

FATED TO DARKNESS TRILOGY

THE
KING
OF
FROST
AND
SHADOWS

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JEN L. GREY

THE KING OF FROST AND SHADOWS

FATED TO DARKNESS

BOOK 1

JEN L. GREY

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NAME GLOSSARY

Lira (LEE-rah)

Tavish (TAH-vish)

Eiric (AY-rik)

Faelan (FAY-lan)

Finnian (FIN-ee-an)

Caelan (KAY-lan)

Eldrin (EL-drin)

Lorne (LORN)

Moria (MOHR-ee-ah)

Torcall (TOR-kahl)

Finola (fi-NO-lah)

Rona (ROH-nah)

Dougal (DOO-gal)

Malikor (MAL-ih-kor)

Moor (MOOR)

Struan (STROO-an)

Pyralis (pie-RAL-is)

GENERAL GLOSSARY

Ardanos (ard-AN-ohss) – Realm Name

Aetherglen (AY-thur-glen) – Unseelie and Seelie joined kingdom

Cuil Dorcha (COOL DOR-kha) - Unseelie Kingdom

Dunscaith (DOON-skah) – Unseelie Castle

Gleann Solas (GLYAN SO-las) – Seelie Kingdom

Caisteal Solais (KASH-tul SO-lash) – Seelie Castle

Aelwen – (A-el-wen) - River in Seelie Kingdom

Tìr na Dràgon (CHEER na DRAY-gon) – Dragon Kingdom

Cù-sìth (koo-shee) – Wolf-like Unseelie creature



PROLOGUE



The lantern in my hand flickered as I tiptoed through the castle's dark secret passageway. I'd learned that Tavish, the Unseelie prince and my friend, was doing poorly, and I needed to see him. I didn't understand why Father wanted to hide this from me, and I didn't know where Tavish's parents were, but he shouldn't be alone.

He'd do the same for me if our roles were reversed.

When Father hadn't come to wish me good night with Mother, my pulse had started racing. The last time he hadn't shown, I'd learned the next day I'd been betrothed to the dragon prince, Pyralis, and that the Unseelie were no longer our acquaintances.

Yet again, none of it made sense to me, but I supposed that was to be expected. I was only ten years old.

I'd always assumed I'd be promised to Tavish. My parents and I and the Unseelie royals met twice a year so the ruling fae families could spend time together. Though the relationship between the two kingdoms had always been uneasy, it was nothing compared to our fraught relationship with the dragons.

When I pressed her for answers, Mother had let it slip that Tavish was here in the holding cells. Then she'd asked me not to let Father know she'd told me. He didn't want me to know, likely because he knew I'd do this.

Cobwebs hung in the corners of the stone walls, and I tried to control my breathing. I hated how dusty it smelled in here, and I avoided glancing at the floor. I'd walked the corridor twice a year since I'd turned four, learning its twists and turns in case something ever happened and I needed to escape. Father's intent hadn't been for me to use it to sneak around behind his wings.

An animal scurried by my feet, and my heart hammered, pounding against my ribs. I closed my eyes and tried not to scream. Maybe I should've waited until morning to visit Tavish, but the weird expression on Mother's face and the way her vibrant red wings had hugged her body had my chest feeling tight, like I couldn't breathe. I'd never seen her forehead with lines before. Between that and Tavish being in a holding cell, I'd realized things in the Seelie Court were worse than Father had let on ... bad enough that he'd promised me to a *dragon*.

When the creature had scurried far enough away, I took two more steps and turned right where the door would be. I lifted the lantern higher, my arm shaking with fatigue from how long I'd been carrying it around. The holding cells were as far away as you could get from the royal bedrooms and a place that an attacker would least expect us to flee to. That was one reason the holding cells were rarely used, and only for a partial day when they were—to keep the cells free each night in case the dragons decided to attack. The last we'd heard, their kingdom's resources were strained, so they were searching for another land to move to.

Gritty stone rubbed against my fingertips. I'd never opened the door before—Father always handled it—but I'd watched him closely enough to find the lever in the bottom corner.

I squatted, my pale-blue silk nightgown brushing the smooth floor, and then flinched, realizing I'd need to change when this was over, or someone would notice the dirt. Exhaling, my aqua wings fluttered behind me, revealing my nerves. Luckily, I was alone, though I could still hear my father's voice echoing in my head. *Lira, as the future Seelie queen, you can't let others see your emotions. You must always be confident and strong.*

Easy for him to say. He'd been nine hundred years old when they'd finally been blessed with an heir.

My finger reached a divot, and something sharp pricked my finger. I jerked back and stuck my finger into my mouth. The sweet honey taste of my blood hit my tongue as I tried to ease the sting ... and the stone wall faintly creaked open.

A groan sounded from the darkened room, and I edged inside, allowing the lantern to cast a warm glow.

I froze.

The boy I remembered from not too long ago couldn't possibly be the fourteen-year-old before me.

His face was paler than normal—which spoke volumes for the Prince of Darkness, Frost, and Nightmares—reminding me of the snow I'd seen a handful of times when we'd traveled to the Unseelie castle. His onyx wings enveloped him like a barrier, and I noticed a large pool of black blood underneath his right side.

I rushed to him, forgetting to be quiet. This broken figure was a shell of the boy from my memories, a boy who used to chase me through the woods and clouds. I dropped beside him, making sure I didn't kneel in his blood and placed the lantern next to me. I took in the sizable wound in his side and gasped. The skin looked jagged as if torn by a dagger, and I could see tissue between the rushes of blood trickling from him.

He grimaced like the light bothered him, which it probably did since he wielded darkness.

I had so many questions, but that didn't matter. In his state, he couldn't respond. I scanned him, noting no signs of herbs or bandages. Why hadn't a healer come, and why didn't he at least have a cot to sleep on? It was as if Father didn't care that he could die.

I took his hand in mine. It felt like ice ... colder than I remembered. The contrast between my sun-kissed skin and his snowy complexion reminded me again of how different we were.

One thing was certain, he could die.

At the thought, something inside me sparked—a magic that felt different from the cool, refreshing kind I used when wielding water. This sensation felt warm and comforting, and it pulsed from the spot inside me next to my water magic.

My skin buzzed where we touched, and the warm magic funneled toward our connection, my power flowing into him.

I tensed. Unless a fae was an experienced healer, we only shared magic if we found our mate. If my parents learned what I'd done, I'd be in more trouble than I could comprehend. Sharing a piece of myself like this would make me vulnerable, but before I could pull away, his wound began to shrink.

Head tilting back, I didn't understand what was happening. Impossibly, I *was* healing him. The last fae who could heal injuries through touch had lived thousands of years ago, and there hadn't been one since. We now relied on healers with earth magic to know which herbs and plants would help people heal faster.

Yet, I couldn't deny what was happening in front of my eyes as the wound stopped bleeding and closed completely.

Something heavy weighed on my body.

His eyelids fluttered but remained closed. I had to believe that if I continued to use this new magic, I'd heal him all the way. Yet, the magic inside me weakened, and my head lolled sideways as fatigue settled over me.

I blinked several times, forcing my eyes to stay open.

Shuffling outside the main door caught my attention. My mouth dried. If the guards came in here, they'd catch me.

Then one of them said, "Watch out! There's—"

His words ended in a gurgle, and the door was flung open.

An Unseelie man I'd never seen before blocked the doorway. Shadows curled around his body, hiding him from anyone behind him. He had long, white hair and white eyes.

When those eyes focused on me, he sneered and marched toward us. "What are you doing to my cousin?"

I peered behind him and saw a guard bleeding out on the floor. Fear strangled me. Even though I needed to move, I went still as a statue. Not even my wings spread out behind me.

The air brimmed with tension, and he charged me.

“I’m heal—” I started, but he shoved me away from Tavish.

I shrieked, but the back of my head hit the floor, cutting short my cry. My vision hazed just as the man picked up Tavish’s unconscious body. The last thing I saw was him blanketing them both in shadows.

LIRA

My chest tightened as bodies bumped into me. Eiric clung to my hand, making sure we didn't get separated among the masses, adding to my wariness. I couldn't shake the feeling that we should head home and leave this overcrowded New Year's Eve party. The air had become electric since we'd joined the crowd for the New Year's countdown, but now it felt different ... like danger was more imminent. Hard to believe because I'd been on edge after waking from my recurring nightmare this morning.

"Dammit, Lira," Eiric said loudly over the noise of the jazz music. "I can't believe you talked me into coming to the City Market on New Year's Eve! We're just asking for drunk people to spill their drinks on us or, worse, vomit all over us."

Yeah, I couldn't believe it either. Earlier, while people-watching from a bench three blocks away, the idea had seemed perfect. Now, the urge to flee damn near overpowered me. Everywhere I looked, I saw dark-slate eyes watching me.

A shiver shot down my spine at the vivid image in my mind. Something made me want to see the person they belonged to, but he was always hidden by shadows and darkness. Only his eyes were visible to me.

I'd had the same nightmare every night for as long as I could remember. Though, through the years, the eyes had become crystal clear, so much so that I could have drawn them perfectly if I'd had the talent.

I'd hoped to calm the restlessness inside me by getting out and around people in the fresh air, but the scents were definitely *not* refreshing. I wanted to jump into the ocean or take a shower because I was certain I smelled like body odor as well.

Despite the faint chill of late December in Savannah, with all of us bunched together, it felt like it was at least seventy degrees out here, and we were still on the outskirts of the grassy lawn, far away from the stage.

"Look, E." I paused behind a group of guys who were leering at the women in front of them and turned toward my best friend, who also happened to be my sister. I hated to admit that I'd made yet another bad decision, but my discomfort trumped my pride ... for the most part. "If you want to go, I guess—"

"Oh no you don't." She arched a perfectly sculpted brow and shook her head, her short, tight curls barely moving in two pigtails piled on top of her head. "You're not blaming this one on me." The glitter sparkled on her dark skin as if she were magical. "Since you're willing to leave 'for me,' I'm not taking you up on it." Her emerald eyes twinkled with glee. She'd purposely worn a long-sleeved shirt the same green color, which wasn't surprising. She favored shades of green.

I lifted my head and pushed back a few of the long blonde curls stuck to my face. I wrinkled my nose from a combination of the smells and her calling my bluff.

The way she smirked should've made me angry with her, but instead, I snorted and said, "*Wow*. Some sister you are."

Something hit me in the back, pushing me forward into the tallest guy in the group of men.

My shoulder hit Tall Guy, and he jerked forward.

"What the fuck?" the guy said angrily.

Eiric grabbed my arm and steadied me so I didn't hit the ground and get trampled. She glared at the two women who'd run into me and took a few steps back, pushing them away with her butt.

Tall Guy spun toward me. "You made me spill my—" His bloodshot eyes landed on me, and the anger twisting his face smoothed into a grin. "Damn. I mean, are you okay?"

Ew.

Standing a couple of inches taller than my five-foot-ten frame and buff, the guy wasn't bad-looking. If he'd been sober, he'd have been attractive to most women. Looking at him closely, I realized he might be the tight end on Savannah State College's football team. And boy, if I was right, he had a reputation as a womanizer.

Not that it mattered. The issue was still the same.

I'd never found anyone I was interested in—male or female—and clearly, that wouldn't change tonight, though I sort of wished I could find someone I was into.

"I'm fine," I said, answering the question he'd probably forgotten he'd asked a few seconds ago. "Sorry about running into you. I hate that I ruined one of the many drinks you've clearly overindulged in tonight."

Eiric sighed, but the corners of her mouth turned upward. She liked to tell me that my mouth got me into as much trouble as out of it, which meant I shouldn't say half the things I thought. However, she could never hide her amusement from me.

"It's fine." He threw an arm around my shoulders and pulled me to his side, his stale alcohol breath hitting my face.

I wanted to gag.

"Come with me, and I'll get you a drink too." He winked, lowering his head so that his scruff brushed my temple. He tried to lead me away from Eiric, so I dug my white tennis shoes into the grass.

The way he leered at me told me everything. My stomach gurgled, and I regretted coming here. It was still thirty minutes till midnight.

“Actually, I don’t drink.” That wasn’t true. I had in the past, but nothing had ever happened. Eiric and I had watched a ton of people get drunk and tipsy, but we’d never gotten a buzz, not even after splitting a gigantic bottle of tequila between us.

“Oh.” His forehead lined as if he’d heard the world’s most complex math equation. “That’s fine. You can keep me company while I get a new brewski.”

Not rolling my eyes physically hurt me. How did this guy get any women? Yet I was certain he’d slept with numerous girls on campus. I felt bad for every one of them, knowing there was no way he could possibly be a good lay. “No, I’m good.”

“Please?” He pouted and tugged on me again.

Eiric stepped up next to me, her face stoic with a look that could make any grown man feel like a child. My sister placed her hands on her hips, ready to give Tall Guy a lesson in etiquette. But that wasn’t all. She was preparing.

Our parents had taught us as children how to defend ourselves, and we never left home without protection, especially on nights like this.

We each had a knife strapped to our ankle—which was why we favored boot-cut jeans—and a pocketknife in our right pocket since we were both right-handed. We had easy access to a weapon if we needed quick protection.

“My sister said no.” Eiric glared. “So let her go.”

Tall Guy pretended she hadn’t spoken, keeping his gaze locked on me.

Something inside me suddenly *tugged*, and the hair on the nape of my neck stood in warning. My skin crawled at the unsettling sensation, one I only ever experienced in my nightmares.

“There you two are,” a deep voice with a faint accent boomed from the edge of the crowd where Tall Guy had been trying to take me. Even though there was no way this man was talking to us, my eyes homed in on him like he was a glass of water I desperately needed.

And what I found shattered me.

Gray eyes the color of storm clouds met mine, causing my heart to quicken. They were so familiar, yet I couldn’t place them. Still, they spoke to

something deep inside me.

He slid gracefully toward us through the groups of people, and my palms became sweaty, which was ridiculous. He wasn't looking for me.

But I wanted him to be.

"Don't be so uptight," Tall Guy shot back at my sister. "You're hot too. One of my boys will gladly take your attention, but blondie here owes me a drink."

I swallowed as Sexy Man scowled. His pale complexion reflected the various lights from the stage, adding more allure to his devastating good looks.

"I hate to inform you, but *blondie* here is with *me*." Sexy Man's dark hair fell into his eyes as he reached out and took my hand then pulled me away from Tall Guy and toward him.

My skin buzzed where he touched me, and my legs moved with ease. I didn't realize what I was doing until I was nestled into Sexy Guy's side with his arm around my waist. Between the way my body reacted to him and his unique scent—a mixture of wet earth, jasmine, musk, and amber—I had to fight to keep myself from burying my nose in his shirt.

Eiric tilted her head, taking in the newcomer. Her hand lowered to her pocket, readying to take out the knife at the first sign of distress.

I wasn't sure what she saw in Sexy Man that made her more uneasy than Tall Guy, yet it was sort of funny that the one I'd labeled Tall Guy was at least two inches shorter than the newcomer.

Tall Guy gritted his teeth as he noted my relaxed posture. "She's your girl?"

Sexy Man chuckled darkly. "The one I've been searching for almost half my life."

My stomach somersaulted, and my cheeks hurt from how huge I was smiling. Great. If Sexy Man was interested in me, I was definitely not playing it cool. I finally felt something for someone! Though the sensation was startling. Being next to him felt *right* ... and I never wanted to be apart from him again.

“Come on, man,” one of Tall Guy’s buddies said and clapped his back. “We all need a refill and a girl to kiss at midnight.”

Eiric gestured between the two guys and said, “If all else fails, you could kiss one another.” She shrugged and moved to my other side. She gave Sexy Man a quick glance then focused back on Tall Guy.

“If you’re so worried about us finding someone, you can kiss me, Green Eyes.” Tall Guy grinned and winked at her.

“I’ll pass.” Her nose wrinkled, making her disdain clear. “I’m sure you can find someone as drunk as you. You’ll be fine.”

Sexy Man’s hand tightened on my waist as he glanced from Eiric back to me. He nodded to the left, which would take us farther from the crowd. “Are you ladies ready to go, or would you rather stay in *this*?” His body stiffened, conveying he was as uncomfortable as Eiric and I were.

“Let’s go.” I didn’t give a damn if Eiric gloated. I wanted to get away from the crowd. I’d heard on campus that this was one of the best places to go for New Year’s, but it wasn’t for Eiric and me. We both preferred hiking, swimming, and gardening to being around drunk people. When I’d suggested we go, she’d asked me if I’d lost my damn mind, and our parents hadn’t been thrilled, but what could they do? I was twenty-two, and Eiric was twenty-one. We were both of legal drinking age, and we lived at home to save costs while I attended Savannah State College to study environmental science and Eiric went to Georgia Southern for her geology degree.

Sexy Man led me out of the crowd with Eiric on our heels. He moved fast, but surprisingly, I had no issues keeping up with his pace. We dodged people who’d been drinking and hanging out on the roads of the oldest section of Savannah until we made our way to Telfair Square.

When the crowd thinned, Sexy Man released his hold but stayed beside me. Eiric cut her eyes at me, and I could hear the unasked question—*What’s the plan?*

The thought of heading home and leaving this man had my heart squeezing in discomfort. And it’d be rude to abandon someone who’d rescued me, right? Not that Eiric and I couldn’t have handled the situation