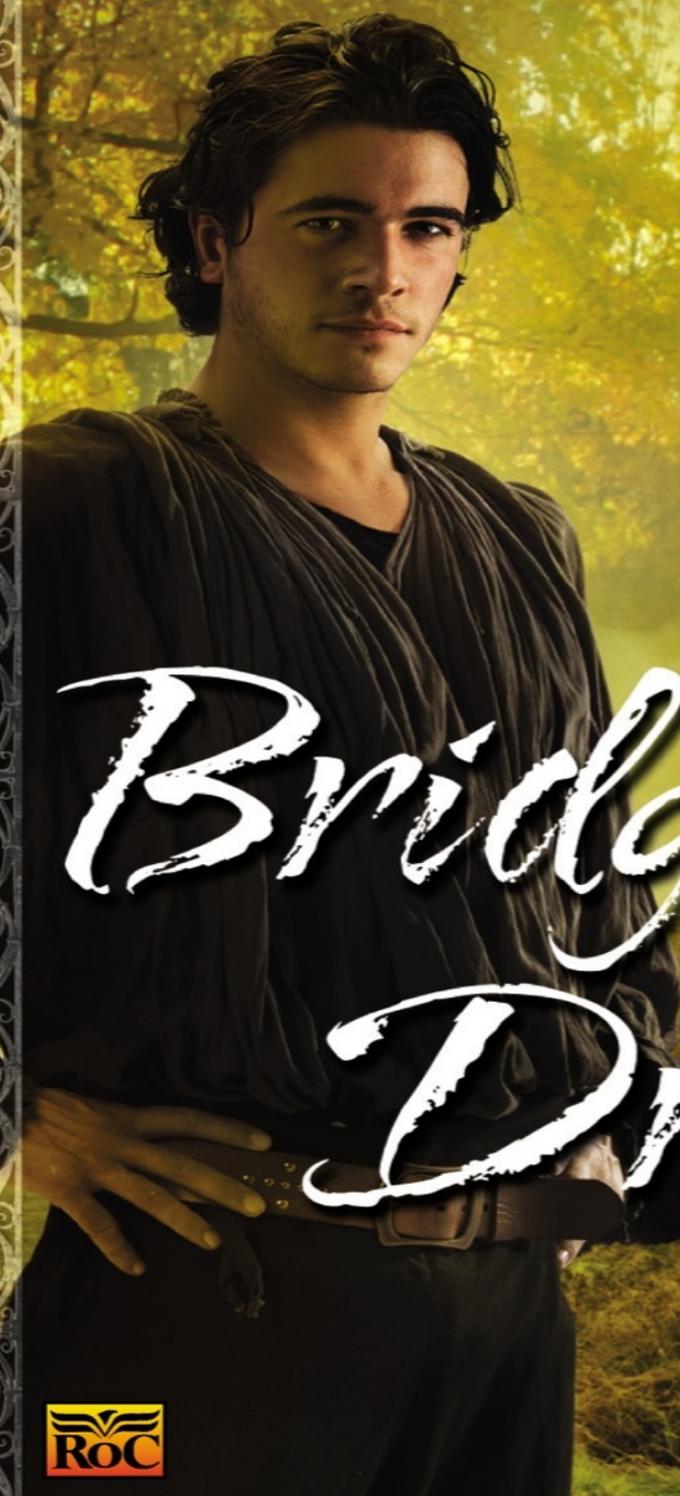


Ephemera

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
OF WRITTEN IN RED

ANNE BISHOP

"An imaginative world."
—NIGHT OWL REVIEWS



*Bridge of
Dreams*



Praise for the Ephemera Series

Bridge of Dreams

“With a well-paced mystery, likable characters, and fascinating world building, this is a fun read.”

—*Booklist*

“[Readers] will find the characters worthwhile and the story satisfying.”

—*RT Book Reviews*

“An imaginative world. . . . I wouldn’t hesitate to recommend the Ephemera series to anyone who enjoys unique fantasy books with characters you can admire.”

—*Night Owl Reviews*

“Strong on world building.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“One of Anne Bishop’s fascinating worlds. . . . [She] has a wonderful way of creating new characters, new worlds that are mind-boggling.”

—*The Reading Cafe*

“An entertaining tale with an incredible, vivid description of the Bishop mythos and a wonderful self-sacrificing hero . . . a super-fast-paced, exciting thriller.”

—*Midwest Book Review*

Belladonna

“The work of a master . . . thought-provoking.”

—*Fresh Fiction*

“Bishop tells a powerful and emotional tale set in a land of dazzling complexity and deep magic. . . . Those who enjoy sophisticated, mature, and original epic fantasy will be well rewarded by spending time in Ephemera.”

—*SFRevu*

“Mystifying forces of light and dark continue to rend Ephemera, a shattered world of extraordinary interconnected landscapes that can be altered by strong emotions. . . . Fans of the preceding installment will revel in Bishop’s imaginative powers.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Set against a unique fantasy background and filled with intriguing characters, [*Belladonna*] is another tale of enchanted worlds.”

—*Library Journal*

“Bishop excels at characterization . . . compulsively readable.”

—*Romantic Times*

“Ephemera is an intriguing world, and the skill taken to create it is readily apparent. . . . *Belladonna* is worth reading on so many levels.”

—The Romance Readers Connection

“Stunning . . . wonderful.”

—Romance Junkies

Sebastian

“Erotic, fervently romantic, [and] superbly entertaining, *Sebastian* satisfies.”

—*Booklist*

“Bishop’s talents lie both in her ability to craft a story filled with intriguing characters and in her flair for smoldering sensuality that recommends her to fans of Tanith Lee, Storm Constantine, and Anne Rice. Highly recommended.”

—*Library Journal* (starred review)

“[Bishop’s] worlds are so fully realized and three-dimensional, they jump right off the pages. . . . Exotic, original, [and] sensual, there’s nothing here I didn’t love.”

—Fresh Fiction

“[An] impressively unclichééd battle between light and dark. . . . Pure originality and lyrical prose . . . will delight fantasy readers.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“I enjoyed every page of the book from beginning to end and absolutely love the characters that inhabit it.”

—Romance Reviews Today

“Highly recommended. . . . Glorianna is a fantastic presence, a nascent goddess.”

—SFRevu

“A wonderful book to get lost in.”

—Romance Junkies

“A fantastic book. Bishop has built a compelling world that is filled with fascinating and complex characters.”

—*Romantic Times* (top pick, 4½ stars)

More Praise for Anne Bishop

“Rich and fascinatingly different dark fantasy.”

—*Locus*

“A terrific writer. . . . The more I read, the more excited I became because of the freshness of [her] take on the usual high fantasy setting, the assurance of [her] language, all the lovely touches of characterization that [she slips] in so effortlessly.”

—Charles de Lint

“Lavishly sensual . . . a richly detailed world.”

—*Library Journal*

“Vividly painted . . . dramatic, erotic, hope filled.”

—Lynn Flewelling

“A darkly fascinating world . . . vivid and sympathetic characters . . . lavish and sensuous descriptions, and interesting world building . . . many compelling and beautifully realized elements . . . a terrific read.”

—SF Site

“Intense . . . erotic, violent, and imaginative. This one is white-hot.”

—Nancy Kress

“Mystical, sensual, glittering with dark magic.”

—Terri Windling, coeditor of *The Year’s Best Fantasy and Horror*

“[Anne Bishop’s] poignant storytelling skills are surpassed only by her flair for the dramatic and her deft characterization . . . a talented author.”

—*Affaire de Coeur*

Also by Anne Bishop

THE EPHEMERA SERIES

Sebastian
Belladonna

THE BLACK JEWELS SERIES

Daughter of the Blood
Heir to the Shadows
Queen of the Darkness
The Invisible Ring
Dreams Made Flesh
Tangled Webs
The Shadow Queen
Shalador's Lady
Twilight's Dawn

THE TIR ALAINN TRILOGY

The Pillars of the World
Shadows and Light
The House of Gaian

THE OTHERS SERIES

Written in Red

ANNE BISHOP



Bridge of Dreams



A ROC BOOK

ROC

Published by New American Library, a division of
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street,
New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto,
Ontario M4P 2Y3, Canada (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd., 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Ireland, 25 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2,
Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd.)

Penguin Group (Australia), 707 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3008,
Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty. Ltd.)

Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park,
New Delhi-110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, Auckland 0632,
New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd.)

Penguin Books, Rosebank Office Park, 181 Jan Smuts Avenue,
Parktown North 2193, South Africa

Penguin China, B7 Jiaming Center, 27 East Third Ring Road North,
Chaoyang District, Beijing 100020, China

Penguin Books Ltd., Registered Offices:
80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Published by Roc, an imprint of New American Library, a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. Previously
published in a Roc hardcover edition.

Copyright © Anne Bishop, 2012

"The Voice" copyright © Anne Bishop, 2012

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any printed or electronic
form without permission. Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation
of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

ISBN 978-1-101-57683-0



REGISTERED TRADEMARK—MARCA REGISTRADA

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's
imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business
establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party
Web sites or their content.

ALWAYS LEARNING

PEARSON

Contents

[Praise](#)

[Also by](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-one](#)

[Chapter Twenty-two](#)

[Chapter Twenty-three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-four](#)

[Chapter Twenty-five](#)

[Chapter Twenty-six](#)

[Chapter Twenty-seven](#)

[Chapter Twenty-eight](#)

[Chapter Twenty-nine](#)

[Chapter Thirty](#)
[Chapter Thirty-one](#)
[Chapter Thirty-two](#)
[Chapter Thirty-three](#)
[Chapter Thirty-four](#)
[Chapter Thirty-five](#)
[Chapter Thirty-six](#)
[Chapter Thirty-seven](#)
[Chapter Thirty-eight](#)
[Chapter Thirty-nine](#)

[The Voice](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

*For
Lorna MacDonald Czarnota
Merri Lee Debany
and
Barb Markello*

Fellow travelers in the landscapes

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks to Blair Boone for continuing to be my first reader, to Debra Dixon for being second reader, to Doranna Durgin for maintaining the Web site, to Adrienne Roehrich for running the Facebook fan site, to Nadine Fallacaro for information about things medical, to Anne Sowards and Jennifer Jackson for all their help in bringing this story to life, to Pat Feidner just because, and to all the readers who make this journey with me. May your hearts travel lightly.

Long ago, in a time that has faded from memory, a mother's tears forged the bridge that, ever after, connected the power of the living, ever-changing world to the human heart.

—MYTH

Is the sight that matters most the kind that is seen with the eyes or with the heart?

—SAYING IN VISION

Belladonna stripped away our human masks, revealing the Dark Guides for what we are—the whispering voices that encourage hearts to turn away from the Light and feed the Dark currents of the world with selfishness and greed and, best of all, violence.

While I wore that mask, I walked among the people of Ephemera as a wizard, as one who was feared and revered because I was a Justice Maker for the most prominent citizens in my assigned landscapes—the kind of citizens who, with whispered persuasion, could do the most harm, snuff out the most Light in other hearts.

But Wizard City, the Dark Guides' stronghold, is gone, taken out of the world and locked away with the landscapes that belong to the Eater of the World. Because the city is no longer within reach, the pureblood females we kept as breeders are also gone. Only a few of us were in other landscapes when Belladonna did that reshaping of the world. Only a few of us escaped that cage. So few of us, hiding now in the pieces of the world.

Of course, we still have some wizards—those descendants of Dark Guides who polluted the bloodlines by mating with humans. Despite that pollution, wizards have the powers that were the gifts from the Dark aspects of the world and, more important for my purpose now, they still look human.

When my true face was revealed, it was the wizards, eager to prove their loyalty to me, who found and booked passage on the various ships that eventually brought us to this city. It was the wizards who found us lodgings that allowed me to study the particular nature of this city and understand how to use it to our advantage.

I can create another stronghold here, another place like Wizard City. Quietly, carefully, I can take part of this city away from its present guardians and turn that piece into a dark landscape where we can rule again.

In the pieces of world we knew, Landscapers were Ephemera's bedrock—the hearts through which the currents of Dark and Light flow, the sieves that keep Ephemera from manifesting the turmoil in all the other hearts. Here the Landscapers are called Shamans. They guard and guide all they can see with the complacency of those who believe they have no rivals.

They don't know about Dark Guides or wizards. They don't know what to look for. Blinded by that ignorance, the Shamans will be able to do nothing but wonder why pieces of their city are slipping beyond their sight and control.

We have a foothold in two sections of this city. Soon entire streets will be under the control of my wizards. The Shamans will not find us.

And neither will Belladonna.

—an entry in the Book of Dark Secrets

Chapter One

Following his cousin Sebastian, Lee stepped off the stationary bridge that connected the Island in the Mist to the rest of Sanctuary. A few months ago, the island had been almost impossible to reach. It still wasn't easy—Ephemera made sure of that—but now family and a few special friends could reach the place Glorianna Belladonna called home.

"We could have used my island to get here," Lee grumbled. His little island was always with him, a piece of land he could impose over any other landscape, Dark or Light. As a Bridge, he created connections between the broken pieces of the world, and his work sometimes took him to faraway—and dangerous—places. But his island, anchored in Sanctuary, was the assurance that he was never more than a few steps away from home.

"We could have used your island," Sebastian agreed. "And we would have if I had been accompanying you on this visit. But since you're accompanying me, I chose to use the bridge."

"Oh, that makes sense." Lee took a couple steps toward the two-story stone house that Glorianna and Michael now shared. Then he stopped and rubbed his left forearm.

Michael had broken that bone during the fight to keep the family away from the terrible landscape Glorianna had made to cage the Eater of the World. The rest of the family had forgiven the Magician for the part he'd played in making that cage—especially after he found a way to bring Glorianna back—but Lee's arm always hurt when he visited the Island in the Mist. He couldn't say for sure whether it was the bone that bothered him or if it was being around the man who broke it.

"Can't tell from here if they're at home," Sebastian said.

"Where else would they be?" Lee asked bitterly. "Glorianna hasn't left this island since she . . . came back."

"It's been only a few weeks," Sebastian said softly. "We don't know what happened to her while she was in that place."

And if the Magician was right and she became the monster that Evil feared, we don't know what she did while she was in that place, Lee thought.

"She needs time to mend, Lee. Time to heal."

"Do you really think she's going to *heal*?" Lee spat out the words. "It's all hugs and kisses for you, isn't it? Some part of Glorianna came back. Aren't we the heroes?"

Sebastian's right hand clenched, reminding Lee that the wizards' lightning, a magic that had been dormant in Sebastian until the previous year, was now a power the incubus-wizard could wield with deadly effect.

"Suit yourself," Sebastian said as he headed for the house. "But if this little discussion produces weeds or stones in Glorianna's gardens, *you're* cleaning them up."

Lee headed toward the walled garden that held Glorianna's landscapes, the pieces

of the world that she kept balanced through the resonance of her own heart. Then he saw Sebastian veer toward the sandbox Glorianna called the playground and hurried to catch up.

The playground was a wooden, calf-high box that was about the size of a marriage bed and was filled with sand. Attached to it was another wooden box, about half that length, that was filled with gravel and had a bench to sit on. Glorianna had made the box as a place for Ephemera to play without there being any consequences in the landscapes where people lived. It was also the means that Sebastian and Michael had used to reach Belladonna.

Michael was in the box, one knee resting on the gravel, a shapeless brown hat shadowing his face from the summer sun. Maybe it was the brim that kept the man from seeing them approach, but Lee thought it had more to do with the Magician being focused on the items in the playground's sand.

"Ah, come on, wild child. Come on," Michael said. "I wasn't meaning it like that, so you have to stop bringing me such things."

Sebastian grinned as he looked at the handful of pocket watches poking out of the sand. Then he laughed out loud when a mantel clock that was missing its hands pushed out of the sand.

"Guardians and Guides," Lee exploded. "What are you doing?"

Startled, Michael almost tipped over. He gave them a sour look as he stood up and carefully stepped out of the box. "It's just a misunderstanding. We'll get it cleared up. Eventually."

Lee stared as another pocket watch poked out of the sand like a shiny gold clam. "You're teaching the world to *steal* things?"

"No," Michael said, looking flustered as he pulled off his hat.

"Then what is that?" Lee pointed to the playground.

"A misunderstanding." Now Michael's voice carried a hint of temper.

"You taught Ephemera to be a thief," Lee said. Then he gave Sebastian a hard look. "I guess the two of you are more suited to each other than I thought."

"Have a care," Michael warned.

Lee swore under his breath. He shouldn't have needed a reminder that Ephemera shaped itself by manifesting the resonances of the human heart. And on Glorianna's island, the world was more responsive to people's emotions than anywhere else.

Moments later, all three men clamped hands over their noses and backed away from each other.

"Daylight, Magician!" Sebastian said. "Did you just fart?"

Michael huffed and pointed to the sand in the playground. "Stinkweed. The wild child has started making it in response to swear words. And if you're wondering who influenced Ephemera so that it creates a weed that smells like farts every time someone swears, all I can tell you is it wasn't me." Turning, he pointed at the stinkweed plant. "But Lee wasn't standing in the box to play with you, so you shouldn't be listening to him so closely that you turn his words into plants."

The stinkweed sank into the sand. Since the smell didn't disappear as fast, the men walked away from the playground.

"So," Sebastian said, wheezing a little. "Did you teach the world to steal?"

"No," Michael said firmly. Then he faltered. "At least, I don't think I did. I just

said . . .” Taking a couple more steps away from the playground, he lowered his voice. “I just said I’d like to steal a little time so that Glorianna wouldn’t feel she has to take up her work as a Landscaper so soon and could rest a while longer.”

“And Ephemera has been bringing you timepieces since then?” Sebastian laughed long and loud.

“It’s amusing as long as you’re not the one trying to explain why you have a basket of broken pocket watches,” Michael grumbled.

“All broken? So the world isn’t sneaking into people’s houses and—”

“Don’t even be *thinking* that,” Michael said. “No, I’m fairly sure it’s been finding these things in the dumping grounds of various landscapes. At least, I’m hoping that’s what the wild child has been doing.”

“I could talk to Dalton and ask if anyone in Aurora is missing a pocket watch or mantel clock,” Sebastian said. “As a law enforcer, he’d have heard about a mysterious thief.”

“Oh, sure,” Michael said agreeably. “And with a handful of diamonds and a couple of emeralds the size of sparrows’ eggs, I’ll be able to pay for whatever the wild child took without permission.”

Things popped out of the ground with enough force and speed to zip past their faces. Sebastian caught one. He opened his hand, stared at the emerald, then handed it to Michael. Without saying a word, he hunted in the grass and found the diamonds and the other emerald.

He gave the emerald and most of the diamonds to Michael, then dropped one diamond in his shirt pocket. “Finder’s fee,” he said with a grin.

“You’re welcome to it,” Michael sighed. “If I’d known I could have gems for the asking, I could have been a wealthy man.”

“You wouldn’t have asked for more than you need,” Sebastian said.

“Maybe. Maybe not. Truth is, the wild child didn’t start giving me such things until I made my bit of a garden inside Glorianna’s.”

Having heard all he could stomach, Lee walked away from them and went to the gate in the two-acre walled garden. Slipping through the gate, he followed the paths to the beds that represented Sanctuary, the landscapes that nurtured and protected Ephemera’s currents of Light. Each of those places had been alone once, isolated by distance and the nature of the world. Then Glorianna brought them together, connecting them to give the Guardians of Light access to each other. Most of those places still kept themselves apart from the hurry and scurry of people’s lives, but the landscape most people thought of as Sanctuary was an open place where anyone could come to rest and renew the spirit.

Anyone whose heart resonated with Sanctuary, that is.

Did Glorianna still resonate with the Places of Light? If she walked across the stationary bridge that connected her island to Sanctuary, *would* she end up in the right place? Or would Ephemera send her somewhere else?

If she found herself in a different place, would she take the step between here and there and return to her garden? Or would she disappear into a landscape that appealed to Belladonna?

All their lives, Lee had been her working partner and her closest friend as well as her brother. He’d had few friends outside the family because he’d needed to be so

Careful of what he said, whom he trusted.

He'd had plenty of acquaintances once he left the school and began traveling to check on the stationary and resonating bridges that allowed people to cross over from one part of Ephemera to another. And he hadn't lacked for casual lovers. But there had been no one he could share his life with, no one he had dared trust with his family's secrets—and bringing anyone in close enough to know his family meant letting them get close enough to learn at least some of the secrets.

Lee sighed and rubbed his forearm. It wasn't just a bone Michael had broken. The Magician had also broken the friendship that had been forming between them, had broken the trust. The feeling of betrayal had hurt as much as the broken arm.

What hurt even more was that Michael had asked for Sebastian's help to find a way into a landscape that no one should have been able to reach. Michael had asked Sebastian, the cousin, and didn't mention the plan to the Bridge, the brother, the one who had put aside his own life to support Glorianna.

And the Magician and the incubus-wizard had done it—they had created a bridge out of memories, heart, and music that was strong enough to draw Belladonna back to the Island in the Mist and the part of her that belonged to the Light. The part of her that was Glorianna.

Rubbing a hand over his chest, as if that would ease the ache in his heart, Lee turned away from the access points that led to the Light and headed for the part of the garden where he knew his sister would be.

She spent hours sitting on a small bench she'd placed in front of the beds that were the access points to her dark landscapes. She didn't even weed the other parts of her garden unless someone was with her, but the beds for the dark landscapes she tended with meticulous care.

He approached her, his footsteps loud on the gravel path. At least, it sounded loud to him, but she didn't turn her head to see who was coming.

"Want some company?" he called.

Now she turned her head and he saw Belladonna, the woman who had cast out the Light in her own heart to become the monster Evil feared. In that moment, he saw cruelty in her eyes, a dark, rich desire to send him into a landscape where suffering was a man's only lover.

Then the look faded, and Glorianna smiled at him and said, "Sure."

She shifted on the bench, making room for him.

He hesitated before sitting so close to her—and hated himself for it.

"Something interesting?" he asked, trying to remember how easy it used to be to talk to her.

"Yes," she replied as she pointed to a grass triangle.

He studied it and frowned. "Why did you rearrange the access points for the other dark landscapes to have that triangle close to the Den?"

"I didn't rearrange anything. Ephemera did." Glorianna also frowned. "The Den of Iniquity is still at the center of the dark landscapes that resonate with me, but Ephemera shifted their access points to make room for this new connection."

"But it's only connected with the Den," Lee said.

"The other dark landscapes aren't connected to each other either except through the Den, so that's not strange. Besides, demon landscapes aren't exactly hospitable."

“The Merry Makers are hospitable. They’re always willing to have someone for dinner.” Of course, the hapless person who stumbled into the Merry Makers’ landscape usually ended up *being* dinner.

She didn’t give him a disapproving smile or an elbow jab.

His sister would have. Before she split her heart to save the world, she would have.

“So where is this landscape?” Lee asked.

“I don’t know. That’s why it’s so puzzling. It doesn’t resonate with me yet, but Ephemera seems to think it wants to. It’s like only one part of it has begun resonating with me, but that’s not enough to—”

“You’re not crossing over!” he shouted as he shot to his feet. “You don’t know anything about that place except it’s a dark landscape.”

“That’s right. I don’t,” Belladonna said. She turned her head away from him. “You should leave now.”

“Glorianna . . .”

“*Please*, Lee. Get out of the garden. *Now*.”

He took a step away from her. Took another. It hurt him to ask, but he asked because she was his sister and he still loved her. “Do you want Michael? Or Sebastian?”

“No. I don’t want anyone in this garden right now.”

His own heart had soured this time together. His own hurt at what she had done to save them all and how she came back kept getting in the way. Would it get in the way one time too many?

“I’m sorry, Glorianna,” he said.

“So am I.”

As he walked away from his sister and her dark landscapes, he heard her say, “Ephemera, hear me.”

He wasn’t sure who had summoned the world—the Guide who belonged to the Light or the monster who ruled the Dark.

She had walked those landscapes, folding them into each other, turning them into mazes that celebrated her Dark purity, altering them into labyrinths that offered no peace, no comfort. Those things did not exist in her world. She created out of the brutal beauty that came from the undiluted feelings that lived in the dark side of the human heart. She was sublime madness, magnificent rage, divine indifference.

In that place, she had been Belladonna.

Only Belladonna.

Setting her feet on the bench, Glorianna dropped her forehead to her knees and trembled with the effort not to give Ephemera a command as the world’s currents of Dark and Light swirled around her, waiting to resonate with whatever her heart wanted.

Unfortunately, when she wasn’t vigilant, she craved the undiluted power she had wielded in the dark landscape she had made for the Eater of the World. She wasn’t supposed to leave that landscape. The Warrior of Light must drink from the Dark Cup and cast out the Light from her own heart. Once she had done that, she became the

greatest danger to the people around her.

But Michael, Sebastian, and Ephemera had found a way to reach her, made her remember who she had been, and hearing the music in Michael's heart, she had used the access point Ephemera had created and taken the step between here and there.

And in taking that step, she had taken back the Light she had cast out of her heart. But she wasn't whole. She wasn't Glorianna Belladonna anymore. She was Glorianna and she was Belladonna. Separate. Opposite. Much like her dark landscapes and Sanctuary. The problem was that the middle ground was missing inside her, and she didn't know how to fix that. Didn't know if anyone could fix that.

Now she had this mysterious landscape that wasn't yet hers. She *thought* its resonance might be enough for her to cross over and find out what the place was—and where it was. Only it didn't feel like a dark landscape, despite Ephemera thinking it should connect with the Den, and it didn't feel like a landscape that belonged to the Light.

And she wasn't sure if that piece of the world called to Glorianna or to Belladonna.

Something rippled through Ephemera's currents of power. Then it washed through her. Both parts of her.

"Maybe it's not the landscape that's calling to me," she whispered as she raised her head to study the triangle of grass.

Someone from that landscape wanted something so much, a heart wish had gone out through the currents of power—and had found her because she wasn't just a powerful Landscaper; she was also a Guide of the Heart.

Glorianna swung her feet off the bench, then lifted them again, startled by the gravel suddenly moving between her feet. A moment later, a pocket watch poked partway out of the gravel.

Oh, that can't be good, she thought as she reached for the watch with the same enthusiasm a person feels when picking up a mouse the family cat left as a gift.

Before she could touch it, the watch wiggled back under the gravel.

She stared at the gravel, then at the triangle of grass. "It's not time for me to go there?"

yes yes yes

At least she understood Ephemera's message.

And she thought it best not to ask her lover where—and how—the wild child had acquired the watch.

Then she heard the music. Michael, tending to the garden he had made within her garden by playing his tin whistle. He heard the song of a place and kept his pieces of the world balanced with tunes—along with the ill-wishing and luck-bringing that were the ways a Magician's power connected with the world.

Giving the triangle of grass a last, thoughtful look, she followed the sound of the whistle until she reached Michael's garden.

He finished the tune and gave her a sheepish smile.

"So what have you and the wild child been up to today?" she asked.

"That depends," he replied. "How do you feel about diamonds and emeralds?"

yes yes yes

Knowing better than to answer when Ephemera was so eager to please, she said, "Play another tune, Magician."

* * *

“Lee.”

Swearing silently, Lee turned to wait for the man striding from Sanctuary’s guesthouse. If he hadn’t stopped for some food to add to his pack, he could have slipped away from Sanctuary like he had slipped away from the Island in the Mist after he left Glorianna’s garden.

“Honorable Yoshani,” he said. “Have you come to argue with me too?”

“Who have you argued with today?” Yoshani asked.

Lee saw nothing but compassion in the holy man’s dark eyes. “Michael. Sebastian. Glorianna.” He looked away, not wanting to meet Yoshani’s eyes. “You all think I’m wrong, that I should accept she will never be the same, and that I should make some kind of peace with Michael because I’m Glorianna’s brother and he’s as close to being her husband as a man can get without the formal vows.”

“He would speak those vows without hesitation. It is Glorianna Dark and Wise who is not ready to take that step.” Yoshani hesitated. “You have not asked for my advice, but as we are standing in Sanctuary, I will offer it anyway. There is much hurt and anger in your heart. It clouds your ability to see the people around you for who and what they are now. Perhaps you need this, but a man who does the work you do cannot afford to hold that much hurt and anger in his heart. People change, Lee. And the world changes. You know this better than most. Don’t let these dark feelings change you so much that you can’t find your way home again.”

“I’ll always be able to get back home,” Lee said, his voice turning sharp as a way to defy the odd shiver produced by Yoshani’s words.

“Will you?” Yoshani asked gently. “If you refuse to see the Landscaper, will you be able to find her landscapes?”

Lee took a couple of steps away from Yoshani. “I have to go.”

“Do your friends and family a kindness. Every two days, return to Sanctuary and let us know you are well. There are still wizards and some Dark Guides hiding in the landscapes beyond your mother’s and sister’s control. And the Bridges who survived the Eater’s attack haven’t stopped creating bridges for people who need to leave where they are.”

Which was why he needed to patrol and stay vigilant. But he couldn’t deny that Yoshani’s suggestion was prudent.

“All right,” he said. “I’ll use my island to reach Glorianna’s and Mother’s landscapes so I’m not spending a lot of time on the roads alone. And every second day I’ll return here and give you or Brigid my itinerary for the next bit of journeying.”

“Fair enough.” Yoshani smiled. “Travel lightly, Lee.”

Giving the man a terse nod, Lee walked to the stream and the small island that sat in the middle of it. His own personal landscape, it existed on the bridge of his will when he imposed it over other landscapes. Because of that, Sanctuary—and safety—was never more than a step away.

Nimble walking across the stepping stones, he jumped to the island and staggered, off balance.

Had there been a moment when the island hadn’t been under his feet? But he was in Sanctuary, where the island actually existed. How was it possible for it *not* to be there?