

## PROLOGUE

MANON LAVEAU, regal on her throne of twining cypress roots, regarded the merman before her. Her eyes traveled over his black uniform, his close-cropped hair, his cruel face. He and six of his soldiers had barged into her cave, deep under the waters of the Mississippi, as she was laying out tarot cards on the mossy back of a giant snapping turtle.

“Captain Traho, you say?” Manon’s voice, like her eyes, betrayed no emotion. “What can I do for you?”


“I’m looking for a mermaid named Ava Corajoso,” Traho said brusquely. “Dark skin. Black braids. She’s blind. Travels with a piranha. Have you seen her?”

“I have not,” Manon replied. “Now if you’ll excuse me, Captain, the cards require my attention. *Au revoir.*”

Manon’s manservant moved to show Traho out, but Traho pushed him away. “Ava was observed entering your cave,” he said. “I’ve also been told you have a seeing stone that you’re using to follow her. Hand it over and I’ll be on my way.”

Manon snorted. “*C’est sa cooyon,*” she said with contempt. *Fool.*

She snapped her fingers, and twenty bull alligators, each weighing half a ton, burst up from the thick mud covering the cave’s floor. Tails thrashing, they surrounded Traho and his men.



“I have a better idea,” Manon said, her green eyes glittering. “How about my hungry little friends eat you alive?”

Traho slowly raised his hands, never taking his eyes off the alligators. His men did the same.

Manon nodded. “That’s more like it,” she said. “*I’m* the shack bully in these parts, boy.”

She laid her cards down and rose from her throne, her turbaned head high. It was impossible to tell how old she was. Her light brown skin was smooth, but her eyes were ancient. She had high cheekbones and a strong nose. A white tunic and a red reedcloth skirt covered her body and her silvery tail. A belt studded with river pearls and mussel shells cinched her waist. The belt had been handed down from the first swamp queen, a Native American who had journeyed to Atlantis as a human. She’d survived the island’s destruction, had become mer, and then returned to the delta.

Manon spoke with the twang of the swamp. Her language was a mixture of freshwater mer salted with the African, English, French, and Spanish words of the terragogg ghosts who dwelled in the Mississippi. Some of those ghosts kept her company, among them a runaway slave called Sally Wilkes, a Creole countess named Esmé, and the pirate Jean Lafitte.

Manon was not afraid of ghosts. Or thugs in uniform. Or much of anything. As her alligators growled, she circled Traho.

“This mermaid Ava, she’s *boocoo* brave. She goes into the swamps all alone. But you?” she said mockingly. “You need two hundred soldiers to hold your dainty little hand.”

Manon couldn’t see the rest of Traho’s soldiers from inside her cave, but she didn’t need to. The stone had told her of their approach.

Traho ignored the taunt. “Kill me, and those two hundred soldiers will kill *you*,” he said. “I need to know where Ava Corajoso is. I’m not leaving until I find out.”

Anger flashed in Manon’s eyes. “You want information, you *pay* for it,” she spat. “Same as everyone else. Or are you a thief as well as a coward?”

“Ten doubloons,” Traho said.

“Twenty,” Manon countered.

Traho nodded. Manon snapped her fingers again, and her alligators burrowed back into the mud. One of Traho’s soldiers had a satchel slung over his shoulder. At his leader’s command, he opened it, then counted out gold coins, placing them on a table.

When he finished, Manon said, “The mermaid stopped here two days ago. She was on her way to the Blackwater and wanted a *gris-gris* to protect her from the Okwa Naholo. I made the charm. Used talons from an owl, teeth from a white alligator, and the call of a coyote. Bound them with the tongue of a cottonmouth. Won’t do her any good, though. She was worn-out. Sick, too. By now she’s nothing but bones at the bottom of the Blackwater.”

Traho digested this, then said, “The seeing stone. Where is it?”

Manon chuckled. “No such thing,” she replied. “Stone’s just a story, one I don’t discourage. Mer in these parts are *boocoo* wild. They behave a little better if they think they’re being watched.”

Traho glanced around. He muttered a curse about the gods-forsaken Freshwaters, then left the cave.

Manon floated perfectly still, staring after him, listening to the shouts of soldiers and the whinnying of hippokamps. Sally and Lafitte joined her, anxious expressions on their faces. When the soldiers finally rode off, Manon let out a long, ragged breath.

Esmé, her silk skirts swirling around her, walked up to Manon and tugged on one of her earrings. “You’re telling *lies*, Manon Laveau! That merl’s not in the Blackwater. Why would she be? There aren’t any Okwa in the Blackwater. She’s headed for the Spiderlair, and you know it!”

Manon shrugged her off. Turning to Sally, she said, “You still have it? Nice and safe?”

Sally nodded. She reached down the front of her dress and pulled out a polished garnet. It was as large as a snake’s head, and so dark it was almost black.

Manon took the stone and cast an *occula* songspell. A few seconds later, an image of a mermaid wearing silver glasses and a fuchsia dress appeared in the stone’s depths. She was frightened, Manon could tell, but trying not to show it. It was Ava. She was already in the Spiderlair. Manon didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

“That mermaid’s *trouble*,” Lafitte fretted, wringing his hands. “I *told* you she’d bring the likes of Traho to your door. You bluffed him good this time, but what if he comes back?”

Manon didn’t have an answer.

Ava Corajoso had shown up at her door five days ago, led by a growling piranha. She was thin and feverish, but she hadn’t begged for food or medicine. Instead, she’d held out what little currensea she had and asked for a charm to keep her safe from the Okwa Naholo.

“The *Okwa*?” Manon had said, looking her up and down. “Those nasty monsters are the *least* of your worries! Take that money and buy yourself some food!”

She’d started to close the door, but Ava had stopped it with her

hand. “Please,” she’d begged. “Everyone in the swamps says your charms are the strongest.”

“Everyone’s right. But *no* charm’s strong enough to save you from the Okwa. Just the sight of them will stop your heart dead.”

“Not mine. I can’t see them. I’m blind,” Ava had said, lowering her glasses.

“So you are, *cher*, so you are,” Manon had said, her voice softening, her bright eyes taking in Ava’s unseeing ones. “Tell me, why do you want to mess with the Okwa?”

“I *don’t* want to,” Ava had said. “But they have something I need in order to stop a monster—a monster ten times worse than any Okwa.”

“Doesn’t mean you’ll get it. The Okwa might still kill you. In fact, I’d put money on it.”

“They might. But I’d give my life gladly if it meant I could save many more.”

*Merl’s crazier than a swamp rat*, Manon had thought. She’d been about to send Ava away once and for all, but something had stopped her. Something in Ava’s eyes. They weren’t right, those eyes, but still . . . that mermaid *saw*. Right down into you, to what was deep and true. She saw the good there no matter how hard you tried to hide it.

“Keep your coins,” Manon had said, against her better judgment. She’d led Ava inside, offered her a chair and a cup of thick, sweet cat-tail coffee. She’d sat down across from her and asked what she was after in the swamps. “Tell me straight. No lies, *cher*,” she’d cautioned. “A good *gris-gris* needs many ingredients. The truth’s one of them.”

Ava had taken a deep breath, then said, “A monster lies under the ice of the Southern Sea. For centuries, it has been asleep, but now it’s waking. It was created by one of the mages of Atlantis.”

Manon’s ancient eyes had narrowed. The swamp mer were given to telling tall tales. Decades of listening to them had made her a

skeptical soul. “A *monster?*” she’d said. “Why would a mage make a monster?”

Ava had told Manon about Orfeo, the talismans, and Abbadon, and how Ava and five other mermaids had been chosen to defeat that monster. She told her about Vallerio, that he was kidnapping and imprisoning merfolk, and forcing them to search for the talismans. By the time Ava had finished her story, Manon was so shaken, she’d had to call for her smelling salts.

Rumors had come to Manon’s ears, carried on the river. Rumors of powerful objects and labor camps. Rumors of soldiers in black uniforms moving through her swamp, and of a shadowy man with no eyes. She’d thought they were only more wild stories. Ava’s arrival at her cave, and Traho’s, had convinced her otherwise.

“You need to find that talisman, child. No two ways about it,” Manon had said as soon as she’d recovered. “I’ll do what I can to help you.”

She’d fed Ava a spicy, filling stew made of crawdads, salamanders, and river peppers, and had given her medicine to break her fever. Then she’d made her a gris-gris—maybe the strongest one she’d *ever* made—and hadn’t taken so much as a cowrie for it. Lafitte, Esmé, and Sally had all looked at Manon as if she’d lost her mind.

As she’d hung the gris-gris around Ava’s neck, Manon had told Ava that the Okwa lived in the Spiderlair swamp and instructed her on how to get there. She’d tried to convince Ava to spend the night in her cave and rest close to the waterfire, but Ava had politely refused the offer. “There are soldiers on my tail,” she’d explained. Then she’d thanked Manon and left.

“You keep that child safe, you hear me?” Manon had whispered to the spirits as she’d watched Ava swim away. She cared for that mermaid, though she didn’t want to. Caring was risky in the swamps. The Spiderlair, a four days’ journey from Manon’s cave, was named

for the large, vicious arachnids that hunted on its banks. It was the other creatures that lived in those dark waters that worried Manon, though—most of them far too clever to be glimpsed with an occula. The seeing stone showed evidence of them, nonetheless—in the bones and skulls half-buried in the swamp mud.

Manon picked up her tarot cards again now. They'd been cut from the shells of giant washboard clams, polished flat, then etched with tarot symbols. She drew one from the deck and laid it down. When she saw what it was—a tall, upright tower with waterfire coming out of its windows—she caught her breath.

“The Tower means danger. Not good,” Lafitte said, clucking his tongue. “Not good at all.”

Manon glanced at the seeing stone again. Inside it, the image of Ava was fading. The mermaid had swum deeper into the Spiderlair, too deep for the seeing stone to follow. Another image took its place: the brutal Captain Traho riding with his troops.

They were headed the wrong way; that was something. And even if they found out that the Okwa were in the Spiderlair and not the Blackwater, Ava still had a good head start on them. Then again, they were on hippokamps and she was on fin. They were strong and she was weak. They numbered two hundred and she was only one.

Fear, an emotion Manon Laveau was not accustomed to, wrapped its cold, thin fingers around her heart.

“Please, *cher*,” she whispered. “*Hurry*.”

# ONE

SERAFINA SWAM TO the mouth of the cave, high in the side of a lonely, current-swept bluff, and peered into the black water. “They’re not coming,” she said.

“They *are*,” Desiderio countered. “They probably took a back current to throw off any trackers. It’s dangerous for the Näkki as well as us.”

Sera nodded, but she wasn’t convinced. While she continued to search the water for movement, the others floated around a waterfire, trying to warm themselves. She’d cast the fire small and weak. The last thing she wanted was to advertise their presence.

Sera, Desiderio, Yazeed, and Ling were in no-mer’s-waters, just over the border of the Meerteufel goblins’ realm. They would have preferred to hold this meeting at their stronghold in the Kargjord, but Guldemar, the Meerteufel chieftain, hated the Näkki—a tribe of arms dealers—and forbade them to enter his realm. Any found in his waters, he’d decreed, were to be shot on sight.

Sera didn’t like the Näkki either and wished she didn’t have to deal with them, but she had no choice. The death riders had just intercepted two weapons shipments. Under an agreement Sera had made with Guldemar, the Meerteufel were to supply the Black Fins with arms. The stolen shipments were the last two that Guldemar owed the resistance, and he’d refused to replace them. The death riders were not his problem, he’d said. He’d met his obligation.



Desperate, Sera had made plans to meet the Näkki here, in the lonely borderwaters of the North Sea. But would they come?

The loss of valuable armaments was bad, but far more troubling to Sera was the fact that the death riders had known when the weapons would be shipped and along what route. It confirmed what she'd suspected—that the Black Fin resistance had a spy in its midst. This traitor had done a great deal of damage to the resistance and was poised to do more. Sera had shared her plan to meet with the Näkki with her inner circle only, hoping to keep it a secret from the spy.

*Play the board, not the piece*, her mother, Regina Isabella, had advised, comparing the art of ruling to a chess game. Ever since Sera had learned that her uncle Vallerio was the one behind the invasion of Cerulea and her mother's assassination, she'd been desperately trying to keep herself, and her Black Fins, out of checkmate.

*Where are the Näkki?* she wondered now, still gazing out at the dark waters. *Did something spook them?*

"Five more minutes, then we're out of here," she announced, returning to the group.

At that moment, the temperature in the cave plummeted and the waterfire burned low. Sera heard a noise behind her. She spun around, her hand on the dagger at her hip, her fighters at her back.

Three figures floated in the cave's entrance. Their faces were hidden in the silt-covered folds of their hoods. They had long, powerful tails and looked like mer, but Sera knew they weren't.

"Näkki," she said silently, releasing her dagger. *Shapeshifters*. Wary and elusive, they could blend in with a crowd of mer, a school of fish, or a rock face within seconds.

A sickly sweet smell wafted from them, one that made Sera's stomach clench—the smell of death. It took her back to the invasion of Cerulea and the rotting bodies of her merfolk lying in the ruins.

Instinctively, she touched the ring on her right hand. Mahdi had

carved it from a shell for her, as an expression of his love. Thinking of him gave her courage.

“Welcome,” she said, nodding to her visitors.

The Näkki removed their hoods. Under them were mermen’s faces, handsome and fine. Their leader, dark-skinned and amber-eyed, his black hair worn long and loose, extended his hand. Sera took it. His grip was hard. His companions were amber-eyed, too. Their skin was pale. Long blond braids trailed down their backs.

“I’m Serafina, regina di Miromara. I’m grateful to you for coming. I know your journey was a dangerous one.”

“Kova,” the Näkki leader said. He nodded at the others. “Julma and Petos.”

As he spoke, Sera saw that his tongue was black and split at the tip like a snake’s. It unnerved her, but she kept her feelings hidden.

“Sit with us,” she said, gesturing toward the waterfire.

Something glinted darkly on the underside of her hand as she did. She glanced at it, and bit back a gasp. Her palm was streaked with blood. She must’ve cut herself without noticing, but how? On her dagger’s hilt? Hastily, she wiped the blood off on her jacket, hoping no one noticed, then joined the Näkki and the Black Fins around the fire.

Kova settled himself, flanked by Julma and Petos. Ling passed around a box of barnacles and a basket of keel worms. As the Näkki helped themselves, Kova brusquely asked, “What do you need?”

“Crossbows and spearguns,” Des replied.

“Quantities?”

“Five thousand of each. Plus rounds.”

“When?”

“Yesterday,” said Yazeed.

Kova nodded, frowning. “It won’t be easy, but I can do it. Give me a week.”

“Quality. No garbage,” Des said.

“The crossbows are goblin-made. The spearguns come from a gogg trader. Best in the world,” Kova said. He smiled grimly. “If there’s one thing the goggs are good at, it’s killing.”

“What about the rounds?” asked Yazeed.

“Spears are stainless steel. Gogg-made. Arrows are Kobold steel with barbed heads. Hit someone with one of those, he’s not getting up.”

“How much?” Sera asked.

“Seventy thousand trocii.”

She shook her head. “We haven’t got mer currensea, only doubloons.”

Kova chuckled. “Stolen from Vallerio’s vaults, I hear.”

“Not stolen, regained,” Sera retorted. “From *my* vaults.”

The Black Fins’ only form of barter was the treasure they’d taken from chambers deep inside Cerulea’s royal palace: goggish doubloons, gemstones, silver goblets, gold jewelry.

“Fifty thousand doubloons, then,” said Kova.

“Thirty.”

Kova didn’t reply. He worked a piece of food from his teeth with his thumbnail. “Forty-five,” he said at length. “Final offer.”

Sera thought about the price he was demanding. Her treasure was dwindling fast. Paying for food and weapons for her troops, purchasing thorny Devil’s Tail vines and other materials to strengthen her camps’ defenses—it all cost a great deal. So did the lava globes she had to buy, for the Kargjord didn’t appear to have a lava seam under it. And this was only the preparation stage. The battle to take back Cerulea from Vallerio, the fight against Abbadon—these were still to come.

Forty-five thousand doubloons, she finally decided, was a price she was prepared to pay. But there was another, even higher price for these weapons, one she couldn’t bear to pay: lives.

For a moment, Sera was no longer in the cave with the Nākki; she was back in Cerulea during the attack. She saw her father's body sinking through the water. Saw the arrow go into her mother's chest. Heard the screams of innocent mer as they were slaughtered.

"Sera . . ." That was Desiderio. She barely heard him.

Her gaze came to rest on Kova. His palm lay flat against a rock; a thin line of crimson oozed from it. She raised her eyes and saw smears of blood on the box of barnacles Ling had passed around, and more on the basket of worms.

*I didn't cut myself,* she realized. *The Nākki have blood on their hands and they leave it on everything they touch.*

"Sera, we need an answer." That was Yazeed.

But she couldn't make the words come. She was immobilized by fear—fear for her people, for the suffering and destruction to come. How could any ruler make the decision to go to war? Even for a just cause? How could she send thousands to their deaths?

And then she heard another voice—Vrāja's. Sera was certain that the river witch had been killed by death riders, but she lived on in Sera's heart.

*Instead of shunning your fear, you must let it speak,* Vrāja had told her. *It will give you good counsel.*

Sera listened.

*The Nākki peddle death,* her fear said. *But you must learn to sit with death, and his merchants, if you want to defeat your uncle and destroy the evil in the Southern Sea. How many more will die if you take no action?*

Sera raised her eyes to Kova's and, in a voice heavy with dread, said, "We have a deal."

Kova nodded. "My terms are half up front."

Sera's fins flared. She did not take orders from arms-dealing sea scum. "My terms are *nothing* up front," she shot back. "When I get my weapons, you get your gold."

Kova gave her a long look. “How will you get the goods to the Karg? They’ll be in crates roped to hippokamps. *My* hippokamps. They aren’t part of the deal.”

“That’s my worry,” Sera replied.

Kova snorted. “Yes, it is. That and much more,” he said, rising. Julma and Petos followed his lead. “Give me five days,” he said, thrusting his hand at Sera to seal the deal.

Sera rose, too, and shook it, her eyes locked on his, her grip firm. Kova released her hand and then the three Näkki pulled their hoods over their heads. Seconds later, they were gone.

Sera looked down at her palm, knowing what she would see.

She felt a hand on her back. It was Ling. “It washes off,” she said.

Sera shook her head. “No, Ling,” she said softly. “It doesn’t.”

## TWO

THE CURRENTS of Mørk Dal were deserted, its shops closed, its homes shuttered against the night. The glow from a handful of sputtering lava globes was all that illuminated the sleeping goblin village in the frigid gray waters of the North Sea.

Astrid Kolfinnsdottir moved silently down the main current, sword drawn, eyes alert for any movement. She was hunting for a mirror.

There were none in the Kargjord, where she'd left her friends, or in the barren waters that surrounded that wasteland. She'd been swimming south for days. Mørk Dal was the first village she'd come across, the first place where she could find what she needed.

Orfeo had summoned her. He'd come to her in a mirror, and she knew she would have to go to him the same way. But how? Many of the greatest mages couldn't travel through mirrors. How was *she*—a mermaid with no magic, one who couldn't sing a note—supposed to?

"This is total insanity," she whispered. "It's hopeless. Impossible. Suicidal." She'd been saying these words a lot lately—ever since she'd met Serafina, Neela, Ling, Ava, and Becca in the Iele's caves.

The six mermaids had been called together by the Iele's leader, Baba Vråja. She was the one who'd told them about the monster in the Southern Sea and said they were the only ones who could defeat it.

After they'd left the Iele, they'd learned that Orfeo had been a healer and the most formidable of the Atlantean mages—the Six

Who Ruled. Each of the six had a talisman, a magical object that enhanced their powers. Orfeo's, a flawless emerald, had been given to him by Eveksion, the god of healing.

Together with his fellow mages, Orfeo had ruled wisely and well and was beloved by his subjects—until his wife, Alma, died. He couldn't accept her death and had begged Horok, the keeper of the underworld, to return her to him. Horok refused, and Orfeo vowed to take her back. He'd set about creating a monster powerful enough to attack the underworld—Abbadon. Orfeo invoked the death goddess Morsa to aid him in his quest. From her, he gained a new talisman: a flawless black pearl.

When the other five mages—Morrow, Nyx, Sycorax, Navi, and Pyrrha—discovered what Orfeo was doing, they'd tried to stop him. Enraged, he unleashed his monster against them. In the ensuing battle, Abbadon destroyed Atlantis. As its people fled to the water, Morrow beseeched Neria, the sea goddess, to help them. Neria knit the Atlanteans' legs into tails and gave them the ability to breathe water, saving them.

Though the five mages fought bravely, they couldn't kill Abbadon, so they'd driven it into the Carceron, the island's prison. To open the prison's lock, they'd needed all six of their talismans. Orfeo refused to surrender his; they'd had to kill him to get it. Once Abbadon was imprisoned, Sycorax, with the help of whales, dragged the Carceron to the Southern Sea.

Afterward, Morrow hid the talismans in the most dangerous places in the six water realms to make sure that no one could ever use them to free Abbadon. Then she had all historical records of the monster erased. A new story was told, one in which Atlantis was destroyed by natural causes. Over time, Orfeo's treachery, his monster, and the talismans were forgotten.

Morrow was sure that she'd done everything necessary to protect her people, but she was wrong.

Because Orfeo had found a way to cheat death. The other mages only thought they had killed him. He'd secreted his soul in Morsa's black pearl, then bided his time, for centuries, until a fish found the pearl and swallowed it. When a fisherman caught the creature and cleaned it, he discovered the pearl. A Viking chieftain bought the pearl from him, and as the chieftain held it, Orfeo's soul flowed into his body, taking it over. Alive again, Orfeo began to hunt for the other talismans, eager to unleash his monster.

Orfeo had vowed to take Alma back from Horok, if it took him all eternity. Astrid knew that he was now close to honoring that vow.

The vicious Vallerio was working to conquer all the mer realms and unite their militaries in the service of Orfeo's quest. With this immense army, and the fearsome Abbadon, Orfeo would finally be able to launch his attack on the underworld. He recognized that the gods themselves would fight him, and that the battle might wreak havoc on not only the underworld, but also the water and land realms. But none of that concerned Orfeo. Once reunited with his wife, he would begin the world anew with whatever was left. The only obstacles in his path were six young mermaids.

*Why have you summoned us?* Serafina had asked Vråja. *Why not emperors or admirals or commanders with their soldiers? Why not the waters' most powerful mages?*

Vråja had told them that they *were* the worlds' most powerful mages; each was a descendant of the Six Who Ruled, and their ancestors' magic lived on inside them.

Astrid was Orfeo's descendant. She hadn't believed the river witch. It was amazing. It was impossible. It was a total joke.

Orfeo was the most powerful mage the world had ever seen. *Ever*. And Astrid? She couldn't even cast a basic *camo* spell without the whalebone pipe Becca had made for her. She'd been able to make magic years ago, when she was a small child, but she'd lost her magic shortly after celebrating at Månenhonnør, her realm's moon festival.



And now she was attempting to find the powerful, immortal Orfeo and take the black pearl from him so that she and the others could combine all the talismans once more, unlock the Carceron, and kill Abbadon. *Her*: Astrid Kolfinnsdottir. A mermaid with no magic.

“Total insanity,” she whispered again. But she had to do it. She had to find Orfeo, and she had to get the black pearl. She was the only one who could.

Astrid kept moving through Mørk Dal, her eyes sweeping left to right. She swam past a shopwindow containing jars of wrinkled terragogg ears, candied sea cucumbers, and spiced krill; another displayed weapons fashioned from fine Kobold steel; a third had an array of lava globes. She needed a hairdresser’s shop, a jeweler, or a tailor—someplace with a mirror—but she didn’t see one.

A few minutes later, she reached the end of the main current, where the shops gave way to houses. A narrow side current with a few more shops on it snaked off to the right. One store had a sign above its window: SELWIG’S SHIPWRECK SALVAGE.

Astrid sped to it. Salvagers, goblin and mer, combed shipwrecks for valuable objects. They almost always had mirrors for sale. She pressed her nose to the window, cupping her eyes. The shop was dark, but a nearby lava globe, mounted on a pole, threw off enough light for her to see its contents: crystal goblets, brass lanterns, a croquet set . . . and a mirror!

Glancing around to make sure no one else was nearby, Astrid slid her sword back into its sheath at her hip and drew a dagger from inside her parka. She inserted the blade into the door’s lock, twisted it sharply, then yanked it upward. The tumblers shot back, and the door swung open. She put her dagger away and swam inside. As she closed the door behind her, she cast another wary glance at the current. The last thing she needed was to get arrested.

Threading her way past piles of sailcloth, plastic coolers, and coils of nylon rope, Astrid approached the mirror. It was oval and quite

large, with a gold frame. In it, she could see her reflection: her braided hair, as pale as moonlight; her ice-blue eyes; her strong black-and-white tail.

“How do I do this?” she asked herself.

She remembered her whalebone pipe. Maybe it would help. But as she was reaching for it, she stopped. Camo spells were all she knew how to cast. And even if she *had* known the songspell for mirror travel, she’d never be able to pull it off. Her magic was too weak.

She thought back to the time Orfeo had come to her in a mirror at Tanner’s Deeps. He’d held his hand up to the glass and she’d held hers up, too, and for a second, she’d felt as if she was sinking into silver. She pressed a palm against the mirror now. Nothing happened. She pushed harder. Still nothing. Frustrated, she tried one last time.

That’s when the woman’s face, pale and disembodied, floated into view.