

THE DOORS THAT TIME FORGOT

There was a rumor that people would go missing if they went with someone to the museum in the forest behind the only supermarket in town, only to turn up next to the person they were with years later, which is why it was off limits, but that didn't stop teenagers from disappearing every few years. Angela Monty, the cousin of my best friend, Isaac Roman, was no exception. She had gone with her best friend Sofia. Still, only Sofia returned, begging Isaac to bring me to investigate. This led to this point where Isaac and I lied to our parents about camping with other people, even though we were going camping for the night by ourselves at 13.

"What if something were to happen to you or me?" I asked as we entered the forest.

"I think we'll be fine," Isaac said, "They never said that lovers would be separated."

"Isaac, you know as well as I do that these doors don't care," I said. "As long as there are two of us, one will vanish."

"That was me asking you out, dummy," Isaac said.

"Oh," I said. I did like Isaac romantically, but I wasn't planning on confessing or anything like that because our families were from different worlds. His family is very wealthy: His grandfather is the third-generation CEO of a company, his mother is a lawyer, and his father is next in line to inherit the company. My mom works as an accountant for his grandfather's company, and my dad is a police officer in town.

"And your answer?" Isaac asked.

"Yes, of course," I said, "But I'm still worried."

"Why are you worried, Benny?" Isaac asked.

"Because I don't want to be away from you," I said, "What if one of us gets tired of waiting? You know how impatient you are."

"I have to save my cousin," Isaac said. "Her best friend gave me this mission, and if I let her down, I don't think I'd be able to live with it—especially if I just chicken out right here."

"Why you?" I asked, "Aren't Sofia and Angela 16? Why couldn't Sofia ask someone her age to do it?"

"Sofia only has Angela," Isaac said. "And since she knew I was Angie's cousin, she asked me to do the confession. I decided to do it at the last minute, but I have a feeling that one of us will still disappear. If you disappear, I promise to wait for you. Will you promise me the same?"

"Of course," I said, "But it's a little nerve-wracking to go to this place together knowing that one of us is going to leave here alone."

"How about we do something we'll remember for a long time before we go in?" Isaac asked, "Something that lovers do?" I wasn't sure how far he wanted to go, but I wouldn't admit I wanted to.

"Let's set up camp first," I said. Isaac smirked. I took the tent from my backpack, and Isaac helped me set it up. We put our backpacks in the tent. Isaac zipped our sleeping bags together to form a large bag, and I took out the food, which included beef jerky, apples, and water.

"I think we're all set," Isaac said.

"Yes," I said. Isaac grabbed the side of my face, pulled me closer, and kissed me. Given what was said before, I knew I should have expected it, but I was still caught off guard because I had never kissed anyone before. I kissed him back, and we started making out.

It soon started to rain, causing us to stop, but we had put the water-resistant rain protector on the tent, so we didn't have to worry about being rained on. Isaac's stomach growled.

"Here," I said, handing him a bag of beef jerky.

"I didn't even realize I was hungry," Isaac said as he opened the bag and started eating.

“Well, aren't you glad I brought food?” I asked. Isaac nodded as he ate, and I started eating the jerky, too.

After we finished eating, Isaac and I got into the modified double sleeping bag. I thought we were just going to cuddle like we used to when we were younger, but Isaac was not thinking that way.

Isaac was very persistent in taking off our clothes and making love to me. I felt that this memory would be remembered for a long time, either as the start of our relationship or as a night of passion before we were separated for a long time. We had fallen asleep around 2 am, but I awoke at 8 am due to a text message from an unknown number that said, 'I know what you did last night.' I decided to ignore it for now and blocked the person who sent it.

I looked over at Isaac's sleeping face; it reminded me of a few years ago when we were in elementary school and had our first sleepover together at his house. He had insisted that his bed was too big for just one of us, so I had to sleep with him on the bed. However, I think it was because he knew I wasn't used to sleepovers and was a little homesick. Isaac had given me his arm to sleep on, too, then. I sighed and went to get up when I was suddenly grabbed and pulled down by Isaac, and I let out a yelp.

“Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you,” Isaac said, looking at me sleepily.

“It's okay,” I said, “I didn't mean to wake you.”

“You didn't wake me,” Isaac said, “I woke up half an hour ago from my phone getting a weird text.”

“I got a weird text just now, too,” I said.

“What did it say?” Isaac asked.

“I know what you did last night,” I said. Isaac frowned and handed me his phone, showing the same text from the same number, just on a different phone, and sent at a different time.

“Creepy, right?” Isaac asked.

“Yeah,” I said. Isaac grabbed my chin and kissed me. “What are you doing?”

“Protection spell,” Isaac said. I'm not sure if he was joking or not. Then he kissed me again, so I kissed him back. Leading to another make-out session, which led to Isaac touching me all over and then us doing it again. I was in pain, but I didn't want to admit it because I don't like admitting that I am weak.

“Are we going to go now, or should we wait?” I asked.

“I asked for three days, didn't you?” Isaac asked.

“I did,” I said.

“Then, we will wait until the afternoon,” Isaac said. “I heard that if we do it too much in one day, the person at the bottom can experience lower back pain. I'm sorry if I hurt you. I was too excited, so I went overboard.”

“I love you,” I said unconsciously, causing my brain to short-circuit. “I... Uh... It's not... Um... False?”

“I love you, too, Benny,” Isaac said.

“It's weird,” I said, “My first love is mutual.” Isaac ran a hand through my hair.

“Mine too,” Isaac said.

“And what you were talking about before does hurt a little,” I said. Isaac sighed.

“I'm sorry,” Isaac said, “But you need to be more honest with me. It's okay to feel weak and cry. Those are normal things. Even if one of us disappears today, I promise to always remember you and never stop looking for you.”

“I promise that, too,” I said. Isaac kissed me deeply. I felt like I was going through a rollercoaster of emotions, and I couldn't figure out why he would want to do something that could tear us apart after what we did last night.

“Let's go now, Benny,” Isaac said as he let me go to get up. He dressed while I was still thinking about how to handle this predicament. “Benny, what are you waiting for?” I looked up at Isaac, who had an apple with a bite taken out of it in his hand and was fully dressed.

“I was thinking,” I said, “Do we really have to do this?” Isaac rolled his eyes.

“We do,” Isaac said, “For Angie's sake.”

We cleared our camp as quickly as possible and set out to find the museum. It was about the size of a two-bedroom apartment and situated in the middle of a clearing, with mushrooms surrounding it.

"I didn't expect it to be so small," Isaac said.

"It looks like a small art gallery," I said. Isaac took a deep breath and grabbed my hand.

"Let's do this," Isaac said as he led me into the museum. We were the only ones here. The paintings here were mostly landscapes, except for one that depicted a faerie with pink hair, twin tails, green eyes, and pink wings. The sculptures were also of faeries.

Suddenly, a door outline appeared on one of the paintings. Isaac let go of my hand as he stepped away in shock, but I was drawn to it. I reached out and touched the outline, causing a bright light to shine and Isaac to disappear before my eyes.

"You have disobeyed the queen," a soft, childlike voice said angrily. "Your punishment is seven years of sorrow." A magical force pushed me out of the museum. I tried my best not to cry, but I called Mom.

"Hello, Benny," Mom said, "Is something wrong?"

"The museum stole..." I sobbed, "Isaac."

"What are you talking about?" Mom asked, "Where are you now?"

"The forest behind the supermarket," I said.

"You idiot," Mom said. "You knew that place was forbidden, and you still took Isaac there? And you lost him? How will I look in front of my boss? I'm calling your father. You'd better go to the supermarket right now and wait for him." She hung up without giving me a chance to say a word.

It was a sad, lonely route to the supermarket, but when I reached the store, I saw Dad's big red truck. I was confused because I thought he was on duty today, but I guess he wasn't. I went up to the passenger door and knocked on it. Dad noticed and unlocked the door. I sat down and buckled up.

"I'm very disappointed in you, Benjamin," Dad said, "but I'm not surprised." What does that mean? "I'm sure you weren't expecting me to be here already, but I have something to share with you." There was an awkward pause.

"What is it?" I asked.

"We are descendants of the Fae," Dad said, "Your great-grandmother was a faerie. Your great-aunt Polly can see the future. She told me about this even before I met your mother. I'm okay with you having a boyfriend, but you and Isaac did something dumb."

"Wait, what?" I asked, "I don't remember ever meeting Great-Aunt Polly."

"She told me to take you to meet her today," Dad said, "Apparently, you have Fae magic, too, because you could hear the faerie in the museum."

"How much did she tell you?" I asked.

"Well, at first, she told me that I was going to have a son named Benjamin," Dad said. "Then, a few years later, she told me to take today off and go to the supermarket at noon to pick you up, but wouldn't tell me why. After I met your mother, she told me that you had Fae magic and heard the museum's faerie. Then, after you were born, she told me that you lost your boyfriend to the faerie who calls herself the queen. When you were two, she told me to take you to her today, and that was the last time she spoke to me."

"So you haven't talked to her in over ten years" I asked.

"Yeah," Dad said, "She's a bit of a recluse."

Dad parked on the side of the road. Then he handed me a thick envelope.

"When you go in there, tell her you're my son and hand her this envelope," Dad said, "Her house has a pink door."

"But I don't know your first name, Dad," I said. Dad sighed.

"It's Tristan," Dad said, "Tristan Marker." I nodded and got out of the car. I looked around to find the pink door, house number 42, and rang the doorbell. An older woman answered the door.

"Why hello there, dearie," the woman said.

"Are you great-aunt Polly?" I asked, "I'm Tristan Marker's son, Benjamin." The woman's blue eyes sparkled.

"Why yes," she said, "I've been waiting for you, Benny. Come in." She led me inside, which looked like a faerie tale cottage. I tried to hand her the envelope, but she shook her head. "I don't need that. Give that back to your father."

"You knew what it was?" I asked.

"Vaguely," Great-Aunt Polly said, "But that doesn't matter. What matters is that we must find a way to get Isaac back, right?" I nodded. "Well, I have a few ideas, but I need to know what the faerie told you before we can take any action."

"She said that I disobeyed the queen and that I would be punished with seven years of sorrow because of that," I said. "Does that mean Isaac will return after seven years?"

"It does make sense," Great-Aunt Polly said. "Nobody has been able to calculate the exact timeframe, but it did seem fairly consistent. I've never had anyone understand her before. Even I couldn't do it, and I'm half Fae. I wonder if you have other gifts as well."

"So, I have an aptitude for Fae magic?" I asked.

"It appears so," Great-Aunt Polly said.

"How can we retrieve Isaac before the seven years are up?" I asked.

"I believe it has something to do with the queen being lonely and wanting a companion," Great-Aunt Polly said. "However, you'll need to go back and ask her some questions. I have a list ready of companions who might be suitable. Judging by her responses, you might be able to narrow everything down on your own, but I'm not sure if she'll reveal herself to you. And when you introduce the companion, you might have to wait outside."

"I don't want to go back," I said, "But if it can bring Isaac back sooner, I'm all for it."

"It might take some work because she's the type to recognize people even if they're in disguise," Great-Aunt Polly said, "But seeing as you can communicate with her, it's probably going to be much easier than if you weren't able to."

"Do you think she will release everyone from her grip?" I asked. Great-Aunt Polly looked away in thought.

"If you ask her for it," Great Aunt Polly said, "She just might, but it's hard to tell with a shadow faerie like herself."

"She's a shadow faerie?" I asked.

"How else would she be able to hide people for seven years?" Great-Aunt Polly asked.

"Oh," I said. Great-Aunt Polly handed me a thick folder.

"This is the list of companions," Great-Aunt Polly said. "They are mostly Fae, but the ones that aren't can still communicate with the Faeries. The left side is designated for male companions, and the right side is reserved for females. A few didn't fit into either category, so I left them loose in the middle, but they're still stapled."

"Interesting," I said.

"Tell your father to come in," Great-Aunt Polly said, "I have something for him, too." I put the envelope Dad gave me on top of the folder and took out my phone to text him to come in. Soon, the doorbell rang, and Great Aunt Polly let Dad in.

"What do you need?" Dad asked. I handed him back the envelope. "Oh, you didn't want to have these pictures? I looked everywhere for them in your sister's house."

"I don't want to be reminded of people who've already left," Great-Aunt Polly said. "Besides, I've something for you, Tristan." She left the room and came back with a stack of three books. "These are all the books I've wanted to give your family for ages. The bottom one lists all the different types of Fae magic. The middle one is a collection of stories regarding the Fae. The top one helps you control your Fae magic." Dad frowned as he took the books in his free hand.

"I have Fae magic?" Dad asked. She nodded.

"It manifested a little late," Great-Aunt Polly said, "But I believe it has something to do with Benny's magic manifesting at this age."

"Wait, what kind of Fae magic do I have?" Dad asked.

“Well, I can't be certain,” Great-Aunt Polly said, “but the bottom book will help you figure it out. I'm sorry for not offering any food or beverage, but Winona will not be happy if she finds out that I had visitors while she was gone, and she will be back in half an hour.”

“Okay,” Dad said, “We hope to see you again soon. Goodbye.”

“Bye,” I said.

“Farewell, young ones,” Great Aunt Polly said as we left, and she shut the door behind her.

“Is she always like that?” I asked as we walked to the car.

“Yes,” Dad said, “Winona is her partner, who doesn't like people, which is why we rarely see Aunt Polly.”

“Oh,” I said.

“Can you take the envelope back, Benny?” Dad asked when we got to the truck, so I did. He unlocked the truck and placed the books in the back seat. I got in my seat and buckled my seatbelt.

“Where would you like to go to eat?”

The usual diner,” I said, “I need pancakes to cheer me up.” Dad messed with my hair before he turned on the truck.

“Okay, son,” Dad said, “But don't tell Mom.”

“I won't,” I said.

We went home after dinner at the diner, but Mom's car wasn't there yet. It was a little past the time she normally came home, which was odd for her. Dad and I looked at each other, but he also seemed perplexed at the situation.

“I'll call Mom,” Dad said as he went inside, leaving the door open. I grabbed everything and brought it inside, including my backpack, which I had forgotten I had brought into the truck when I left the museum.

I placed the books on the shelf in the living room, where my elementary school-age books used to be. However, the pictures that were in the envelope were returned to the old photo box we received from Grandma, and I put the folder on my desk in my room. Then, I unpacked my backpack, put away the camping gear, threw my dirty clothes into the laundry basket, and stored the uneaten food. Dad walked into the living room, but something was off about his eyes, as if he had been told something he never expected to hear in his life.

“What's wrong, Dad?” I asked.

“Your Mom is staying at a friend's house tonight,” Dad said. And she said she won't be back until she can find it in her heart to forgive us—both you and me. She's mad at you for doing something stupid that could get her demoted or possibly fired, and she's mad at me for not telling her about this beforehand or even preventing it.”

“Even if I had promised Aunt Polly not to tell anyone about it, I didn't know how to prevent it because you lied about the entire camping trip. So, even if I knew what would happen, I couldn't stop you because you're a kid. Therefore, you think you're invincible, and nothing will ever hurt you. It's unfortunate, but that's not how it works.”

“Yes, saving your boyfriend's cousin is a good cause, but not at the expense of your relationship with your boyfriend. What if you disappeared instead? There would be chaos because, at least, you can understand what that faerie is saying and have the ability and resources to fix this mess. Isaac may be related to the CEO of a big company, but at the end of the day, he's just a human who wasn't born with the blood of the Fae running through his veins.” I waited until it was obvious that he had said everything he wanted to say before I dared open my mouth.

“I'm sorry,” I said. “I didn't think about the consequences enough beforehand, and I shouldn't have lied to you and Mom. I was hoping it'd be different because it was Isaac and me, but it seems that even if you're lovers, someone disappears if there are two going together.” Dad pushed his bangs back with his left hand.

“I'll take that apology,” Dad said, “But you have to call your Mom to apologize as well. I suggest you wait until after your shower to do it because it gives her time to calm down. And to return to the topic at hand, there was a case where two people entered, and both of them left. However, the explanation was

that they never saw a door, and it was a coincidence that they both arrived at a similar time, as they didn't know each other. If you go in alone, you don't see a door."

"What about more than two people?" I asked. Dad grimaced.

"Only one person would leave," Dad said. "It happened to one of my cousin's friends' original friend groups. I think you remember cousin Denise." I hope she isn't the one I thought she was.

"Isn't she the one who died due to a heart attack six years ago?" I asked.

"No, that was her older sister, Dorothy," Dad said. "Denise was the one who could hear the deceased, which is why that friend wanted to befriend her. They investigated around the building but couldn't figure anything out because the group wasn't dead. They all showed up several years later in the friend's basement with her during a power outage."

"I don't want to think about anyone, even Isaac, just appearing like that in the dark," I said.

"Well, because you did an idiotic thing," Dad said, "you have to deal with it if it happens, because there's a chance it might not happen, though don't depend too much on chance."

I returned to the museum with the folder in hand, determined to make the faerie, who called herself the queen, release everyone she sent to the shadows. The first two times, I couldn't even step near the door, but the third time, I was able to go inside the museum.

"What do you want, stupid child?" the faerie I had heard before asked, showing herself—she looked just like the faerie in the painting. "I won't send your friend back until the seven years are up; the only exception is if you find me a lover, too." I opened the folder facing myself so she couldn't see what I was looking at.

"So, what kind of lover do you want, Miss Faerie?" I asked. She looked flabbergasted, not expecting me to see or hear her.

"I want someone who will live long with a good personality," the faerie said, "and I don't care how they identify, as long as they don't identify as a man. If they like pretty dresses, it's a plus." I took all the men out and put them on the table. I took a pencil and reviewed the rest to find who she was looking for. I narrowed it down to three girls; two were faeries, and the other was a tree nymph. Luckily, they were all on the same page.

"So, out of these three, who would you choose?" I asked, holding up that page. The faerie looked at the profiles carefully.

"They're all very pretty," the faerie said, "But I think I like the flower faerie, Rosalind."

"Okay," I said, "I'll bring her here. I'll be right back." I quickly grabbed the discarded papers and went to find Rosalind, who, according to her profile, lived near the museum.

"I'm guessing she chose me," Rosalind said. "She's such a silly child; all she had to do was come out and talk to me. We could have been friends years ago."

"Yes, she chose you," I said, "But how did you know? This is the first time we've ever talked."

"I hear everything in this forest," Rosalind said, "Now, let's go."

"Okay," I said. So I brought her to the museum without trouble and opened the door for Rosalind to enter. After a few hours, Rosalind opened the door and gave me a look.

"Elsie wants to talk to you," Rosalind said, "She calls herself 'the Queen' because that's what the other shadow faeries call her."

"Okay," I said, "Thank you for letting me know, Miss Faerie."

"Call me Rosalind," Rosalind said. I went inside to see Elsie, who had rosy cheeks and a big grin on her face.

"Miss Queen?" I asked.

"Oh, hi," Elsie said. "Um... Since I agreed to send everyone back, if you do this for me, I will do the same. You and your boyfriend should come to our wedding." I was dumbfounded. How did they progress so quickly?

"When is it?" I asked.

"Next year in the winter, right before the first flowers bloom," Elsie said. "It may seem abrupt, but we have already made our decision." Elsie snapped her fingers. "Everyone I trapped will be back in a few minutes. After all, it takes a few tries before I can let them out."

“Will they be with the person they disappeared next to?” I asked. Elsie nodded.

“Of course,” Elsie said, “That's what I agreed to, after all.”

“But I'm the only one who can understand you, Miss Queen,” I said. “Nobody else can because you're speaking the language of faeries.”

“Oh,” Elsie said, “So, what should I do?”

“If you promise that you'll never send people to the shadows again,” I said, “I'll let you do it how you used to bring people back.” Elsie frowned.

“I promise,” Elsie said. She snapped ten more times, and Isaac appeared, wearing the same clothes he had worn when he disappeared, with his backpack on his back. “Now take him and go.”

“Let's get out of here,” I said. Isaac nodded, and we left the museum. Isaac didn't even notice Rosalind sitting on the windowsill outside the museum. I nodded to her, and she nodded back.

“I sure hope my cousin came home too,” Isaac said. “I did find her, but she disappeared just before I returned to you. What were you doing in the museum again anyway?”

“You don't even want to know,” I said.

“Try me, Benny,” Isaac said.

THE END