

## You May Call Me...

*June, 2010*

“They can tell no lies but do not trust a word they say. They are beautiful and terrible, shaped like man but steeped in Mother Nature’s golden tea. Long ago we all forgot, but I swear I won’t, no, not me. Out of fear, or maybe hope, in fae I still believe.” Mom’s voice drifted off as she brushed the hair from my face. “Now go to sleep. Your brother doesn’t want to hear me read that again.”

My tiny, older brother piped up, “Crow knows how to read. If they want their stupid story every night they can read to themselves.” He was never fond of story time. He never saw it as a cherished childhood experience. We were different like that. He was in a hurry to grow up, while I stayed perpetually old for my age and much too childish. Change was where he thrived, but I clung to rules and routines like my life depended on it.

### ***Rules***

***-Never go out alone at night.***

***-Don’t try to use the microwave and dishwasher at the same time (you’ll trip the breaker).***

***-Don't talk to strangers (exceptions in restaurants, school, museums, and libraries).***

***-Avoid the creek.***

***-Always ask for pronouns. You really never know.***

***-Don’t bind for more than ten hours. Take breaks on weekends.***

***-Don’t use names.***

***-If you see a cat, pet the cat. It's not their fault you're allergic. Take allergy medicine and shower.***

***-The dog's blanket is pink. Don't mess with it.***

***-People lie.***

*August, 2025*

“We shouldn't be here.”

“Don't be silly, no one's watching.”

“Squishy...” I warned.

“C'mon, Crow! We never do anything fun! You're leaving in a week.” She fixed me with that pouty face I'm sure induces some kind of mind-control. “Don't you want one last adventure with your baby sister before you go off to college and I'm all alone?”

“But we're breaking the rules.”

“And you're an adult. Make new rules! Besides, Stinky took me here, it's fine.”

I looked at her and my resolve softened. I wasn't always a very fun older sibling, but Squishy had me wrapped around her finger since the day she was born. We were growing up. Well, our brother and I were grown, him just finished college and me about to start. I thought about the picture beside my bed, the three of us at Stinky's graduation. To no one's surprise Squishy already towered over our tiny brother. Stinky's hair was bright green and he was paler than usual from staying inside for finals. A few weeks later, he came home, tanned from the beach and immediately dyed his hair purple. Squishy called him a grape and we helped her use the leftover dye to color her own pixie-cut. Mom was less than pleased with the purple stains we

got on our t-shirts. If this was my last chance for teen antics with my little giant, I thought I could maybe break a few rules. That was before I saw the creek.

“Whoa,” she wasn’t wrong. It was objectively whoa. “Didn’t do that last time.” The creek was usually about five feet across and two feet deep, and most of the time it was still. Tonight was not most nights. She stepped closer.

“Don’t go in there!”

“It’s fine.”

“Bioluminescent algae is full of deadly toxins.” I had looked it up when she wanted a glow-in-the-dark fish tank.

“Ok, Britannica.”

“I’m serious!”

“It doesn’t look like algae.” She was right of course. There was nothing in the water. The water itself was just...glowing.

“It could be radioactive!”

“Live a little.”

“Die painfully!”

She ignored my warnings and waded into the water. It came up to her neck. Shit.

“Squishy, something’s wrong!” She didn’t turn around. “Squishy!”

A large glowing horse erupted out of the creek. “No!” I tried to dash for my sister, but I was repelled by an invisible wall. Squishy climbed onto the horse’s back, and I felt the tears start streaming down my face as I watched helplessly. Squishy and the horse dematerialized in a flash of blue-green light.

“No!” I tried again.

“You’ll never get across.” I turned to face a stranger in the trees.

“Why not?” I hissed. And at this point, what’s another broken rule?

“Are you cursed?” the stranger asked.

“Not to my knowledge, but then again a kelpie just killed my sister.”

“Your pet isn’t dead.”

“She’s not a pet!”

“Well she’s certainly not your flesh.” The stranger came closer until I could see their violet eyes. “A feeble glamour may fool humans but you needn’t waste parlour tricks on your own.”

“Who are you?”

“You may call me Amethyst.”

“You’re fae.” The words left my mouth but I hardly felt them. It was unreal. I used to dream I was a fae. I had hundreds of drawings and DND character sheets imagining what I’d look like.

“As are you.”

“I can’t be.”

“Why? Is your pendant iron?” I’d forgotten I was wearing my stimmy necklace.

“No, it’s rubber. I chew on it.”

“It’s a food source?”

“No. I’m autistic. I like to chew on things. It’s so I don’t chew on myself or something sharp or damage my teeth.” I’d had to explain this to enough ignorant humans that my response

was a reflex. I also had a forced laugh prepared for when they inevitably compared me to a dog or made some strange suggestion based on a FaceBook post they saw last week. There's nothing more annoying than a social media scientist pretending they're an autism expert even though they still believe that vaccines and cell phones cause autism.

“Well if you dropped your disguise, your teeth would certainly benefit.” Amethyst's response was at least original.

“What disguise?”

“The...” Amethyst's face wrinkled almost as if they'd smelled something gross, “Human.”

“I can't!” I wondered why they were so insistent I wasn't human.

“How do you tell these lies? Show me your face!”

“This is my face!”

“Oh.” The fae's expression softened in pity. “You don't know.” They stepped back and flames engulfed me, searing me from inside out. I wondered briefly why I wasn't in unimaginable pain, or why my nerves hadn't burned off to the point I couldn't feel anything. But that wasn't even in the top ten weirdest things happening. When the smoke cleared, Amethyst stood in front of me holding a mirror. “Condolences.”

The creature in the mirror, the me-not-me, blinked. At least it still had two eyes. My glasses and clothes, my high school marching band shirt and loose green flannel, seemed untouched. But behind thick black frames, instead of light brown my irises were a deep scarlet, my teeth were razor sharp, and my skin was a little green. My chest was completely flat though. One silver lining. Oh, and my hair was still on fire, or was fire.

The fae stared at me. "I've never met a changeling before."

"Well, I've never been a changeling before."

Abruptly, the fae remarked, "Your world has shattered. The child's lost, and your form has changed." Again with the cold indifference towards human suffering. What was I getting dragged into?

I took a breath and managed a reply. "You could say that."

"What are you called?"

"Crow." I considered the relevance of adding and asking for pronouns, but since it was my sister who was stolen, I figured social norms of mythical beings were less important than my comfort. "I use they/them. What about you?"

"She/her, thanks for asking." She had certainly looked feminine. By human standards Amethyst was impossibly pretty with oak brown skin and very curly, very soft looking, indigo hair. She wore a dark blue cloak and an iris eighteenth-century dress. On her head was a silver circlet with flowers made from, wouldn't you know it, amethysts.

"You said my sister wasn't dead," I asked, a little guilty that I'd allowed myself to be distracted from what should've been my first concern. Squishy was a pretty strong swimmer but I doubted her ability to fight an ancient water spirit whose sole purpose was to drown people.

"Yes, she's still alive."

"Where is she then?" I asked. If she was still out there, I had to find her.

"I'd wager the kelpie went to the Gulf. Though I couldn't tell you why."

"Take me there."

"We'll never make it on foot."

“We’ll take the truck.” The truck was old enough to be impractical but not old enough for car shows and high prices. I’d decided it was perfect the moment I saw the peeling rust red paint and stick shift. I was familiar enough with a toolbox to make it work anyway. “Are we talking the Gulf like Houston or further South, ‘cause I don’t got a passport.”

“East to the port of the paranormal.”

“New Orleans? There’s no way we can get there without crossing the Mississippi. We might be able to circumvent the Red River but...” I’d been to Oklahoma. I went to OSU homecoming with my mom last year. You can’t get from Denton to Oklahoma without crossing the Red River. “Hang on, I’ve crossed the river before. Fae can’t cross running water. I did. How?”

“Perhaps a blessing from a more powerful ally? There must be a reason the kelpie chose you.”

“It didn’t choose me! It kidnaped my sister!”

“I’ve never seen one come for unconnected humans in this area, and it wasn’t after me. So what’s special about you?” Amethyst said as if this were a natural conclusion. I was pretty sure the world was ending if I couldn’t find my coffee cup. There’s no way I could handle actual universal forces conspiring against me.

“Nothing! Nothing’s special about me!” But then, as if my night wasn’t overwhelming enough, I grew wings. And, because the universe loves trolling me, they were crow wings.

“*Catha, Badb*. It’s not after you. It’s after your patron.”

“Badb Catha, like goddess of war, insanity, and banshees?” There was no way. Except, I suppose there was with the night I’d had. My brother used to say I was a banshee, though that was probably because of my atrocious singing and not some mythological implication.

“I’d heard rumors of a changeling being under her protection and raised by a daughter of Cailleach, but I never believed it of any consequence,” said Amethyst. Cailleach was essentially Celtic mother earth and patron of witchcraft. Being raised by a daughter of Cailleach could only mean one thing.

“My mother’s a witch.” You think you know a person.

“Well, this *is* interesting!” Amethyst clapped her hands.

“Why are you helping me? I don’t have anything for you.” I’d read every folktale and modern fantasy with so much as a mention of fae, yet I’d never heard of one acting with purely selfless intent.

“The Queen requires me to have all information possible on local spirits.” The fae’s answer was cryptic as ever. That much was expected, albeit unhelpful. Still I figured I needed all the help I could get. If the faerie queene tried to kill me, I could deal with it later.

“Alright,” I said as I started back towards home. “C’mon, Mother dearest has some explaining to do.”