

The Brightest Fell

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New York Times-bestselling October Daye faerie series ☐ Hugo Award-winning author Seanan McGuire ☐ "Top of my urban-paranormal series list!" -Felicia Day

Contains an original bonus novella, Of Things Unknown!

Things are slow, and October "Toby" Daye couldn't be happier about that. The elf-shot cure has been approved, Arden Windermere is settling into her position as Queen in the Mists, and Toby doesn't have anything demanding her attention except for wedding planning and spending time with her family.

Maybe she should have realized that it was too good to last.

When Toby's mother, Amandine, appears on her doorstep with a demand for help, refusing her seems like the right thing to do...until Amandine starts taking hostages, and everything changes. Now Toby doesn't have a choice about whether or not she does as her mother asks. Not with Jazz and Tybalt's lives hanging in the balance. But who could possibly help her find a pureblood she's never met, one who's been missing for over a hundred years?

Enter Simon Torquill, elf-shot enemy turned awakened, uneasy ally. Together, the two of them must try to solve one of the greatest mysteries in the Mists: what happened to Amandine's oldest daughter, August, who disappeared in 1906.

This is one missing person case Toby can't afford to get wrong. Seanan McGuire lives and works in Washington State, where she shares her somewhat idiosyncratic home with her collection of books, creepy dolls, and enormous blue cats. When not writing--which is fairly rare--she enjoys travel, and can regularly be found any place where there are cornfields, haunted houses, or frogs. A Campbell, Hugo, and Nebula Award-winning author, Seanan's first book (Rosemary and Rue, the beginning of the October Daye series) was released in 2009, with more than twenty books across various series following since. Seanan doesn't sleep much.

You can visit her at www.seananmcguire.com.One

October 9th, 2013

Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell.
-William Shakespeare, Macbeth.

THE FETCH IS ONE of the most feared and least understood figures in Faerie. Their appearance heralds the approach of ines☐ capable death: once the Fetch shows up, there's nothing that can be done. The mechanism that summons them has never been found, and they've always been rare, with only five conclusively identified in the last century. They appear for the supposedly sig☐ nificant-kings and queens, heroes and villains-and they wear the faces of the people they have come to escort into whatever awaits the fae beyond the borders of death. They are temporary, transitory, and terrifying.

My Fetch, who voluntarily goes by "May Daye," because nothing says "I am a serious and terrible death omen" like having a pun for a name, showed up more than three years ago. She was supposed to foretell my impending doom. Instead, all she managed to foretell was me getting a new roommate. Life can be funny that way.

At the moment, doom might have been a nice change. May was standing on the stage of The Mint, San Francisco's finest karaoke bar, enthusiastically bellowing her way through an off-key rendition of Melissa Etheridge's "Come to My Window." Her live-in girlfriend, Jazz, was sitting at one of the tables closest to the stage, chin propped in her hands, gazing at May with love and adoration all out of proportion to the quality of my Fetch's singing.

May has the face I wore when she appeared. We don't look much alike anymore, but when she first showed up at my apartment door to tell me I was going to die, we were identical. She has my memories up to the point of her creation: years upon years of parental issues, crushing insecurity, abandonment, and criminal activities. And right now, none of that mattered half as much as the fact that she also had my absolute inability to carry a tune.

"Why are we having my bachelorette party at a karaoke bar again?" I asked, speaking around the mouth of the beer bottle I was trying to keep constantly against my lips. If I was drinking, I wasn't singing. If I wasn't singing, all these people might still be my friends in the morning.

Of course, with as much as most of them had already had to drink, they probably wouldn't notice if I did sing. Or if I decided to sneak out of the bar, go home, change into my sweatpants, and watch old movies on the couch until I passed out. Which would have been my preference for how my bachelorette party was going to go, if I absolutely had to have one. I didn't think they were required. May had disagreed with me. Vehemently. And okay, that had sort of been expected.

What I hadn't expected was for most of my traitorous, backstabbing friends to take her side. Stacy—one of my closest friends since childhood—had actually laughed in my face when I demanded to know why she was doing this to me.

"Being your friend is like trying to get up close and personal with a natural disaster," she'd said. "Sure, we have some good times, but we spend half of them covered in blood. We just want to spend an evening making you as uncomfortable as you keep making the rest of us."

Not to be outdone, her eldest daughter, Cassandra, had blithely added, "Besides, we don't think even you can turn a karaoke party into a bloodbath."

All of my friends are evil.

As my Fetch and hence the closest thing I had to a sister, May had declared herself to be in charge of the whole affair. That was how we'd wound up reserving most of the tables at

The Mint for an all-night celebration of the fact that I was getting married. Even though we didn't have a date, a plan, or a seating chart, we were having a bachelorette party. Lucky, lucky me.

My name is October Daye. I am a changeling; I am a knight; I am a hero of the realm; and if I never have to hear Stacy sing Journey songs again, it will be too soon.

Danny, who was looming beside me at the bar, nudged me with his shoulder. "It ain't so bad," he rumbled, in a voice deep enough to sound like it had bubbled up from the bowels of the earth. It was in proportion to the rest of him: he's a Bridge Troll. When not wearing an illusion to make himself look human, he's more than seven feet tall, with skin like granite and hands that can punch through walls. Take the rest of him into account, and his voice is kind of dainty.

At the moment, he looked like any other wall of a mortal man, wearing a brightly colored Hawaiian shirt that somehow wasn't any more garish than the decor. His hand dwarfed the cocktail glass he was holding. Its contents were an impressively virulent shade of pink.

"They're going to make me sing," I said.

"Probably," he agreed, taking another sip of his cocktail. "But you know what?"

"What?"

"We've been here for three hours and you ain't had to bleed on nothin'." His grin was broad enough to show his back molars. "If we can make it another hour, you and I set a new personal best, and Quentin owes me twenty dollars."

I lowered my beer bottle in order to gape at him. "You're betting on me?"

"Oh, please. As if you didn't know that going in."

"I suspected, but I didn't think any of you would be stupid enough to admit it to my face."

Danny kept grinning, unrepentant to the last.

We weren't the only people in The Mint. Aside from the bar staff—mortals all, although given where they worked, they probably saw weirder groups than ours on a regular basis—and the karaoke DJ, there were about twenty regulars who had yet to give up and surrender their places in the karaoke rotation. May had planned the party for a Tuesday night because of the bar's popularity: if it had been a Saturday, those twenty regulars would have been fifty or more, and it would have been a lot harder to get to the bar for a beer.

I needed my beer. I needed a lot of beer. Thanks to my specific flavor of fae heritage, I heal at an incredible rate. Sadly, that means I can't get drunk without really putting in an effort, and even if I manage it, I can't stay that way; my hyper-efficient liver sobers me right

up. By drinking almost constantly, I could stay mellow enough not to flee screaming into the night. If I stopped, sobriety would reassert itself, along with the true horror of my situation.

All things considered, I might have been happier getting covered in blood, the betting pool be damned.

May finished her song to scattered applause, some of it more sincere than the rest, and hopped off the stage to sweep Jazz into her arms and kiss her deeply. That got more applause from the regulars, who clearly appreciated a good floor show. I took another swig of beer.

"Next up, we have . . ." The DJ squinted at the slip of paper in his hand. "Diana, come on down."

I choked on my beer.

"No," I said, refusing the evidence of my own eyes as Dianda Lorden got up and took the microphone, to general cheers from the people at her table. She was wearing a short blue-and-green-sequined dress that showed off the legs she normally doesn't have. It was weird. I didn't like it. "How does she even know what karaoke is? I call shenanigans."

Danny smirked.

Dianda is several things. Cheerfully violent. The Duchess of Saltmist. A frequent ally of mine. And, oh right, a mermaid-specifically, a Merrow-which means she lives under the Pacific Ocean and doesn't have that many opportunities for exposure to human culture. I'd been surprised when she'd shown up at all. I certainly hadn't been expecting her to sing.

I definitely hadn't been expecting her to sing Phil Collins.

"I really don't know how to deal with this," I said, staring at the stage.

Danny plucked the empty beer bottle from my hand and replaced it with a fresh one. One nice thing about being the bachelorette: even if I was being forced to watch essentially everyone I knew play pop star while wearing illusions designed to make them look human, at least someone else was picking up my tab. I could drink until I forgot why I needed to keep drinking, let myself sober up, then do it all over again.

"So don't deal with it," he said. "She's pretty good. Have another beer."

"All my friends are awful and I hate you," I said, handing the beer back to him as I slid off my stool. "Save my place. I need to pee before I do any more drinking."

"You got it," he said, and settled in to loom menacingly over my stool. The few people who'd been looking at it thoughtfully backed off, recognizing a lost cause when they saw one.

The Mint is designed to prioritize karaoke over alcohol, with the bar dividing the entryway-

which served as a space for the serious drinkers to do their serious drinking-from the stage and performance space. The entryway side is narrow to the point of being a claustrophobic panic waiting to happen, and naturally, that's where the bathrooms are, since that makes a poorly-timed flush less likely to disrupt someone's Sondheim medley. I pushed through the crowd toward the back of the bar, feeling my buzz dwindle with every step I took.

Sometimes it's nice to have a Timex watch for a body-I can take a licking and keep on ticking. But when I can't stay drunk for more than ten minutes, or get enough of a jolt from a cup of coffee to actually wake myself up, it sort of sucks. It would be nice to be impossible to kill and capable of reaping the benefits of caffeine, but alas, we can't have everything in this world.

There was a short line for the two unisex bathrooms. I took advantage of the opportunity to check my phone. It was barely past midnight. We'd been here for three hours, and May had stated, several times, that she intended to close the place out.

Swell.

Dianda hit a high note; someone whooped. It was probably her son, Dean, who was refreshingly not embarrassed by everything his mother did. They have a remarkably solid relationship, one that has only been strengthened by him moving out to take over the County of Goldengreen. His father, Patrick, is Daoine Sidhe, and Dean takes after his father's side of the family, which means he can't breathe water. Dianda clearly misses him, and every time I see her, she's just as clearly relieved not to have to spend her time worrying about whether he's going to drown.

Faerie makes families complicated. Mermaids have sons who can't breathe water. High Kings and Queens send their children into hiding to keep them from being assassinated before they reach their majority. Fetches become sisters.

People like me, who mix their fae blood with human ancestry, wind up standing on the outside looking in, wondering what it's like to have two parents who know and accept them for who- and what-they are. My father died a long time ago, and he died believing that my mother and I had been killed in a house fire. My mother . . .

Well, it's complicated.

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