her tiny legs behind her back. “I have seen that ring before. Long ago. On a very different hand.” She paused. “It behaves better on yours. The last owner had terrible manners, and I will leave it at that.”

She straightened abruptly, all business.

“Pre-Dawn. Do not be late. Your mother is never late. I am never late. You will not be late.” She pointed at Tansy. “Rest up, Sprout. You’ll need it.”

She gave one sharp, satisfied nod—Bertie’s universal signal for “*this conversation is over, and it went exactly as I intended*”—and zipped off into the violet dark, beret perfectly level, shell glittering until she vanished entirely between the branches.

Tansy stared after her, grinning.

She turned back to the moon.



It had been an intense, life-altering, life-threatening night. Only two days ago, she had been a nobody—uncertain and invisible.

She was unsure if she would ever get to attend the Faery Academy. Now she had faced danger, confronted doubt, and passed her very first faery test.

The elixir shimmered vividly in her memory: the precise measurements, the trembling of her hands holding the hard-sought tree star. She had done it. She had created the required potion and earned her place—at least for now. Her guardian, who stalked her to QuillSnap, was imprisoned. The weight of it all pressed gently against her chest.

The Ravenite Ring rested cool against her skin, a reminder that her journey was far from over. Passing one test did not mean the shadows were gone. It only meant she was stronger than she had been the day before. Tansy lifted her gaze once more to the moon with quiet resolve. She paused on the same flat stone she had arrived on by dragonfly taxi. She took a deep, sparkle breath.

She slowly twirled her new Cosmic Compact, feeling the weight of what it had cost her—the hunting, the snipping, the moments she had nearly given up. The octagon-shaped gold lid caught the moonlight, its ivy-like patterns glinting as if alive. Her fingers moved to the silver Sprout chain at her waist. She touched it reverently. The soft ching-a-ling of its charms steadied her the way a deep breath would.

Each one earned. Each one was hers.

The Purple Moon-shaped brooch for surviving what she had. The pink star charm for seeing what others had missed. Modest achievements, perhaps—but they hadn't felt modest when she'd earned them.

Now her gaze settled on the radiant gold gem of the Ravenite Ring, loose on her finger. It had taken Tansy—a

simple Sprout with no magical abilities—fighting for her life to wake it.

Miss Vivi SparkleBrite had explained that the ring possessed extraordinary powers and that Tansy would learn more about it when the time was right.

She could wear it overnight. But tomorrow, Miss Vivi would safely lock the ring away until she had learned the skill and knowledge to control its magic. The thought of mastering the

ring's powers filled her with excitement. She was eager to unravel its secrets. She stood there as its gem caught the last rays of the Purple Moon.

Without warning, a gentle heat bloomed in her hand and spread up her arm. Tansy blinked, unsettled by the sudden sensation. It faded as quickly as it had come, leaving her with the strange sense that something—somewhere—had answered her. The image of the ring's former owner flooded Tansy's mind, and she shivered. In the Human Realm, she had known her as Merkel—a name wrapped in storm clouds and bitter memories. But tonight had revealed something far more troubling:

Merkel had once been Tempest ShadowMoss.

A faery.

The contrast between those two identities—human and faery, exile and power—hinted at a history far deeper than Tansy understood. Mama would explain more in time. She was certain of it.



Miss Vivi's lesson echoed in her thoughts: *"When you are no longer a faery in good standing, you lose your faery name, and it is never spoken again."* Tansy would think of her as Tempest here, in the Faery Realm, but not say her name. Merkel belonged to the Human Realm, to a life she had left behind.

She reminded herself she was safe.

Tempest was confined to her bubble cell in the Spellatorium, along with Miss Twigg's twin sister and the all-white lady, Lark. The entire school had been told the truth. They were dangerous. The Spellatorium was hardly a dungeon, but it was secure under the watchful eye of the formidable Madame Kitondore. It was a towering castle-like structure lined with shelves of magical ingredients where spell-making classes were held. A place Tansy longed to explore properly. She twisted the ring loosely on her finger, dismissing that thought for now, as she walked into a puff

of pink cotton fluff that webbed around her face. She stopped, plucked it off, and watched it float away in the breeze.

Creating her first magical elixir was extraordinary. Not only did the elixir grant her night vision, but it also gave her the signature faery laugh, as Miss Twigg had, the sound of tiny twinkling bells ringing through the air around her.

She patted her pink satchel, tailored specifically for her, as it was for every Sprout. She traced her name, scripted in shimmering gold across the flap, watching the raised letters sparkle like starlight. Bertie had warned her never to lose it or the Faery Manual inside.

She held up her hexagon-shaped turquoise amulet to the fading light of the Purple Moon. Miss Vivi had awarded it to her for her courage in saving the Academy. She was the only Sprout to have earned one.

A strange, swooping sound cut through the stillness. Tansy's hair stood up on the back of her neck. She looked up at the sky, lit only by the eerie glow of the Purple Moon hanging low on the horizon, and noticed an unusual shape moving across the moonlight—a featherless bird, pure white against the glow. Its wings spread wide as it veered toward the distant Toadstool Terrain.

"A bat?" she murmured as something furry brushed against her legs. She jumped.

"Hi, North Watch." The large orange-and-white cat at Tansy's side lifted his head, his eyes following the bat's pale trail across the sky, as if he sensed something too.

Shaking off the strange encounter, she lifted the amulet held between her thumb and index finger. Its surface was cool to the touch. The intricate designs etched into it shimmered softly in the moonlight.

Tonight, under the watchful gaze of the Purple Moon, she admired it one last time.

"Wait a second," she murmured. She tilted it toward the light.

A vivid pink swirl shimmered inside the glass. It moved—slowly at first—then gradually steadied. The glow became clearer, hinting at a shape.

Someone was inside.

It was not a reflection or an illusion. Tansy's heart raced. Shadows flickered in the eerie purple light as she struggled to make out the figure inside. A cold sensation crept up her spine, mixing confusion with a strange sense of familiarity. The pink figure stilled as she whispered.

"Mimi... is that you?"

