

Galloping at breakneck speed through the forest, her horse shied at something where the trail forked. Launched into some bushes on the side of the trail, the girl had a relatively soft landing, and was swallowed up by the bushes. Her horse just kept going at a full gallop and tracked left. Getting dumped undoubtedly saved her life. As she caught her breath and tried to ratchet down the adrenalin pumping through her body, the two who were chasing her galloped past and veered left, following the disappearing horse.

Extricating herself from the bushes, she stood up and assessed her situation. Nothing was broken, but she was deep in the forest and completely lost. It was twilight, so she could still see but darkness was encroaching. Still breathing heavily, all the air was sucked out of her lungs when a woman's deep voice behind her said "Come with me; we need to get away from here."

The girl turned to see a very tall woman with curved horns and a shaggy head of hair standing there. She wore a hunting bow slung across her shoulder and was dressed in a corseted outfit with high boots and a short leather skirt. Two knives were sheathed along her belt, and in spite of the fall weather, wore no jacket. Bronze leather strips wrapped the length of her arms and were clipped by ornate rings to copper bracelets. Her ears came to a point and were studded with several sets of gold and silver earrings.

"You might want to move a little faster. When they catch up with your horse, they will be back along this trail looking for you." As the woman turned to go deeper into the forest, the young girl followed. The huntress had wings, but didn't look like any angel Gennie had ever seen. Following the woman felt right, and the teen picked her way between the roots on the trail and the overgrown bushes. Her head started to hurt as a loud buzzing reverberated in her ears. The goat woman started to fade from sight. "No," she cried out, "not now." She felt herself swimming to the surface of consciousness as her alarm kept blasting in her ears. Punching the pin down, Gennie leaned over and found her dream journal in the top drawer of the nightstand. Fishing out a pen, she opened the stuffed journal, and found the next available clean page. Writing down the date, she filled in the details of the dream. Sitting up in bed, the dream continued to swirl around her. Gennie was nine when she realized that not everyone had dreams that became reality. Learning to keep them to herself, they became a tool to reveal to her things that would come to pass. The woman was intriguing, and was unlike anything the girl had seen before. She drew a quick sketch on the next page, and when she was satisfied, wrote "Land of Faery?" underneath, then closed the book.

"Wake up, pumpkin. Not a good day to be late." Her mother said as she entered her bedroom to make sure her daughter was awake. Gennie grunted as she sat up. "Yes, mom, I'm up."

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While waiting for class to begin, Gennie was drawing some finishing touches on her new dragon. As she shaded in the ridge above his eyes, one of her classmates walked past her desk and pushed the notebook onto the floor. Several loose drawings scattered as the workbook hit the ground, leaving the floor littered with faeries, dragons, and horses.

“Oh, sorry. How did that happen?” the teen said sarcastically in Korean.

Their teacher turned from the chalkboard where she had been writing down today’s reading assignment. “Yungie, please apologize in English and pick up Gennie’s notebook. You are well aware that we only speak English here. Class, this is Genevieve Yoo. She has recently transferred here from the U.S. Please make her feel welcome.” The teacher didn’t see what happened, only turned to look when she heard the notebook hit the floor. She had no idea it was deliberate.

“I’m. So. Sorry,” Yungie said to the new girl in English, deliberately enunciating each word. “Let me help you.” As Yungie bent to pick up the art, she crumpled the ones she touched, and then tossed them at Gennie. Their teacher had already turned back to the chalkboard and missed this additional act of malice.

It was Gennie’s first day at her new school in Seoul. Third period. How could things have gone so wrong in just three hours? Miserable, she tried to straighten out her drawings as she tucked them into the back pocket of her notebook. Outwardly Gennie’s face appeared to be without emotion, but inside she was seething. She was mad at everything and everyone right now and giving off sparks. It wouldn’t take much to ignite her suppressed anger. As Yungie moved past her and sat down, Gennie took a few deep breaths until she felt calm again.

This international school was a lot larger than Gennie’s high school back in New York. It was overwhelming. Her mother had meant to bring her down the previous week and show her around. That didn’t happen. There was too much unpacking and getting them all settled in her grandmother’s house in Seoul to be done.

At the early bell this morning, she had been standing in the hall, trying to figure out where her first classroom was when a cute boy had stopped to help. “Hi, you’re new, right?”

“Yes. First day. I’m Gennie.”

“Hi, Gennie. Ah, you’re American.”

“Is it that obvious?”

“No, that’s not what I meant.” He blushed, looking embarrassed. “I could tell from your accent. My name is Steven. I’m from San Francisco. Been here for two years. My dad gets transferred a lot. What about you?”

Feeling more comfortable already, Gennie said, “Manhattan.”

“East Coast, West Coast. Perfect! Here, let me see that.” He examined her class schedule. “Ah, History. Turn left here, go down two hallways, and then take a right. Can’t miss it.” He smiled as he waved goodbye and headed off in his own direction, shouting ‘good luck’ over his shoulder.

A girl leaning against the wall gave Gennie a dirty look, took a book out of her locker, and slammed the door. Gennie figured that must be her boyfriend. *Great*, she thought to herself. *Day one, square one, and I have already pissed somebody off.*

Overwhelming sadness enveloped her again. If she could just get through the tenth grade here in Korea, her parents promised that they would be moving back to the U.S. before she started eleventh grade.

Many years ago, her mother had come to the U.S. from Korea to get her college degree. After meeting her father, they fell in love and married. He was American of Korean descent, but had been born and raised in the U.S. After they graduated, they settled down in New York.

Gennie had been to visit her grandparents many times, and used to love the visits. Her grandfather died last year, and now her grandmother Mi Cha was ill. After a fair amount of discussion, it was decided that they would go to Korea for a year. If her grandmother got better, they would return with her to New York. Gennie was devastated but said nothing. What was there to say? Her dream had already told her this was coming. Her dad took a sabbatical from the college, they rented out their house, and she was starting her first day of school in Seoul.

Gennie hated it here, even before school started. More American than Korean, she really missed her friends, American food, American television and going to the mall. She looked Korean on the outside, but was just a typical American teen with a penchant for Goth clothes and vampire stories. Everything was upside down and there wasn’t anything she could do about it. With Yungie glaring at her, she thought to herself, *This is going to be one very long year.*

When class let out, she headed to the cafeteria. Steven was leaning against some lockers as she approached the door. He stepped in front of her and opened it for her. “Hi there. So, how is it going?” He asked. Together they walked toward the food line.

“I’ve never changed schools before. In New York we lived in the same neighborhood since I was a baby so I knew everybody. Here I don’t know anyone.”

“You know me.”

She smiled. “Talking to you seems to have gotten me in trouble.”

“What do you mean?”

“You tell me. Who are they?” she asked as she motioned her head toward Yungie and a friend sitting at a table by themselves.

“Oh, that is Yungie and Hana. Hana and I hung around together last year but it’s been over for a long time.”

“Well, apparently she still has feelings for you.”

“I doubt it. Her feelings are nothing but jealousy. She perceives herself as the most popular girl in our class, which is only true in her head. You’re a threat because you are new, which means you are interesting, and because you are cute, it’s a double threat.”

Gennie blushed at the compliment and looked down.

“Just ignore them. I do. The two of them together are a bad combination. They are both a bit off.”

“Easy for you to say.” Gennie didn’t tell him what happened in third period.

“I know how it is to go to a new school, Gennie.” Grinning, he said, “You already have one friend and it will get easier. Let’s sit together today and I’ll introduce you to some of mine.” Smiling, the girl nodded.

Lunch was fun and an improvement on the day. Her last three classes passed without incident and Gennie hit the restroom before she headed for the bus. As she came out of her stall, both Hana and Yungie were waiting for her. Hana pushed her into the stall door.

“Listen, bitch, why don’t you go back to New York? We don’t want you here.”

Gennie dropped her backpack and pushed her back. “It’s none of your effing business where I go to school, so back off.”

Hana seemed surprised. “So you’re a tough girl.”

Before Gennie could respond, Yungie grabbed her long hair and twisted it, pulling her off balance. Hana punched her in the face, catching her nose and the left side of her mouth. She fell to the ground.

Two girls came in the door, saw what was going on, and ran out again. “We had better get out of here before they go get a teacher.” Said Yungie.

“Yeah, Mr. Lee said he wouldn’t give us any more chances.”

Everything had happened so fast, and Gennie started to get up off the floor when Yungie kicked her in the stomach and pushed her back into the stall. Hana turned around as they were leaving and said, "Go back home. Freak."

Gennie was shaking as she got up off the ground. She had made it through sixteen years and had never been in a fight. Well, so much for that record. She took a look in the mirror. Tears were spilling out of her eyes, her lower lip was cut and bleeding and there would be quite a bruise. Her hair was a mess. Looking straight into the mirror, she said, "Welcome to Korea, Genevieve Yoo."

Straightening her clothes, she picked up her books and headed for the door. She didn't want to miss her bus. Looking out the front window of the entrance, her day just kept getting better. Her tormentors were getting on the bus she was supposed to take. *Great.*

Waiting tentatively until she saw the bus pull away, the teen slowly went down the front stairs then looked around realizing she didn't have a clue as to how to get back to her grandmother's house from here. Turning on her cell, she texted her mom that she missed the bus and would take a taxi. That was their Plan B. She was almost seventeen, and very resourceful. When her mom replied ok, then asked her how her first day at school was, Gennie replied "t tyl k? xoxo." *Not ready to deal with that.* She decided to go back down the street the bus had come up this morning. She vaguely remembered passing a shopping area at the bottom of the hill and was sure she could find a taxi near there. Not ready to do the subway thing, she started walking.

It was farther than she thought. When she passed a small park, she sat on a bench and started to cry. Overwhelmed by being so far away from everything she knew, her emotions just let loose. After a few minutes, she felt better. She sent three long texts to Rory, her best friend in New York, telling her what happened. It was the middle of the night there so she didn't expect she would hear from Rory until later, but it felt good anyway to reach out to her best friend.

None of her dreams had tipped her off to how horrible this first day would turn out to be. That was very irritating. Her whole life she had been dealing with precognitive dreams about all kinds of things. What was the point of dreaming about things that would happen if you weren't warned about stuff like this? She then remembered her dream from this morning. *That was totally weird,* she thought.

The smells of Korean street food finally got her up and walking. Coming into the shopping area, she was amazed by how crowded it was. The shops sat close together and felt more like cramped booths to her. In front of the shops, various vendors were cooking up everything from sweet potatoes and dumplings to buttered squid and octopus chips. The air was thick and fragrant with a thousand scents. Settling on some barbecued chicken skewers, she had two cream puffs for dessert. The shops behind the street vendors were crammed with clothing, jewelry, and household items. Gennie took her time looking through them.

Sandwiched between two stores filled with clothes was an odd looking shop. It couldn't have been more than thirty feet wide. In the window were herbs, leaves, roots, and more varieties of dried mushrooms than she knew existed. What caught her eye on a shelf halfway up the storefront was a row of Tarot cards in Korean. A strange force guided her into the shop. As she pushed open the door and entered, a distant memory pinged around in her head. She had dreamt of this place. A soft tinkling from a small copper bell that hung off the back of the door announced her entrance. Various bells and chimes hung from low beams that ran from the storefront to the back wall. The shop smelled like incense, herbs and knowledge.

Books lined the left wall, organized by subject. Most were in Korean, although there was a shelf marked English, Japanese, and Chinese. One whole shelf was given over to Tarot cards. More decks than she had ever seen in one place. Rory's mother Roni was an Astrologer and Tarot reader, so the teen picked out a set of cards for her. She would love that they were in Korean. Roni had read the cards for her on many occasions. It was obvious that the young girl was fascinated by the Tarot.

Prayer flags hung from twine across the middle aisle, and glass and copper singing bowls lined the shelf above the Tarot cards. An amazing metal dragon was wrapped around one of the beams. Gennie stared, mesmerized by the variety of items the shop had to offer. As she turned the corner at the end of the first row of shelves, she was startled to see a very old man sitting behind a wooden counter that spanned the width of the shop. His eyes were closed. She stared at him for a second, thinking he was meditating or maybe asleep. Trying to walk without making any noise, she tiptoed quietly past him on her way to the next aisle.

In Korean he asked, "May I help you?"

Startled, she turned to look at him. His eyes were open. She then asked in Korean if he spoke English.

"Of course. May I help you?" His skin stretched taut and translucent across his cheekbones, showing his age, but his eyes danced with mischief, full of life. His grey hair hung long and braided, both in the front and the back. He wore a simple high-necked jacket made of silk.

She responded by being flippant. "I need a first class ticket back to New York."

Observing her cut lip, red eyes, and tangled hair, it wasn't difficult to have some idea what had happened. "That bad, eh."

"Pretty much." She tried to smile, but winced at the pain. In an odd moment, she blurted out, "You look out of place here."

Smiling, he said, "Yet I feel at home everywhere."

“No, sorry, what I meant is that you kind of look like Confucius.”

He smiled. “I get that a lot.”

“Is this your shop?”

“For the moment.”

“What is your name?”

“You may call me Master Kong. What name do you go by?”

“Genevieve, for formal occasions, Gennie for common usage, and Jayhee if it is my mother speaking.”

“Ah, it is easy to see that you are many personalities. Which personality came into this shop?”

Gennie pondered this question. “The adventurer.”

“Well, Gennie the adventurer, come and pick a card.”

A well-worn deck of Tarot rested on the counter in front of him. He gathered them and shuffled a few times. Placing her backpack at her feet, she sat on a stool across from the man. Carefully choosing a card, she laid it face up on the counter.

“You are familiar with the cards, I see.”

“Yes, my best friend’s mom reads for me all the time.”

“Ah, The Wheel of Fortune. This is a very powerful card. It represents your destiny with respect to the synchronicity of all things. It was fated that you move to Korea so that your true journey could begin. A new cycle is beginning.”

“Sure doesn’t feel like that.”

“I suppose destiny can be trying at times. One must be patient.”

Gennie gave a weak smile.

“Please, take another card.” She studied the deck of cards as he fanned them out and went back and forth before pulling the one out she wanted.

“Ah, the High Priestess. She is the Guardian of Secrets, and represents the Divine Feminine. A secret of yours is going to be revealed. Some special ability you have that will help you on your journey.”

Gennie had gone pale as she looked at the card.

“What is wrong?”

“I had one of my dreams last night. A woman came to me. She looked just like the woman on the card.”

He didn't seem surprised. “She will help you on your journey, in many ways.”

“You don't understand. My dreams come true.”

“Genevieve, if I may use your more formal name. I have been expecting you. I have lived many years and developed many talents. You might think of me as a sage or a magician. You are a Seer, and that is a very special talent. I knew you were the one I was waiting for as soon as you opened the door. This is a very special place that can be a doorway into new adventures. A choice is laid before you. If you choose to go on this journey, this woman will be your guide and protector.”

Gennie froze when he said that. “You don't understand, I met her in another realm.”

“I do understand, child. Welcome to your destiny, Genevieve. Please pick one more card.”

The teen studied the cards held out to her and drew one towards her. She turned it up on the counter. It was The Chariot

“Ah, this is the travel card. Change is coming. This card represents both your journey to Korea and your journey into this other realm. It is your destiny. You will be triumphant. This journey is a part of what this life is about for you.”

Gennie sat there in a stunned silence, letting what the philosopher had said bounce around in her head. “Why me?”

“You must know that we all have our own distinct paths we must follow. You have many talents besides being an artist and precognitive dreams. Your gifts will be needed to help people open up to so much more. This other realm has been connected to you from your birth.”

“What is this other realm?”

“It is the land of Anara.”

“Is that where the goat woman lives?”

“Yes. She is one of the Chiviceni, an ancient race of warriors. She dwells in the realm of Faery.”

“Is that why I am always drawing dragons, faeries, and creatures from my imagination?”

“Yes. Your connection is very strong.”

“How do I get to there from here?”

“I will conjure up a portal for you.”

“As simple as that?”

“Yes.”

“Can I come back?”

“Of course. You will travel on The Dragon Matrix for your return, which can travel on the timeline throughout the Universe. When you return, you will be in the same moment as when you left. Your parents will not know that you have been gone. This is your choice. If you are not ready now, there may be another moment later.”

“You mean I might miss this opportunity and it might not come again.”

“Things change. That is not something I can guarantee.”

“Will I be safe in this other realm?”

“I believe so.”

“You don’t know that?”

“I know many things, but not all things. I believe you will be safe.”

“Well, I know that I would rather travel to another realm than go back to that school tomorrow. If I hadn’t had the dream, I probably wouldn’t say yes. I want to go.”

“Is that your answer?”

“Yes.”

“Genevieve, there will be many who will guide and protect you. I wouldn’t be sending you off on this adventure if I felt that you would come to harm.”

With that the young girl smiled at him. She took off her Ipod, and put it along with her cell phone in the backpack. “Please take care of these.”

Master Kong came from behind the counter and stood next to the girl. “This won’t take very long. Kazzi will be waiting for you on the other side.”

“Is that her name?”

“Yes. She is eagerly awaiting your arrival. You will be joining others who are making the same journey.”

“That sounds interesting.”

“Your destinies were always meant to intertwine. All is as it should be. It is time.”

Gennie closed her eyes as the Sage began a rhythmic chant. He raised his hands toward the ceiling, and as he brought them down he began a circular motion, swirling the energy around the room, then drawing it closer and closer to them both. The air in the shop was shifting and changing as the shimmering vortex began to take shape. When it was perfectly formed, the Sage escorted the teen into the center of the swirling energy. With a loud whoosh, she was pulled into the vortex and disappeared. As soon as she crossed, the room returned to its former condition.

The Sage smiled to himself as he tucked her backpack behind the counter. He would be crossing soon. It had been many an age since he had been in Anara and he was looking forward to renewing old friendships and protecting all of the young charges. As he moved back behind the counter, the Tarot cards were spiraling up from the counter. They swirled around and around for five rotations, then five cards removed themselves from the swirling mass and fell to the countertop. The five cards created a formation as the remaining cards came back down to the countertop in perfect order.

The Sage lost his smile as he viewed the five cards now resting on the countertop. The message had been delivered. Out loud, to no one in particular, he said, “Anyone who causes any harm to these young charges will know my wrath.” Master Kong looked across the room but he was looking beyond this realm into much darker places.