

to be a Fae Legend
by Tricia Copeland

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The Royal Families of Middle Earth

Aubren



King Oberon m. Queen Grace of Bedham
Queen Titania
Prince Thornton
Prince Garrison
Prince Bryce
Prince Rigel

Hilbron

King Luther m. Queen Raven
Prince Adrian m. Princess Brittany
Prince Holden m. Princess Lily of Lindleton
Prince Brandon
Prince Lowell



Bedham



King Herman m. Queen Natasha
Prince Akani
Prince Leith
Prince Ryja
Princess Alyah
Prince Jakub m. Princess Annabelle
Princess Cassia m. Prince Levi
Princess Gatuika
Princess Makani
Princess Isla

Willhelm

King Ivan
Prince Abram m. Princess Mina of Chastam
Princess Beatrice m. Prince Rolan
Prince Maxim
Princess Nika
Princess Marta
Prince Kirill



Lindleton

King Gabriel m. Queen Isabel
Prince Arimas m. Princess Greta
Prince Mikel
Princess Rose



Rotuga

King Nohan m. Queen Petra
Prince Alman
Prince Maleek
Princess Shea
Princess Lea



Chastam

King Ying Shen
Prince Minyu
Princess Ita
Princess Dea
Prince Han



Borean



King Joseph
Prince James m. Princess Wendy
Princess Marta
Princess Sara
Prince Maxwell
Princess Rebecca
Princess Kate

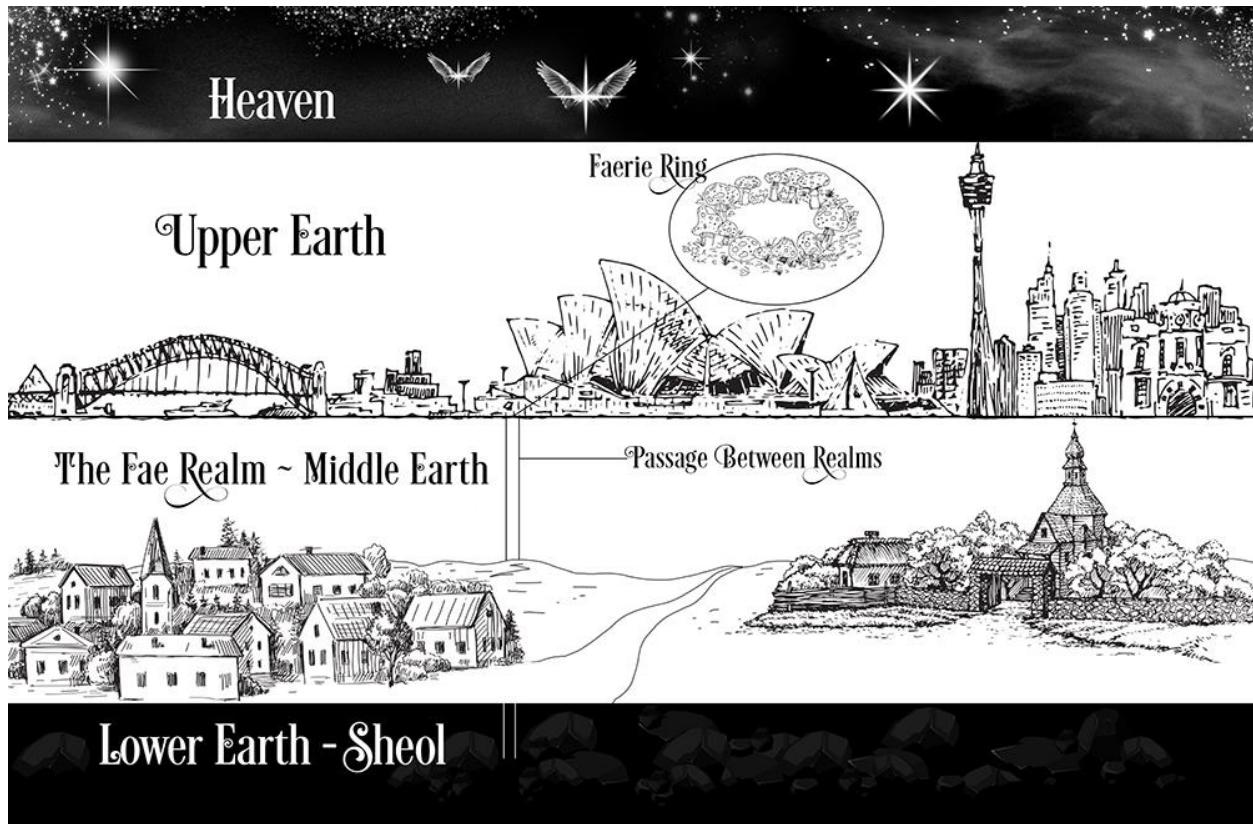
Elita

King Philipe m. Queen Maria
Prince Joseph
Princess Liza
Princess Maria
Prince Mario









Chapter

1



HOLDEN. MARRYING SOMEONE THAT is not me. I lean over the rock cliff, imagining plunging into the thrashing water, letting my lungs fill, and sinking into darkness. At least that pain would be temporary. My real anguish may be the scar left on my heart.

“I cannot believe we are here.” Isla spreads her arms and jumps into the air.

Focusing on my cousin, I watch the wind catch her dress as she rises above the rocky bluff. I marvel at the turquoise ocean and the blue sky beyond, the colors so bright my mind struggles to process them.

Her iridescent wings shimmer with reflection of the light.

“Thank you for bringing us with you.” Makani slides her hand in mine.

“Of course, cousin. Who else would I bring?”

Gatuika leans in. “You could have invited Foster. I know he would love to be here with you.”

“Yes, where is Foster, cousin?” Quinn joins us. “I would think you would want your most trusted spy here. I know he would want to see you are safe.”

Gathering my skirt, I stoop to pick up a rock. “He wouldn’t be a very good spy if you knew where he was, now would he?”

I gaze at the water, watching the whitecaps bobble atop the waves. Lifting my chin, I revel in the warmth of the light. I imagine what the island lying beyond the horizon looks like today, drenched in light from the sun, the grounds of the castle afire with autumn blooms and bright-blue waves crashing on the rocks below. *So different from that turbulent day not six months ago when we helped the witches of the trinity defeat Sonia.* It feels as if I am in a dream. I should amend my dream, because if I were to create a story for myself it would not be one where I was attending the wedding of my former love to another—even if the event does take place in one of most beautiful places in Middle Earth.

“What are you thinking, daughter?” Father’s voice brings me from my thoughts.

“How bright and beautiful it is here.”

“I would say our kingdom rivals this beauty.”

“Yes, it does.” I smile at him, happy that we could be here together.

Glancing back to the blanket where Mother sits, stoic as always, my chest tightens. It would be a perfect day, nay, I would say an almost perfect *life*, even given our challenges of the past year and my lingering worries, if only I could converse with her, feel her love once again.

Father clears his throat. “You should have accepted quarters at the castle with the other royal families. It would give you more opportunity to get to know them better.”

“I like it here by the sea. It helps clear my head.”

“And keeps you as far from Holden as possible.”

“Yes, that too.” I steel my jaw, wondering why he must say the name aloud.

“You need to be thinking about a marriage alliance. Borean and Lindleton are the most populous kingdoms, and both have princes your age.”

Releasing a long breath, I spin to face him. “Father, we just arrived yesterday, and the first reception is tonight. You are aware I know all of this. Please, give me a moment to breathe, to enjoy this amazing view. This is to be my respite from responsibility, save for the ceremonies and parties. I spent the festival season wooing all the royal families, convincing them I am not the crazy, erratic, rebellious, flighty young queen who acts on a whim. I shored up our kingdom’s resources for the winter season, ensuring all had enough after the locusts threatened our harvest. I have met, and will continue to converse with, potential alliances, as you call them.”

“Alliances secure power. I feel it in my bones. Evil is coming, and we need a bigger army.”

I wrap my hand around his. “I know this better than anyone. Will you give me a week before you remind me of this again?”

Leaning in, he kisses my forehead. “I gave you the festival season already, but I have said my peace. This, I will do for you.”

“Thank you, Father.” I kiss his cheek and watch him hobble up the path to Mother.

Makani alights beside me. The light catches the golden strands of her hair and light-white, almost silver, wings, bathing her in a shimmering bubble. Her hair is the darkest of the three sisters, and the more subdued coloring matches her quiet, introspective temperament. In two years, she will enter the princess life of matchmaking parties and courting. While her older sister has embraced that role whole heartedly, I presume it may be more challenging for Makani. The brighter light afforded by the proximity to the equator makes her coloring seem a shade lighter, and perhaps her mood is elevated as well. I wonder if we look so odd standing together, me with my auburn hair and green wings, skin a shade darker than theirs.

She wraps an arm around me and squeezes my shoulder. “I cannot believe we have five days in this beautiful place.”

“Yes.” I take her hand. “And after the wedding, we shall see the whole peninsula. Perhaps even fly to see the Northern Lights one evening.”

“Are you worried about seeing Holden?”

My mind pings at the second mention of his name. Part of me would love to forget he ever existed, but he taught me much about what I would want in a mate—someone my equal that challenges me yet supports my zeal.

“A little, but I am choosing to believe the goddesses will help bring me happiness again. They already delivered you and your sisters.”

“And we are most happy to be with you.” Dropping my hand, she links her arm in mine. “So, you will think about a match? Gatuika said you would probably be engaged by spring. That any prince in all the realm would want to marry you. You could be celebrating *your* wedding weekend a year from now.”

“Your older sister has an optimism I am not sure I share.” Sliding my arm from hers, I take her hands. “I made much progress but am still in an odd position. I believed all my life that Father would be choosing a match for me, but now that it’s my job to do for myself, it feels a difficult task.”

She squeezes my fingers. “The goddesses will guide you. I am sure of it.”

“Wise words.” I cup my hand to her cheek, wondering at how perceptive her heart is. Of course, perhaps she caught my words with Father. She has been known to use her powers over the air to her advantage.

Motion catches my eye, and I turn to see Quinn approaching. With a kiss to Makani’s cheek, I ask her to excuse me for a word with him.

He dips his head to Makani as they pass. “You have chosen a most beautiful retreat. Thank you for inviting me. The light here is amazing, and the colors—the blue of the water, the green of the foliage, and the white-rock cliffs—they are almost overwhelming to the eye.”

“I wanted this to be a family holiday with all those I hold dear.”

“So, you have forgiven me for marrying Abeetha?”

“You know I have.” I smooth my skirt.

“But not enough to welcome her into your family.”

Spinning to face him, I hold his gaze. “Her father and brother tried to take my throne. I can only extend my kindness so far.”

“And what of the procession today? Will I be included?”

“No. I hope you are not too offended. You chose your path.”

“It seems I am not completely forgiven. What of your cousins?” His eyes cut to the picnic blanket where Isla, my youngest cousin, fits a flower in Mother’s hair.

I lift my chin. “Yes.”

“Are you sure that is best? They are of your mother’s line, not your father’s.”

“What am I to do, march with only my aging father and stoic mother? My brothers are gone. I do not believe my heart could bear seeing the large, happy families and thinking of all I have lost.”

“Do you mean to present Gatuika as Heir Presumptive when she is of age? Because that is what will be assumed if you include them in the procession.”

Rolling my eyes, I shake my head. “You are as bad as Father. All he wants to talk about is my marriage and you my successor. You do remember this is to be a holiday, do you not?”

“The two could be the same. See? I have already helped. I have cut your worries in half.”

“Yes, let us just put all the names in a bowl and draw one out for me to marry. Then I shall have no problems at all. I am sure whoever it is will be most suitable to be my successor should I meet an early end, as he would be a male fae. And of course, we would be perfectly matched and in love forever, bear perfect sons and daughters and be the happiest people in all of Middle Earth.” I plant my fists on my hips.

Stepping towards me, he tugs one of my hands from its post. “I did not mean to anger you. I worry for you and your kingdom, you know that, cousin. I consider Aubren my home. I was born there, and it will always be in my blood.”

I lift my chin. “And as the closest relative on Father’s side, you have the greatest claim to the throne.”

“I do not crave power. If I did, I would have married you. I wish only to see Aubren prosperous. If we lost you without a suitable heir, there would be a vacuum, a struggle for power, and the kingdom would fall into disarray.”

Wriggling my hand from his grip, I clutch my skirt and force a smile. “I know all this, but I am in no imminent danger, and Father is healthy. We should retire to dress for the reception.”

I skip towards the picnic blanket, attempting to reset my darkened mood. “I believe it is time to get ready for the party.”

Isla bounces up. “Yes, you should look so beautiful that Holden will hate himself.”

Wagging my finger, I shake my head. “You know it is not Holden’s fault. And please, there will be no further admonishing of him, even privately.”

Isla hooks her arm in mine. “Sorry, cousin. It just makes me so mad. It is so unfair. I will never fall in love or marry.”

“I hope that you will find your true happiness. That is my wish for you.”

“What of Foster? He asked you to marry him twice.”

I wriggle my arm from her grip and place a finger over my lips. “That is secret information. And Foster does not have an army, now does he?”

Lifting my skirt, I stride ahead to Mother. I sit on the quilt and take her hand. Reaching for Alfreda’s as well, I smile. Her countenance, dark hair, and skin to match mine, eases my burdens upon sight. I do not know what I would do without her. She has known me since birth and fills the chasm vacated by my altered mother. “It is so good to have both of you here. A proper holiday for all of us.”

“It is long overdue, I say. And the perfect way to celebrate a successful first year of reign.” Alfreda squeezes my fingers.

“Oh, for the goddesses, Alfreda. Do not utter such and curse us further. We have several months before that anniversary. Let us focus on the present. We should dress for the party tonight.”

I lift Mother’s hand as I stand. She grips my palm and follows my lead. Gathering the basket and blanket, we wind up the hillside, following the switchback path to the top of the ridge. With the steep terrain, my brow beads with sweat, and I stop to gaze down the mountainside. I smile at the sight of Gatuika and Makani walking with Quinn and Father and Isla still flitting about the meadow, picking flowers. Even with Father’s and Quinn’s worries swirling in my head, I am happy to be with my family. I vow to leave these issues for another day and focus on enjoying the company around me.

Resuming our climb, we reach the summit. Before us sits a stone villa, and we climb the steps to a veranda and pass inside to a great room. A narrow hall leads to the bedrooms, and Alfreda escorts Mother to hers, her light hair whisking in the cross breeze.

I pad to my room, noting the feel of the warm stone on my feet, so different than the cool rock of our castle. Sweat hangs on my skin and, grabbing an urn, I traipse outside to the well. I know we will all want baths and decide the bucket to be the best for getting water inside. At least we do not need to wait for it to heat with the warm climate. The girls join me in the task, and within an hour, we stand wrapped in towels, chest lid open, surveying our dress choices.

“This is the prettiest one. You should wear it to the wedding.” Isla lifts a light green gown, bodice covered with clear jewels and skirt topped with layers of sheer fabric.

“I think it is too close to white. I would wear it tonight and the emerald to the wedding tomorrow.” Gatuika spreads the gossamer skirt.

“Then it is decided.” I pack the dark green gown back in the bureau.

We are dressed and curling our hair before Alfreda flits in, apologizing for shirking her duties. I reiterate what I have told her many times today. We are *all* on holiday and can attend to our own needs.

“Goddesses be! It is the first day, and I am already coming unraveled. I do not know what to do with myself.”

Standing, I take her hands. “Alfreda, you will have the villa to yourself tonight. Have some wine,

enjoy the sunset, read a book, whatever you desire.”

“You want me to lounge about, eat when I please, sleep when I please, walk or read, or do nothing if I please?”

I squeeze her fingers and nod. “Exactly.”

“I have been in your family’s service for fifteen years and have not been away from your castle for a single day since...” Her large eyes hold mine.

Since my brothers died four years minus one day ago. My stomach turns. *How much more emotional turmoil could pile onto one day?* I will not think of this. To honor my brothers, make them proud of the ruler I have become, is the best way of commemorating their fae lives.

I hug her to me. “You know I love you as if you were our own. Nicholas and Timothy can keep you company. You may play games, perhaps some music, and dance till you can no longer stand.”

Patting my shoulders, she releases me. “Your mother is ready. Are you sure you should take her?”

“She fared well the last festival ball we hosted. I think she will be okay.”

“I hate that the wedding falls on the anniversary.”

“We will not worry about tomorrow yet.” Gripping her shoulders, I spin her away from me. “Now, go take a bath, or a nap, or something relaxing.”

Watching her retreating form, I exhale. I will not think about tomorrow.

“I can finish your hair. Sit.” Gatuika slides a stool from under a dressing table.

Isla hops to the dresser top and slides her bottom to the back. “What is special about tomorrow?”

“Isla.” Makani glares at her sister.

“What? What am I missing?”

“It is okay.” I squeeze Makani’s hand. “Tomorrow is the anniversary of when we lost my brothers.”

Isla flings her arms around me. “Oh, I am so sorry. I did not mean... How did you lose them?”

Tears pool in my eyes. “That story is for another day, perhaps. I am grateful the goddesses gifted me use of my powers that day. I killed the kobold, who bested my youngest brother, Rigel, with my magic. You were only nine, too young to know of such things.”

Stepping out of our embrace, Isla runs her hands down my arms and grips my fingers.

“Well, if she had read the history books the tutors gave her, then maybe she would have known.”

Gatuika taps Isla’s arm with the back of the brush.

Isla retracts her arm. “Oww. I am sorry. History seems so boring. I fall asleep every time I start reading it.”

“School starts once we are back from holiday. Perhaps a break will help you focus.” Staring at my reflection, I smile at Gatuika. “You are a magician with hair.”

“Thank you, cousin.” She kisses my cheek.

We switch seats, and Makani weaves Gatuika's hair into a braid and winds it atop her head while I work on Isla's. Finishing, my cousins slide on their slippers and I my boots, complete with a blade in one. Confirming all our outfits are complete, we meet Mother, Father, Quinn, and two guards in the front room.

It is a short carriage ride to the castle, and as we stop in the courtyard, I eye the structure. Large and white, it looms over us like the side of a mountain. White marble steps lead to a wide portico and tall, round columns flank the entrance. I imagine Julius Caesar himself lounging on a chaise eating grapes. Exiting the buggy, I take in the view of the hillside and sea below. The sun hovers just above the horizon, and light ripples off the waves in a band, almost as if a carpet had been laid out atop the water. I imagine living here would not be so bad if the Lindletons were not so pretentious.

Remembering my role, I focus on the line of fae gathered. We climb the steps, me in front; Mother and Father; then Gatuika, Makani, and Isla in the third row, to take our places as first kingdom in the procession, as is customary. Passing those from the kingdoms of Borean, Elita, Rotuga, Willhelm, Chastam, and Bedham, I dip my chin and smile at those that offer greetings. My stomach turns as I think I should have included Quinn in our party. It would be nice to stand beside someone rather than all alone. *But what message would that send?* No, I made the right decision.

You should be proud. Your kingdom is secure and prospering under your rule. You have thwarted not just one, but two invading enemies in less than a year. I raise my chin as we reach the herald bearing the green flag of Aubren. My skin tingles as I behold the billowing fabric. Me, the girl who could barely leave her room without having an anxiety attack two years ago, holds the most honored position in the realm.

As the coronet sounds and the stained-glass doors begin to open, my stomach twists anew. *What will it be like to see him again?* Much kept me distracted the last months. I raise my chin. *All happens for a reason, so trust in the goddesses,* I affirm. Taking a deep breath, I lift my foot and take the first step. My boot heels ring on the marble with each stride. I cross the threshold to a sea of almost blinding white. White marble floors, walls, and ceiling reflect crystal chandeliers adorned with white candles. Bouquets of white lilies gathered with white bows set in white urns line a broad white strip of fabric.

Motion beside me catches my eye, and the page bearing our flag sets it in a marble stand. Dipping my chin to him, I turn to the line of fae waiting to greet us. A male fae with short, white hair, dressed in a double-breasted, cream-colored suit, stands at the front of the line.

“King Gabriel, thank you for inviting us to this magnificent event.” I curtsey and offer my arm.

Gripping it in typical fae fashion, he smiles. “Titania, we are delighted to host you.”

Releasing my arm, he turns his face to the woman beside him. Dressed in pale pink and with skin of porcelain, hair of spun hay, and eyes of the lightest blue, Queen Isabel could be an angel.

“Titania, it is so wonderful to see you.” She kisses my cheek.

“You as well. Your home is truly a beautiful sight.”

“Thank you.” She spins to her daughter. “Her name inspired all the decorations for the celebration.”

I take Princess Lily’s outstretched hand, lean in, and kiss her cheek. Her skin smells of a garden in spring, and as I squeeze her fingers, her light eyes hold mine.

“Titania, thank you for coming. Holden and I...” Her eyes cut to him.

I chance a glance Holden’s way. The same eyes that shone for me now fix on her. My stomach twists and heart thuds in my chest. *The goddesses have a plan for you, Titania. Trust in this.*

Stay tuned next week for more from chapter 1. Until then you can add to your Goodreads TBR list, wishlist on Bookbub, or pre-order at special release price with the links below.

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