

Fairy-Struck

Amy Sumida

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DEDICATION

This one is for all of you who have supported the Godhunter Series and made it possible for me to dream beyond Vervain. Seren exists because of you.

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Pronunciation Guide at the back of the book.

Fairy-Struck: Several types of conditions such as paralysis, wasting away, pining, and unnatural behavior resulting from an enchantment laid by an offended fairy.

Prologue

Once upon a time; isn't that how all fairy tales begin? Except this isn't your average fairy tale. There are no charming princes or wicked witches within these pages, and the fair maidens are more deadly than any big bad wolf. This is a fairy tale in the truest sense of the words; a story about fairies... the real story.

My name is Seren Sloane, and I'm an Extinguisher. That will mean nothing to you, I'm sure, so let me go back a little further. No one knows the true origins of the Fey—I don't think even the Fey themselves remember—but theories abound. One has them evolving alongside us, but where we advanced in groups—banding together to become stronger—the Fey evolved from those outcast predators who were too wild for a pack. Those who don't believe in evolution, think instead that the Fey issue from the Divine; angels fallen from God's grace. Yet another tale insists that they were gods themselves, or demi-gods; led by a mother goddess named Danu.

A final theory suggests they were not gods or angels or outcasts; merely nomads from an advanced civilization. The Scythians or Sidheans from which the word *sidhe* originates. Myths tell of these talented Sidhe coming to Ireland where they flung about their magic and generally wreaked havoc until the aggrieved locals fought back and forced the Fey to retreat into their raths; holy shrines now known as fairy mounds. History has disguised the raths as burial mounds even though originally they were thought to be royal palaces for portal guardians. Although, I cannot validate the rest of the tale I do know this; the Fey don't live under mounds of dirt. The original descriptions strike closer to the truth. The raths shrouded portals, not corpses. Hidden paths to the fairy world; a realm laid parallel to ours and not at all

underground.

Anyway, we did just fine living side by side with them until humans started destroying the environment around those entrances to Fairy. Fairies don't like it when you mess with nature and when they stroll from their magical abodes to find that mess strewn all over their backyard, they get even more pissy. So, they began to fling the mess back. All those old stories about fairies stealing babies and striking people with wasting diseases stem from this time period. Things got real bad, so bad that those of us who had the gift of clairvoyance and could actually see fairies joined together to defend the human race.

The first Human-Fey war erupted across Eire—now known as Ireland—and the losses on both sides were staggering. After the third war, a grudging truce was finally attained and councils were created to mediate between the races and support the truce with laws approved by both sides. A good start to be sure, but laws flounder and fail if they can't be enforced. Both councils conceded jurisdiction over their people to the other side; agreeing upon the penalties to be meted out should someone be found guilty of a crime. Rules for determining guilt and administering justice were set into place and military units were sanctioned to carry out the verdicts of the councils.

The Fey created the Wild Hunt. They gathered the fiercest, most terrifying of their people and trained them to stalk the shadows of our world; watching us like guardian angels until one of us breaks the law. Then the angels become devils who do much more than watch. Trust me when I say that you don't want to ever meet a member of the Hunt.

To police the Fey, we created the Extinguishers. Formed from members of the five great psychic families who originally defended humanity in Ireland, the Extinguishers inspire a fair amount of fear as well. Armed with clairvoyance as well as other talents which vary by person but can include telekinesis, pyrokinesis, telepathy, and psychometry, we also have some

serious combat skills. Most humans don't have the ability to see a fairy unless that fairy wants to be seen so every council member and extinguisher must at least possess clairvoyance. The Human Council keeps an eye out for humans with exceptional psychic abilities so they can recruit more into their fold, but Extinguishers are born into the job. I'm one of those lucky few.

Kavanaugh, Teagan, Sullivan, Murdock, and Sloane. The first five psychic families of Ireland. Over the centuries we've become a secret society so big it spans the globe; gaining strength by breeding only within the Five. This has virtually guaranteed powerful psychic gifts in our children. I'm the product of a Sloane and a Kavanaugh. Over thirty generations of contrived breeding (not inbreeding, thank you very much) have given me abilities which rank me as one of the top ten extinguishers of all time.

I was trained from childhood to become what I am; an Extinguisher, a hunter of fairies, remover of the light of the Shining Ones. Childhood wasn't horrible for me but it was definitely not what most would consider to be normal. Bedtime stories were non-fiction accounts of extinguisher heroism and instead of receiving platitudes that monsters weren't real, I was told most emphatically that they were and that when checking beneath my bed at night, I should always have an iron blade in hand. My only friends were children from other extinguisher families and every game or toy had practical purpose to it. Like the dolls my mother made me which showed what each type of fairy looked like... and had their weaknesses written on their backs in red ink.

Still, I was a child, and I knew nothing else. Life seemed magical to me; not just in the way that life is magical to all children but in a literally magic way. I was taught to move objects with my mind, create fire in the palm of my hand, and make things materialize anywhere I wanted them to (that's called apportation in case you're curious, not teleportation which is a thing of science fiction). When I got older, I was taught to fight and, finally, to kill.

Despite all of that, I wasn't raised to hate fairies. Quite the

contrary; I was taught to care for them and protect them if need be. The job of an extinguisher is first and foremost to protect the peace. We kill fairies only when they disrupt that peace and then we do it in the most efficient and merciful way possible... after we receive a warrant of execution approved by the Council. We are, essentially, peacekeepers.

That changed for my family when my mother was torn to pieces by a pack of pukas. I know; it sounds funny, doesn't it? A pack of pukas. In reality, a bunch of fairy dogs the size of ponies, with teeth sharper than a shark's, shredded the flesh from my mother, gobbled down every last bit of it, and then gnawed on her bones until they shattered them and could suck out the marrow. That reality killed all the mercy in my father and a lot of the compassion in me as well.

We immersed ourselves in the job; taking every warrant issued for criminal fairies we could get our hands on until the Head Extinguisher himself finally noticed and called us to heel. We were sent to a small territory where very little fairy crime occurred and where we were supposed to get our shit together. Most humans would love to live where we do now and when I tell you where we were placed, I'm sure you'll roll your eyes, but let me assure you that this place is a slow death for an extinguisher. Peacekeepers need a certain amount of action to keep them sane, and Hawaii has very little of that on the fairy front.

Yes; I've been exiled to paradise and for someone with my fair Irish skin, Hawaii imitates Hell in so many ways. Sure, beauty abounds and the people here embody that tropical temperament of almost Gaelic hospitality, but when you're itching for a fight, you don't want to be scratching at your peeling, sunburned skin too. Plus, the only fairies to be found—the little local variety called *menehunes*—frolic about causing mischief but never mayhem. Yes; Hawaiian fairies exist. Does that shock you? It shouldn't, I've already mentioned how the Fairy Realm lies parallel to ours. Fairy mounds connect more than merely Ireland to Fairyland; they form

bridges between Fairy and places all over the world. The fairies who frequent these paths seem to be influenced by the culture they cross over into.

And the fairies don't just visit. Ever since the creation of the Councils, a lot of fairies have moved into our world in an effort to support the peace. There was also the issue of the numerous entrances to Fairy which needed to be guarded. So, several fairy council members have very human jobs with very powerful positions. I think you'd be pretty damn surprised if I told you which companies secretly belong to the Fey.

We don't have any of those powerful companies here in Hawaii because, as I mentioned before, this place isn't all that important in the whole fey-human interrelations department. So, my life has become a constant preparation for a battle it doesn't look as if I'll ever be allowed to join, in a place whose beauty only feels like salt in my wounded heart. I will admit that my anger has lessened over my time here, as the memory of who my mother was slowly overshadows the memory of how she died, but for my father, this exile has only served to make him even more bitter, more vicious, and more intent on killing the entire Fey race.

Chapter One

“No way.” I looked down at the fax in my hand with amazement. “This can't be right.”

“What is it?” My dad walked into our office; his sea blue eyes narrowing on the piece of paper in my hand like a hawk who's spied a mouse.

It was a small office with just a cheap particle board desk littered with all the necessary items; a computer, a phone, a fax machine, and a copier. There was an old desk chair in front of it, a cracking plastic mat beneath that to protect the boring beige carpet, and a beat up filing cabinet to the right. That was it, and with us in the room, the tiny space was almost full. Still, it fit our needs. The office was purely for communication with the Council and for record keeping. The bulk of our work was done outside these bare walls.

“A warrant of execution.” I handed the fax to him. “From the Fairy Council.”

“The *Fairy* Council?” His narrowed gaze transformed into surprise which returned some vigor to his sorrow-lined face.

“When's the last time you saw one of those?” I asked.

“Never. To get one here is...” He looked up at me; a lock of his black hair falling over one eye. He brushed it away distractedly. He hadn't bothered with a haircut in awhile. Things like that tend to get neglected when you're on a quest for vengeance.

“Suspicious?” I lifted a brow.

“Fortunate.” Dad began to grin.

“Dad, doesn't this make you at all wary?”

“I get to kill a fairy.” He shrugged. “That it's a request of the Fey themselves is simply a bonus.”

“Maybe we should contact our council first.” I glanced at the picture that had been included with the warrant.

A willowy woman with huge mossy eyes and long hair the color of young pea pods smiled back at me. Her skin was a deep tawny umber and in combination with that hair, I knew her to be a dryad. So, she was probably a member of the Seelie Court. Not that it made any difference; Seelie or Unseelie, Light or Dark, all of the Fey were dangerous, and her sweet looks could be hiding the heart of a monster. Still—

“It says she murdered a sidhe male.” I held out my hand for the warrant, and he handed it back to me so I could read it again. “Dylan Thorn. Aren't the Thorns one of the stronger fairy families? The Unseelie King is a Thorn, isn't he?”

“Which is probably why they want this bitch extinguished.” Dad grinned. “She murdered a royal; they take that very seriously.”

“But *how* did a dryad kill a fairy royal?” I stared at the picture again. “Dryads are generally timid and their magic is low class compared to that of a sidhe, much less a royal sidhe.”

“You should know better than anyone that the amount of magic a person holds has nothing to do with their capability to commit murder.” My father was already pulling out his extinguisher gear from the little closet in the left wall.

He laid a mini crossbow on the desk and followed it up with a quiver of iron-tipped arrows and an iron knife. Guns were dangerous around fairies, even when filled with iron bullets. A lot of fairy magic was born of the elements and when fire is used in a

particular way—such as igniting all of the bullets in a gun at once—it could make a weapon explode; harming the wielder more than the intended victim.

Non-combustible iron weapons were the way to go with fairies. Something about the chemical composition of the metal reacted to their blood, and if they were actually struck with a piece of the stuff, it would burn their skin. If they were shot with an iron arrow or cut with an iron knife, the iron would poison their blood and without purification, they'd die. So, iron was the metal of choice for extinguisher weapons and when we used it in combination with our psychic abilities, we did pretty well against the Fey.

“Why aren't you getting ready?” Dad asked pointedly.

“So, we aren't calling the Human Council?” I tried one last time.

“Not necessary.” Dad strapped a specially made, flat quiver to his back with practiced movements and then layered his coat over the top as I tried to push my unease away.

It wasn't that I didn't want to kill the fairy. I would have no problem extinguishing any fairy I had a warrant for. The problem was; this warrant came from the Fey themselves and if our Human Council didn't approve of it, we shouldn't be executing. It could get us into a lot of trouble and, frankly, if this was just some high up fairy wanting someone else to do his dirty work, I'd rather not help him out.

My Dad began to hum an old Irish tune as we headed out the door. Yeah; getting in trouble with the Human Council hadn't been an issue with him for a long time.

Chapter Two

You'd think hunting fairies would be difficult. Beings with magic at their disposal and the ability to become invisible should be hard to track, but when you're an Extinguisher, you're trained to use their magic against them. All magic leaves traces of energy and when combined with the powerful aura of a fairy, the resulting glow flares up and around its host like the Northern Lights.

Still, you had to find the right sky to search in order to see those lights and tracking the murderess took most of the day. We finally found her hiding amid the crowds at Ala Moana; a massive, outdoor shopping mall on the outskirts of Waikiki. I thought it was a strange place for her to be hiding—she would have fared much better up in the mountains—but maybe she thought she'd be safer in a crowd.

“I'll circle around behind her,” my dad whispered to me. “You grab her, and we'll get her out of here so we can kill her without witnesses.”

“All right,” I agreed.

Even though most humans couldn't see fairies, when one was killed, they lost their magic; starting with their invisibility. That wouldn't be the issue with this particular fairy, though. She was completely visible; her oddly-colored hair tucked up into a baseball cap and her large eyes covered with a pair of celebrity sunglasses. That wasn't too surprising. Using invisibility magic ironically made a fairy even more visible to those of us with the sight. Magic was energy, and energy burned brightly to clairvoyants. So, if she wanted to hide from Extinguishers, using the least amount of magic was her best option. She hadn't seen me

yet, but I had no doubt that she would soon. Fairies could see Extinguishers almost as well as we saw them. All of those psychic gifts made our auras stronger than most humans.

She was sitting on the edge of a long, oval-shaped, cement planter set in the center of one of the open pathways between the shops. Plants rose up behind her and one of her hands was laid against the slim trunk of a palm tree. The Fey liked to be close to nature but that touch was a clear sign that she was scared, or at least nervous. Her slim body was hunched in on itself—as if she were pulling away from the humans sitting around her—and her lips were pressed into a thin line. A baby cried, and she flinched.

It made sense that she would be scared but, usually, a murderer has some kind of plan. They don't just sit in the middle of a group of humans and touch plants. Was she waiting for someone? Maybe she had an accomplice. This could be a lot more complicated than we'd thought. My steps slowed as I searched the area for signs of another fairy but there weren't any to be found.

I was about five feet away when her head lifted, and she looked unerringly in my direction. Her hand released the plant with a blur of movement, and she stood; looking as if she didn't know which direction to run in. I tensed for the chase as her gaze flitted over her shoulder to where I knew my father was coming up behind her. Then she took a deep breath and started walking calmly in my direction.

I was so startled that I froze for a second and a Japanese tourist bumped into me from behind. It jolted me back into action. I pulled the fairy handcuffs from my pocket and opened them with an ease won from repetition. They were iron but lined in silicone so they wouldn't burn her, just prevent her from using her magic. When I reached her, she gave me a nod and held her hands out submissively. I put the cuffs on her with complete bafflement.

“Aideen Evergreen, I have a warrant of execution for you from the Fairy Council.” I took her arm and started walking her

through the crowds. She was taller than me, as most fairies are, probably around six feet. I was five-five and although I was leanly muscled from all the training I did, I'd inherited my mother's curves and next to Aideen's willowy, fragile form, I must have looked like an Oompa Loompa.

“Asylum,” she whispered, and I jerked to a halt.

“What did you say?” My eyes slid over to her with a slow slide of incredulity.

“I ask for asylum with the Human Council,” she stated more firmly. “I have information that could lead to the destruction of the entire human race.”

“What?!” I turned to the side so I was facing her. The flow of foot traffic split around us with irritated murmurs. “Did you just say—?”

“I'm talking about the extermination of your race, Extinguisher,” she hissed. “Now, get me to your Council.”

“Yes, Ma'am.” I swallowed past the sudden lump in my throat and started ushering her more quickly through the shoppers; using a combination of telepathy and telekinesis to nudge them out of our way.

Possible extermination of the human race called for excessive measures.

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