

MISTRESS OF ALL EVIL
A TALE OF THE DARK FAIRY

PROLOGUE

The Dark Fairy's castle was eerily silhouetted against a tempestuous sky by a magnificent spiral of glowing green mist. Suddenly, a brilliant burst of green light shot up from the highest tower, warning every nearby creature that Maleficent was in a terrible rage. Her goons shuddered as the castle shook violently with the power of her anger, sending her beloved murder of crows into flight. For nearly sixteen years, her creatures had been searching for the princess Aurora. But it had all been in vain. Now the girl was home in King Stefan's castle for her sixteenth birthday, ready to take her place at the royal court.

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Maleficent paced back and forth in her private chamber. She hadn't been able to reach the odd sisters by raven or crow. "Why didn't they listen to me?" she muttered furiously. "They should *never* have trusted Ursula!"

Maleficent needed the sisters now more than ever, and she feared they were lost to her. She went to the enchanted mirror hanging on her wall. The three sisters had given it to her many years before.

"Show me Lucinda! Show me Ruby! Show me Martha!" she commanded. The mirror's surface swirled with a glowing violet light. The Dark Fairy had never quite mastered mirror magic like the odd sisters, and she seldom used their gift. Nevertheless, after a moment, hazy images of the sisters appeared in the glass. They were wandering aimlessly through a large mirrored chamber. They seemed to be calling out a name over and over again, but Maleficent couldn't discern their words.

"Lucinda! Can you hear me? Sisters! I need you!" Maleficent cried. For a moment, she thought that

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the sisters had heard her, because they abruptly stopped their ceaseless wandering.

“Sisters! Where are you? I need your help with Aurora!” Maleficent shouted.

Suddenly, Lucinda grew more distinct in the mirror. Her face flickered in the swirling purple haze of magic as she ushered frantic orders to the Dark Fairy. “You must get into that castle, Maleficent! Go by fire! Go by smoke! Go by rhyme! Go by any means available to you, but go! Create the mundane instrument of her doom if you must and send her to the land of dreams. We will be waiting for her. But you must find a way to make sure she never wakes! Our powers are not the same in this place. It’s all up to you! Now go!”

And then, as quickly as she had appeared, Lucinda was gone. Maleficent only saw her own green face reflected in the mirror’s surface. No matter how many times Maleficent called for Lucinda and her sisters, she couldn’t summon them again. She smashed the mirror into tiny pieces with her staff, angrier than ever with the odd sisters for their foolishness.

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Maleficent turned to her beloved pet raven Diablo, who was perched on her shoulder. “It seems the odd sisters are lost in the land of dreams. I told them something like this would happen if they helped Ursula! They didn’t listen, the *fools!*”

Maleficent tightened her grip on her staff. The green sphere on the end began to glow. “I will use fire, smoke, and rhyme! Those meddling fairies thought they could keep their darling Rose hidden from me. They thought they could keep her safe. But I know the king and queen have their precious princess within their castle at this very moment!”

Maleficent stormed to her fireplace. “I shall use fire!” she cried as she slammed her staff soundly on the stone floor. Her castle rumbled as a large blaze appeared in her fireplace, followed by a matching fire in Princess Aurora’s chamber. Through the flames, Maleficent could see Aurora crying. “Poor dear, she doesn’t know she’s betrothed to her one true love! All the better.

“Now I shall use rhyme,” Maleficent declared, extinguishing the fire and closing her eyes as

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the words of her dark spell swirled through her thoughts.

*Bring me to their cherished Rose
And bring this chapter to a close.
By smoke, by fire, and by night,
Touch the spindle I shall ignite.
Sleep will come to their fair Rose,
Forever trapped in her repose.*

A tiny wisp of smoke curled ominously from Aurora's fireplace. Maleficent's yellow eyes contrasted brilliantly with the fireplace's darkness as she transported herself to King Stefan's castle.

*Enchant the Rose with burning light,
No fear, no sorrow, no flight from fright.
Let her follow without despair
So she may slumber forever without care.*

An odious green orb appeared in the princess's room, casting an unearthly green glow on the girl's

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pale face as she rose from her vanity. The luminous sphere danced before her eyes, bewitching her to follow it through an enchanted passageway Maleficent had conjured in the fireplace. The spell-bound princess followed the orb up a cold, dark stairway with an archway that eerily resembled a tombstone. Maleficent heard the troublesome good fairies calling their Rose's name. With a flick of her hand, she closed off the passageway, leaving the good fairies behind.

Higher and higher Aurora climbed, until she reached the tallest tower in the castle. The Dark Fairy transformed the malignant glowing ball into a spinning wheel. At last her curse would be complete.

*As the wheel spins, so does time,
Unstoppable and divine.
Weaving my spell of endless sleep,
In dreamscape she shall keep.*

The princess reached for the spindle but

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hesitated. A force within her seemed to be struggling against Maleficent's evil spell.

"Touch the spindle! Touch it, I say!" Maleficent commanded. Her dark magic prevailed over the poor princess, who reached out and lightly touched the spindle's point. The sharp needle pierced her skin, sending a sickening feeling through her entire body. She felt all the life draining from her as her world went black. The princess fell to the floor at Maleficent's feet, hidden beneath the Dark Fairy's long robes.

At that moment, the three good fairies burst into the room, their little faces filled with fear and worry.

Maleficent smirked at the trio. "You poor simple *fools!* Thinking you could defeat me! *Me!* The mistress of *all* evil!"

Finally, she had the princess Aurora.

After all those years, her curse had put their beloved princess to sleep, just as she'd decreed. Their attempts to keep her safe had failed. With a flourish, Maleficent swept her cloak to one side.

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“Well, here’s your precious princess!” she added, cackling triumphantly.

The three good fairies gasped at the ghastly scene. Their beautiful Rose’s lifeless body lay on the cold stone floor. Her tiara lay beside her, like an omen that she would never become queen.

CHAPTER I

THE DARK FAIRY

Black crows circled overhead, following the Dark Fairy as she made her way through the tangled forest. With each step she took, the trees grew increasingly dense. The forest was a living thing, moving and breathing. Its vines curled themselves around everything in her path, unknowingly creating a deep, penetrating darkness as they ensnared the treetops and obscured the sky. In the shadows, the Dark Fairy could keep the grasping trees and vines at bay. Even though she didn't understand that aspect of her magic, Maleficent used it to her advantage. Contrary to the tales surrounding the Dark Fairy, the vines weren't entirely subject to her will. She had heard

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stories about how she could control nature. How she could direct terrible forests to destroy her enemies. It was ironic, given the truth. Nature had cursed her for a past transgression. Nature was her enemy, and this forest was no different.

Though Maleficent could keep the forest in check in the shadows, she wasn't entirely sure what would happen once she left the protection of the darkness provided by the canopy. She wondered if she would be able to fight off the forest when she wandered into the full blaze of the sun.

For now, it gave her great satisfaction to see the emerald greenery wither and retreat before her as heat emanated from her staff. The trees on nearby cliffs were joining with the vines. The foliage banded together, creating an army of sorts against her.

There is nothing more frightening to a forest than the threat of fire.

The Dark Fairy laughed as she sent a surge of green light toward the branches, which recoiled from the heat. She wished the forest would give her

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a reason to set it ablaze. But she reined in her desire for destruction, reminding herself of her purpose and destination.

Maleficent resented having to travel at that time; she hated being so far away from the Sleeping Beauty and the lovestruck prince who threatened her plans. A few short days earlier, the princess had pricked her finger on a spindle, just as Maleficent's curse had decreed. Maleficent had ordered her goons to abduct Prince Phillip and bring him back to her dungeons, where he would be well away from the sleeping princess. She couldn't have him intervening in her masterful plan. But even so, the Dark Fairy needed help. She needed witches—powerful witches who could help her bind Sleeping Beauty's curse so that the princess would never wake. If she couldn't kill the princess, Maleficent would have to content herself with Aurora's forever dwelling in the land of dreams. So the Dark Fairy ventured to Morningstar Kingdom.

How she wished she was traveling by her preferred method of flames. But she wanted the witches

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at Morningstar Castle to know she was approaching. She wanted to give them time to grieve the loss of the sea witch and the odd sisters before she arrived. Maleficent knew the reason for her visit would be obscured by fear if she showed up without warning. So she took her time and walked slowly to Morningstar Kingdom, following her beloved crows. The canopy was so thick now that she could not see her birds flying overhead, but her magic was strong and it allowed her to see the path that lay before them through their eyes. She loved that aspect of her magic more than any other. It made her feel like she was flying with them, untethered from the world. But Maleficent did not need magic to find her way. The witches' hearts drew her to them, shining like a brilliant beacon among the ruins of some of the greatest witches of their age.

Maleficent had sent Diablo ahead to Morningstar Kingdom. As he circled the castle, she could see the extent of the carnage and destruction left in Ursula's wake. Engulfed in the remains of the sea witch, the ancient fortress was almost pulsing with

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hate. Maleficent had no love for Ursula and didn't grieve her loss. In fact, she thought the many kingdoms on land and sea were better off without such a power-hungry and foolish witch. Ursula had put all their lives in peril by creating a spell so dangerous that the odd sisters were now suffering its consequences.

Maleficent couldn't see into the future like some witches and fairies, but she was a good judge of character. She had sensed the amount of power Ursula had been hoarding, and she had been certain the sea witch would betray the sisters. She only wished that the odd sisters had listened to her warning. Maleficent had once loved the odd sisters deeply, though lately they were more like strange relatives she barely tolerated, and avoided at every opportunity. She struggled to remember them as they once had been, to remember how she'd loved them. But that feeling—*love*—was a mere memory.

Perhaps that was for the best. The odd sisters had become troublesome nuisances, growing more and more deranged as the years had passed. She could

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no longer feel their presence in the world—or in her heart—and she suddenly felt a kinship with the sisters that she hadn't felt for some time. She tried to remember what it was like to care for them—or for anyone, for that matter. But she couldn't. And now the sisters were lost to her; too far gone for her magic to reach them. It almost made her sad.

Sadness. That feeling had eluded her for so long that her memory of it was like a faded dream. And that was where those sisters were: in a dream, lost forever to the waking world.

Wandering in dream. Alone.

Maleficent didn't want to think of what the sisters dreamed or what their dream world was like. Living in the dreamscape meant inhabiting the darkest and deepest places of the mind. She couldn't fathom what secrets sprang to life for the sisters in their new reality. She shuddered at the thought of the land of dreams being invaded by the sisters' nightmares, and she wondered if they would find the sleeping Rose in her own corner of the dream-
scape.

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Damn those sisters to Hades, with their mirrors, rhymes, and lunacy! They just had to save their precious little sister!

But the old queen in the mirror had said it best. *“Like many of us, Maleficent, those loathsome sisters were unable to think clearly when their family was in peril.”*

Maleficent had laughed at the old queen, whom she knew as Grimhilde. For her to be speaking to Maleficent of concern for *family* of all things . . . But she'd choked down her words like jagged stones, unwilling to speak with the old queen about her daughter, Snow White, who now thrived as queen of her own kingdom.

The thought made Maleficent sick.

What must it be like to live such a charmed life? To live untouched by the strife that had been ripping so many kingdoms apart? But that was the old queen's doing, wasn't it? Somehow her magic was even greater now than it had been when she was alive. Grimhilde reached beyond the veil of death to keep her daughter and her family safe. Perhaps that was Grimhilde's punishment for trying to kill

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Snow White when she was a child. Grimhilde had taken her own father's place in the magic mirror. She would forever be Snow White's slave, as Grimhilde's father had once been hers. She was cursed to be Snow White's protector—never at rest. She was always watching Snow White while she slept, forever shielding Snow's children and grandchildren. Eternally bringing happiness to that infernal brat and her brood.

Grimhilde's love for her daughter sat in Maleficent's stomach like a cold stone. It caused a tingling sensation that told Maleficent this was something she should feel. An inkling that this was something that would have touched her heart. But she pushed that inkling down with the others that lived in the pit of her stomach. She imagined they all looked like broken pieces of headstone. She wondered how they all fit together there and how it was possible for someone so small to carry so much. Sometimes she felt the weight of them would crush her, yet it never did. She supposed everyone carried their burdens there. It seemed like the perfect

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place—close to the heart, but not dangerously so.

The odd sisters had once told her that Grimhilde had also kept her pain in her stomach. To the old queen, it had been like jagged glass slicing at her insides. Maleficent wondered what was worse: the heaviness of her burden or the pain of Grimhilde's. The odd sisters would have said both were capable of destroying their hosts. But Maleficent felt like the weight of her sorrow grounded her and kept her steady. Without her pain, she might just float away.

The odd sisters had decreed that the brat queen and her family were to be left alone, so as not to anger Grimhilde. But Snow White wasn't entirely untouched by the odd sisters, was she? The old queen Grimhilde could not control her daughter's dreams. That was not her providence. That was not her domain.

Dreams belonged to the good fairies and to the sisters three.