

# SUGARPLUM DESTINY

By Cindy Yantis

## CHAPTER ONE

### Left Behind

The small town of Mistwell Springs was aglow with promise and anticipation. The domed courthouse was plastered with red and white blinking signs that proclaimed Merry Christmas, and Ho, Ho, Ho. The modest homes in the modest neighborhoods were full of twinkling Christmas trees. In most houses the people slept soundly; it was the middle of the night on Christmas Eve.

On the edge of town, an enchanted wooded lagoon sparkled as a soft snow fell through the tree branches and settled on the ice-covered lake. There was stillness in the air, filled with mysterious anticipation. A huge oak tree with an unusually wide trunk skirted the lake.

Suddenly, the sky directly overhead opened in a quick flash and a bright multi-colored tube shot out of the sky and pointed toward the lagoon. A small explosion at the base of the oak tree quickly followed the flash in the sky. Silence fell over the woods for a long moment, until the tree trunk split wide open and a portal magically appeared. The light tube dove down thru the tree and drifted out of the portal.

After a moment, a tall, beautiful and elegant creature with long hair the color of golden silk appeared out of the tube, and hovered over the lake. She had the face of a beautiful lady; with translucent skin like snow and dark blue eyes that sparkled. She was Queen Floralese, the ruler of Averleese, Kingdom of Destiny, and she wore a delicate diamond crown on her head. Her long silken hair curved down and around her body and morphed into her golden dress with a train attached to the iridescent tube. Her dress train unfurled the tube forming a large golden carpet over the iced lagoon. When the tube unfolded, many small purple glowballs that could fit into the palm of a hand tumbled out of it followed by twinkling snowflakes that sprouted wings and became tiny snowflake fairies. The glowballs swooped and danced around each other in the trees.

Suddenly, a spunky teenage fairy, Anabella, the 17-year-old Princess and daughter of Floralese, spilled out and rolled into the woods where she hit her head hard on another tree, causing her to be very dizzy. Her favorite pets, folliwiggles, which were fuzzy round roly-poly fairies that looked like lemons and oranges, popped out of her pocket and rolled under a bush, giggling with glee.

Anabella rubbed the growing bump on her head where she hit the tree, tucked her long, blonde curly hair behind her ears and hid out of sight before she was discovered. Things were a bit blurry as she watched in a haze as the party of glowballs popped into sugarplum sprites, the jolly purple fairies whose job it was to plant a year's worth of dreams in the sleeping heads of people all across the Earth on Christmas Eve.

“Scatter about. Off you go. The night will be short and there are many sleeping people waiting for you,” said Floralese as she corralled the dream mission team.

The sugarplum sprites secured pearl dream boxes to their belts, dissolved back into purple glowballs and then streaked toward the town.

She spied a dream box that someone had dropped in his or her hurry to leave, so she crept forward to pick it up. She would return it somehow when she got back home. It suddenly hit her that if she were caught she would be in a world of trouble. It was against their laws for her to venture outside the walls of Averleese until she was crowned queen and would lead the dream mission someday like her mother. And, to her knowledge no one had ever stowed away on the dream mission before so she had no idea what the punishment would be. But, she couldn't wait any longer! She had to find out what it was all about; she would just do a bit of exploring and then be back here before midnight to hitch a ride back to Averleese and get back to bed before anyone knew she was gone.

Just then she heard a noise behind her. She turned in time to see a group of Army of Confidence soldiers appear out of enchantment dust to patrol the area. Too quickly, she darted behind the tree and knocked her head hard again against a branch. A quick circle of stars appeared before her eyes as she fell silently onto the snow, unconscious.

Several hours later dawn slowly appeared on the horizon, and Queen Floralese hovered over the lagoon as the tired dream mission team rolled up into her dress train. She once more glanced around the wooded area.

“Mission accomplished,” said Floralese with a flourish. She swept into the oak tree portal and disappeared from view. The portal sealed back up after her.

Across the lake, Princess Anabella lay still unconscious, hidden behind heavy foliage. She was left behind.



## CHAPTER TWO

## Seventeen Years Earlier

## Sweet Dreams on Crescent Lane

It was Christmas Eve seventeen years earlier and a soft, glittery curtain of snow fell around twinkling streetlamps in the sleepy neighborhood on Crescent Lane. Christmas lights glowed in the windows and the tidy yards of the cozy houses were carpeted white with snow. Crescent Lane was a street in a neighborhood like most neighborhoods in Mistwell Springs and it was bedtime for most kids everywhere, especially on this night when they went to sleep anticipating exciting things on Christmas morning.

Suddenly, a gust of wind blew the falling snowflakes into a cottony funnel. Tiny bell-like sounds came from the funnel, creating a sweet song in the breeze. Riding on the same gust of wind, a group of small purple glowballs swooped and danced around each other and then found their places outside the bedroom windows of the houses on Crescent Lane. One glowball buzzed by the glittering snow funnel, hovering for a moment, when plump, bubble pink lips appeared on the side of the glowball, puckered and blew kisses at the swirling snowflakes. The bell sounds became tiny melodic giggles as the snowflakes suddenly sprouted wings and became snowflake fairies. They danced around each other as their song hung in the air and they scattered for the treetops.

The glowball came to a stop outside the upstairs bedroom window at 222 Crescent Lane. It appeared almost transparent against the white Christmas lights framing the window.

Inside the warm bedroom, a brother and sister snuggled in their beds. Danny, age fourteen, and Nancy, age eight, paid close attention as their Grandma Rose, perched on Danny's bed, read to them. "While visions of sugarplums danced in their heads," she read.

"What's a sugarplum?" asked Nancy, her voice heavy with sleep.

"Well, it's a small purple fruit. And, it tastes very sweet when it's plump and ripe," said Grandma Rose.

"Hmmm," hummed Nancy as she happily closed her eyes.

Danny heard a faint "hee, hee" coming from the window. He spun his head around and thought he caught a glimpse of something moving out of the window. But, there was nothing there that he could see.

"Did you hear something, Grandma?" he asked.

"It's just the wind, dear heart," she answered. Danny wasn't sure; he was certain he saw something out there. But, he was really too tired to make anything more of it. Grandma continued reading until she was sure her two grandchildren, whom she was raising, were fast asleep. "Sweet dreams, angels," she whispered as she kissed each on the forehead, turned out the light and left the room.

As the children slept, the purple glowball seeped through the window and snowflake fairies danced against the ice-encrusted glass. The glowball hovered

for a moment over the beds and then, all at once, it popped like a bubble and it became Maraplum, a plump sugarplum sprite with grand intentions. She was plum in color, had a round face with huge eyes and long eyelashes, silver wings and tiny feet, and in her hand she carried an ornate pearled box which carried a year's worth of dreams. She swooped happily over the beds, scooped her hand inside the dream box and placed a purple palm over each child's eyes. As soon as they felt her touch, Danny and Nancy sighed and smiled in their sleep.

“Here's to visions of, well, visions of me!” Maraplum whispered and giggled, her laugh like musical notes up the scale.

The snowflake fairies added their bell-like laughs to the choir as, Maraplum, satisfied that she had completed her Christmas Eve dream mission, sealed the dream box, folded herself up into the purple glowball and seeped back through the window into the night. She dashed through the air with the snowflake fairies at her heels over the snow-hushed neighborhood and into the woods at the end of the street. She sped through the trees towards a faint glow that got stronger and stronger as she neared it. Finally, she reached the source of the glow, a myriad of the other purple fairy glowballs along with ones in gold and white as well. The glowballs danced and played in the snowy clearing near a lagoon, chasing and toppling over one another in the air.

A breeze stirred the branches of the trees and the glowballs quieted. They hovered in the air, waiting. After a moment, a young 25-year-old Queen Floralese with the long hair the color of gold appeared before the group of fairies. Her long silken hair curved down and around her body, became her dress,

revealing that she was very pregnant. Her dress formed a long, wide train behind her and covered the iced over lagoon forming the large golden carpet. The glowballs and snowflake fairies gathered on her train as their queen raised her arms. A bright stream of light broke through the sky and opened the portal at the base of the huge oak tree with the unusually large trunk and branches that reached out like arms. The light shot upward forming an iridescent tunnel into the sky. In a voice both confident and kind the queen proclaimed, "You have done well. Until next Christmas Eve! Now, home to Averleese."

Queen Floralese's dress carpet rolled up, with the fairies and sprites in tow. They shot through the tree portal, out of the top of the tree vanishing into the sky. Slowly the portal in the tree faded and disappeared. A quiet snow fell over the trees in the woods, as well as the cozy homes full of sleeping children with their happy, sugarplum dreams.

CHAPTER THREE  
A Birthday in Averleese,  
Kingdom of Destiny

Averleese, Kingdom of Destiny, was a beautiful, lush floating island that was suspended on the clouds. The island moved with the clouds and the enchanting inhabitants of Averleese watched over the people living on Earth. Each resident had his or her particular role in the kingdom's mission of planting, nurturing and guarding human dreams. It all started every year with the Christmas Eve dream mission led by Queen Floralese and the sugarplum sprites. And, then each night, the sand pimpernels surveyed humankind for those who needed help getting to sleep so they could dream. The purpose of dreams, according the wise elders on Averleese, was to allow them to fulfill their true destiny in life. If they didn't sleep or have regular dreams, then that would lead to a life unfulfilled and full of despair. As the keeper of dreams, the kingdom took their responsibility seriously, and happily. When someone's dream came true a flock of songbell birds sang sweetly from the roof of the palace and there was great celebration throughout Averleese. There were days when they sang all day long. When that happened, there were usually awards handed out to certain sand pimpernel and sugarplum sprites for doing an exceptional job. One such award-winning sugarplum sprite was Maraplum, who was currently sound asleep after the dream mission the night before.

Averleese glowed golden in the morning light. In the center of the kingdom grew the powerful Tree of Destiny. Its green and gold leaves the size of pancakes shimmered with morning dew. Plump, ripe sugarplum fruit hung from nearly every limb. Blending in with the fruit were the tiny sleeping faces of the sugarplum sprites, including Maraplum, exhausted from the mission. Their long curled eyelashes grazing their fat cheeks as contented, purring snores came from their pink lips.

As the fairies settled deeper into their sleep, the rest of Averleese prepared to start their day. The solid gold doors of the copper-colored palace opened and Queen Floralese stepped out onto the palace courtyard. Her blonde silk hair was now pulled up to cradle her crystal crown. She wore a royal dress of white velvet and satin, which draped over her pregnant belly.

“Good Morning, Averleese,” she said as she looked with pride over the palace grounds and toward the village square. The wind carried her voice throughout the village as tiny, blue water nymphs sprang out of dewdrops and danced in the air as they headed toward the nearby village with cobblestone streets. Doors of the quaint homes and shops opened as fairies and nymphs giggled and gossiped as they began their day.

With grandeur, Floralese raised her arms. The sun shone even brighter as its golden rays hit a gathering of daffodils. The daffodil petals opened to reveal sweet faces. The green leaves fluttered and became wings as the sundancer fairies left the ground and flew towards the sun.

“It’s a new day, Sundancers,” exclaimed Floralese.

“Good morning, Your Grace,” they twittered in response.

Floralese removed a gold suede bag from her robe pocket and pulled a handful of glittering enchantment dust from it. She threw it into the air and all the bells of the kingdom rang in unison as the town square sprang to life. She looked over her shoulder at the palace balcony where her mother, Morganessa, a tall regal lady fairy with silver hair twirled on top of her head, stood watching over her. Morganessa was an Averleese elder and the Queen Mother, and she had a powerful presence. Next to her was her other daughter and Floralese’s twin sister, Tempesta. While Floralese and Tempesta had similar facial features and were about the same size, where Floralese’s beauty was bright as the sun, her sister had a dark intense beauty with hair and eyes as black as the night. And though she donned a jeweled royal gown, Tempesta wore a scowl rather than a crown. She gave Floralese a look of pure envy, dark eyes flashing dangerously. Noting the look, Morganessa rested a calming hand on Tempesta’s shoulder.

“Tempesta, dear, have you done your morning duties? This is going to be an important day for your sister,” said Morganessa. “You need to be there for her.”

“Every day is her day, Mother. She’s the queen and I’m not,” said Tempesta.

“When are you going to finally accept the gods’ choice that she was to be born first? This is the way it’s meant to be,” said Morganessa.

“Two minutes, Mother,” said Tempesta, exasperated. “Two minutes later shouldn’t mean that I’m a lady-in-waiting, which is practically what I am. I was meant for more.”

“Just try to enjoy the day,” said Morganessa, shaking her head sadly at her younger daughter.

“I prefer the night,” grumbled Tempesta between her teeth. She turned away from her mother, her olive skin flushed with anger. Tempesta had spent the last 25 years regretting that she was born only two minutes after her sister and that meant that as the first born, Floralese was to be queen of Averleese. And, Tempesta was left to live as a member of the castle, barely more than a servant fairy in her mind. And, today was particularly stinging for Tempesta because it meant that she would be one step further from ever being queen. She turned her attention back to Floralese and then stormed off the balcony.

“Arise, we have much to celebrate,” Floralese called to the kingdom, as she rubbed her swollen belly, her voice echoing through the village. Floralese had been queen for four years now, since her 21st birthday. It was the Averleese tradition for the first born to take the throne on that momentous birthday, and she was now very comfortable in her role. She and her husband, King Larzon, ruled with compassion. She knew starting today that her life would never be the same. She knew it was nearly time.

Floralese reflected on this as she strolled through the courtyard, tenderly touching and greeting her subjects along the way. When she reached the Tree of Destiny she paused, stroking its trunk then leaning against it to catch her

breath. The sugarplum sprites began to stir. Suddenly, Floralese grasped her abdomen and moaned in pain. Maraplum's eyes fluttered open. She jumped up when she saw the queen.

"Your Majesty," she said, scurrying down the tree.

"I didn't mean to disturb you, Maraplum," Floralese said. It was clear the queen was having a contraction.

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear," Maraplum said as she flew excitedly around Floralese. "It's time, it's time, it's time." She giggled, like musical notes up the scale. They had been waiting for this exciting occasion. In fact, Maraplum remembered the Christmas day Floralese had been born, 25 years earlier. She couldn't believe all that time had passed so quickly and now the little girl she had helped raise was her queen and was about to be a mother herself.

"Yes, help me back to my chambers and summon the King," Floralese said. The other sugarplum sprites were awake with excitement too; they turned into their glowballs and went off in various directions to spread the news.

Maraplum helped her queen. Her husband Norval, a larger-than-life sand pimperl, joined them. His friendly old face looked like it had been sprayed with gold paint; his golden body was thin and lighter than air. He hovered just above the ground so when he walked he glided.

"Allow me, Your Majesty," Norval said in a deep soothing voice. He carried Floralese and flew toward the balcony outside Floralese bedroom quarters. Maraplum popped into her glowball and followed along.

A large black wasp fairy circled the Tree of Destiny. He had a permanent frown and post nasal drip.

“Ahhh,” sang Wasp. “Desssstiny is about to turn.” He rubbed his wings together in anticipation.

The sundancer fairies flew by in a circular formation around Wasp.

“Go away, Wasp!” they twittered in unison. They blew him off course and into a mud puddle next to the Tree. Then, they flew off toward the sun again.

Wasp picked himself up out of the mud. “I have patiencccccce. The time will come ssssoon enough,” he said to himself.

Tempesta sat on a stone near the crystal clear lake bordering the kingdom. Frowning, she threw sandstones into the water and watched the ripples expand and then fade away. She was oblivious to what was happening in the palace at that very moment. She felt frustrated and betrayed by the gods. She just knew that she was supposed to do something great in her life; she really believed the gods had made a mistake and she was the one who should have been born first. But, what was she supposed to do, she thought?

“It’s not fair,” she grumbled as she tossed another stone into the water.

Wasp appeared and circled Tempesta’s head. She swished him away. “Not now, Wasp.”

Wasp circled her again, this time settling on one of Tempesta’s raven curls. “Your ansssssswer hassss been here all along,” hissed Wasp into her ear.

“What do you mean?” asked Tempesta, agitated.

“The Tree of Desssstiny, Your Highnessssss.”

Tempesta whipped her head toward the Tree and Wasp tumbled off her curls, hurling him wing over stinger. Her eyes narrowed, Tempesta watched the happy sugarplum sprites tidy their branched home. She glanced up to the palace balcony and caught Morganessa looking down at her with concern. For a moment they locked eyes. Tempesta turned toward Wasp, who lay panting in the pile of sand where he landed from his unexpected flight. “I’ve told you to stay away from me, Wasp,” she said to him, loud enough for her mother to hear.

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It was a crisp, cool night. Brilliant streaks of light swept across the sky, creating the Aurora Borealis Northern Lights, their power and beauty a sign of the sacred event about to place. The kingdom village waited in anticipation as the fairies stayed in their various quarters. The air was quiet.

In the royal bedchamber, Floralese groaned exhaustedly, her labor becoming stronger. Larzon, the Prince of Confidence and as Floralese’s husband was also King, strode impatiently alongside the bed. He was a strong soldier paladin with a handsome tanned face, the mane of a lion, and the muscles of a knight. Sensing the growing tension, he leaned over his wife and kissed her forehead.

Norval appeared in one of the corners near the ceiling. He sighed heavily, exhausted from having just returned from his nightly sleep mission. It was his

job, along with the other sand pimpernels, to aid people into their deep sleep so they could dream each night. He was pleased because he had arrived just in time to watch over the sacred event. Maraplum was next to him, ready to assist.

Morganessa came in and out of the room, checking on her daughter. Tempesta slumped in the corner, with a bored grimace on her face. The last thing she wanted to witness was the birth of the child who would be next the ruler of the kingdom.

Floralese's abdomen took on a faint glow. "Oh Mother, it's all so clear now. I now know the true meaning of our destiny," she said.

"Yes, it's just the beginning," said Morganessa in a sure, powerful voice that was full of emotion.

"This may be your destiny, but it's not mine!" said Tempesta.

Morganessa pointed for her to leave the room. But, Floralese was the queen and she was still in command.

"Sister, you are speaking about your future queen. You can stew in your own self-pity another time. If you can't be here in the right spirit, then leave," said Floralese as another contraction overtook her. "I won't have it otherwise."

"Oh, by all means, Your Majesty," exclaimed Tempesta as, with angry determination, she stormed from the room. They all watched her go for a moment.

Morganessa sighed and then signaled to Larzon to begin the birthing ritual. He stood and stretched his arms over Floralese's glowing body. Brilliant

rays of light in purple, then blue, then yellow and gold rose up from her belly. The entire room vibrated with excitement.

Tempesta strode across the courtyard, looking back over her shoulder at the balcony, where streaks of light shot out of the windows toward the bright orange sun-moon of Christmas, which appeared beneath the Northern Lights. She plopped herself down on a hill in the courtyard between the Tree of Destiny and Floralese's balcony.

Wasp spun around the Tree, beckoning Tempesta. She hesitated for a moment and then, mesmerized, approached him.

"Imagine a fruit that, oncccccce eaten, givessss you the power to rule your own Desssstiny," Wasp hissed. He buzzed around the Tree full of sugarplums. There was only one tiny sprite snoozing high up in the branches because the others were all gathered beneath the balcony in the courtyard, awaiting the birth of the new princess.

"No," said Tempesta. "If we eat the sugarplums then our kingdom will perish and evil will take over the world."

"Nonsenssssse. Eat one fruit and you will be able to see all destinies; you will see and will be able to help form the future. A future where you will be queen. You, Tempesssta, will be all powerful." He was quiet for a moment, letting what he said to her sink in.

"You're lying, Wasp," she said slowly.

“There’s more,” said Wasp confidently. “Eat the second piece of fruit and the kingdom will be destroyed as you now know it. But, then there will be nothing... and no one standing in your way. You will rebuild it as its queen and empress, controlling not only dreams, but nightmares as well. Imagine ruling over good *and* evil.”

“We don’t choose our destiny. It chooses us,” replied Tempesta, only half believing it as she said it.

“Ah, but what if thissss is your Desssstiny?” asked Wasp. He buzzed around Tempesta’s head once more.

A glorious golden light came from within Floralese’s window drawing Tempesta’s attention.

“I want more,” she whispered.

“Yesssssssssssss. Yesssssssssssss. Yesssssssssssss.” Wasp tempted her.

The golden light bounced around Floralese’s bedchambers as she moaned softly. The rays of light coming from her abdomen were strong and vibrant. Larzon stood in place with his arms outstretched.

Suddenly rising in the rays of light was a naked and gleaming infant girl. She rose to Larzon’s embrace where he tenderly held his newborn daughter in his strong arms. “So this is Anabella, the newest Princess of Averleese,” he murmured to her. The baby cooed and squirmed happily as tears of joy streamed down her father’s cheeks.

Outside, the Christmas bells tolled throughout the kingdom. Inside the room, the servant fairies, Morganessa, Maraplum and Norval all bowed to Floralese. A great cry came from Anabella, as if she didn't want to be left out. Floralese smiled and reached for her daughter. This was the best moment of her life and everything made perfect sense now. There had been times when she wasn't sure what the future held for her and her kingdom, when she had feelings of doom. But, now she felt certain that all would be well.

Suddenly, the room shuddered and quaked and the lights of the palace flickered. The skies outside exploded with thunder and lightning. Morganessa staggered to the window, her face full of fear.

"What is it Mother?" asked Floralese as she instinctively held Anabella tighter.

Tempesta stood rigid under the Tree of Destiny as Wasp hovered next to the moat. Wind tore through the Tree blowing some of the pancake-sized leaves into the air. Tempesta hesitated, then plucked a ripe sugarplum fruit from the Tree and held it in front of her, unsure.

The sky exploded again, the lightning mixing with the light streaming from Floralese's bedchambers. The sugarplum fairies scattered across the courtyard in fright as red hairy howling harlots with sharp fangs and angry eyes swooped overhead, their screeches worse than the worst nightmares.

"No!" Morganessa screamed from the balcony. But her voice was swallowed by the wind.

Wasp landed on the fruit in Tempesta's hand and hissed, "Tasssstte."

Tempesta took a timid nibble.

"More, more," said Wasp.

Tempesta sunk her teeth into the sugarplum for a deep bite, as lightning shot from her fingertips and eyes. She looked up at the balcony, her once dark beauty replaced by a face distorted with hate. Tempesta howled with evil delight as she turned to the tiny sleeping sugarplum sprite in the Tree. She waved her hand over the sprite's face when suddenly the sprite thrashed from side to side, groaning and screaming as a nightmare vision appeared over her head.

*The sprite ran slowly through a dark, dreary forest, dense with trees. Branches became hands and grabbed at her. She fell down a long chute, landing on a carpet of moss as the moss enveloped and swallowed her.*

Tempesta cackled with delight as she watched the little fairy toss and turn on her branch bed. Wasp hid in Tempesta's black mane.

"Enough!" yelled Floralese from behind Tempesta. Her booming voice woke up the sugarplum sprite so frightened her that she dissolved in her purple glowball and flew quickly away.

Larzon assisted a weak Floralese across the courtyard toward the Tree and Tempesta. In her hand she carried her magical royal scepter, which was only taken from its hiding place in times of crisis. It was the first time in over 20 years that it had been seen. The scepter was made of gold and silver entwined on the handle like a heavy rope, the head a large crystal ball that looked like a round prism shooting a kaleidoscope of colors as the sun-moon rays hit it.

Two decades earlier, when Morganessa was queen, she was left with the heart-wrenching task of banishing her husband, King Nero, from the kingdom. His evil ways were discovered when Morganessa found his plans to destroy and steel the kingdom from her. She was pregnant with Floralese and Tempesta and did what she had to do to protect her daughters and her beloved Averleese. So, with the royal scepter she banished him forever.

All eyes were now on the scepter, as they knew what it meant. It only made Tempesta howl more. Floralese came face to face with her sister.

“Do you realize what you’ve done?” asked Floralese, barely concealing her fury.

“What I do realize is that I see all now,” said Tempesta with a new confidence. “And, what I see is powerful and beautiful. It’s my dream and it’s magnificent.”

“The worst evil will look magnificent to the evil eye,” said Morganessa.

“And your vision has always been clouded by your own envy,” added Floralese as she approached her sister.

Tempesta got close to Floralese’s face. “Ha, you think I’m envious of you now? I have no reason to be, because let me tell you how it’s going to be. I’m going to be queen of Averleese and things are going to be very different.”

“Is this what you really want to see happen?” asked Floralese as she tossed a handful of enchantment dust in the air and an oval mirror, framed in ornate gold appeared in front of Tempesta.

Tempesta stared at her reflection then primped her hair. “Oh, you’re all boring me.” The mirror fogged over. Tempesta took the edge of her skirt and tried to wipe it dry. A streak of lightning flashed out of the mirror, shocking Tempesta’s hand and burning a hole in her skirt.

“This is the world you would rule,” said Morganessa, standing in unison beside Floralese.

The fog in the mirror cleared and Tempesta saw a world ruled by despair. The sky was leaden gray and the trees were barren. People walked around in rags, their shoulders hunched and with scowls on their faces. Then a new image appeared in the mirror. It was of Tempesta, skeletal-faced and seated on a throne of reeds and thorns. Wasps swarmed her head. The Tempesta in the mirror smiled, baring yellow, ragged teeth.

The mirror fogged again and when it cleared Tempesta’s present reflection returned. The mirror then disintegrated and fell to the floor in a pile of sand.

“Those are not my dreams,” protested Tempesta.

“No, but it is now your destiny. If you were to be queen now, nightmares would become the way of life,” said Morganessa.

“I don’t believe you. Besides, nightmares to some might be a dream come true to others,” said Tempesta defiantly.

“You don’t have to believe me. You will see it transpire,” said Morganessa.

“Whatever you say, Mother. I see it differently,” said Tempesta.

“Your heart has a hole in it, Tempesta. I’m ashamed to call you my sister,” said Floralese.

“You were never my sister,” hissed Tempesta.

Floralese fought back tears as her sister’s insult stabbed her in the heart. Even after all of these years, she felt a sense of protectiveness for her slightly younger sister. She held out hope that she could help Tempesta to open her heart and find happiness in Averleese. But now she felt an even stronger sense of duty.

“Now your destiny, and mine, must be fulfilled,” said Floralese, making her voice sound stronger than she felt. A battalion of 20 soldier paladins marched forward and made a shield around Tempesta.

Wasp buzzed near Tempesta’s ear. “Take another bite,” he whispered. She spun around, pointed a sharp fingernail toward the Tree of Destiny and a ripe sugarplum fruit sailed through the air toward her outstretched hand and open mouth. But, before it could land, Floralese reached forward with the magic scepter, batting the fruit away from Tempesta and back to its rightful place at the top of the Tree.

“You will never be able to take another bite, Tempesta,” cried Floralese.

“How can you be so sure?” cackled Tempesta.

Floralese nodded toward the soldiers, silently ordering them to stand at attention. She pointed the scepter toward the kingdom’s front gates, gates that always remained locked insuring the safety of the residents within. One wave of the scepter unlocked the heavy iron gates; they flung open wide.

“You’re making a devastating mistake!” cried Tempesta. Several of the fairies gathered at the edge of the courtyard to witness what was taking place. They were afraid and many of them wept. They had watched Tempesta and Floralese grow up and couldn’t believe what had finally come to pass between them. Tempesta pointed at all of them. “You’re sealing their fate if you do this to me. It will be on your head when they’re all destroyed!”

Two powerful soldier paladins surrounded Tempesta, grasping her arms tight and pushing her just beyond the gates.

Tempesta looked toward the palace balcony where the infant Anabella slept. “And, she will never become queen. I will see to that,” screamed Tempesta.

“Never!” Floralese stood powerfully and pointed the scepter at Tempesta. The sky became very black. “Tempesta, you are hereby banished from Averleese, Kingdom of Destiny forever. You will live the rest of your existence in the Land of Nowhere.” The scepter crystal glowed bright and shot a sharp beam of colorful light at Tempesta. She was cast into the darkened sky on a streak of lightning. Her shrieks faded as she traveled farther and farther from the kingdom, followed by red howling harlots and an army of wasps led by Wasp himself.

The gates closed. Queen Floralese took a deep breath and discreetly wiped away a tear from her cheek. Then, she tossed some enchantment dust toward the sky. A protective golden veil covered the kingdom and the sun

reappeared to shine on all the fairy inhabitants young and old. Floralese turned to address them.

“You are safe now,” she said with a calm that made them all relieved.

