

Prologue: The Phantom Queen

Her eyes were as dark as a raven's and she stared deep into mine as if she was searching for something within my soul.

"Death is too easy a punishment for what you did to my mate! How could you kill your own brother?" Morrigan screamed in rage as she twisted the spear deeper into my chest.

"Sister, listen to me! I beg you... I did not kill my brother! It was a trick to get you on their side, and you fell for it!" I wailed in pain as the spear dug deeper into my body.

"Aoife, do you take me for a fool?! I saw you through his eyes as he laid dying."

"It was a shifter in my form, surely as the Phantom Queen of The Realm of Nightmares, you know them to be capable of such things!" I coughed, blood splattering across my lips. Today I will die but not alone, not without taking Morrigan with me.

Morrigan stumbled, confused as she pondered over the reality my words brought forth in her mind. Then as if she made up her mind, she stood up straight returning to her façade as the Phantom Queen, ruler of the Boogeymen. My sweet sister was gone, just like my brother. I had no choice but to protect my people now.

Morrigan bent down staring into my eyes again, "No sister. Your words are but lies. There is no escape from your fate."

"Forgive me Morrigan, for what I must do." Grasping her wrist, I pulled my knife from the sheath, plunging the blade deep into her heart. Morrigan released a howl that burst through my ear drums as I held onto her wrist, twisting the sharp blade to end the pain both of us have endured since Cuchulainn's death.

I watched as she stumbled backwards, falling onto her back. Black tears fell from her eyes as death took her fast. Her body dissipated into the gold dust it once was a long time ago, she was free as she floated up to the stars to be with her mate once again.

My vision blurred as Quinn reached my side, taking my hand, "You fool! Help is on the way, you're not leaving this world yet!"

I weakly squeezed my best friend's hand and chuckled, "Silly, you and I both know it's my time."

"But..." She sobbed.

I cut off her protest before she could even begin, "It's okay Quinn, I'm ready." I coughed as I tried to fight the blood filling my throat slowly. "I had a vision, Quinn. The war will end when true mates, one

of light and one of dark, bare the markings of the first true mates. Don't forget this, pass it down. Only *they* can save us all."

"Just hold on Aoife, please for me... You can tell the Elders yourself. Someone help me!!" She squeezed my hand encouragingly in hers.

I saw the Spirits all around me, smiling and reaching for me. I felt an inner peace and wanted to go with them.

"Do you see them Quinny? They're everywhere, calling me to them. I don't feel the pain anymore. I love you, Quinny, you're the best friend I have ever had. Don't worry Heffer, I'll watch over you." I tried laughing, but only more blood answered for me.

Quinn was saying something, but I couldn't hear her anymore. Cuchulainn bent down taking my hand, helping me up. Morrigan smiled next to him, as I floated up to paradise among the stars with the Spirits.

Chapter 1- Chaos

I'd never given much thought to love and all that nonsense. I enjoyed my voyeuristic life through human dreams. While other Sandmen enjoy finding their soulmates during their down time from dream duty, I simply enjoy my own private quiet time. Whether it be training for any battles or wars with the Boogeymen or just reading. Life was much simpler as a loner, no stress or worries about anyone else but yourself.

I loved my life, and my purpose. I was one of many Sandmen, I floated around and sprinkled golden Dream Dust onto the eyes of humans. My favorite ones were children, so full of innocence and wonder. The adults were another story; their dreams were full of all sorts of things from romance with a mysterious stranger to paradise on a beach in the Bahamas.

The Realm of The Sandman is a paradise in itself, the good dreams from the humans fuel our world, as the nightmares give power to the Boogeyman's world, The Realm of Nightmares. Only our ancestors have been to that realm, it became forbidden after some Sandmen went to the dark side as the humans would say. Surprisingly the Boogeymen are like us but evil, like Heaven and Hell or good versus evil.

There are always battles being fought against the Boogeymen in the human realm, that's where all the different types of storms come from to cover our tracks there. The Boogeymen have yet been able to penetrate our borders, whereas we could theirs if we wanted. The elders forbid it way before my time, they said it can turn even the most loyal Sandman into one of them. We have been trained since we were children to fight this never-ending war.

Love was a weakness, didn't mean I didn't care for my fellow Sandmen. I mourn each and every loss after a battle, but I've also seen many die trying to save their loved ones in the midst of a battle. It wasn't worth the heartache they endure afterwards, in my opinion.

The Realm of the Sandman is beyond comprehension in its beauty, it's always bright and sunny. A maze of hundreds of thousands of homes everywhere. If you flew above it, you could see the never-ending golden river, flowing with Sandman's Dust which made up the Trinity Knot symbol. Then there's me, Sabal the loner, who lives further out, away from the others in my personal version of

Heaven, out in the countryside by the river in a little cottage of my own making.

Nothing from the human world is allowed to enter our own unless it is purified at the borders, so as not to contaminate it like the many humans so fondly do. Think of our world as a subdivision given to us by God, a gift, like the garden of Eden was to Adam and Eve. The purity of our world is above all importance to anything else. Like Adam and Eve, some of us squandered our precious gift bestowed upon us by God. Thus the Realm of Nightmares was made. With Boogeymen, the evil version of a Sandman living within it, it didn't take long before the first of many wars broke out. As good fought against evil to protect the dreams, we were created to gift humans within their sleep.

I sat on a rock by the edge of the golden river, thinking about nothing in particular when I heard Jenny behind me. Chessie, my pet jackalope, was laying across my lap while her little rack of antlers pressed against my belly. She lightly snored in her little slumber, I couldn't resist stroking her soft sandy fur across her back.

"Are you ready to go?" She said shyly, fidgeting nervously as she approached my back. She reached around and bent over to pet Chessie. She awoke with a start and sat up, her little nose twitching, as she smelled Jenny's offered hand. Jenny ruffled her fur between her antlers and Chessie's foot thumped excitedly in appreciation. We both giggled at her as I sat her down on the ground.

"Are you? Judging by the way you are fidgeting, I can tell you aren't ready." I said knowingly.

Squatting down, Chessie stood up on her hind legs while resting her front paws on my knee. I looked into her eyes connecting my mind with hers, "I have to go for a while, so be good till I get back and watch over our cottage will ya? Ohh, and try not to eat all the carrots out of the garden at once."

An answering sneeze with a shake of her head was all I received from my little friend as she hopped off towards the garden beside my cottage. I chuckled and shook my head in amusement.

"Sabal, what if the Boogeymen attack us tonight? The attacks have been happening more and more lately. Surely I could just keep working around here, maybe help out with the children some?"

I love her innocence, I hate that it will eventually be ruined by this damn never-ending war with the Boogeys.

“Jenny, we have been over this, you have to get your training in; we are already becoming more shorthanded by the loss of Sandmen. Plus, you’ll be with me. I’ll protect you if the Boogeys show up.” I said encouragingly to reassure her.

Jenny dug her toe of her converse shoe into the dirt nervously, “I know Sabal, you’re like a sister to me, and you’ve trained me well for this crazy world...”

“If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is because everything would be what it isn't. And contrary wise, what is, it wouldn't be. And what it wouldn't be, it would. You see?”

Jenny shook her head giggling, “You and your Wonderland Alice quotes...”

“Alice in Wonderland...” I corrected her as she burst out laughing even more.

Jenny has only been out in the field a handful of times. Her last trainer was killed when a couple of Boogeymen ambushed them. She hasn’t been the same since, her pale skin had lost its glow. She and I were about the same height barely reaching five foot, give or take a few inches. After taking over as her trainer, we became friends. She was the only true friend I’ve had for many centuries, in fact she had become more than a friend, more like a little sister to me. She didn’t care that I was a loner, but she was constantly around trying her hardest to make me more social, I think she felt it was more like a challenge she enjoyed trying to beat.

I was patient as I took her hand, pulling her to flight we soared through the sky, passing through the clouds to the human realm. We flew under the clouds in the darkness of the night.

“Where are we tonight?” Jenny asked showing some excitement as she saw the mountains below.

“Tennessee, the Smoky Mountains, the star show over here is amazing! I figured it would help you relax some before we get started working.” I smiled at her as I felt her grip loosen.

I touched us down on the edge of a cliff, sitting in silence and admiring the twinkling stars.

“Do you think that’s really all the Sandmen we have lost, watching over us up there?” Jenny said smiling sadly, never taking her eyes off the sky above us.

“That’s the rumor. The elders say when a Sandman dies their body’s essence flies up past the clouds to the stars to join all the

Sandmen who have passed before us, where they take their place as a star to watch over us down here. They live in peace and happiness for all eternity.” I said lightly, trying to lighten up her mood some more.

“I’m ready to go, Sabal. I can do this.” Her skin glowed and her silver markings shimmered in the dark.

I loved her markings, they resembled doves holding an olive branch on her right cheek with swirls going up to her temples and following her jaw line down. I believe her marking are because of her sweet personality, she was an amazing peacekeeper between people when an argument broke out.

“Okay, lead the way, I have a trick I wanna show you!” I said excitedly.

She leaped into flight as I followed her lead to a big log cabin with smoke still coming out of the chimney. We stopped outside a window to a child’s room.

The room was pitch black as I heard Jenny say, “Something’s wrong.” The color drained from her face as we realized the problem.

“Yeah, I feel it too, the room is too dark to see in and we should be able to see *something* between the moonlight and our night-vision,” I said, as concern took over my mind.

We heard the whimpers of a little girl and the malicious chuckles of a man. “Sam, are you going to finally join me for once or do I have to keep covering for you?! Come on, this human is young enough that we could probably scare her to death!” His laugh sent chills down my back as I felt the hair on my arms raise.

Everything happened at once, as I glanced over at Jenny who went from pale to furious within seconds.

“Jenny! Wait!” But she was already gone through the wall as I quickly followed her, I gasped as she tackled the tall man against the wall.

I didn’t recognize the warrior before my eyes, I guess the Boogey had struck a final nerve that finally broke her. Jenny stood up throwing her hand out as a whip materialized.

“I’m so sick of you nightmare scum hurting innocent lives!” She yelled as she threw the whip and it wrapped around the Boogey’s neck. He was tall, I would guess every bit of six-foot plus. His grey hands grabbed at the whip as Jenny yanked him to his knees. The other Boogey came at Jenny as I threw out a materialized sword and held it out to his throat.

“Another step and I slit your throat.” He was handsome, for a Boogey. *What a shame*, I thought, staring at his face. I saw relief in his eyes as he tried to decide what to do, and a confusion filled me, wondering about his internal debate.

Jenny screamed behind me, I whirled around to her holding her stomach and seeing the shock in her eyes.

The tall man stood up wiping the slick gold blood from his knife onto Jenny’s shoulders as the other Boogeyman took advantage of the distraction putting me in a headlock. I struggled for breath and to break free as I watched Jenny fall onto her knees. My eyesight felt hazy but still I fought.

The exceptionally tall Boogeyman smiled evilly at her, “I’m going to enjoy this,” he said as he quickly slit Jenny’s throat. I watched helplessly in horror as she gasped grabbing her throat and turned to me. A big smile spread across her face as a single tear fell from her eye.

“Jenny! NO!” I screamed.

Time felt so slow as the play by play rolled on. In that single space of time, she gracefully spun around to the laughing, distracted Boogeyman. A long sharp katana materialized and caught his neck perfectly, decapitating him as his head fell with a swift thud. With my last bit of vision, I watched as Jenny dropped her hand, holding her arms out. Her body dematerialized into nothing but a silvery gold mixture of Sandman’s dust, floating through the wall up to the stars.

Rage took over me as I slammed the back of my head against the Boogey holding me hostage. But he held fast as the blackness took over with me going limp in his arms and then nothing surrounded me.