

CARLA REIGHARD



THE AEROWYN INTERLUDES

BELLAROSE III

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Chapter 1

Preface

Author note: *This was a complete small interlude book I published before the third book of the Aerowyn Tales was completed. With my editor's help, I combined some of this story with "Quinn", which is now called "Bellarose and the Captain", and unpublished this short book.*

Dear Reader,

Here is another interlude to help you hang on after reading Jasper. Like the other in-between book for The Aerowyn Tales trilogy, it's short and leaves on a cliffhanger. The conclusion to all the characters' stories will happen in the next book, Quinn.

I also added some bonus material at the end of this book. Please check it out before shutting off your e-reader or putting this book on your shelf. I like the Gilmore Girls TV show and its gilmore-isms, which references so many different aspects from pop culture, history, and more. Besides using some of the show's character names in The Travelers Duology, I copycat the show's method of making an assortment of references to my favorite books, movies, and places throughout my stories. I know this idea isn't original with them and many authors do this, but the GG excel at it. In one of the DVD seasons of Gilmore Girls, a booklet was added that explained their eclectic material and what it referred to, so I decided to do the same at the end of this interlude.

Happy reading,

Carla Reighard

WARNING: This contains spoilers to the previous books in this series. You may want to read those first before having certain things revealed.

Chapter 1

Bella

Bella replayed the recent death-defying experience that had landed her on Captain Modo's ship. She stood alone on the *Notre Dame's* upper deck, hoping the wind would dry her clothes. She was tired, hungry, and wanted a change of attire, but she wasn't ready to ask the captain for anything. She needed time to absorb today's events.

Ulyssa, the sea witch, had summoned another typhoon while the pirates were getting attacked by Modo's crew. Bella had managed to grab onto the rigging for dear life to avoid getting tossed into the violent sea, but within seconds, her slippery fingers lost their grip and she was yanked across the deck into the water. Her rope-burned palms and bruised body still hurt after knocking into several hard surfaces before getting dunked.

She recalled her desperate gasps for breath as her lungs burned. The foaming waves had crashed over her head, eagerly pulling her to Davy Jones's locker, a term she'd heard pirates use. Then, out of nowhere, she had felt a sinewy arm wrap around her slender waist, hauling her to safety. Somehow, Captain Modo had been able to swim through the storm and drag her onto his ship. At the time, she had assumed Modo was a fae like Peter and Aerowyn because it seemed the only explanation for the miraculous rescue. Later on, she realized Aerowyn could have gifted Modo with supernatural strength, but Bella wasn't positive she knew that was true either since Peter had her fooled for

days. Regardless, Modo was a mysterious man. She wondered if she would ever get to know him.

Bella also recounted Jasper's courageous act and the redemption that ultimately took him away from her forever. She wasn't going to miss him no matter how the pirate captain had transformed, but Jasper had left an imprint on her.

After the unbelievable alteration of Jasper, Bella had asked Captain Modo, "Now what?"

"We return to New Orleans," he stated matter-of-factly.

That was when she realized he wasn't going to be anything like the too presumptuous but handsome men she had encountered since coming to America. Modo even insisted on calling her Miss Bonnay and expected her to address him by his title to keep their relationship proper. She liked making new friends, but Modo did not seem open. He didn't know how to let loose and she wasn't going to be the one to teach him.

She wondered how she was going to endure yet another extended journey on a strange ship. Why did most of her adventures carry her across an ocean? She stood at the bow, gazing across the turquoise depths, pondering the past months of her life. While the ship sliced through the sea, the wind mussed her hair. She struggled to get a wisp of it out of her mouth as it clung to her lips. She wished she hadn't lost her hair-tie during the storm. The whipping tresses matched the wild spirit she felt breaking free from inside her. The prim and proper girl with perfectly coiffed hair no longer existed as the messy strands and sun reddened cheeks emulated the transformation of Bella's inner thoughts

After getting kidnapped by Captain Jasper Falcon, Bella had considered becoming a pirate. She wanted to protect herself from him and tried to manipulate the crew through flirting and showing the

rough men kindness. Her plan was to enlist the sailors to help her stage a mutiny against the vile captain. Now the idea seemed utterly ridiculous.

Imagine me a ferocious pirate. Bella laughed out loud as she thought to herself, *I'm smaller than anyone aboard, and probably the weakest. I know nothing about leading and can't even name the sections of a ship. How in the world would I have ever learned the skills to captain a vessel?* Bella's laughter was interrupted by a low voice.

"What has tickled your funny bone, Miss Bonnay?"

"Blimey! Next time make some noise before sneaking up on me, Captain. I thought I was all alone."

"I didn't mean to frighten you. I hear you've picked up some of the sailors' more colorful language." He gave her a tentative smile.

"It's hard not to when I've been exposed to it so frequently of late."

"Anyway, you won't ever be truly alone on the upper deck. The only place for solitude and privacy is inside your quarters."

"I was trying to dry off, and I like the fresh air. I guess I will have to get more attuned to stealthy footsteps."

She hoped the stuffy captain wouldn't ask her again what had made her laugh. It would have been humiliating to admit she had once thought she was capable of instigating a coup. Modo seemed too nonsensical to ever understand the mind of a girl who, before leaving France, only had escapades that came from books. Her sheltered aristocrat life had been safe but dull.

"Speaking of your quarters, would you like to go there now? I'm anxious to see your reaction to what Aerowyn has designed. Your cabin especially was obviously crafted for you. I suppose sometimes magic has its advantages."

"Is this whole ship a product of her spells?"

"I can't say for sure, but I suspect that to be true. She asked me to rescue you and promised me a ship and crew. She delivered."

Captain Modo had been sent to deliver Bella from the pirates, but in the end, she actually needed to be saved from the sea witch. Jasper had been taking Bella back to Louisiana when Modo attacked the *Black Fear*, but Ulyssa detoured them all.

"You didn't already have a ship?"

"No, and I wasn't exactly a captain."

Bella wanted to pry, but Modo was a lockbox. She knew it would take more than her usual manipulations to gain access to his secrets—not that she had much luck inducing people to confide in her. It was Aerowyn who had involved her in so many and Bella witnessed them unravel without any help on her part.

"I'm curious what the enchantress has done to my room since she really doesn't know me. Although, I do suspect the fae can read our thoughts and may know more than I want them to."

"I'm sure you're correct about that. Aerowyn did seem to pry into my head to create the perfect ship. Shall I take you to your quarters now?" He gave her a nervous sort of grin.

"I have nothing better to do, and I wouldn't mind changing these clothes. I've been wearing the same thing for days. I assume Aerowyn conjured up different attire for me as part of the unique room."

"She provided everything I think you will desire for the voyage. I suspect once you see your accommodations, you will have something to preoccupy most of your time with and make the journey go by faster." The captain finally seemed to relax the more he spoke of her quarters and she could see the slightest dimpled grin appear.

Bella liked Modo's smile and wished he would use it more often to put her at ease. He had a handsome face and seemed to be closer to her

age, but his normal expression aged him ten years. She wondered how her cabin could have brought out this unusual reaction in Modo.

As they went below deck, Bella tried to memorize the way. Though all the vessels she had been on were different, the nooks and crannies seemed to blend together in her head. The narrow spots required Modo to walk ahead of Bella, but beyond this, his propriety kept him from doing so when they could walk side-by-side.

"I must say you have my curiosity bursting at the seams about Aerowyn's creation. I can barely pay attention to where we're going. I'm quite directionally challenged. I hope I can remember how to get back on the upper deck once I leave my room."

"If you get lost, there is always one of my men close by to help you."

"On the *Black Fear*, Sven was with me most of the time."

"Did he die in the storm? He's not on this ship."

"I guess you didn't know Sven or his true identity. On Ageless Isle, he is King Peter and Aerowyn's father. Sven was the *Black Fear's* first mate, and like Aerowyn, he has the ability to transform into anyone. He was disguised as an older, rotund man who seemed more like a father to me than my own father had ever been, but once Peter showed his true self, I started doubting his honesty."

"It seems odd that the fae king himself guarded you. Why not send one of the other fae from his kingdom? Also, now that I say that, why did they need me to rescue you if Peter was there?"

She sighed, "Those are all questions I have had myself, but I don't have an answer to any of them. I speculate that Jasper's cursed hook wasn't adequate protection for me since Sven kept a watchful eye on me the whole trip, but the powerful enchantress could have done better than that with her spells, so her ultimate plan was probably to get Jasper and Arela together."

"Cursed hook?"

“When Jasper thought I was open to his seduction, he started to— Well, when Jasper wanted to get intimate with me, -um, -let’s just say he couldn’t touch me without my permission. His hook forced his whole body to the floor and he lost control of it.” Bella’s palms began to sweat. She really didn’t wish to discuss the pirate’s failed attempts at forcing her into bed.

Modo pulled at his collar as his face reddened. “Oh, I see. I didn’t realize it was cursed. Just like— never mind.”

“Like what?”

“That’s a story for another time.” Modo cleared his throat and kept walking. Bella wondered if Aerowyn had put a spell on him too. Maybe he was forced to rescue her or be hexed forever.

“You may want to keep our relationship formal, but I have to admit when someone says ‘never mind’, I begin to obsess over what they were going to say. I want to do the exact opposite. My over-active imagination wants to explode from curiosity. Please finish what you were going to say.”

Before Modo could do so, Jeb showed up and foiled Bella’s plan.

“Beller, did ya see yer room? I finks it’s the bes’ room ever. You mus see it now.”

Jeb had become one of Bella’s closest friends since her kidnapping and he treated her that way. He pushed past Modo and yanked on Bella’s arm to pull her towards him.

“Cap’n, I wanna’ to shows Beller her room.” In his excitement, he seemed to have forgotten to treat Modo as respectful as he had once treated his previous captain.

Bella had to squeeze past Modo as Jeb led her away from him. Modo and Bella’s bodies brushed as they passed each other in the narrow space, and it felt way too intimate for her comfort. The captain’s delightful scent wafted past her nostrils and she instinctively inhaled.

Jasper had always smelled like spiced rum and salt air, but Modo was a mixture of freshly cut pine and something familiar that she couldn't identify.

"Apologies, Captain!" Bella blurted while being tugged along.

As she glanced over her shoulder, she almost thought she saw a smile on Modo's face, which quickly made way for his unreadable one as soon as their eyes met.

"I'm accustomed to it," Modo said curtly.

Modo vanished above deck and Bella partially regretted not having him show her where she would be sleeping during the journey. She couldn't explain it, but she felt that Modo was looking forward to her reaction to the room. He seemed disappointed that he wouldn't be there to witness it.

Chapter 2

Bella

Jeb's sweaty palms soaked through her mostly dry shirt as he pulled Bella towards her quarters.

"I know the witch has magic, but she's outdone herself 'fis time."

"So you think this ship was created by Aerowyn."

"Course' I do 'specially after seein' yer room."

As they neared the chamber, Bella smelled something sweet and spicy. Jeb walked through the entryway while Bella stood opened mouthed as she gawked at the place. It wasn't just a room, it was a library filled to the brim with books—volume upon delicious volume of delight. Her cheeks felt stretched from the huge smile overcoming it and her stomach fluttered in joy.

"How did she know I love books so much?"

Jeb laughed. "Beller, everyone knows ya like them."

Bella put her hands on her warmed cheeks to cover her embarrassment. "I suppose I do talk a lot about stories I've enjoyed. But I believe the fae are able to read our thoughts too."

"It's kinduv creepy, isn' it?"

"I do like to keep some things private inside my head, so yes, it is rather off-putting."

As Bella stepped into the chamber, a strange flash of Christmas decorations and sugary treats scrolled through her mind, but she knew she had never been on the ship before today. The scents that had

delighted her nose ended up being evergreen garlands and a bowl of oranges covered with cloves that pierced the fruit's skin. Next to the bookshelves was a table with a plate of cookies.

"This room is unbelievable! It doesn't look like we're on a ship. Only the motion reminds me that I'm in the middle of the ocean."

"I 'fought you'd like it." Jeb flashed a black-toothed smile her way.

"I can't wait to dive into these books. I will read until my eyes get sore or I fall asleep."

Jeb giggled like a little boy, "I fink you should read some of your stories to the crew. We've likes them in the past and perhaps Modo's men will too."

Bella entered her new living quarters with reverence. Her eyes gleamed as she neared the shelves, grazing her fingers across the smooth spines of the volumes within reach.

"I wonder why Aerowyn would have decorated the room this way."

"Becuz ye like books."

"Not the books, but the evergreen garlands and oranges."

"Probably to cover up the stink."

Bella laughed but was glad Jeb finally acknowledged there were some horrific smells aboard a ship, and most of them were attributed to the men who never bathed. Jeb had told her a while back, "I'm jus goin' get d'rty agin. Why bother cleanin' up?"

He totally missed the point of proper hygiene and she didn't feel she could teach him. If Jasper's example of always looking clean and groomed didn't inspire Jeb, she wasn't sure she could convince him either. Even her charms had their limits.

The room must have held a magical spell because it was larger than what could fit inside a ship.

"Go ahead and read one now," Jeb begged.

"I want to be clean before touching any books. They deserve to be handled with the best of care."

Jeb's face reddened, "I finks I may 'ave smudged one of the pages before fetchin' ya. It was the book ya kep' talkin' about wif the dragon."

"I suppose I should share these books with everyone, but please wash your hands before you touch any of them next time," Bella scolded.

"Yes, ma'm." Jeb ducked his head down in shame. "I bes' let ya git to it then, shouldn' I?"

"These clothes are tremendously soiled and would like to get cleaned up a little before I pass out from exhaustion."

"I need to go anyways. I ain't finish learnin' about my responsibilities jus' yet."

"Thank you for showing me to my room. It is better than anything I have ever seen before in my life."

She was grateful Jeb took her hints. She didn't want to be rude to the man, but he had a habit of overstaying his welcome. He never made inappropriate advances like his former captain, but she couldn't decide if he thought of her as a friend as she did him. She would have to remind herself not to encourage anything but friendship just in case he got ideas.

After Jeb shut her door, the room seemed to lock out all sounds. Even the constant motion of the ship ceased as if her quarters were not really aboard the *Notre Dame*.

Chapter 3

Bella

Bella attempted to ignore the books' calling until she'd dealt with her own hygiene. She faced the ornate armoire and opened it. The contents confirmed that Aerowyn had desired to make Bella's journey a pleasant one. The cabinet was filled with dresses and undergarments designed for a lady of her aristocratic background. She supposed she wouldn't be wearing any britches on this ship, which meant she wouldn't be doing a lot of the jobs she had been willing to do aboard the *Black Fear*.

In the corner of the room was a tub for bathing. She didn't think it was practical to waste all the ship's water on a bath. She knew ships had barrels of water, but they also relied on collecting rain water for drinking. Some used the ocean water to clean up, but salt made her skin itchy. It wasn't ideal, but Bella was accustomed to what some people called a wash-down, and the fresh water in the basin on the dresser would be her only way to wipe off any sand or salt from having been dunked in the ocean. As Bella moved to dip the sponge into the basin, a sound like waterfalls echoed in the cabin and the tub began to fill itself with steaming water.

Bella's eyes felt like the size of saucers with amazement. There were no pipes or holes for the water to come from as the clear liquid rose up from the bottom to the top of the white porcelain tub. Her astonishment grew as bubbles formed with the scent of roses flowing through

the air. The orange, clove, and pine scents blended nicely with the light floral aroma. It brought her back to the de la Rose plantation with the ever-present reminders of their surname. She felt hollow inside as the sudden loneliness invaded her emotions. She longed to return to her friends, Antoine and Brooke, whose wedding she was forced to miss because Jasper had kidnapped her before the event.

She made sure the door to her quarters was locked and then peeled off her dress. Captain Modo wouldn't allow anyone on this vessel to behave as Jasper had, but she didn't want Jeb to be so anxious to show off the library that he barged in without knocking. He didn't have manners and had become less shy at invading her privacy after their excursion to Ageless Isle.

As soon as the clothes she had been wearing dropped to the floor, they disappeared.

"That's convenient," Bella said aloud, "I won't have to wash or wear them ever again. Perhaps the enchantress will spoil me and I won't want to return to the real world." She laughed as the stress of the day seemed to ebb away with the bubbles.

Bella stepped into the tub. The balmy water eased the tension in her aching muscles as the rose scent erased the putrid odors and dreadful memories from her past. Droopy eyes made her jerk slightly to stay awake.

I'm not going to dose off and turn into a prune. Besides, I only want to clean off the grime so I can luxuriate inside those books. Reading will help me escape all the horrors I've had to experience since I left France.

Bella used the sponge to wipe off the dirt from her hands and dunked her head backwards into the water to scrub away sea-granules that managed to get into her hair from the storm. The tangled mess was going to need more than clean water to smooth it and before she

could blink, a bottle appeared onto the table nearby. It was unmarked except for simple instructions, *Use on your hair.*

It's as if the room can read my mind too. At least that is easier to accept than Aerowyn being inside this room disguised as a shelf or something else.

Bella combed the white creamy substance through the messy strands, which caused the tangles to disappear and left her hair feeling silky. She instinctively knew to rinse it out after a few minutes and Bella had flashbacks of memories. The scene that popped into her head was in a room where the water came from above her rather than a bathtub. It sprayed down onto her head as she rinsed out the thick material she knew to be called conditioner.

Bella's once relaxed muscles tensed as more bizarre visions from another world crashed into her mind's eye. She didn't know what to make of the strange thoughts because they weren't dreams and they definitely couldn't be memories—or could they be?

Bella gingerly stepped out of the tub so she wouldn't slip when a plush rectangle piece of material began drying her body on its own volition.

"Who's in this room?" She darted her head back and forth looking for someone who was probably invisible.

When no response came, Bella thought perhaps she was hallucinating, but a towel finished dabbing up the water while a dress flew out of the armoire and began pulling itself over Bella's head.

"Stop this at once!" Bella's muffled voice spoke as the dress forced itself onto her. Bella cooperated by putting her arms into the sleeves, but the hooks and laces were all being connected by invisible hands. Then, the undetectable fingers put a ribbon into her hair that matched her dress. Supernaturally, the brown wavy locks had dried and were easily arranged so that they wouldn't get into her face as they had on

the windy upper deck. Bella was forced to stand still even though her body felt like it needed to escape. Every hair on her skin prickled with goose bumps.

“Who is in this room?”

A chair pulled up under Bella and scooted her over to the dressing table where a mirror sat on top. Words began to appear onto the looking glass and Bella read them out loud, “No one is in this room. All the objects have been enchanted to anticipate and fulfill your every need or desire.”

As soon as the final word had been spoken, the message vanished without a trace. Her chest rose and fell with unease. Once it seemed that she was truly all alone and not being pampered by an invisible person, she calmed a little. Bella’s pulse slowed enough so that she no longer felt it thumping through her veins, but the intrusive magic still had her on edge.

“Did Aerowyn enchant this room?”

The word “Yes” appeared on the mirror. Then it vanished and a new sentence formed, “Stop worrying Bella. This room is safe and only designed to give you some joy. Don’t overthink it.”

Bella did tend to overthink things, which of course confirmed that Aerowyn had read her mind way too often. She also wondered how many times the enchantress had spied on her with her disguises, but rather than ruin this gift with speculations and suspicions, Bella decided to read a book. Surely, an interesting tale would distract her from the paranormal happenings inside her cabin.

The hexed room almost caused her to forget the glorious library, but Bella wasn’t daft enough to totally let the volumes of adventure and romance slip from her thoughts. She was more than ready to dive into a safe journey where it all remained inside her imagination rather

than in the hands of a roguish war hero or hook-handed pirate. Danger would only be inside her mind and that was where she liked it to be.

A purple spine caught her attention. Bella stood up from the dressing table to grab the tome, but as she reached for it, the shelf opened up to another room.

“Shiver me timbers!” Bella used the expression she had heard often when the pirates weren’t allowed to curse around her.

Inside the hidden room was a library larger than anything that could fit onto a ship. It was familiar yet strange. Bella was startled when an orange tabby cat rubbed up against her legs and meowed. That was when she noticed the britches she was wearing and also when she realized she was no longer in her former reality.

Memories flooded her mind as she picked up the friendly cat. It purred as the tag on its collar gleamed in the low light spelling, “Hobbes”.

“So, Hobbes, where am I?”

“Meow.” He leaned into her palm as her fingers rubbed behind his ears.

“Why is this place familiar, but so strange?”

Bella looked around and saw that it was decorated for Christmas, which complimented the embellishments that were in her cabin aboard the ship.

“Am I on the ocean or somewhere else?”

“Meow.” *Purr, purr, purr.*

“You aren’t going to be able to tell me anything.”

Bella walked around the room and placed the soft, plump cat onto a plush chair in the middle of the room. The round table next to it had a plate of cookies and a steaming cup of something she thought she had tasted before.

“Am I too trusting to sample that treat? Probably, but I’m going to do it anyway.”

Thinking she was a bit like the book character, Bella bit down onto the chewy sweet treat. Her mind cleared and flickers of the truth seeped their way into her head like a fog dissipating in the sun. Walls of book shelves suddenly surrounded her and there was no longer a door to be seen. In fact, the quarters aboard the ship were gone—she was in another time and place.

“Layne, where are you?”

Bella recalled this was the magical library her new neighbor had shown her in the real world. Since her family had to move due to bankruptcy, her new home was a small apartment she shared with her parents. Elayne, who liked to be called Layne, lived in the complex and introduced her to this fantastical library located in an abandoned Victorian home a few miles from where Bella lived.

Rather than being on a ship in-between Ageless Isle and Louisiana in 1784, she had been living inside a story—this library was a portal to fairy tales! Bella recalled that she was not actually an orphan from France getting rescued by a straitlaced, but handsome captain. Bella had not encountered an enchantress and her fae father, Peter. Jasper wasn’t a pirate turned merman and Gerard wasn’t turned into a wolf. Bella sat down on the cushy chair next to where she had placed Hobbes, who was giving himself a bath.

“Do you know where my friend Elayne is? Has she been stuck inside a book this whole time the way I have been?”

Hobbes stopped licking the pad of his paw, gave her a contented look and resumed his grooming.

“You aren’t going to be any help to me, are you? I do remember I came back here briefly before getting kidnapped by Jasper.” Bella’s

stomach turned in anxiety. "I wasn't able to get out of this library and only found more shelves of books at that time."

Bella scanned the room for a door, but none could be found. She sat rather than walked around the room, because she needed to think through her options before wasting oxygen and energy. If there were no doors and windows, how long could she live inside this supernatural place? She knew food and water would appear if she needed it, but she just wanted to be home in her crummy apartment.

Hobbes purred loudly and she realized that if he could live in this library there had to be an exit. Unless he was a figment of her imagination and she was already suffering from lack of oxygen. She stood up and decided to pull books off shelves to see if one of them opened a hidden door or concealed a passage way. As she reached the section where all the fantasy books were, she recognized the title of the story that started it all.

"What are you doing?"

Bella spun around as her heart jumped out of her chest. She didn't scream, because she knew it was Layne's voice, but the unexpected appearance of her friend gave her adrenaline an unnecessary boost.

"Layne, where have you been?"

"I've been inside those books, but there's no time to waste. Gerard and Quinn will be trapped inside the stories forever if we don't finish your tale."

"What are you talking about? Aren't they fictional?"

"No, they're the guys you met near the pool just before we came here. Don't you remember?"

"I hardly remember who my parents are let alone some boys I just met. They were inside the story but were older and I was there, and you are—" Bella's mouth slacked open as she began to recognize Layne's other identity.

“Yes, I was the enchantress, but there isn’t time to fuss over all of that right now. Gerard is stuck inside a wolf’s body and Quinn, well, let’s just say he isn’t himself at all.”

“How am I supposed to help any of them? Didn’t you curse Gerard? Why can’t they just stop reading the books and get out of the story?”

“It’s not like I told you originally. This library isn’t just a fun magical escape for me to spend my free time. It was created by my father, King Peter. I’m not from this world. I tricked you into saving the stories because my father told me it was necessary. He ruined the fairy tales when my mother and sister died. He lied to me about everything. I thought I was helping him, but he kept the truth from me.”

Layne’s eyes welled up as a few drops clung to her cheeks. She transformed into the more womanly-looking Aerowyn. Bella was flabbergasted and she even thought of that word as fitting to describe her frame of mind if she ever told anyone about this experience.

“So you’re telling me that you created this library to trick me into the fairy tales, but why me?”

“My father thought you had the imagination of a true story-teller. Someone with your abilities is needed to rewrite all the tales he’s managed to ruin. Gerard and Quinn followed us to this house and jumped into the stories with us. Now they are stuck in that other dimension. I wasn’t sure who they were at first because their appearances changed slightly, but I now know the truth.”

“How am I supposed to rewrite the legends your father twisted?”

“By getting back onto the ship and finishing your own story. When you find your happily ever after, things will go back to the way they should be. I don’t know how you manage to keep coming back here before you end your tale. I locked the passage.”

Bella sighed heavily, "That makes no sense. My happiness shouldn't change the fate of the whole fairy tale world. None of this makes sense."

"I know, I know. It was confusing to me too until I kept digging for the truth. My father changed the outcomes of some of the folklores. Jasper is a perfect example. When his grandparents were killed by dragons my father created, Jasper replaced Captain Hook. Gerard became a twin to a character's story I cursed because my father told me to rid the world of selfishness. I accidentally hexed too many people in my zeal. In order for me to fix my errors, someone had to take on the curse. Gerard's new character became that someone. The sea witch shouldn't have been a witch at all, but we really don't have time to go into that. You need to return to that ship."

Bella's pulse raced. Not only was she lost inside a fictional world, but she was being forced into something she never volunteered for.

She raised her voice, "I'm not going anywhere until you explain everything you know." She moved to the chair near the one Hobbes was on and plopped down hard.

"I will explain everything, but you must come with me first."

"No." Bella shook her head and crossed her arms over her chest in revolt.

"Okay, I will explain everything if you calm down." Layne picked up Hobbes from the chair near Bella's and placed him on her lap. He purred as she scratched his head and then he curled up in a ball onto her lap.

"I am calm."

"Please don't be mad at me. I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't expect the library on Modo's ship to lead you back here. You wouldn't even know the difference if you hadn't returned here a second time."

"Second time?"

“Here have a cookie. This is going to be a long story.”

Layne pushed the plate of chocolate chip cookies towards Bella. They smelled like they had just come out of the oven. Bella could have sworn the cookies were gingerbread men when she first spotted the treats. The mug had a snowman reading a book on the side of it and it was filled to the brim with steamy coco and marshmallows bobbing to the surface. The scents of warm chocolate from the cookies and beverage made Bella’s stomach growl.

She grabbed the treat and took a bite out of it as the buttery taste blended with the savory chocolaty morsels in her mouth. She sipped the hot chocolate and it was just the right temperature—not too warm and not too cold. It reminded her of a line from *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, a story her mom read to her as a child.

“I don’t know where to begin. I’m still not one hundred percent aware of all the details since Father hasn’t been forth-coming with me. When I met up with Arela to help give Jasper another chance, she told me about his childhood. She had been following his life since he was a boy beaten by his parents, looking for ways to help him. The names of Jasper’s parents were familiar to me and that was when I realized they had come from Terradraco.”

“Terradraco is the place Leia lives in *The Scorned Fairy*.”

“Yes, and she killed my sister, but that isn’t why I’m telling you this. The dragons didn’t go extinct when Leia broke Isla’s spell by burning my sister with her dragon-fire. The land had more dragons than the original one my father had invented. The fire-breathers also killed Jasper’s grandparents. As a result, his parents turned out to be miserable, horrible people who abused their son. It was a circle of pain that Jasper finally broke when he gave up half his heart to Arela. It was a cycle that should have never started, along with many others because my father allowed my mother’s death to change him.”

Aerowyn rambled on, but Bella still couldn't decipher how any of this involved her. She interrupted, "I know the stories are messed up, but how am I supposed to change them?"

"I'm getting to that part, but you need to be patient. You have to know that each of these stories got changed because of pain and suffering brought about by my father. True, most tales have conflict and villains, but Father created unnecessary villains. Antoine's curse shouldn't have been broken by Gerard, but rather by Antoine himself and I shouldn't have cursed the entire plantation. Gerard should have never been in that story. He and Quinn followed us to the old house because they were curious what we were up to."

Bella felt her eyes get droopy and she fought the urge to curl up and sleep in the soft chair. It was an unnatural fatigue and one she recalled happening to her on Ageless Isle. She tried to talk but her words were slurred.

"Did-d- you-u druggg me?"

"Sorry, Bella, but I need to get you back to Captain Modo's ship. You will remember none of this and complete what you started."

Bella's consciousness blurred into a fuzzy under-water-like feeling where sound disappeared and nothing seemed clear. She felt her body fall from the chair as Layne took out a stick—no, a wand—and Bella's world turned black.

The Aerowyn Tale-isms

Bellarose-isms

1. **Bellarose's name:** It may seem like an obvious reference, but yes, it is a version of Belle's name from *Beauty and the Beast*. Of course I had to use references to the fairy tale I was retelling and I continued to throughout *The Aerowyn Tales*. Her surname was originally just a French name I liked the sound of, but it also bears similarities to Lizzie Bennett's name in *Pride and Prejudice*. I will be using some P&P inspiration in *Quinn*.
2. **The movie *Psycho* and *A Christmas Carol*:** *The gate creaked open as Bella had expected—the perfect sound for a scary movie. She thought the house looked like it had potential to be beautiful, but it also could be in a film about ghosts or a psycho who kept his dead mom's body in the living room while pretending she was still alive. Since it was around the holidays, a visit from the ghost of Christmas future would be fitting in this setting also.*

I also mention the book *A Christmas Carol* in another part of this short story.

1. **The movie *Mean Girls*:** “Maybe you'll get a peek at Gerard.

He's so fetch."

Fetch was a slang term the character Gretchen Wierners, played by Lacy Chabert, tried to get everyone to use to replace the word 'cute' or 'fetching'. Many of the people I follow on Instagram love this movie and refer to it a lot. When I write, I picture my audience and attempt to write not just things I will enjoy, but things they will relate to. I had fun re-watching this movie to recall the term.

1. **The book Outlander:** *"Don't worry. I'm sure we can find a nice, juicy story about a Duke or Scotland Laird to get your mind off of the small-minded Gerard."* Bella teased.

Outlander is another favorite of the Instagram world, but WARNING, it isn't written for teens. It is strictly adult reading, but I think most people have seen references to Jamie Fraser, the famous fictional Scottish hottie somewhere on TV or social media. There are even custom candles referencing his sexy knees in a kilt (ha, ha).

1. **Trend of photographing books in back pockets:** *Bella put the short story inside her back pocket when Layney wasn't looking. It was a small, pocket-sized book that fit nicely in her jeans.*

Again, you have to be on Instagram to understand this reference, but people photograph their bums with back pockets and books. Every time I see it, I think of this part in my book. I didn't intentionally write this as a reference because of the trend, but I'm sure it happened subconsciously. Look up #paperbacksandbutts or #booksandbutts on Instagram and you will see what I mean.

1. **Gluten allergies:** *"Ok then, I'll have a peppermint mocha latte and gingerbread cookies, but wait, they need to be gluten-free. Is that possible?"*

I know several people who get sick off of gluten and reading about delicious Christmas treats they can't enjoy would be criminal. I had to give them the chance to enjoy this magical library thoroughly.

Gerard-isms

1. **Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* theme song:** *Tales as old as time full of beauties and beasts would have not been written without someone like Aerowyn the enchantress to orchestrate—or rather, manipulate—them all.*

Did anyone start singing the song as soon as they read the opening line to Gerard? Sure, I changed the lyrics, but it is obvious where my inspiration came from.

1. **Historical reference:** *"I read that Spain controls Louisiana now, instead of France, so maybe his family is safe from the battle grounds?"*

Louisiana was a Spanish territory after France gave it to Spain in exchange for help in the French and Indian War. Any references to the American Revolutionary War itself, I researched to be historically accurate. I moved my story to America because I've visited New Orleans and I have seen more of the United States than of my short visit to Paris, France. I try to write what I know or can do a lot of research about so I'm accurate when it isn't the fantastical part of a story.

1. **Disney's song, *Gaston*:** *"They'll be writing songs about you someday. Singing about how no one is as great as Gerard."*

You will note that Gerard and his friend, Leo, have names that begin with the same letter as Gaston and LeFou. This was done on purpose as inspiration from these characters. I do this with other characters in the series.

1. **TV show *Once Upon a Time*:** *In the local tavern, The*

Swan, Leo bragged about how great Gerard was in battle.

Emma Swan is the heroine in *Once Upon a Time*, which retells fairy tales and crisscrosses their stories so that, for example, Cinderella and Snow White sometimes share drama together. *The Aerowyn Tales* also entwines some folklore, and the idea to do this was inspired by the TV show. *Beauty and the Beast* characters meet up with *Peter Pan* characters along with *The Little Mermaid*, *The Frog Prince*, and a few others in my books.

1. **Actress Emma Watson:** *“Here’s the salon where you can wait for dinner. Mrs. Watson, the head cook, will bring you tea shortly.”*

Brooke was saved from possibly revealing her true feelings for Antoine when Mrs. Watson’s daughter, Emma, came scurrying into the dining room with a cart of dessert and tea.

The names of the head cook and her daughter were inspired by that of the actress who played Belle in Disney’s live action movie. Sometimes it’s hard coming up with a side character’s name and I thought adding this subtle reference to the movie was fun. I use my own family member’s names too, but those references don’t mean anything to the people who read my books.

1. **The historic Royal Sonesta:** *I’m staying in New Orleans, at the Royal Sonesta hotel.*

I researched New Orleans hotels that existed during the 1700s. The site of Royal Sonesta New Orleans dates back to 1721 when French military engineer, Adrien de Pauger, first laid out the city of New Orleans. It’s located in the French Quarter on Bourbon Street and though I stayed in a hotel on that street, it wasn’t this one. I thought

it would be a suitable place for a French lawyer to stay while visiting America.

Bellarose II-isms

1. **TV show *Jane the Virgin*:** *Her female friends liked to tease her for using big words she read in her nerdy books, and her male friends liked to call her Jane, which referred to a TV character who was pure.*

Before putting this into my book, I had never watched the TV show *Jane the Virgin*, but I needed a reference to Bella's innocence without copying *Gilmore Girls* where Tristan calls Rory, 'Mary', to imply the same idea. I also needed something my target audience might understand in a pop culture reference. I have watched the show since then and was pleasantly surprised. It is a satirical telenovela comedy, and I suspect true telenovelas leave you at cliffhangers after each episode because that show was hard to stop watching at just one episode for the same reason.

1. **Movie and book *The Wizard of Oz*:** *She remembered the expression, "We're not in Kansas anymore," and the longer she focused on the room, the more she recalled that this was her version of Kansas—the place she belonged to, just like Dorothy returning from Oz for the first time.*
2. **Movie *Star Wars*:** *I'm engaged to be married in one month to Leia, the princess of a nearby kingdom, Terradraco.*

I needed a name for my princess in *The Scorned Fairy*, which is an added bonus story and retelling of *The Frog Prince* at the end of *Bellarose II*. I love *Star Wars* and I'm pretty sure some of my readers do too, so I chose the name Leia in honor of the brave princess in one of my favorite sci-fi movies. I plan on telling more of her story

since it has dragons and many lovers of the fantasy genre like to have dragons thrown into their books. This will be for *The Aerowyn Tales II* trilogy, because *Quinn* isn't going to have any of the fire-breathing beasts—well, at least not now. The story isn't finished yet, and it could dictate to me a different idea.

Jasper-isms

1. **Peter Pan:** *They journeyed to a land located beyond the second star to the right, where dreams and nightmares were invented by the fae.*

'Second star to the right' is explained in my story, but did Peter Pan ever explain it to Wendy in the original story? I had to come up with an explanation for this because there are so many stars in the sky and leaving it at those ambiguous directions is like saying, "In the forest, second tree to the right."

1. **TV show *Once Upon a Time*:** *"I must only take half your heart so you will be forced to become a merman. It is part of the payment to break the curse. All magic comes with a price."*

The line 'Magic comes with a price' is used a lot in *Once Upon a Time*. Splitting the heart idea also came from OUAT. Jasper's physical appearance was inspired by Killian Jones from this show too. Jasper is a mixture between the muscular tattooed actor, Stanislav Yanevski, who played Viktor Krum in *Harry Potter*, and Captain Jones. I had some fans of Stan who wanted a character who looked like him so I obliged happily.

1. **Movie *Hook*:** *"Bangarang!" multiple voices screamed in unison.*

There are other less obvious references to this movie, but this one can't be denied. By the way, there are no Lost Boys in my book because they are leprechauns instead.

1. **Movie *The Magical Legend of the Leprechauns*:** *Bella began her story like most had begun in books; "Once upon a time, a man from America decided to visit Ireland. He wasn't a believer of magic or fantastical creatures, but soon, he found a leprechaun family living in the cottage where he was staying."*

This movie is a Hallmark two-part series that was shown on regular TV before the Hallmark channel was born. I have it on DVD and like to watch it around St. Patrick's Day. I enjoyed having Bella tell the story because it has inspired more than one book for me. The fairies in *Elle's Magical Shoes* create plants, seeds, etc. as the fairies did in the movie.

1. **Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*:** *It resembled Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet's tale, except that neither of the two in love died.*

This is a reference inside a reference. The love story in the leprechaun movie resembled the tragic love story of Romeo and Juliet but with a different ending. Bella knew her literature.

1. **Movie and book *Princess Bride*:** *"Are we all ready to go back to the Cliffs of Madness?"*

"I read a tale of a giant who carried three adults while climbing a rope that led up cliffs similar to those. I suppose, in books, impossible things happen."

The cliffs were called Insanity in *Princess Bride*, so you may not have caught that reference. I also had creatures called R.O.U.S. but they weren't anything like the ones in the movie or book.

1. **Movie and book *Harry Potter*:** *“To name a few: there are the R.O.U.Ses, the redcaps, and the voldermice. Don’t worry, they can’t harm us here.”*

I needed a name for some unusual creatures to be on Ageless Isle. I thought of having mice, the prey, turn into snakes, the predator, and this made me think of Lord Voldemort. Again, you may not have caught this reference since I made up the name, but I do like throwing in things the average reader may miss.

1. **Disney’s *The Little Mermaid*:** *He also tried to imagine his happily ever after with Bella, but strangely, her image kept getting replaced by the mermaid named Arela. Her emerald colored eyes and fire-blazoned hair engraved a tattoo on his memory.*

Since Ulyssa was the outcast mermaid turned evil, she made it her life’s mission to ruin merpeoples’ lives.

I think I surprised a reader or two by throwing in these characters. The names Arela and Ulyssa are definitely similar to Ariel and Ursula. Their stories begin and end differently, but you’ll have to read the second *Aerowyn Tales* trilogy to get the whole story. I haven’t started writing it yet, so don’t be looking for it too soon.

1. **The *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies:** *His stomach grumbled so he took another swig of the rum he carried in a small flask from his coat pocket.*

Jasper drinks rum just like Jack Sparrow, who also drank a lot of rum, and I suspect that’s why Killian Jones in *Once Upon a Time* drinks a lot of it too. Pirates did drink rum, but they also drank grog. It was safer than the water back then and they had easy access to it in the Caribbean.

I hope you enjoyed reading about some of the references I made. I didn't point out all of them, but I think finding them on your own is half the fun. Drop me a comment on Instagram, Goodreads or through my newsletter if you have a question or want to add to my list of hidden gems you found in my books. Even more importantly, give my books a rating and review. Those reviews tell the book seller (computer program) to recommend the book to other readers. If you like my books, let others know. Thank you in advance.

*Off to finish Quinn,
Carla*