

Prophecy Apples

“Flying dreams! Cherries for dreams of flight! Soar like an eagle and swim amongst the clouds! Three for two dollars!”

“Ocean Raspberries! Swim deep with the whales and glide on the backs of stingrays! One dollar a basket! Ocean Raspberries!”

“Family dreams! Relatives who’ve passed on will visit you with one of these dream pears! Reconcile your differences with the dead!”

Ava strolled through the fruit market of Tamerine. Bright cloth banners of grapes still on the vine hung from over several vendor stalls. Flags with Tamerine family emblems lofted over some of the busiest stalls. Their prestige brought in customers as much as any of their products. Large piles of fruit were out on display, promising different dreams with their goods. Oranges promised soaring in the air, strawberries that would give dreams of being famous, grapes that let the eater dream of love. Dream produce wasn’t hard to find, but it took a skilled farmer to grow prominent dreams. Ava had eaten some blueberries the other night and had a dream where she had swum with dolphins.

Ava had heard of the Tamerine Valley Dream Market from a family friend who had brought her the blueberries. The farmers would water their crops with water from the River of Dreams. The river valley had been a place of pilgrimage, people traveling for miles to drink from the River of Dreams. It was first called the Waters of Enlightenment, but the visions were nothing but dreams. After the illusion broke, locals started learning how to sell certain types of dreams by adding herbs and oils to the dream water. The climate gave way to all sorts of fruit that would provide fantastic dreams to those who ate them. Adding seawater would yield fruit that gave dreams of swimming deep in the ocean. Crushing mistletoe and holly into it would

yield dreams of snow and winter. Rosemary gave dreams of family memories. Ava had packed a bag and traveled to Tamerine on foot with high hopes for a particular prize she'd heard about.

“Miss!” A barker at a stand yelled. “Come, come! Don't be shy! If you seek dreams, I have what you desire.”

Ava humored the man, stepping forward and folding her hands around her basket. There were piles of fruit arranged in wooden boxes or stacked to resemble pyramids. The seller had split open a fat, juicy melon so that people could sample the taste, though it spoke nothing to the quality of the seller's dreams. Ava brushed her hands over a spherical orange and rolled in her hands while she talked to the fruit seller. “What do you have to offer?”

“Dreams of all sorts! What are you looking for? I have dreams of flying, very popular. Passion Fruit: dreams of love...romance...sex! A night with anyone you can think of unlike any you've had before!”

“I've had my share of romance,” Ava shook her head. “Didn't take. I'm looking for something about more unique.”

“Very well,” the fruit seller nodded. “Perhaps something bolder! These pears? My pride and joy. You'll soar through the sky on the back of a giant turtle, sailing above the clouds and into to stars, flying through rings of fire!”

“I'm not looking for a dream,” Ava said. “I'm looking for truth.”

“Truth?”

“I'm feeling a little lost recently. My job fell apart between my fingers, the man I loved ran off with my roommate and I'm running low on hope. I need to know there's something more on the other end. I need hope again. I'm looking for prophecy dreams.”

“Prophecy?” The fruit seller scratched the back of his neck. “That might be a little harder to manage. Prophecies are a dime a dozen, but accuracy is difficult in the best of times. I tend to stay away from prophecies...a spoiled prophecy can be bad for business.”

“Know anybody who does?”

“The Alvaire Family? They have Golden Apples for prophecies. They’re not all good news, and they aren’t cheap either. Hard to say if they’re accurate, but enough people have benefited that they’ve made a name for themselves. I’ve heard of Golden Apples selling for thousands of dollars a piece.”

“Anyone a bit more affordable?”

The fruit seller sighed and rubbed his scruffy chin. “There’s a guy works a small stall. He usually takes the unsellable fruit that the rest of us can’t or won’t sell. Ugly, bruised stuff...some spoiled. We’d throw it out, but he buys it for cheap and does his best to sell it for a modest price.”

“And that works?” Ava asked.

“He keeps buying my castoffs,” the fruit seller shrugged. “Works well enough for his purposes. I can’t promise it will be good, but if there’s a prophecy in this particular dream market? Owen will have the cheapest one...or at least point you in the right direction.”

“Sounds like what I need.” Ava looked toward where the man was pointing.

“Word of warning? Bitter prophecies aren’t easy to stomach...physically or emotionally. Be sure you want to know before you take that first bite.”

“Where can I find Owen?”

The fruit seller gave her directions, sending her down the market street. Fruit sellers still called out, trying to get her attention with fruit to make her dreams unforgettable. Ava remained

focused as she marched towards Owen's stall. She turned down a side street, rushing down a set of stairs into the lower market.

This part of the market was only lit by a few hanging globes of light, the area filled with a dark orange glow. There were fewer people down here as well, most covering their faces with hoods and wide-brimmed hats. The merchants this far below were less vocal, trying to entice Ava with quiet whispers and welcoming gestures. The fruits down here weren't the most appetizing or as picturesque as the fruit stalls above. The seller's here were offering figs and pomegranates that could as easily give nightmares as dreams. Ava walked with her shoulders tucked a little closer to her small body, saving the wicker basket for valuable contents.

Owen's stand was small, just a narrow table with a few wooden boxes of mixed fruit. The produce seemed priced by age, rather than type or what they looked like. Even Owen's freshest fruit looked near spoiling, but the price was less than half of anything that Ava saw up above. Owen sat with his ankles crossed on the countertop with his hands folded behind his head. He didn't try to entice Ava or make her valuable offers. Ava figured he knew that if anyone was coming this far down into the bowels of the market, they were looking for him. He didn't have to make any offers.

"Looking to buy?" Owen asked as Ava touched a few the fruits.

"I hear you might have prophecies," Ava said, cutting straight to her purpose. Owen twisted his face in thought, kicking his feet off the table and standing over the crates of fruit. He picked through a few fruits, working his hands through lemons with strange protrusions and withered plums. He looked almost bored as he picked through the crates. Before long, he took out a small, shriveled apple, yellow with dark brown bruises on the sides.

“It’s not the freshest prophecy.” Owen held the apple up to her eyes. “But it’s far from expired.”

“How old?”

“Might tell you something within the next three months.” Owen shrugged. “Possibly four? It’s more of a warning than a true prophecy. Not a lot of time to do anything about it, but it’s enough time to settle things.”

“How much?”

“Fifty dollars,” Owen offered. “No refunds.”

“Fine,” Ava pulled a wad of bills out of her wallet and passed it over to the man.

“And no refunds includes taste, too,” Owen wagged a finger at her. “Or the results of your prophecy.”

“Thank you.”

“Eat it an hour before you go to bed,” Owen said, sitting back and kicking his ankles up again. “And don’t mix it with alcohol. Wine prophecies are harder to understand and I don’t do dream interpretation.”

Ava nodded, putting the single apple into her basket and wrapping it up in a silk napkin. She turned and hurried down the corridor. With her Prophecy Apple in tow, Ava marched back up the stairs and into the market. She’d spent her last fifty dollars for the month on the bruised dream produce, but that was the price of knowing.