



THE SHATTERED TALES

A SLEEPING BEAUTY RETELLING

To DEFY  
A DREAM

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## CHAPTER 1



**D**anger. That was the clear message that the bewitched spindle's cold, unforgiving metal gave me as it rolled between my fingers, the sharpened silver tip drawing my eyes repeatedly. It hummed with a secret enchantment that reeked of sinister magic. I could almost smell the acrid poison that I knew was concealed within the needle, waiting to render its victim incapacitated with unimaginable pain as they were transported to the alternate world in which my people were being held hostage by a demonic djinni.

That journey was the fate that awaited me.

Concealing the shaking that threatened to consume my body that was caused by more than the turret's chilliness, I glanced up at Irsula. My fairy godmother smiled, a disturbing, foreboding expression that gave me no comfort. When I had requested my coronation gift to be something to help end the plague and revive my people, I didn't anticipate her solution to be so...evil.

"Tell me again what I need to do." The forced calmness of my voice hid the terror that urged me to flee, shrieking,

from the lonely tower room. Irsula had already enumerated just how excruciating it would be, and I paled at the thought.

“Once the potion enters your body, you will be put into a deep sleep, just like those trapped in the dream realm. You’ll be able to return and bring one person with you.” She handed me two additional identical spindles. “These are for you and your brother Waylon’s return journey, easy as that.”

None of this sounded easy to me, but the thought of my gangly older brother sustained me. I numbly accepted the silver spindles, my fingers curling automatically and bundling them into scraps of fabric to avoid inadvertently pricking myself, then swept my cloak aside and tucked them into my dress pocket. If only they provided the calm assurance that they would return me once my mission was completed. “They’ll stay with me when I go to the dream world?” The last thing I needed was to be stuck in the dream world and leave Terrene heirless.

“Correct,” she confirmed. “It’ll be painful, but you’ll be able to go find your brother.”

I could endure anything if it meant bringing Waylon home. For years, I’d spent every spare moment studying both djinnis and the mysterious illness that plagued all of Terrene. When my father unexpectedly took ill and passed away a year prior, my mother fell into a deep depression. As consort, she had never intended to rule, and leadership should have passed to Waylon, but in his absence, I’d been forced to take on all the duties of the heir to the throne: negotiating treaties, holding court, settling domestic and international disputes, and balancing complicated budgets during the day, followed by the nights of rigorous study.

My mother, regent ruler until my upcoming coronation, did the best she could, but she had barely stopped

mourning Waylon when Father died. Her grief often left her numb to the world, and I had to step in and do everything. I couldn't bring Father back from the dead, but maybe, just maybe, I could rescue Waylon.

Each breath weighed heavily in my chest. The fear of the unknown, coupled with the dread of impending pain, left me tense with apprehension, my knuckles white as they clutched at the spindle, whose surface gleamed wickedly. Other royalty had fairy godmothers who blessed them with beauty, quick wit, or the gift of discernment.

True, once I learned that Irsula was capable of granting such a wish, I'd been the one to ask for a way in and out of the dream world where all of the victims of the Eternal Slumber were being held. But I'd never know why Irsula's solution had been a poisoned spindle that acted as a gateway to a realm haunted by a dark force. Suddenly, the onerous responsibilities belonging to the heir to the throne didn't seem quite as daunting as I'd previously imagined. Would I always be burdened with more and more difficult tasks?

Irsula's lip curled back, revealing two rows of jagged, yellowing teeth. "I know you'll succeed."

I met her eyes, chin lifted in feigned confidence. "As do I." I had to succeed. The kingdom depended on it.

For five long years, my subjects had been falling prey to the Eternal Slumber, minds trapped in an alternate realm, and for all five years, our best teams of scientists, physicians, and researchers had failed to discover the cure or source of the mysterious disease. The same conclusion was drawn each time: it was the work of a powerful djinni. The glint of the lethal spindle caught a flickering reflection from the hearth's dying fire, and my gaze was attracted back to the item that would force me into that

same cursed sleep—the sleep from which no one had ever awakened.

No matter how much Professor Dyvan lectured me about the nature and magic of djinnis, my brain was often so full from the day's work that it felt like a saturated sponge, unable to absorb any more information, and now there was no more time for study. I understood enough about djinnis to know that the object to which their powers were connected had to be destroyed if there was any chance of ridding our kingdom of the creature's otherworldly pull. Such an item would be well hidden in their mystical dream world. If I was going to kill a djinni and save my people, I had to enter its realm.

Suddenly chilled to my very core at the prospect of what I faced, I paced the circular tower room in which Irsula and I had hidden ourselves, knowing that Mother would never approve of letting the only remaining heir to the throne embark on such a risky endeavor. If I stayed, it was only a matter of time before I was forced into an engagement for political reasons. Mother visited Waylon's comatose body every day, where she watched his chest rise and fall as his unbroken slumber continued. He lay with the hundreds of other victims who were continually nourished and watched over in the east wing, unable to be buried, for they weren't truly dead. I would join that number soon.

With every step I took, my blood pulsed to my very fingertips, drawing attention to what I still clutched in my hand—forbidden dark magic. I could feel every curve of the tiny spindle and continued to nervously avoid the razor-sharp tips as I flexed my fingers around the base. The heavy weight of the metal spindles intended for our return journey weighed in my pocket, reminding me of the enormous responsibility that had settled onto my shoulders.

To avoid looking at Irsula's disturbing leer, I turned my attention to the sweeping view visible from the turret's open window. The picturesque scene of a tidy village, complete with orchards in full bloom and a bustling street lined with booths, belied the true state of affairs in my kingdom. I leaned forward, fingers gripping the sill as my eyes hungrily searched for any reason to procrastinate the task I knew I must complete but which I dreaded.

The limping figure of the Viscount of Silverdale caught my eye, and I curled my lip in disdain. At least when I stabbed myself, I wouldn't have to deal with him until I returned. Why couldn't he have been one of those taken by the Eternal Slumber? The pompous, self-righteous, pitiful excuse for nobility never wasted an opportunity to incite riots against the crown. The despicable man!

If I hadn't been so preoccupied with the all-consuming stress of finding a cure and managing the aftermath of the disease's effects, the tedious paperwork to strip him of his title and imprison him for treason would have already been filed. In recent years, he had lobbied for increasingly aggressive measures to cure the disease, like capturing fairies and forcing them to grant wishes, which most weren't powerful enough to do, though the commoners didn't know that. It was only a matter of time before he tried to seize the throne, as he hinted he would if the issue was not resolved soon.

It wasn't an idle threat. He had amassed a loyal following of commoners who agreed with his philosophies and blamed the crown for failing to bring their family members out of the cursed sleep. How satisfying it would be to fling a chamber pot down onto the viscount's shining bald spot. It didn't matter to me that he was in his mid-fifties and should be treated with respect. The man had done nothing to earn

my respect, and I refused to give it, even if I was forced to behave cordially in public.

“Princess Aurelia!” The shrill sound of one of my ladies-in-waiting calling my name lurched me back to the present. The spindle’s metal, which remained cold despite the extended contact with my skin, leached my body’s heat from me and reminded me of just how aggressively I planned to fight for a solution to the problem.

“Better hurry,” Irsula urged, nodding at the weapon in my fist.

“Princess Aureeeeeelia!”

Sweat broke out on my forehead.

*Do it now!* an insistent voice at the back of my head screamed at me. I had tried without success to suppress my impulsive nature for years and mold my temperament into the patient, logical ruler that Terrene needed. But now that the time had come to embrace my reckless, impulsive nature, it abandoned me. Try as I might to conceal it, violent trembling shuddered throughout my body, and the interior of my mouth became bone dry.

Footsteps echoed up the stone stairwell, drawing nearer. I stared down at the spindle.

Seconds trickled by as the lady-in-waiting sent to find me came closer, step by step. It wasn’t the act of piercing my skin that caused my apprehension; it was the pain that I knew would follow.

The heavy wooden door’s handle rattled, and the hinges creaked.

Time was up. I had to act. For Terrene.

Before I lost my nerve, I swung the spindle high into the air and plunged it down, the sharpened silver tip piercing my forearm. Poison flooded into my system through the



needle embedded deep in my muscle. The effect instantly froze my insides while simultaneously burning every inch of my skin. I tried to scream, but my lungs had solidified into two useless lumps of ice. I was trapped—trapped inside my own head, and my body curled in on itself, writhing in agony.

Wave after wave of blinding, excruciating pain swept through my body, incapacitating me far more readily than any torture our dungeon's jailers could ever have dreamt up. I collapsed to the floor, unable to register any sensation beyond the suffering I was forcing myself to endure. The only thought in my mind beyond my torment was the knowledge that by doing this, I had a chance, slim though it was, to relieve the suffering of my people and rescue my brother.

Just as I felt that I would surely die from the pain, the most curious sensation I had ever experienced flowed through me. It felt as though my conscious mind was floating away, far away from my pain-riddled body, away from the abandoned tower room, away from everything I knew and held dear. Darkness swelled and overpowered the fragmented bits of awareness I had left, but before I lost complete consciousness, I heard, as if from worlds away, the lady-in-waiting scream as she found my motionless body, Irsula long gone.



Ready to see what happens when Princess Aurelia

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