

Chapter Two

May 20 - Through the Looking Glass and into Trouble

The quill hovered, defying gravity, defying reason. “This isn’t happening,” Sera whispered, hugging her knees to her chest, her fists clenched as though to stop herself from reaching out to see if the quill was real or a figment of her imagination. The golden quill hung poised over the journal.

Magic wasn’t real.

Yet the quill floated above the journal, tapping the air insistently, demanding her answer.

Her acceptance.

“I’m going crazy.” Her head dropped to her knees, and she tried to cling to logic. *This is just a vivid dream.* Magic belonged in fantasies, not in her cramped, ordinary living room.

Scrambling off the couch, she fled to the bathroom, her breath hitching as she splashed cold water on her face.

“Just a dream,” she repeatedly told her reflection in a voice not quite steady. But the pale woman staring back—bright green eyes wide with panic framed by a mane of wild, golden-red curls that tumbled around her face and shoulders—looked all too real. “Me, a witch? Absurd,” she stated. Numbers and facts were her reality, not spells and magic.

Staring into her confused eyes, her reflection rippled and swirled, transitioning into something impossibly vivid—a golden beach stretching to the horizon. She felt the cool spray of saltwater on her skin, heard the cries of gulls in her ears and laughter from a child running into the ocean, a blaze of gold and ember curls streaming behind her and her father lifting her high to avoid being knocked down by the waves. Before she could process the memory, another followed, this one of her, slightly older, walking along a forest path with her father.

The memory tasted bitter as it reminded her of all she'd lost when her father had died. It was as though her memories had also died with him. A fresh wave of grief rose. Had she grieved for him? How could she have when she didn't remember him beyond peppermint candy and a silly song? Her grief felt sharp and raw and not just for the father she'd forgotten, or her grandmother, but everything, including magic—if it truly was real.

Palms flat on the sink, Sera leaned forward. "How did I forget this?" she whispered, tears pricking her eyes. Another glance in the mirror revealed a cheerful Victorian house painted a buttery yellow. Wildflowers danced in the breeze, their scent mingling with the sharp tang of the ocean. And then she saw her—Nonie Wenna. Her grandmother, standing in the doorway, her golden-red hair glinting in the sunlight.

The images in the mirror were too vivid to be imagined, too real. The odd driver's voice telling her—no, commanding her—to remember echoed in her mind.

Sera touched her lips with trembling fingers. "I do. I remember," she whispered as her gaze drank in the sight of her grandmother wearing a flowing tunic and a floppy hat crowned with

wildflowers. Her emerald-green eyes shimmered, deep and knowing, as if they carried the weight of a thousand secrets.

Sera reached up to touch a strand of her own hair, perfectly matching the older woman's. The image in the mirror shimmered and glowed, and Sera swore she felt the warm rays of sunlight bathing her face, even as clouds stirred overhead.

Each memory slammed into her like a wave—salt-laced, stinging, unstoppable. “Why didn't I remember all of this until now?” she asked, her voice thick with tears. Sera's fists clenched, the sharp sting of her nails digging into her flesh, grounding her. Anger warred with grief—anger at the loss of her childhood memories. The mist in the mirror twisted and curled as if reflecting her emotions.

“I just don't understand what is happening.” She lifted her hand, but hesitated, afraid to touch it. “Am I doing this?” Sera whispered hoarsely, her voice faltering. A chill scraped down her spine when she recalled how her reading glasses appeared on the table, and the way the refrigerator silenced. Had she done those things? She shook her head. “Me? A witch? That's fairytale nonsense ... right?”

A voice whispered in her mind, “You've always been more, Sera. This is real—as real as the magic in our blood.”

Sera tipped her chin up, determined to end this fantasy. Or whatever it was. “I am Seraphina Blackthorn—”

Her grandmother's image appeared once more. This time, her lined face filled the mirror as though she stood on the other side of a window, her green eyes intense and unwavering.

"You are Elowen Blackthorn's granddaughter, seventh in a long line of Guardians. It was always meant to be you. The seventh. The strongest. And the last—the only one who can stop what's coming."

Sera's knees buckled. "Stop what?" she whispered.

"The destruction of Havenwood Cove and all within," her grandmother said gravely, her voice faltering, as though she could barely speak the words.

Chilled, Sera rubbed her stomach to ease the hollow ache her grandmother's words brought. "How is this possible? It can't be real."

"As real as you, my dear child. Your gift lies in your ability to see what is not there. Veil sight. See the truth."

Her grandmother's image wavered, then sharpened, her bright hair now tucked beneath a shawl woven with colors of the moon and stars. *"Listen closely, my child. There isn't much time. A portal to another world lies hidden somewhere within Havenwood Cove,"* her grandmother said, her voice grave. *"The oldest tales whisper of a love so powerful it sealed the portal, of a sacrifice so great it bound the magic to this place forever. It must remain sealed at all costs."*

Shadows flitted across the image like smoke, forming monstrous shapes. Her grandmother's green eyes darkened with fear. *"I must go, child. Trust yourself. You've always had the gift."* Her face shimmered.

"Nonie, don't go!" Sera slapped her palm against the glass as the mirror flared silver. Light blinded her—then only her pale, tear-streaked face stared back. Her grandmother's words pressed against her chest like claws. She staggered, crashing into the door, gripping the knob as if it could anchor her to reality.

A portal. A legend. A great love. A greater sacrifice.

And her? The seventh and strongest Guardian? She shook her head in denial. This was insanity. And yet ... her heart pounded in agreement, like some forgotten part of her had been waiting for this truth to surface.

Feeling disoriented, as though a rug had been yanked out from under her, Sera stumbled out of the bathroom. Across the room, the golden quill continued to hover over the journal, its gleaming point tapping insistently against the page.

"This just can't be real," she whispered, leaning against the doorjamb. A portal between Earth and another world? Chaos and evil? She glanced over her shoulder into the bathroom and saw that the mirror was just a mirror. Yet moments before, it had revealed so much.

Another memory surfaced: herself as a child floating feathers for a ghost-like cat to catch and wishing for one of her grandmother's freshly baked cookies. And it appeared in her

hand. She smiled faintly as she also recalled the scolding she'd received, not from her grandmother, but from her mother.

The sudden influx of memories became too much. She pressed her fingers against her temple and rubbed the growing ache gathering. Was that truly a memory, or a dream? Pulling her hands down, she stared at her fingers and wiggled them. Nothing happened. Stepping back into the bathroom, she snatched a tube of mascara off the counter and tossed it onto the rug. She held out her hand, palm down.

“To me,” she commanded firmly—and gasped as the mascara flew up into her outstretched palm. Breathing hard, she could not deny that magic was real. The proof lay in her palm, and in the living room, as the quill awaited her answer to three simple words:

Do you accept?

“Wow! Nonie is right. I. Am. A. Witch!” She savored each word. A thrill surged through her, but her chest tightened with fear. If that was true, did that also mean she was the seventh Guardian, responsible for protecting a portal that led to another world? If she accepted one, didn't she have to accept the other? She recalled her grandmother's plea not to waste time and go to Havenwood Cove.

“How can I just race off to some unknown place to save a world? I'm one person.” Her voice rose, tinged with a bit of hysteria. She clutched the crystal at her throat, its warmth a steady throb—like a borrowed heartbeat, undeniable and alive.

She glanced into the living room, where the quill hovered silently over the journal. Waiting. Sera wanted to run to her bed and hide under the covers, like a child, but she shook her head. “I will not run,” she said firmly. Doing nothing wasn’t an option. Ignoring this ... this legacy felt more dangerous than confronting it.

Without taking her eyes off the journal, she crossed the room and sat gingerly on the edge of the couch. Though she dreaded talking to her mother about magic, she had no choice if she wanted answers. Maryann Blackthorn had little use for dreams or dreamers.

Facts, not fiction. Hard work and results, not dreams or intangibles. As a child, her mother had drilled those words into her.

Drawing a deep breath, she pulled her resolve around her like a cloak and hit the speed dial button on her phone.

“Mom,” she said when Maryann answered, sounding distracted.

“Sera. This isn’t a good time. I’m working. I’ll call you tonight for your birthday. We can chat then.”

“Sorry to interrupt, mom, but I need to talk to you. Now.” Sera heard her mother whispering to someone.

“All right,” she sighed with disapproval. “What’s wrong? Your divorce?”

Sera grimaced at the disapproval in her mom’s tone. Maryann thought Evan walked on water and that his being unfaithful was her failing. Not his. “No, the divorce is final.”

“Well, good. You’ll find another—”

“Mom,” she interrupted. “Is Elowen Blackthorn, my grandmother, still alive?” Her voice was steady, but her hand tightened around the phone.

The silence on the other end stretched, sharp and telling. “We’ll talk later, Sera. I need to—”

Sera pinched the bridge of her nose. “Answer me, Mom.” Sera cut her off, her tone leaving no room for evasion.

“How would I know?” Maryann said, her voice tight. “I haven’t seen her since your father died.” In the background, Sera heard the rapid tap of nails on a desk.

She pressed on. “My grandmother needs me, Mom.” Sera’s voice softened, the certainty in her words surprising even herself. “She says I’m the Guardian of the Moondragon. That I’m the only one who can protect it and save the town.”

“Sera, stop this nonsense,” Maryann’s voice hardened. “You don’t belong in Havenwood Cove. It isn’t safe for you.”

“Why isn’t it safe? What aren’t you telling me?” Sera’s grip on the phone tightened as the driver’s words rang in her mind.

Old truths wrapped in silence.

Sera stared at her hand. *Gifts once lost, now returned.*

The truth hit her. Somehow, her gifts had been taken away or removed. And that strange old man, with his strange words, had restored them.

“Sera! I’m talking to you! Are you there?”

“Yes, Mom.” For the first time in her life, Sera defied her mother. “You knew about Nonie. About me being a witch, about all of this. And you never said a word. Why?”

“It was for the best. You made yourself a good life, had a good man—”

Sera laughed bitterly. “A man who cheated on me, had a child with that woman, and his family destroyed my career. Tell me what was so good!”

“You’ll get another job, find another man. Come home. Plenty of jobs here, and I know a few eligible men ...”

Her mother’s voice faded to static. In her mind’s eye, Sera saw the dark shadows in the mirror and the look of fear in her grandmother’s eyes before her image faded. She dropped the phone onto the couch beside her, her gaze drawn to the quill. Her hand trembled as she reached for it. It flew to her hand. Wrapping her fingers around it, warmth spread through her palm, steady and certain. The journal’s weight pressed against her resolve, urging her forward.

“I’m sorry, Mom,” she whispered, her voice trembling, “I have to go to Havenwood Cove. She needs me. They all do.”

Taking a deep breath, Sera steadied her hand and penned,

Yes. I Accept.

Seraphina Blackthorn, May 20, 2024.

The quill dissolved, and light flared from her crystal, tendrils of energy weaving around her wrist. When the light dimmed, a bracelet of seven gemstones circled her wrist, pulsing gently. At its center, her aestivalite glowed, warm and steady.

Breathless, Sera stared at the stones set in silver. Magic surged through her veins, grounding her yet making her feel as though she stood on the edge of something vast and unknown. “I’ve just become ... the seventh Guardian,” she whispered.

The journal closed with quiet authority. The Tree of Life seemed to shift, its intricate Celtic knots glinting faintly, alive with energy. Where gemstones had once rested, faint symbols now glittered—subtle but significant, as if the book itself had awakened.

Sera leaned back. This wasn’t just a book. It was a key—one that unlocked the legacy her grandmother had passed down to her, a legacy she could not ignore. “I’ve spent years being what everyone else wanted—a dutiful daughter, a perfect wife, a flawless professional. Maybe it’s time to be something else. Someone else. It’s time to be me.”

She touched the aestivalite, now surrounded by the six other stones. The familiar warmth grounded her; its presence unnervingly intimate. The stones seemed alive, their energies distinct yet harmonious, like seven voices singing in perfect unison. Her crystal at the center pulsed in time with her heartbeat, comforting her even as her mind spun with questions.

The cover opened once again, revealing the square envelope and the ornate silver key that moments ago had been mere images on the page. They were now as real as the quill had

been and waited for her to claim them. Her fingers hovered over the two objects—no, they weren't just objects—they were invitations. Or perhaps warnings.

Whatever lay ahead—the key and what the thick envelope contained—would open the door, but to what? Power? Danger? Or something she couldn't imagine yet?

Sera held the key and envelope in her hands, their weight heavy with purpose. An icy dread coiled in her chest, yet a thrill of excitement pulsed alongside it. Whatever lay ahead—danger, power, or truths she couldn't yet fathom—she would face it. Clutching the key, she whispered, "I'm going to find out." Her bracelet's steady pulse echoed the rhythm of her growing resolve.