

Evermore

by Exe



EVERMORE

For Ty

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## Evermore - Chapter 1

*“But, said Alice, if the world has absolutely no sense,  
who's stopping us from inventing one?”*

Lewis Carroll

The noise had come from under the house. Sophie Anne was certain of that now.

This had been the third time, and there just wasn't any getting' around it. There was something large beneath the house.

***‘The gun! Grab the gun!’*** She heard her father's voice holler inside her head.

And by-God, how Sophie Anne truly wished her father was there now, as she grabbed up the shotgun he'd shown her how to use, a very long time ago.

“Don't you dare!” her mother had threatened him at the time. But the semi-stoic man had insisted.

And so, with an expert hand, the young woman cracked open the gun and smiled in relief when she realized her pa had indeed left it loaded.

Of course, her pa would know what to do. He always had a solution for everything. Especially when it came to things that went bump in the night.

But her pa had taken the wagon to town to see about her ma, who was currently up at Doc Collin's place givin' birth, to twins.

And even now, with things such as they were, Sophie Anne's eyes rolled nearly into the back of her head at the thought of it.

But her pa was nothing if not excited to finally be having his boys, or at least he was fairly certain they were gonna be boys, as everyone said they would be, from the way her ma was carrying.

Her pa had already picked out their names, and everything.

Of course, Sophie Anne had hated them both. And she had told her pa as much, just as he had been headed out the door.

But the large man, with the sweeping blonde hair and piercing blue eyes, just bent down and gave the ornery fifteen-year-old an exaggerated kiss on the forehead.

“Now, don’t you worry, you know you’ll always be my little princess, Miss Justice,” he said with such warmth and tenderness even her teenage heart couldn’t resist, and so, she had allowed him to take her up into an overly-enthusiastic hug.

“Just think... Justice, by this time tomorrow we’ll finally be a family of five! Just think!” he said laughing, and then, just like that, he had skipped merrily out the door.

“Don’t call me that!” Sophie Anne Gilmore screamed back through a large and poorly concealed smile.

But that had been hours and hours ago, and now night was setting in something good, and her pa, the man who had always come running whenever she’d had the slightest of fears, was nowhere to be found.

And now a fourth bump sounded from somewhere beneath her feet. And it was an ungodly sound too, as if a large body was shuffling through a tight space. Why, even the way the sound itself had squeezed its way up through the thin cracks of the floor her daddy had laid himself, made her shiver, there in the gathering darkness.

“I have a weapon! And I’m not afraid to use it!” she hollered, just like her pa had always told her to do. And then she took aim at the spot from whence she’d last heard the sound.

“You don’t need to do that,” a level, but somewhat-untidy voice said then, from somewhere behind her.

So, Sophie Anne turned on her bare heels, and aimed the barrel of the shotgun at the empty space behind her.

But there weren't nobody there.

“It can’t get in,” the voice said calmly, and matter-of-factly.

“Where?” Sophie began, but then she spun around, thinking perhaps terror was making her ears play tricks on her.

But she was alone in the sparse room.

Again, the shuffling sounded, this time from just to the right of her feet.

Sophie Anne took aim, inches away from her bare toes.

“I’d really hate for you to lose a toe. Pretty toes, old toes,” the odd voice said. This time from much closer.

“I...” Sophie began. “I...” she tried again, when another word failed to materialize in her mind.

“I...” she started a third time. And then her eyes finally caught it.

“It’s not what’s below your house you should be worried about, Miss Justice,” a plump and hairy spider said, as it dangled now, just inches from the tip of her freckled nose.

Sophie Anne closed her eyes. Like hard. Squeezing her lids together for all she was worth, hard. So hard, in fact, that when she opened them again all she could see were large red spots.

“Well, that’s not going to help anything,” the spider said helpfully.

“I... I don’t believe,” Sophie Anne said then, bringing the barrel of the shotgun level with the tiny spider.

“So, I see,” he said, as he spun in a lazy circle on a single thread of silk dangling from the thatched roof overhead.

“But it’s not me you need to be worrying about, dear” he told her, as he finally came around to face her directly.

“Oh yeah?” Sophie Anne asked, as snarkily as any teenage girl can.

“Yep,” the spider said, as he slowly spun away again.

Again, the shuffling from beneath her feet sounded, this time with a loud THUD, as something heavy hit the wooden board directly under her feet.

“And why are you dressed like that? You can’t fight dressed like that,” the spider inquired, squinting all eight of his eyes, that were somewhat hidden behind a pair of spectacles, in order to focus on the pretty girl a little bit better.

Sophie Anne looked down at the white dressing gown she wore, and shrugged.

“What? I was getting ready for bed,” she said, again with that air of teenage mystique.

“Well, you’d better dress, in a hurry!” the spider yelled, just as a loud howling sounded from the other side of the wooden front door.

Sophie Anne’s face went a ghastly shade of white instantly upon hearing the large wolf so close to the house.

So, she swallowed hard, and then spun around to look again at the spider dangling from her ceiling.

“What was that?” she asked, her eyes as wide as harvest moons.

“That... my dear, is the *Calling*. And it’s come for you.”

Sophie Anne didn’t know why she should believe anything a talking spider said. But then again, it hadn’t offered her any advice she wouldn’t have given herself. And so, without further prompting, she ran for her bedroom.

A tiny room off the main living area, it was almost completely dark, as its one tiny window stood in the shadow of a large, majestic oak.

Without even the light of the moon to guide her, Sophie Anne fumbled in the dark for clothes.

Just as she finished dressing, just as she was putting her winter cap on, Sophie Anne heard yet another blood curdling howl.

“Miss Justice, there just isn’t any more time to waste.”

“Waste???” Sophie Anne stammered, as she came into the dimly lit room.

“It’s here,” the spider said, as it began to swing, much like a pendulum.

“What’s here?” Sophie Anne asked with such a terrible tremor in her voice she was actually surprised when the spider understood.

“The Calling.”

And with that, the spider left its thread and hurled its body through the air, until it landed on top of her shoulder.

Sophie Anne’s eyes went wider still, as she looked at the spider up close.

“Are those... glasses?” she asked, in a bewildered tone.

The spider shook its furry little head.

“They look like glasses...” Sophie Anne said, sounding mildly confused, as the front door caved in.

Gun in hand, the young woman spun towards the darkness that quickly unfolding itself in the doorway.

“I have a gun!” she hollered shakily, into the sudden night wind.



## Evermore – Chapter 2

*“To every question I have ever had,  
or ever will have, you are the answer.”*

Deborah Harkness

Everyone had told her not to fall in love, that he was not the boy for her, that they could never be together. Everyone had said so, including her father, when he had taken her mother’s side at the dinner table one night.

“But you said they’re just the same as us. My whole life, that’s what you’ve said, that there’s no difference between us and them!” Sophie Anne had yelled back.

But her father’s stoic face would not budge, and his only words had been, “until the rest of the world sees it that way... I’m afraid it’s impossible, Sophie Anne.”

She’d known then that her argument was finished. Because her father was like that; an immovable mountain, when it came to things he’d accept, and those he wouldn’t.

And besides, she knew it was true. That the rest of the world saw her Jacob as something less than human.

***And you just can’t fight the entire world.***

Sophie Anne thought bitterly, just as the boy she loved more than anything else in the entire world came storming through the door, iron shovel in hand, ready to take on the dark form that was suddenly materializing out of nowhere.

Yet, there seemed to be little he could do up against a man that was quickly coalescing out of a dark and impenetrable mist.

A mist that at first, was just two rows of wicked white teeth, that shown bright and clear from the center of the dark swirling mass. And then suddenly, there were two dark and foreboding eyes looking back at her, that seemed to come from nowhere at all.

But just as Jacob's nicked and dented shovel came down upon the quickly materializing head, the darkness itself spun on the spot, reached up with a rapidly-solidifying right hand, and grabbed it.

"Run! Miss Justice! You can't fight the Shanti Man! Run!" her Jacob hollered at her, just as the shovel was yanked from his hands.

And then his bright eyes suddenly went wide in terror, wide with a knowing of what was about to happen.

"Come, he's right. You can't fight this," the forgotten spider said from her left shoulder. "Come now! Before it's too late for you too," he said so urgently it made the hairs on the back of Sophie Anne's neck stand on end.

"But..." Sophie Anne stammered then, as she watched her dark knight freeze in midair, as if time for him had suddenly stopped.

The young man's mouth was pulled back over two rows of brilliantly white teeth in a scream that Sophie Anne couldn't hear, which made her feel even more helpless.

But feeling helpless was something that made Sophie Anne mad as hell.

"Don't you dare shoot!" the bespectacled spider hollered from her shoulder, "I mean... the odds are not good. One in a million, I'd say... that you don't actually hit the boy."

Sophie Anne glared at the spider. But knew he was probably right.

"But," she started again, hoping a solution would just pop into her mind.

But nothing came to mind, so she lowered her weapon instead.

"But nothing, girl! You don't have what it takes to fight the Calling. Not now you don't. But come," the spider beckoned, seconds before he began to race about her body, wrapping her up in a tight, white web.

Causing her to drop her father's gun on the floor.

"Come," he repeated, before she could conjure another protest.

"Come, and we'll see if you have what it takes to save them."

"Them?" Sophia Anne stuttered stupidly, as her mind slowly began to untangle all of the things she'd just witnessed.

The least of which being a talking spider... that wasn't making any sense at all.

“Sense girl?!” the hairy spider screeched, as he once again came to sit upon her left shoulder.

“You’re definitely in the wrong story if you’re looking for sense!”

And just like that, with a terrible whooshing sound, and just as her Jacob was disappearing all-together into the same dark mist that had invaded her home, she was gone.

Whisked away, by a magical spider wearing glasses.

And quite honestly, even with all of that, Sophie Anne couldn’t help the tiny snicker as her lips slowly dissolved into nothing.

## Part 2

“But there’s nothing here,” a small voice said from the darkness.

“Oh... I can assure you, there are a great many things here,” an even smaller voice said, in a dark and foreboding tone.

“But I’m scared,” the small voice trembled.

“Well, you should be.”

“You see, I’m scared of the dark. Isn’t there any light?”

“Light? Light? What do you mean, light?” the spider demanded incredulously.

“It’s dark, I can’t see anything,” the girl said, with a bit more annoyance now, than fear.

“Dark? Why, that’s because you’re trying to use your eyes, you stupid girl!” the spider shrieked from her shoulder.

“And you haven’t got any of those here, so how are you gonna use them?” he asked in a tone that suggested he didn’t really expect, or even want, an answer.

And yet Sophie Anne was entirely too much like her father to do anything else.

“I suppose, the same way I’m using my mouth,” she told him, as she reached up with a hand to feel a mouth that wasn’t even there.

Of course, her hand wasn't there either, but that fact escaped Sophie Anne just then.

"Touché my dear! Touché! I knew I was gonna enjoy you," the spider told her, in such a way as to raise the tiny hairs on Sophie Anne's arms.

But before either of them could say another word, a thunderous, yet oddly-stupid-sounding voice bellowed in the darkness from somewhere above them.

"I can help with that," it said.

And before Sophie Anne even knew what was happening, she felt an incredible jolt to the top of her head, as if a great sledge hammer had just come down upon it, staggering her for a moment.

And then, her vision slowly cleared.

Slowly, Sophie Anne looked around in complete shock and amazement.

Because somehow, she now stood in a vast, and brilliantly lit underground chamber.

And scary enough, the spider had been correct, there were a great many things all about them in the enormous room.

Namely, the giant that stood just a couple feet away.

Sophie Anne stared up at the impossibly large man, and blinked; all three of her eyes.

"Welcome my dear," another voice said then, from somewhere close by.

But this voice was unlike anything Sophie Anne had ever experienced in her life. Why, it was as if it filled the entire room in a vast pool of sound, that Sophie Anne was actually swimming in.

Sophie Anne turned to look at the woman who spoke, and for a second all she could do was stare.

"It's customary to kneel, girl, when you're in the presence of the Queen," the spider said loudly, as he hopped up and down on her shoulder.

"What?" Sophie Anne stammered, still a bit dazed and confused.

"Kneel girl! Kneel!"

Sophie Anne, feeling the tension grow exponentially all about her, from the faceless bodies in the distance (that she could feel more than see), dropped to her knees on the cold stone floor.

"Do you know who I am, girl?" the giant woman asked, from a throne made of thorns.

Sophie Anne stared at the two ram's horns protruding from the top of the woman's head, and shook hers.

The woman, who was as naked as the day is long, chuckled lightly at that, and then stood, and as she did an array of flowers, insects, snakes and other garden creatures all moved with her, so as to cover any 'delicate' parts.

Still, Sophie Anne blushed.

Which of course made the lithe and supple woman laugh, causing the nest of bees in her hair to temporarily be disturbed.

"Who?" Sophie Anne stammered up at the woman, who was approaching her slowly, and almost as if floating.

Reaching down, the radiant woman chuckled, as she offered her hand to Sophie Anne.

"Why, I am Maeve, Queen of the Fairies. And you have entered my realm."

Sophie Anne took the woman's hand to help her stand. And then dropping it, she quickly brushed off the trousers her mother had made for her riding lessons.

Then she let out a rather huge sigh.

"Well, where is that, exactly?" she asked, mustering more courage than she'd have thought possible.

"Why... she is a clever one, isn't she?" The Queen asked of the spider on Sophie's Anne's shoulder.

Using a single leg, the spider adjusted his crooked glasses, and then bowed, deeply, before replying.

"Yes, I have great hopes for her, your majesty," the spider, who still remained nameless, Sophie Anne just realized, said with as much reverence as she thought a tiny spider capable of.

Which had the effect of causing Sophie Anne to once again feel like a child left out of the action.

So, she placed her hands on her hips with all the authority of a teenage girl, and demanded to know, "Just what, pray-tell, do you have hopes for?"

Sophie Anne though, instantly regretted her words, as the giantess' gaze fell upon her, with the weight of a mountain.

“Why, for you to save the entire world, of course,” the woman said smiling in such a way as to convey more pity than anything else.

“And why does the world need saving?” Sophie Anne, never one to take anything at face-value, asked plainly enough.

“Because... clever girl...” the Queen of the Fairies began, as she turned on a bare heel and stalked back to her very uncomfortable looking throne.

Then, taking a seat upon it, she leveled a look upon Sophie Anne that made the girl’s insides tremble.

“There’s a fear rising in this world... and if you can’t stop it... it will destroy us all.”

Sophie Anne’s eyes instantly went wide with belief, and then terror.

It was a memory, you see.

Of the day the men had come for her father.

Her precious father, whom she loved more than anything else in the entire world.

He had hidden Sophie Anne away that day, in a cubby he’d built within the wall of their small home, a cubby he’d built just for her.

But her pregnant mother had been too big to fit into hers. And still to this day, Sophie Anne was haunted by the look of sheer terror on her father’s face, as he’d realized he’d neglected to accommodate for his wife’s growing belly, and the twins inside.

“It’ll be fine Henry, we’ll be fine,” her mother had said, laying her hand upon the distraught man’s shoulder, just as a posse of more than a dozen men had ridden up to their extremely modest home.

Sophie Anne had heard the anger in the men’s voices then. And then she heard the anger in her father’s voice. Anger like she’d never in her entire life witnessed before.

And it had scared Sophie Anne, scared her more than she was able to admit, even to herself.

“They’re just afraid,” her mother had tried to explain.

“Your father pays the former slaves more than the other plantation owners, and it makes them afraid they’ll lose their money, and status in the community. And men do stupid things when they’re afraid, Sophie Anne. You must always remember that; fear makes all men stupid.”

They had threatened her father that night, threatened him, and his family, that they would return if he didn’t cut his worker’s wages, and then strip them of the land he’d given them.

That night, after all the men had left, and Sophie Anne had been pulled trembling from the cubby she'd been hiding in, she'd seen the look of fear on her father's face, and she had prayed that night, and every night since, to never have to see it again.

And later, as she lay in bed, she'd heard her father speaking to her mother in the other room.

"They'll be back," her mother had warned him gently, as if to comfort him with the truth, rather than a lie he would've seen through.

"I know... but I can't, Annet. I can't treat them as if they aren't even human. I just can't do it."

And even though Sophie Anne hadn't seen her father's face at the time... she'd been able to imagine it well enough... the stoic face with the incredibly kind eyes.

"It's true, he's a rare man, your father. And he needs your help, Sophie Anne. Will you help us? Will you help save your father?" the Queen of the Fairies asked in a rich and luxurious voice, that seemed out of place, given the gravity of the situation.

"Yes, I'll help you," the trembling girl told them. "I'll help you save the world."

## Evermore - Chapter 3

*“It takes courage to grow up  
and become who you really are.”*

E.E. Cummings

“I’ll help you. Though I don’t know how I can, truth be told,” Sophie Anne admitted, without any trouble at all.

“It’s a curious thing... your world,” Queen Maeve said softly, from her thorny throne; a storm of bees circling her horns as if intentionally demonstrating a dark cloud of worry roiling overhead.

And then, with a wave of a giant hand, the Queen opened a magical window that looked directly into that world... the one Sophie Anne had just left.

And for a long moment, all Sophie Anne could do was stare into the center of that spinning vortex, transfixed upon a setting that was both familiar and quite upsetting.

“Why?” Sophie Anne began, like any rational person would.

But then she found she couldn’t continue, and for a moment she just stood there, a single finger pointing at the image her mind just couldn’t quite comprehend.

Together, both the Queen and the spider gently laughed at her.

And it was the simple fact their laughter didn’t arouse Sophie Anne’s tender ego that gave the spider to know something was up.

“It’s you... girl,” he said most unhelpfully.

Then, with a loud chuckle, the giant spoke up from somewhere behind her.

“It’s ‘the Calling’, Miss Justice... and it’s come fer ya,” he said in a rather cheerful tone.

And it was true, Sophie Anne knew it was true. The Calling had in fact come for her. Because he stood there, in front of her frozen body, with a rather large silver dagger poised at her throat.



Sophie Anne's eyes wandered then, from the image before her - of her standing in her tiny farmhouse - to her own pointing hand.

*A hand that's not a hand...* she thought, as she blinked all three of her eyes, again.

With a wide-eyed look of sudden understanding, Sophie Anne's hand went to her forehead, where she poked herself smack-dab in the center of her open third eye.

"Ouch!" she hollered, as she blinked it over and over, until it ran with rainbow-tinted tears.

"Now, why did you go and do that?" the suddenly petulant spider demanded.

But Sophie Anne pretended he didn't exist, and instead, returned her gaze to the image the Queen of the fairies had conjured of her home, and of her body, that was still standing frozen inside of it.

"I don't..." Sophie Anne started again, and then she stopped, again, when she realized she had no idea what words to choose.

But the Queen smiled at that, and then waved off a particularly persistent bee that had been trying to taste a flower that had blossomed at her throat.

Then, she stood and came to stand behind the tiny young woman.

Bending, she wrapped her large hands around each of Sophie Anne's shoulders, and then whispered into her ear.

"We couldn't bring all of you here. Such is not our way. Nor could your body have survived here... even if we had tried."

Sophie Anne stood there, stock-still, as the woman's honey breath fell across her face.

And though she could not feel it, nor see it, nor in any other way know it... a vast horde of the Queen's insect minions had begun to crawl all about the stunned girl.

"Nor can we stop time, see there?" she asked, pointing one of her huge fingers into the center of the spinning vortex... at the heart of the image itself, where Sophie Anne stood with the large man's sharp blade poised at her throat.

Sophie Anne's eyes took a second, but then... as the image of herself came more clearly into view... she could see... a tiny drop of blood at the base of her neck, at the spot where the sharp instrument touched her flesh.

At that exact moment Sophie Anne let out a small shriek, as she reached a hand up to touch the left side of her neck.

“Ouch!” she screeched again, as she placed her hand over a fresh wound.

“Let me see...” the Queen cooed into her ear.

Sophie Anne slowly pulled her hand away.

“Pishaw...” the Queen said, with a robust smile that Sophie Anne had not expected.

Suddenly insulted by the Queen’s biting indifference, Sophie Anne pulled away from the large woman’s grasp.

“I beg your pardon,” she snapped, as she continued to dab at the fresh wound. Her back now to the spinning vortex, and the image within.

The Queen, smiling a menacing smile that made Sophie Anne immediately cringe, grabbed the girl once again by her shoulders, and spun her around, so that she could see for herself the menace she faced back in ‘her world’, as the mad woman had put it.

But Sophie Anne’s mind threatened to black out everything. So, the Queen quickly shook the girl out of it.

“Nor can we stop time. See? There?” the Queen repeated, shaking Sophie Anne harder now than she’d ever been shook in her entire life.

“Yes... Yes, I see it!” Sophie Anne hollered finally at the woman, as her wits slowly returned.

“He has just started...” the Queen of the Fairies explained, of the huge man with the skin as dark as night.

“And when he’s through, you will be dead. And so too your entire family, and most likely every one you’ve ever loved.”

Sophie Anne, her right hand pressed tightly to the left side of her neck where a tiny nick was bleeding just slightly, stared angrily up at the giant woman.

“And where is my Jacob?” she asked, with more resolve than she’d anticipated.

Smiling hugely, the Queen waved a single hand in front of the spinning vortex, and suddenly the image within changed, moved, slid over... to some other place and time.

Shaking her head, Sophie Anne suddenly felt nauseous.

“Why, he’s there... with the rest of them the Calling has taken. See there... how they suffer?”

And suddenly that's all Sophie Anne could see, a million screaming faces all calling out for relief from their suffering, and their torment. And Sophie Anne only had to glimpse it to know it was hell, sure as anything.

"He's... he's..." she stammered, but was never able to finish.

Shaking her head, and retreating once again to her throne of thorns, the Queen just said, "No... he's not dead. And there's still time for him, and the others too..."

And then, like a night that falls instantaneously, plunging you at once into terror as darkness - the Queen's mood suddenly shifted.

"You have three days, here... in my world, to solve this riddle, Sophie Anne. Three days or hell will be his, and your, eternal fate. Do you understand me girl?"

Sophie Anne swallowed hard, but only nodded, as she did not trust her voice just then.

Dark as any demon Sophie Anne's mind could've conjured, the Queen of the Fairies had suddenly morphed into a haunted being; that seemed more akin to the deepest and darkest of woods, than the flowery meadow she'd just been.

The spider on Sophie Anne's shoulder coughed quite loudly into one of his legs then, causing Sophie Anne to look at him, which made her instantly absorb all of the terror his eyes were projecting.

With a shaking she could no longer control, Sophie Anne turned back to the gathering storm that was the Fae Queen, her body still a writhing mess of insects she had not taken the time to notice, and asked, "Riddle? What riddle?"

And like that, the Queen waved her hand and Sophie Anne was no more... faded once again into the fabric of space, or time, itself.

Sophie Anne still wasn't sure about that one.

But, one thing she was sure of, this time she was keeping her extra eye open.

## Evermore – Chapter 4

*“Google can bring you back 100,000 answers.  
A librarian can bring you back the right one.”*

Neil Gaiman

“What’s with him?”

“Who?”

“The slice of bread and cheese is who.”

“Oh. I almost didn’t notice him.”

“Why does he look like that?”

“Oh my, oh my. Oh... my... oh... my... oh... my... this isn’t good at all,” the spider said, as he removed his glasses and looked all about the place more thoroughly.

“Oh my, she didn’t...” the spider stammered, quite forebodingly, Sophie Anne thought.

“Sir,” she said, as she slowly approached a large, wooden desk, and the human-sized slice of bread and cheese that sat in the chair behind it.

Slowly, the half-sandwich/half-man looked up from an empty plate that sat before him.

Looking up at her, the sandwich man asked, rather slowly, “What are you doing here?” in an accent Sophie Anne did not recognize.

And so, she looked bewilderedly, from the peculiar creature to the once-again bespectacled spider, and then shrugged her shoulders.

Which almost caused the spider to fall from her arm.

“Hey! Hey! Hey!” the spider screeched, as he scrambled for purchase.

“Sorry,” Sophie Anne said, with the tiniest of shrugs, before she remembered not to.

Then she threw a hand over her mouth (in a taught and learned coyness) and giggled softly at the nearly-repeated offence.

“I can help you get where you’re going,” the sandwich man said, slightly irritated. “I’ve been here all-night answering questions, but... you’re lucky, as I have a single moment to fit you in...”

Sophie Anne cleared her throat, in order to ask the sandwich-man a question. But before the first syllable could escape her bright-pink lips, the spider threw a leg in the air and cast his web over her mouth.

In an instant, the sticky threads covered her mouth, and all Sophie Anne could do was mumble quite loudly in protest.

With wide eyes, she clawed at the spider silk with both hands, to no avail.

“Shhhh girl! Do you want to get us into trouble?” the spider asked in a huff.

At that, Sophie Anne went limp in her struggles, temporarily, as she gave the spider the benefit of a moment or two.

With a single eyebrow cocked, she let out a loud sigh through her nose, as if to say... ‘fine, get on with it’.

“Not here,” the spider told her.

Sophie Anne looked around the odd place the Queen of the Fairies had sent them to. And upon initial inspection, she was not impressed.

In fact, it looked just like a long hallway, a very long and wide hallway in fact, but a hallway non-the-less, that was positively crammed-packed with odd bits of furniture, and what looked like machines of some sort. Machines Sophie Anne did not recognize.

“Don’t speak to him, girl,” the spider instructed rather bitterly, as she retreated behind a rather large and dusty credenza.

With quick work, the spider cleared Sophie Anne’s mouth of the silk that had prevented her from speaking.

But oddly enough, Sophie Anne, after sputtering for a moment, decided to remain quiet... given the rather dire look on the spider’s face.

“You can’t help him girl,” the now calmer spider told her. “He’s stuck here, and if you speak to him there’s a chance you’ll get stuck here too,” the spider explained, as he cleaned off his glasses, and then placed them back on his head.

“But where is... here?” Sophie Anne asked, with a rather pinched look on her face.

“Why,” the spider said, looking all about them, “it looks like we’re in some sort of office storage room. Look, see here? That’s an old fax machine, and those there... are printers, from the 90’s it looks like...” the spider told her, as he squinted into his glasses.

But all Sophie Anne could do was shake her head, because she still didn’t have the foggiest notion what the arachnid was going on about.

“We’re in the Bardos, girl. The Bardos of Death.”

Sophie Anne swallowed hard at the sudden turn in the spider’s tone, and mood.

Looking over at him sitting on her shoulder, she asked (rather politely she thought), “And what pray-tell is that?”

And then Sophie Anne smiled at him, the same way she smiled at her grandmother, who was losing her mind. And then she sighed one more time.

In the background, however, a few paces behind them, the sandwich-man was mumbling something to himself about ‘getting his tail between his legs’, and then suddenly... POOF!

He was a normal man again, only... this time... with a very large tail, that was, in fact, tucked squarely, if not neatly, between his legs.

Instantly, the now-irate man began to spin on the spot, trying to get a better view of his newly formed tail; just as a dog might, Sophie Anne imagined.

And so, she giggled then, which caused the dark-haired, dark-eyed man to look up from his pointless endeavor.

Which made the spider hiss in warning from her shoulder.

“What is the Bardos of Death?” she asked him then, a bit shakily, and in the tiniest of whispers.

“It’s the passage-way the Queen has given us, to get where we’re going, it looks like. But this poor fella... well, let’s just say... not many get stuck in the first bardos... the Bardos of Unbeing.”

“Poor chap,” the spider said then, with a solemn shake of his head, that shivered the now-nervous girl’s skin.

“Unbeing?” she asked, when the spider didn’t automatically go on.

“My guess is, he must have proclaimed himself a soothsayer. They’re always getting themselves stuck here for a hundred years, or more. It would explain the half-sandwich, at any rate.”

“You are what you eat,” the spider quipped, with an amused chuckle.

“What?” Sophie Anne asked, now more confused than ever.

“If during his life the man proclaimed to have had all of the answers, but only ever in fact knew half the truth – which is all anyone living can ever really know – well... then, he would have a hard time in ‘The Bardos of Unbeing’.

At least until he finally realizes that ‘one big truth’ everyone must learn - that ultimately must have escaped this poor chap during his life.”

“And what ‘one big truth’ would that be?” Sophie Anne asked, as she watched the man with a tail spin himself endlessly in circles, all the while slowly muttering softly to himself.

“That the world, my dear girl, is much more complex than any small set of instructions, or worn-out clichés. True wisdom, you see, comes from aligning to the whole of the truth, not just part of it.”

The spider suddenly jumped from her arm then; swinging out on a single line of silk, back down the hallway behind them, back towards a sign marked ‘EXIT’.

“It’s this way, I think!” he hollered back towards the still-bewildered girl.

But Sophie Anne, still as curious as ever, was still looking at the odd man with the most peculiar problem, when he hollered after the spider, “What? I can’t hear you. Cat got your tong...”

But before the man could get the entirety of the word out, a large, fat housecat appeared out of nowhere and snatched the poor man’s tongue, between a set of teeth much too large to fathom.

At that, Sophie Anne let out a little yelp, and then turned and ran after the spider.

Looking over Sophie Anne’s shoulder as she ran, the spider said, in a rather gleeful voice, “I imagine that one will take forever to get out of. Poor chap. Poor, poor chap.”

However, by the amused look on the spider’s face (which Sophie Anne saw clearly enough as she raced passed him on her way through the door beneath the big red EXIT sign), she didn’t really think he felt entirely bad for the panicked man.

## Evermore – Chapter 5

*“No wise fish would go anywhere  
without a porpoise.”*

Lewis Carrol

“But where are we going!” Sophie Anne whined, as only a teenage girl can, as she raced to keep up with the spider who seemed to be doing his very best Tarzan impersonation.

Not that Sophie Anne knew who Tarzan was... or would be, rather. Though, in a few short years she undoubtedly would.

The spider considered this with a mild sense of amusement, as he continued swinging from spider-silk to spider-silk, down what appeared to be an abandoned hospital wing.

“And...” Sophie Anne stammered, as she pushed aside a stray X-ray machine that was cluttering up the seemingly endless corridor.

“Where are we now?” the girl asked, her face, the spider realized sadly (as he turned to look at her, just as they made it to the next ‘Exit’ sign), was the spitting image of all those great martyrs... just before they’d been sacrificed by the one’s they loved the most.

With a sigh as his only reply, the spider heaved himself through the open doorway, praying the silly girl had enough sense to follow.

Of course, rather than being stuck god-only-knows-where, the silly girl (who just happened to be the brightest of her class), ran headlong after the speedy spider.

And it didn’t take her that long to catch up with the hairy arachnid neither, and together they were suddenly transported into a very small dressing room, in what looked like a ‘Forever 18’.

“Shhh, you stupid girl!” the spider hissed, just as Sophie Anne opened her mouth to ask yet another question.

“We have come through the Bardos girl,” the spider said, dangling at her ear.

“Only, I believe we have landed in the wrong time...” he whispered loudly, over the incessant music that blared through tinny speakers overhead.



And then, just as the spider was about to ask a question himself, one he knew the ignorant girl would not have the answer to, the door opened and all of his questions were immediately answered.

“Hurry, you must come... you must see...” a dark-eyed man with a jester’s cap said, by way of greeting the two startled companions, as a sudden burst of light lit up their dark dressing room.

“See...” Sophie Anne began, but once again the spider was there to intercede.

Though this time he just tapped her on the cheek, rather than spraying her mouth full of sticky webbing, like he’d done before. And for that... and that alone, Sophie Anne was grateful.

“Ahem...” the spider cleared his throat.

“Hurry man! You must hurry, or we’re all doomed! Doomed! I say!!” the agitated jester screamed, before turned on his checkered heel and stormed away.

Sophie Anne and the spider exchanged a look, and then Sophie Anne took off after the long-legged man.

And it was then that she realized the man had a tail; a bright, white, fluffy tail. Just like her rabbit Daniel back home.

As they ran, Sophie Anne quickly realized... they weren’t in Mississippi anymore.

In fact, they weren’t anywhere on Earth, as far as she could tell.

“What is this place?” she asked in awe and wonder, as her booted feet pounded down the wide corridor of the largest shopping mall on the planet.

“Why, it’s The Mall of America, sweetie,” the spider said, in his best Groucho Marx. (Another reference she’d have to wait a few more years to understand, he realized, but he didn’t really care.)

Sophie Anne just looked at him, and then sped up, because the man in the bedazzled suit was quite quick on his enormous feet.

“Where’s he going?” Sophie Anne huffed, somewhere near to a Cinabunn.

“And what’s that smell?” she asked in awe, as her mouth started to water.

And even the spider couldn’t help the pool of saliva that suddenly gathered in the front of his mouth.

“Why, I can’t remember the last time I’ve eaten anything,” the teenage-girl told the spider then, by way of suggestion, as she stopped to catch her breath.

But when she looked again, the strange man was almost out of sight. And then he disappeared entirely near a store that seemed to sell nothing but undergarments of every colour.

It was then, that Sophie Anne finally took in all of the nudity around her; on the mannequins, and even the people... with their short-shorts and crop-tops.

Why... in that moment, all of Sophie Anne's sensibilities were totally over-loaded.

"Why... I never," she said, as she turned herself in dizzying circles, suddenly hypnotized by all of the colors and lights.

"Girl, we don't have time for that! We must catch that bunny!"

And with that, Sophie Anne plopped herself down onto the floor – right there – in the middle of the second floor of The Mall of America; with what seemed to be a million people passing by per second.

But Sophie Anne didn't care. Because she'd had quite enough.

"I don't understand... where are we going? AND... what are we even doing here?"

Sophie Anne's eyes were suddenly harboring all of the tears she'd never let herself cry, and the spider realized then, that only the truth would soothe this wound.

"There is an evil here, Sophie Anne, and we're on a quest. A holy quest," the spider said, a bit more forcefully this time, as he stood up a bit straighter; straightening his crooked spectacles as he did.

"And you're the only one who can accomplish it. Don't you see? Sophie Anne? You're the chosen one."

The spider, his eyes magnified by his lenses, suddenly looked more regal to the distraught girl.

Wiping her runny nose on the back of her sleeve, she righted herself, as if to say she'd decided to get back into the fight.

"But I don't know what to do now, that man is gone."

Sadly, the spider, to Sophie Anne's mind anyway, looked as disappointed as she felt at that observation. Making her stomach sink just a bit. I mean, if the spider didn't know what was going on, who would?

But just then, a million tiny insects that Sophie Anne hadn't even known about, came flooding out of the pockets of her large winter coat.

Out they came, more than a million of them, it seemed, until finally they formed a long arrow that headed off in the direction the man-bunny had run.

“A gift!” the spider hollered at her ear, so that he could be heard over the sudden uproar of a far-off crowd.

“From the Fairy Queen!” he shouted again, as Sophie Anne jumped to her feet, and sprinted after the fast-moving line of insects; who were quick to avoid the rain of feet from the flood of shoppers moving in every direction.

“Follow those bugs!” the spider yelled, as he pointed a leg in the air... clearly more comfortable as a General, than a regular-old foot-soldier.

After a long moment of huffing and puffing down the lengthy hall, the two finally made their way into what seemed the very heart of the enormous mall.

And it was there, at the water fountain, sitting with his head in his hands, they found the bunny-man, with his jester’s cap flopping off to one side (which revealed two, white floppy ears tucked up beneath his cap).

“Ahemmm”

The spider cleared his throat again.

And the man looked up at the duo who stood above him.

“There’s no hope. No hope at all. We’re doomed. Doomed I say. Doomed.”

Sophie Anne eyed the man, and then looked all about her, at the playing children, and the busy parents, that seemed as familiar as they seemed strange, with their brightly coloured clothes and their odd hair.

But for all of their strangeness, the families sharing laughter and joy all about them seemed joyful enough. And Sophie Anne couldn’t see anything terrifying about that.

“But, what’s there to be afraid of?” Sophie Anne inquired of the nervous looking man with the long nose, and paranoid eyes.

“What’s there to be afraid of? What’s there to be afraid of? Why! Everything you stupid girl! Absolutely everything!”

Sophie Anne eyed the spider on her shoulder, with a single brow cocked all the way up. As if to say, ‘are you sure we need him?’

The spider though, only nodded.

Sophie Anne looked back to the man who was now devouring his nails as if they were tiny little carrots stuck on the ends of his fingers.

“Pardon me?” Sophie Anne asked, with the voice she often used with her senile old granny.

“But...”

“Him! You ignoramus!” the now volatile man shouted, as he leapt to his feet.

“Him!” he shouted again, pointing off into the center of the large domed room.

“He’s going to be the death to us all!” and with that, the man-bunny ripped off his jester’s hat, and unleashed two of the largest ears Sophie Anne had ever seen.

It was hard after that, tearing her eyes off of his beautifully-long ears, long enough to follow his finger in the direction he was pointing.

But when she did, Sophie Anne was more confused than ever.

“Why, do you mean that big ol’ baby?” Sophie Anne inquired with a chuckle.

Because at the center of a large green space sat an enormous baby, almost the size of a house. It’s blonde hair a disheveled mess sitting atop a bouncing head, as it played with a large set of balls, that it tossed, rather aggressively, at a gathering of some rather distraught looking folks.

It was curious, really... an enormous baby in diapers, sitting amongst the splendor of it all.

Very curious indeed.

“But who is he?” Sophie Anne asked, as she turned back to the man who was now hopping up and down, and checking his watch manically.

The man-bunny, absolutely indignant at the possibility anyone wouldn’t know what he was on about, stared wide-eyed at the girl (who stood a foot and a half beneath him) and screamed, “Why, he’s the president, you stupid-stupid girl! You know... The one who runs all of this?”

And with that, the man was gone, racing back... off down the way he’d come.

“Still running in circles, I see,” the spider said, with a very distinct ring of disappointment in his voice.

“So? What do we care who’s in charge? This isn’t where we live. I don’t even know Where we are.”

Sophie Anne took a seat at the fountain, and shook her head, as if to say she was just done.

The spider, having near the same look in his eyes, came to stand on her knee, so that he might look the exhausted and starving girl directly in the eye.

“Because, Sophie Anne, not all monsters are dragons.”

## Evermore – Chapter 6

*“I wanted to punch him and understand him  
at the same time.”*

Shannon A. Thompson

“That’s it!”

“What’s it?”

Sophie Anne was sitting, cross-legged now, in front of the fountain at the very heart of the great domed enclosure.

“I’m not goin’ another step, until you tell me what-in-tarnation is goin’ on. Starting with your name.”

There was a harumpf in there, the spider was certain of it, though it was eaten up by the noise of the bustling mall crowd.

“My name…” the suddenly pensive spider said, rather too slowly, if you know what I mean.

“Why, it’s… it’s Walter, Walter Goggins. Walter Goggins, at your service,” the suddenly theatrical spider said, with a sweeping bow and a wide smile.

“I cannot believe I forgot to mention that. I guess it seemed a little less pertinent… before. But now… why, now seems a perfectly fine time to discuss insignificant personal details.”

Sophie Anne stared cross-eyed at her shoulder, and the tiny spider that sat there.

“Walter? Walter Goggins?” Sophie Anne asked, with a tone that clearly implied she felt the spider was having her on.

The spider, in-turn, just shook his head. As if to say, “It’s the best I got…honey. Take it, or leave it.”

And since Sophie Anne was far more intelligent than most folks her age, she decided to take it.

At least that part of it, at any rate.

“But the riddle...” Sophie Anne went on, a bit less petulantly than before. And yet, still quite determined to make some headway on the details.

But that’s when the crowd took her over.

Oh, not took over her body, but her mind. Because suddenly Sophie Anne was seeing what had eluded her before.

And just like that, her question was left hanging in mid-air. For which, the spider (who was not named Walter Goggins - for the record), was eternally grateful for.

“You see it, don’t you?” the spider asked, loudly in her ear.

It was admittedly a stupid question, or at least so the spider thought, just after he’d asked it.

Because it was all over her face, just how much Sophie Anne had suddenly seen *it*.

“Why... there are so many... *kinds*... of them. All here, *together*...” Sophie Anne remarked, with a whisper-of-a-smile edging around the corners of her pretty pink lips.

“Yes. It’s different now.”

“Much different,” Sophia Anne said, almost whimsically, as she watched a white man take a black woman by the hand.

But before the spider could remark further, Sophie Anne hollered, and grabbed once more at her neck.

“Ouch!” she hollered again, as a tiny bit of blood dripped from underneath her tightly-pressed fingers.

“It’s the Calling, his blade. We’re running out of time Sophie Anne, we can’t just sit here... pondering,” the spider admonished, but not unkindly. Or so at least Sophie Anne thought.

“But I don’t know what I’m doing here, or where I’m going, or what my purpose is. Why, I don’t know anything at all,” she whined; her teenage years leaking through her sharp intellect.

That... and hunger.

Sophie Anne pulled her hand away, in order to better assess the bleeding, and as she did the spider hit her neck with a bit of spider silk, closing the wound, and stopping the bleeding... *for now*... he thought. But he did not comment aloud.

Because, as always, the less Sophie Anne knew, the better.

“You’re here to *see*, girl,” the spider said, softly, and yet loudly, over the growing crowd.

“See?” she asked, looking around at the myriad of shoppers, in their jovial clothing and their odd-looking shoes...

Sophie Anne stared longingly at some of the fashions, she was just now beginning to take note of.

But then, with a SPLAT of webbing to the forehead, the irritated spider called her back.

“Never mind the shoes, girl! See... here,” the spider said irritably.

And then, with a quickness he rarely demonstrated, he sprinted to the top of her head and pounded on her forehead, causing her third (and still very strange) eye to open – once again.

And then suddenly... there it was.

The flow of energy.

“Here, look over there,” the spider said, indicating the giant baby in the corner. The one the strange bunny-man had called the President.

But this time, with her strange new eye open, all she could see was a dark mass of energy.

“And there,” the spider said, indicating the large throng of people the laughing baby was lobbing giant toy balls at.

“They’re all red...” Sophie Anne said in awe, as she watched great swaths of energy flow off the crimson people, all of it, to eventually get sucked up into the giant baby-shaped abyss.

“There’s nothing they can do. Those people. They’re just making it bigger. Can you see that? How their attention just feeds it exactly what it wants. It’s all part of the same dance.”

With a sad shake of his head, the tutelary spider went on.

“Up there, look,” he said, indicating the huge glass dome above them.

“See the cracks?”

“There?”

“And there?”

Sophie Anne had to squint to see, but when she focused her new eye, it all came into view.

“Why, that does not look good. Not good at all,” she said, not knowing what else to say.



“Why isn’t anyone doing anything about it?” she asked, staring open-mouthed - up at the now looming-menace above her.

“Oh... some are trying...” the spider said, with a great deal of disappointment in his voice.

“See here...” he pointed a hairy limb towards a group of people arguing outside of a Moondocks Coffee House.

Sophie Anne looked where the spider was pointing once again, but all she saw was a group of irate and irritated people that were taking it in turns, more-or-less, to scream at each other – in what sounded like nothing but gibberish to Sophie Anne.

“Those are the ones discussing who’s to blame for the cracks,” the spider informed her.

“And here,” he said, waving a leg towards another group of people; people who seemed markedly more irritated than the first group. “Them, they’re arguing about who’s gonna pay for all of it.”

Sophie Anne had to shake her head at that one, because one look around the opulent place, and it was clear as day, there was plenty of money here to fix that dang roof... if only someone would just do something about it!

“And those...” the spider carried on, depressingly. “Are the ones who are arguing if it’s even happening at all.”

This was by-far the angriest bunch of people Sophie Anne had ever done seen.

Because many of them were already in all-out-brawls; kicking and hitting and even spitting on one another.

“And while they stand around arguing... the ceiling caves in on everyone’s head,” Sophie Anne concluded, for the suddenly sullen spider.

“That’s pretty much the size of it,” he said with a nod, though he was quite impressed with the way Sophie Anne had grasped hold of things. That helped.

And it didn’t...

“But all these people are gonna die if we don’t get them out of here. That roof could come down at any moment. Shouldn’t we at least to do something, to stop it?” Sophie Anne was on her feet then, the spider clinging to her right shoulder.

“Look there,” he said, waving towards the last corner of the vast space; and there, among the brightly coloured bricks and neon lights, was a quiet group of people diligently working.

And from what Sophie Anne could see, they were all freely sharing their ideas as well.

“Why... Why...” the confused girl stammered, and then looked up to the drastic cracks that were now so-very-apparent in the glass ceiling far above, and then to the mostly-indifferent crowd.

“Why isn’t anyone helping them?!” Sophie Anne suddenly hollered at the top of her lungs, loud enough to cause a few of the passerbyers to look at her in annoyance (not an ounce of shock, or even mild interest on their faces), just annoyance.

Sophie Anne sat back down then, with a huff.

“So that’s it? All these people are doomed? And we’re just gonna sit here and be doomed with them. Is that it?” she asked, with all the annoyance she could muster.

“It’s actually much worse than that,” the spider informed her, clearly defeated in his own right.

“See those people there?” the spider asked, pointing one last time.

“You mean those dark black blobs?”

“Yes,” the spider said, sadness clearly tinging his voice.

“What are they?” Sophie Anne asked, when the spider didn’t immediately go on.

“They work for the ‘government’,” the spider said, using air quotes around the word ‘government’.

“They snatch up anything promising. Anything that might actually help. See there? How the good ideas are all being sucked right out of all their heads, see how it’s flowing into those boxes they’re holding?”

Sophie Anne nodded as she watched the bright rays of light stream out of the top of the people’s heads and right into the boxes, each of the dark blobs was holding.

Boxes that were all clearly marked: **PATENTS.**

“They’ve confiscated millions upon millions of ideas that could’ve saved everyone... all in the name of ‘National Security’.”

The spider told her. Again, with the air quotes.

Sophie Anne shook her head then, because at this point, she honestly didn’t think it could get any worse.

But it could... and it did... as the mall crowd was just beginning to show her.

Because just then, the real trouble began, as a mad rush of people came flooding into the large open area.

All of them gathering around a... a... a...

Sophie Anne couldn't think of what to call it.

"A boxing thing?"

Sophie Anne's father had been a collegiate pugilist, in his time, and so the roped off 4x4 area looked oddly familiar, and reminded her oddly of some old photos from his school days.

"Not... quite..." the spider quipped, looking now more disappointed than ever.

And that's when the lights went down, and a loud voice boomed over an invisible over-head speaker.

"Tonight, for the first time ever... we have our returning champion, Cuddly Cudmore..."

There was a burst of uproarious applause, and the ring-announcer had to pause and let it die down before he could go on.

"Squaring off against The Mad Hatter!"

Sadly, Sophie Anne, being only five-foot-five, was not in a position to see whom either contender was, from where she stood at the fountain. So, she did the only thing a fifteen-year-old girl could do in a pressing crowd, with nowhere to go.

She went up.

Up and up, the statue of the large, strange, baby, until she was sitting on the fluff of yellow hair that protruded from the statue's enormous forehead.

And from there, she could easily see the two strange opponents.

"Why are they doing this? Now? Here? Don't they all know what's about to happen?"

"It's called 'Bread and Circuses', sugar. And it's what they do, every single time."

## Evermore – Chapter 7

*“It’s no use going back to yesterday,  
because I was a different person then.”*

Lewis Carroll

“Rough and tough challenger, my ass,” a voice croaked from just below where Sophie Anne sat on top of the baby-president statue.

To which, the spider sitting on her shoulder harrumphed loudly.

“I knew he’d be back,” he said snottily, as the house lights went out and the boxing... I mean, brawling... began.

I say ‘brawling’ because, though the giant red kangaroo named Cuddly Cudmore had a set of boxing gloves strapped tightly to his forelegs, his moves were strictly more wrestling than boxing.

“Oh my!” Sophie Anne remarked, when Cuddly wasted no time in charging his opponent, who appeared to be just a normal man, at least from what Sophie Anne could tell.

“He’s gonna kill him!” she shouted, as the roo knocked the tall, gangly man’s cowboy hat from his head. Knocked him so hard, in fact, the man’s head was left wobbling, and his spurs were left jangling’.

“Oh, he plays it up for the crowd,” the man with the large white ears tucked up under his cap said, without even a ‘how do you do?’.

And so, Sophie Anne harrumphed loudly too, because he really was the most pessimistic bunny-man she’d ever met.

Not that she’d met any before, but that just made it worse, to her mind at least.

Shaking her head, Sophie Anne went back to watching the strange brawl between the giant kangaroo and the odd man, who was dressed head-to-toe like some fancy cowboy from the motion pictures; just in time to see the cowboy take a kick straight to the head.

And down the cowboy went.

A bell was rung, and a second later the announcer’s voice sounded over the intercom, advertising all of the wonderful food and souvenirs available, for the low-low cost of just ‘half your spleen’.

Or, at least, that's how it sounded to the fifteen-year-old girl, who, strictly speaking, hadn't been raised in a commercial society.

But before she could remark on any of it (as she so incredibly wanted to do), a tiny snowflake alighted upon her nose.

"Oh no," she said, breathlessly, as she looked up to see that while they'd all been distracted by the 'bread and circuses', six-inches of snow had fallen upon the cracked and broken ceiling.

"Oh, yes," the spider agreed, as he too looked up.

Sophie Anne looked at the spider in alarm, just as another bell was sounding and the two opponents were retaking their positions within the ring.

Only... this time, the Mad Hatter looked more like the Mad Rapper; with his ball-cap on backwards, his bedazzled baggy jeans, and his plethora of mis-matched chains.

Why, he was the spitting image of Machine Gun Kelly.

Or, so at least the spider thought. And then he remarked on it, out loud.

However, having been born in the year 1879, Sophie Anne had no friggen clue who Machine Gun Kelly was - so the remark had flown right on over her pretty little head.

But personally, she thought the man looked ridiculous.

She even said as much, just as Cuddly grabbed the Mad Rapper around the neck and began the rather quick process of kicking his guts in.

But just then, another flake called her attention away - from the man-made-distraction.

Looking up, she could see sections of glass had already started to give-way.

Down came small shards of glass, and down came even larger clumps of snow. Down on the unsuspecting heads of the crowd below.

Sophie Anne trembled then, when she looked out at all of the people - who were just minutes away from a certain and horrible death; all of them cheering and waving, and enjoying themselves immensely - and noticing nothing of what was actually transpiring - right over their heads.

And that's when the young girl had finally had enough.

After slipping from the statue, she made quick work of winding her way through the tight-knit crowd, until she was just-outside of the boxing ring ropes.

Meanwhile, the kangaroo (who was being egged-on by the chanting crowd) had the Mad Rapper by the throat once more.

Only this time, he was repeatedly bashing the man's skull against one of the corner pads.

"I give!" the Hatter shouted.

"I give!" he repeated again, when still Cuddly would not let go.

But the crowd just cheered the now-ruthless-roo on.

"Go Cuddly!" they screamed.

"Cuddly can do it!" they cheered, in unison.

"What are you going to do?" the spider asked Sophie Anne from her shoulder, in an almost bored fashion, as she put a leg between the ropes.

"Oh, I don't know..." she barked back, as she swung her head inside of the ring.

"Get everyone out?!"

The spider on her shoulder chuckled at that, but otherwise remained silent.

But just as she was fully through the ropes, there was a great kick from the roo...

And the rapper was down, in a giant spray of blood.

And the crowd went wild. "Cuddly!"

"Cuddly!"

"Cuddly!" they chanted, over and over, in a deafening cacophony that covered up the large cracking sounds from overhead.

But Sophie Anne, with one eye ever-on the doomed glass ceiling, saw it, and pushing aside the now-foaming-roo, she barged to the center of the ring.

"The ceiling is cracking!" she shouted at the top of her lungs.

Still the crowd chanted, "Cuddly!"

"Cuddly!"

Sophie Anne looked desperately to the spider sitting on her right shoulder.

And after a second, a rather long second, the spider finally got the cue, or demand – rather – for help.

And so, he threw his front legs in the air and screamed, “The sky is falling! The sky is falling!” in the most terrified manner he could muster.

Which, admittedly, wasn’t much.

Still... he’d tried.

And yet, nobody listened, just as he’d known they wouldn’t.

Instead, it was just more “Cuddly! Cuddly! Cuddly!”

Sophie Anne desperately pointed up towards the ceiling, and screamed, “The ceiling is cracking!”

And then she yelled some more.

And when that didn’t work, she turned to grab the microphone.

But it was too late. During her mad rant the Hatter had gotten himself cleaned up and ready for round 3.

The announcer, a portly British man (who the spider thought very closely resembled Hugh Grant) pushed poor Sophie Anne aside and took up the mic.

“Back for more! The Hatter is ready to rumble!” the speakers belched.

Sophie Anne could see tiny drops of snow falling all around the great open area now.

So much so it made the baby-president statue look like it was aging, as its hair was almost entirely white with snow now.

But... but...

What could a fifteen-year-old girl do, when nobody wanted to listen to reason?

And that’s when he did it. That’s when the strange, paranoid, bunny-man saved the day.

With long-lean legs, he leapt into the ring, and took up the announcer’s mic, just before the roo... who didn’t look the slightest bit winded, and the Mad Hatter (who was now dressed in nothing but a \*nude-statue-leotard and a jet-black-balaclava), could go at it.

(\*It probably should be pointed out here... that even spider didn’t get this reference.)

“We’ve just gotten word...” the bunny-man began, a bit trembly, but still loud and proud enough for the rambunctious crowd to sit up and pay attention.

The respect, of course, in-turn, made the bunny-man’s voice all that much more confident when he continued, which helped.

“I just wanted to announce that they are closing Pillard’s!” he yelled loudly for all to hear, even those at the way-way back. So loud in fact, Sophie Anne almost had to plug her ears.

“Yes,” he continued.

“Pillard’s is closing, and everything is a hundred percent off!” he hollered at the now-perplexed crowd.

“Right now,” he added, when still nobody moved.

Looking around desperately, there was a sudden ah-ha moment, when the bunny-man finally seemed to get it.

“I mean, fifty-to-sixty-percent off, but you must go now!” he yelled into the microphone.

And that’s all it took. Nearly three-quarters of the crowd turned on their heel and immediately headed to Pillard’s, each of them desperate to get a better deal than the person in front of them.

“It’s not enough. Not enough of them are leaving,” Sophie Anne remarked from a couple feet behind the tall, lanky, and yet still incredibly handsome bunny-man.

With a wink of confidence, he hadn’t had before, the bunny-man crooned into the microphone, “And they’re opening a Sporty Goods this very second!”

At that, the bunny-man threw his furry hands into the air and cheered himself on, as the area quickly emptied, almost entirely.

But Sophie Anne looked around at a few people who remained, all of them diligently working.

Grabbing the microphone, she hollered clearly into it, “The ceiling is caving in from the snow! Get out now!”

And that’s all it took for the rest to leave, once they could clearly hear, and see, the truth of the matter.

And in just a matter of a few minutes, the odd fivesome was standing there, alone.

Sophie Ann brushed the snow from her shoulders, taking great care not to swipe the spider off as well.



“We all have to leave, now,” she told them, still uncertain as to why they were all still hovering in the middle of the ring.

And that’s when she saw it... the chain that held poor Cuddly in-place.

“Oh Cuddly, how could they do this to you?”

## Evermore – Chapter 8

*“One of the deep secrets of life is that  
all that is really worth the doing  
is what we do for others.”*

Lewis Carroll

“What? They close all the bars or something?” the large, red kangaroo inquired, looking around the now-empty center-courtyard of The Mall of America.

“No, Cuddly, the ceiling’s caving in,” the Mad Hatter whined, as he picked up the heavy chain that had the roo bound by the tail to a corner post.

“So what? There’s no baked ziti then?”

“No Cuddly, there’s no baked ziti. Where’d that tosser hide that key now?”

“Hell, if I know. Could somebody just get me these friggin’ things offa me, already, I’m dyin’ for a smoke over here,” the irritable marsupial growled, waving his gloved forelegs in the air.

Sophie Anne stared wide-eyed at the creature.

“What? You fuckin’ never seen a talking kangaroo before?” Cuddly asked her with a twitch to his whiskers, that implied he was thinking something not entirely decent.

“Well, if I have, I’m certain they weren’t anywhere as rude as you,” Sophie Anne told the kangaroo, with an amount of petulant disdain typically only ever achieved by the super-vain, the super-wealthy, or them that are blessed with the ignorance of youth.

So, of course Cuddly liked her immensely.

“Here, give me... your... uh...” Sophie Anne stammered as she attempted to corral one of the roo’s flailing limbs.

“Well... if you could just... hold... still...” she demanded, trying hard not to use any of the colorful words she’d often heard her father use, whenever he was frustrated with something, or someone.

“Yeah, Cuddly...” the Mad Hatter said in a shrill tone, as he attempted to grab the roo’s other foreleg, “Hold the fuck still”.

But Cuddly had never been great at following orders, hence the chain.

“You goddamn deer-T-rex-hybrid. I mean, how do you even wipe your arse with these things?” the large, well-shouldered and yet oddly-squeaky man asked, with a flippant laugh, and a mocking gesture that implied his arms were half their normal length.

Which looked even more odd, given that he was still dressed head-to-toe in what appeared to be a nude statue leotard.

In fact, Sophie Anne, more than once, had been forced to divert her gaze on account of how uncomfortable his outfit made her feel.

Cuddly (the still undisputed champion of the Sunday-Night-Free-For-All, btw), tho... well, he just leveled a death-glare (unlike anything Sophie Anne had ever seen before), on the Hatter.

But truth be told, even if she hadn't already stared down 'the shadow of death' itself, not to mention already come face-to-face with a giant fairy queen, Sophie Anne woulda still giggled.

Cuz really, a kangaroo can only look just so mean, anything after that... and you're on the floor rolling in laughter.

However, the Hatter, who still looked a bit anemic from having his guts kicked in earlier by the roo, quickly dropped his grin and redoubled his efforts at dislodging one of the boxing gloves.

However, they'd only managed to get one of the gloves off, before a very large section of the far ceiling caved in.

With a loud CRASH, a chunk the size of small house came falling down upon the heads of the few stragglers that had remained behind to see what they could do to get the giant baby president to safety.

Unfortunately, none of them were able to move fast enough, and they all were soon buried entirely.

All except for the baby, who just began to wail and cry all the harder.

Sophie Anne wiped a large flake from her nose with the back of her hand, and then looked nervously to the spider on her shoulder.

To which, the spider sighed.

Because that was kinda his job.

And then he just shrugged.

“I found it!” the large bunny-man said.

Which made Sophie Anne jump, because she'd nearly forgotten about him, that is, until he screamed and waived a large key in their air.

“And not a minute too soon,” Cuddly quipped, just before he lit up a cig and took long, satisfying drag.

“Oh... Yeah....” he cooed, as the bunny-man rushed to his side – with his literal salvation.

“So... you're sure there's no baked ziti then?” the kangaroo asked, as a chunk of glass the size of a van landed too close for comfort, for any of them. Except perhaps for the rather peckish marsupial.

But Sophie Anne never heard if anyone answered the famished roo, because just then two impossible things happened at once; Jacob (the boy she loved more than anyone else in the whole entire world) materialized next to her, and then the floor gave way.

## Evermore – Chapter 9

*“I don't think...”  
then you shouldn't talk,  
said the Hatter.”*

Lewis Carroll

“But... you can't be here,” was all Sophie Anne had time to say, before everything appeared to go black.

And I say ‘appeared’ here, because Sophie Anne wasn't entirely sure she didn't just have her eyes pressed tightly together.

Because if Sophie Anne knew anything, it was this: some things you just never want to see.

And some things, once seen, can never be ‘unseen’ again.

“Wake up!” she heard a voice yell from next to her, as what felt like a great wind rushed by.

And from what Sophie Anne could tell, that wind was coming from directly beneath them. Which suggested to her, that they were falling - at an incredible speed. And to be perfectly honest, Sophie Anne didn't care much to think what awaited them at the bottom.

“Sophie Anne! You're dreaming! And you must wake up, now!” a familiar voice hollered.

Sophie Anne smiled then... that lazy, half-smile of some half-forgotten dream.

“Wake up!” Jacob screamed directly into her ear this time.

“Wake up now!”

## Evermore – Chapter 10

*“Sometimes there’s no way to get the upper hand  
without taking a few uppercuts.”*

Curtis Tyrone Jones

“Dude, just give her a toke on this... she be alright’.”

Sophie Anne cracked just one eye open... you know... cuz, ‘what the fuck?’ ... right?

Only, and Sophie Anne immediately knew her mistake when she made it, it was the wrong eye.

“What the fuck? Duuuuude!! That’s some seriously messed up shit,” an unfamiliar voice said, from the dirty sofa on the opposite side of an even dirtier living-room.

Sophie Anne stared up at all of her new companions with her new - third-eye - as all of them were suddenly gathered around her, staring down on her expectantly.

Which of course, made her sit up right quick enough.

But, she took another second to rub the sleep out of all three of her eyes before she answered, because honestly, she just couldn’t quite believe what she was seeing.

“Excuse me?” she asked after a minute’s long pause, and then she got to her feet and dusted off her riding britches.

“But, excuse me, who are you? And... where *are* we?”

Sophie Anne’s voice was a bit petulant - to be fair, but also to be fair - the girl had taken just about all she could take - since her last run-in with death, which by her calculations, was just one short nap ago.

So, honestly... she’d just about had it with all the nonsense.

However, the large caterpillar-looking thing that sat opposite from her (the one she had addressed her questions to) just sat there, staring back at the young woman in utter dismay.

Except for the occasional cough, as he continued to suck on a rather long tube attached to an even larger hookah, which sat in the middle of a very crowded coffee table.

In the end, it was the unimpressed roo that spoke first.

“So... You got any fucking baked ziti in this joint, or what?”

With his tail, the large, famished roo nearly took out the entire contents of the coffee table.

Which instantly enraged the large, sluggish caterpillar.

“Hey! Hey there buddy! Watch what you’re fucking doing, a’right? Geeze... Why don’t you go and check out the kitchen? I bet you can find something to eat in there. More likely than out here. Yeah?”

The roo didn’t have to be asked twice. I mean, just the mention of food, to the mindless muscle, was enough to get him out of the picture.

In response, the now somewhat-agitated caterpillar took another long pull on his smoking machine, and then immediately calmed back down.

“Wrecking the vibe, man...” the caterpillar cooed, as he looked the girl over, taking special care to examine the large eye in the center of her forehead.

So, Sophie Anne stared back.

Then, after a second, after a small smile and a nod from the caterpillar, Sophie Anne closed her third eye.

And suddenly... she was standing in a very average twentieth-century living-room. Which, to be fair, still seemed a bit odd to the nineteenth-century girl.

Even the caterpillar now appeared to be nothing more than a very average-looking man.

A hairy, disheveled, unmuscled, and seemingly heavily-medicated man. But just a regular man, none-the-less.

Sophie Anne closed her two regular eyes then, leaving open just her new 'third eye', and once again sitting in front of her was the blue and green caterpillar with the dark eyebrows and multitude of legs.

“Why? But... How?” she stammered, and then looked around....

To the half-man-half-bunny, to the talking spider, to the Mad Hatter; with his curious eyes and vacant face, not to mention those god-awful leggings that made him look like his peter was hanging out.

Sophie Anne blushed hard at that, and then forced herself to look away.

“Here, girl,” the caterpillar said, blowing out ring-upon-ring of smoke.

With a swipe of his tail segment, he cleared the sofa of all the detritus of a very sedentary life.

“Have a seat... why don’ ya?”

Sophie Anne looked around, but all of the faces simply implied they were just as clueless as she was. And so, she sat.

“Want some?” the caterpillar asked, offering her another long hose off the large smoking device in the middle of the room.

Sophie Anne put a hand up. But before the caterpillar could tell if she was accepting or refusing his generous offer, the small spider made a very large coughing sound from her right shoulder.

“Ahem!” he began...

“She’s only a minor,” he finished.

And just like that... the offer was swept away.

“Sorry love,” the smiling-eyed larva said, with a wink.

“I’m sure you have a ton of questions. But... first though, you might want to take care of that,” he said, pointing to her neck, where the cut the Calling had given her had grown again, and was now bleeding out past the webbing the spider had put in place as a bandage.

With a sigh, the spider raced across the young woman’s shoulder, and then sprayed her wound with another thick coating of his sticky webbing.

When he was finished, Sophie Anne reached up to her neck with a trembling hand.

Then, shaking her head, she looked around at the unfamiliar setting, and her unfamiliar cohorts, that had somehow, and rather suddenly, become her posse.

And then, with a wish pulled directly from the depths of her heart, Sophie Anne asked the one question she was both desperate for, and terrified of.

“What about Jacob? Why isn’t he here? I’m sure I saw him... just before we fell...”

Sophie Anne looked around the small apartment.

She even turned to search, once-again, the small kitchen that was directly behind the sofa. But the only thing in there was a ravenous roo raiding the fridge.

Suddenly everyone was looking away...



“It’s the Bardos girl... when you’re in it, you can see and hear those that have passed on. But he couldn’t come all of the way with you. I mean, he couldn’t come here,” the lazy larva said, puffing away on his smoke stack.

“And here. Where is here?” Sophie Anne asked, in a somewhat demanding tone.

The roo smiled from the kitchen then, but nobody saw it.

“Why... here?” the caterpillar began, with a wave of his tubing.

“Here is my home, and you’re welcome to stay for as long as you like.”

Sophie Anne resisted the urge then to sneer in disgust. But not entirely.

“What?” the caterpillar asked, with a knowing grin. “You don’t like?”

Sophie Anne smiled her best Southern Belle smile then, and replied sweetly, “why, it’s just not to my taste, is all.”

Again, the roo, and his prideful grin, that nobody even saw. But the spider knew. But then again, the spider knew everything. He just wasn’t saying, cuz that’s not how the game is played.

And that’s when Bugs, or the bunny-man... thing, decided that he’d had enough standing around, and decided to make a spot for himself on the extremely cluttered floor.

And once he’d decided himself comfortable, he took up a long tube from the hooka and began to smoke.

“Well, as they say, ‘when in Rome’,” the bunny-man said with a shrug, just as the Mad Hatter joined him on the floor.

“Sir?” Sophie Anne began again.

“Do you know what riddle it is... that I’m supposed to solve?”

“Why... Sophie Anne, I was hoping you’d ask me that very question,” the caterpillar told her, with a somewhat-sad smile.

“What is the last thing from home that you recall, dear girl?” he asked.

To which, Sophie Anne had to take a second to answer, because quite honestly, it had already been quite a day.

“Two days, in fact,” the caterpillar informed her, as he blew out another round of lazy smoke rings. This one encircling a ship the Mad Hatter had blown.

Oddly enough, Sophie Anne never actually thought she'd commented aloud.

"What is the last thing you recall, Sophie Anne?" the caterpillar asked again. But this time in a very uncaterpillary way.

Sophie Anne shrugged, and then told him honestly, "I remember the Calling breaking into my home, and... Jacob... Jacob trying to stop him."

"Really?" he asked, with a cock of one thick-dark eyebrow.

Sophie Anne thought about it again. But it all seemed so hazy now.

"And your father? Where was he?" he asked, with a penetrating gaze that made Sophie Anne break out in a cold sweat.

"He had gone to the doc's, to see to my mother," she told him.

"Then that's your question, Sophie Anne," he said, with a factual nod.

"What is?" Sophie Anne asked, nearly indignantly.

But he never had a chance to answer, because this time three impossible things happened simultaneously.

One: The Calling began to materialize out of thin-air.

Two: Sophie Anne heard the distinct sound of her mother's scream.

And...

Three: An enraged and uber-protective roo came charging out of the kitchen, with a small microwave in his hands.

With a swipe, he clobbered the now mostly-formed-man upside the head. And for a split second, the dark man with the brilliant white eyes went down.

"That's right! KO'd with a Deawoo motherfucker!" the roo cried, as he pumped both forelegs in the air.

"KO'd by a Deawoo!"

## Evermore - Chapter 11

*“Rock bottom became the solid foundation  
on which I rebuilt my life.”*

J.K. Rowling

Sophie Anne’s stomach rumbled loudly.

“Good, that’s good,” the spider said.

“But why?” the girl asked indignantly, of the dark, since she couldn’t actually make out the tiny bespectacled spider sitting there on her shoulder; as they were all currently stuffed inside of an unlit closet.

“Because it means you ain’t dead, yet, of course,” the bodiless voice hissed from the void.

“But how much longer do we need to hide in here?” she asked, whining now, more than demanding. Which unsettled the spider more than he cared to admit.

And so, with a little sigh, the furry arachnid told her honestly, “Well, my dear... that’s always been entirely up to you.”

Sophie Anne sighed then, too. Because she was tired of all the riddles, and of the running, and the hiding.

In fact, she determined just then, quite forcefully I might add, that she was good and truly done with the lot of it.

And so, she reached out and opened the closet door.

Of course, the odd-fivesome had been packed in rather tightly, and so when the door to the closet they'd been hiding in finally gave-way, they all came tumbling out; with Cuddly Cudmore, the still undisputed champ, on top.

“Jeez Cuddly, could you at least move your tail?” Sophie Anne begged, as she attempted to dislodge the monstrosity herself, but was entirely unable to.

With another somewhat sinister twitch to his whiskers, the roo quickly hopped off the crumpled girl.

With a bow, the Mad Hatter swooped in and offered the girl a hand up.

“Why, thank you,” she told him, curtsying the best she could while wearing trousers.

Smiling self-consciously, she turned to examine their startlingly new surroundings.

Because instead of dumping them out onto the floor of the disgusting apartment where they had all just been (as logic would have expected), they were now standing in what could only be described as ‘an abyss’.

“Where are we?”

“I don’t know. Tell me, what do you see?” the spider asked.

Sophie Anne shivered, because underneath the deafening rush of the nothingness that surrounded them, she was sure she could hear her mother’s cries.

But that was nonsense because her mother was nowhere near here. Wherever here happened to be.

“What do you see, Sophie Anne?” the spider asked again, this time his voice a hypnotic sound that seemed to induce in Sophie Anne a sort of trance. So that the next time she gazed into the nothingness, the nothingness gazed back.

“A woman...” she finally said, squinting into the empty mist.

“Sitting on a... a bus... I think,” she said.

The spider smiled then, big and wide.

“She’s a negro woman, and it looks like she’s refusing to give up her seat.”

“And... a girl... a negro girl in glasses carrying a... a school book. But they’re yelling at her... taunting her...” again, Sophie Anne’s voice trailed off.

Shaking her head, she squinted into the mist, even harder this time.

“And... there’s more... more of them...”

The spider’s pride grew then, by exponential degrees. Because, the images were now coming into view for him too.

“Why, there’s Malala Yousafzai, the girl who fought for education for all girls. And... Obiageli Ezekwesili, who fought to bring back the stolen girls of Nigeria. And, Hasina Kharbhih, oh my!” the Spider squealed, as he was really getting inspired now.

“Hasina Kharbhih saved over 72,000 slaves, before she was even forty-seven-years-old. That is impressive, I dare say,” he said loudly, over the murmurings of the Hatter and Bugs (both of whom were in awe of what they were witnessing, along with the girl).

“But...” Sophie Anne stammered as she watched the parade of people and images play out before her; some of them quite distressing and sad, and some so inspiring Sophie Anne doubted there could be words to express how they made her feel.

“But... who are they?” she asked, as she witnessed a lone man standing in a business suit, staring down the barrel of what appeared to be a giant cannon on wheels. Sophie Anne shuddered at the image before her, just before it shifted again, to a black man shouting, “I have a dream!”

“What does it all mean?”

Sophie Anne rubbed her eyes, and then her neck, where the sting of the ever-growing cut was also growing.

“I’m so confused,” she told the spider, just before plopping herself down, right there, on the misty spot.

“And tired,” she finished lamely, as she cradled her throbbing head in her hands.

“Why, Sophie Anne, I think it’s the answer to your riddle.”

## Evermore – Chapter 12

*“Who in the world am I?  
Ah, that's the great puzzle.”*

Lewis Carroll

“Where are you, Sophie Anne?”

“Why, I don't rightly know.”

“Try harder, Sophie Anne. We're running out of time.”

Sophie Anne squinted her eyes as hard as she could then, and then, after a long second, she let out a huge sigh and slumped to the floor, ready to burst into tears.

But just as she was covering her face with her hands, so that her odd traveling companions couldn't see her disgrace, she heard her mother cry out her name.

“Sophie Anne! Sophie Anne. Where are you? Sophie Anne...”

Her mother's voice called to her from the mist in a voice that was steadily growing fainter.

“Mama?” Sophie Anne asked, of the darkening mass, in the center of all that gray nothin'.

“It's time, Sophie Anne,” the spider said gently, in his ever-stern tone.

“It's time to wake up.”

“Wake up?” Sophie Anne asked, so very confused now.

And then the stinging at her neck pulled her into very unwelcome consciousness.

Because there she was, back home, standing in the center of their living room, with her father's blade pressed tightly to her neck.

Shocked, she pulled her hand away from the wound at her neck.

And then she began to tremble so hard the shiny metal knife, that was now half-covered in blood, fell to the floor.

“What?” Sophie Anne stammered, as she took a second to place herself once more in her parent’s small cottage home.

While all about her, she could hear the faint screams and cries of people in torment.

And one more, that was not-so-faint, that seemed to be coming from nowhere at all.

“Mama?” she asked of the wall, as she heard her mother’s groan of agony sound faintly from within.

And then it all came flooding back...

The posse had come... had come to tell her father he wasn’t to offer the negro’s land, nor pay them twice as much as what the other owners did.

But when her father had gone to hide his family within the cubby he’d built inside the wall of his modest home, there hadn’t been enough room - for both her pregnant mother, and Sophie Anne.

And in the end, it hadn’t been Sophie Anne her father had chosen to save.

“I’m sorry, Sophie Anne. There just isn’t enough room,” he’d said, as he’d sealed her mother safely inside the wall.

“Here... take this Sophie Anne, and hide!” he’d shouted at his daughter, as he’d thrown her his shotgun, before racing outside to see what all the screaming was about.

“But...” the girl had stammered, as she stood there in her dressing gown, holding a gun she had never once in her life shot.

Her father had always told her it was too ‘unladylike’.

Sophie Anne had stared at the gun in her hand then, and then, not knowing anymore what to do... she’d gone to the window to see.

But, as it turns out, that was the worst possible thing she could’ve done, because that’s when they’d seen her. Or, at least one man (on a particularly angry horse) had seen her. And so, he had ridden right up to her front door.

And by the look on his face, it hadn’t been hard, even for a girl as naïve as Sophie Anne, to tell he had terrible things in mind.

Sophie Anne had screamed then, and backed away from the window, still clutching her father’s shotgun tightly in her hands.

But Jacob must’ve seen the man too, because he was there - just a few steps behind the savage looking man, who held a long leather whip in his hands.

“No!” Sophie Anne had screamed, as she saw the shovel come down upon the man’s head, just as he’d reached out for her.

And that’s when they had him; another three men from the posse, who had followed Jacob into the house.

The second his shovel had come down on that wicked man’s head they’d had him; by his arms and legs and any other place they could grab him.

And then they had hauled him bodily, out the open door.

Sophie Ann had run into her bedroom then, flinging the door shut with her foot as she went.

And then she proceeded to get dressed as quickly as she possibly could.

“Get your ass outside of this house, right this second. We don’t need the raping of a white girl mudding up the waters, Frank! Goddamn it! You know what this here is about,” a man’s voice hollered from the other room, just before the front door had slammed shut.

And yet, it had taken Sophie Anne another couple minutes, and the sound of her mother’s first faint cry, before she could work up enough nerve to open her bedroom door.

“Mama?” she’d called, as she went.

And that’s when her mother had cried out from inside the thick wood-paneled wall.

“Mama, are you okay?” Sophie Anne had asked again, this time not sure she wanted to know the answer. I mean, things being what they were, and all.

I mean, what on earth could Sophie Anne have done if she wasn’t?

What on earth could anyone possibly do?

“The babies...” her had mother cried then, breathlessly.

“They’re coming!” she cried louder, as another wave of pain overtook the encapsulated woman.

Sophie Anne had swallowed hard then, and then slowly, and with a great deal of trepidation, crept once again to the window.

But this time... nothing on God’s green earth could have prepared Sophie Anne for what she was witnessing.



## Evermore – Chapter 13

*“She who saves a single soul,  
saves the universe.”*

Lewis Carroll

Sophie Anne had already endured so much, been asked to sacrifice so much, what more could be asked of her; a powerless girl with nothing left to give?

Because, while all the other families around her had been busy rebuilding their legacies, her father had chosen instead to live beside the bombed-out-shell of her birthright.

And while Ethel Pragmore and Elizabeth Merrit were buying Parisian dresses and attending all of the best social gatherings, Sophie Anne had been lucky to see a new cotton dress at Christmas.

And her invitations... why, her invitation always seemed to get ‘lost’ due to her father’s radical inclinations.

No, Sophie Anne hardly had a life, thanks to her father, and all the stupid rules about color.

“And yet... isn’t that all the more reason to go?” the spider asked from Sophie Anne’s shoulder, and suddenly... she recalled what she’d seen at the window... what had caused her to grab the small, silver pocket knife, that her father liked to keep on the nightstand next to his side of the bed.

“I can’t,” she had whispered softly, before she’d pulled the blade slowly across the left side of her neck.

“I just can’t...” she’d said, one more time, before the whole entire world had gone black.

***I know... you’re thinking... cue that song, Amy.***

“Yes, Sophie Anne, you can,” the spider said then, so matter-of-factly that she was nearly inclined to believe him.

“But...” she stammered, as she held pressure to the small wound at her neck.

“But... what if they don’t stop?” she asked softly, pulling at her bottom lip with her teeth.

“You won’t have to do it all by yourself, Sophie Anne. You just have to look for your support,” the spider said, with a confidence Sophie Anne simply did not feel.

In fact, at that moment, her gut was doing flip-flops inside her belly, just to prove how much she did not feel it.

But then, she heard Jacob scream in pain. A horrible, terrible scream, that tore right through Sophie Anne, much like her father's switchblade had done.

And then suddenly, there was nothing on God's green earth that could've contained her.

"Look for your support, Sophie Anne. They're out there," Walter, the spider, said sternly, as she grabbed hold of her father's shotgun once again.

"You just have to give 'em the chance to do the right thing!" he hollered quickly after her, just as Sophie Anne was rushing head-long out of the door.

## Evermore – Chapter 14

*"But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen,  
nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived,  
what God has prepared for those who love him' –  
these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit;  
for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God"*

(1 Cor. 2:9 NRSV).

Sophie Anne flung herself through the open door quite before her tender spirit was ready to witness what was transpiring out on her front lawn.

And nor had the peeks out the window properly set the stage for the horrors she was encountering as she rushed head-long out into the mob of men that had come to do her family, and everyone she loved, harm.

At the moment, they were all gathered around a center post that had once been home to the family bell.

Oddly enough, the large bell had been one of the few things that had survived the civil war intact. But now, why now, it had been tossed aside as if it held no meaning at all.

And next to it there, kneeling on the ground, was her father, Henry Gilmore, the plantation owner that... wasn't.

Sophie Anne's eyes were wide as saucers then, as she saw the blood pouring from a tear in his scalp that looked to be about three-inches long.

But even though his head was hung, and his eyes were rolled nearly into the back of his head, Henry Gilmore (the second of his name - but the first with a stout-and-steady backbone), was cognizant enough to utter, "Sophie Anne, run," before he was backhanded into silence once more.

"That's enough out of you," Craig Nikols, the overseer from the Farsley Plantation snapped, as he threatened her father with another, if he didn't remain quiet.

Sophie Anne, her eyes filled with tears, turned then towards the commotion that had drawn her out in the first place.

Four men had tied her Jacob to the center post and had already whipped him raw. And as she stood there collecting her jumbled mess of thoughts, it didn't take her much time to realize what they were planning to do next.

Because it was obvious, they were in the process of throwing a lynching together.

There... on her front lawn... on the pole that had been the center of her father's pride.

"No!" Sophie Anne screamed.

"No! No! No!" she screamed some more.

As loudly as she could, and directly into the faces of those closest to her.

Which to her surprise, was enough to halt the execution, at least temporarily.

"Young lady, this is no place for you," Walter Cannon began, but didn't finish, as Sophie Anne stepped past him, as if he wasn't even there.

No, if Sophie Anne knew anything, it was the smell of power.

And right then, it was Doc Collins that was reeking of it, reeking of it something fierce.

Jacob struggled with blood-covered hands to free himself from the noose they'd tied around his neck, until he caught sight of the wide-eyed girl that had come to save his life.

And then he smiled at her the tenderest smile that's ever been.

One that was full of knowing, that even though he was a dead man, and Sophie Anne was as good as raped, and then married off to whomever would have her afterwards, their love would somehow live on.

Because the truth was, Jacob had seen too much to believe anything this beautiful girl could do would save them.

You see, Jacob wasn't the only one they were aiming to lynch that night.

Because from the looks of it, they were setting up to hang several more of her father's key producers. No doubt in order to permanently cripple the man's operation, and drive him out of Louisiana for good.

But the good news was, Sophie Anne saw Jacob's smile.

However, her innocent heart, being what it was, caused her to see only a man that loved her, and would die for her, and believed in her when no one else had.

No, it was a terribly good thing Sophie Anne hadn't really known what Jacob, or any of them, were thinking that night.

Because... just then... she believed.

Sophie Anne Gilmore, the first of her name, finally believed...

in herself.

## Evermore – Chapter 15

*“You have plenty of courage, I am sure,” answered Oz.  
“All you need is confidence in yourself.  
There is no living thing that is not afraid when it faces danger.  
The true courage is in facing danger when you are afraid,  
and that kind of courage you have in plenty.”*

L. Frank Baum

The moment Sophie Anne had stepped outside of her door, all thoughts of crinolines and tiaras, and all of the other wonderful things she’d never get to wear evaporated fully from her mind.

Because gone was the girl that had once dreamt of fairytale weddings, and dances that go all night.

And gone too was the innocence that protects all children.

By all rights, it was gone far too soon for Sophie Anne, and all of the other children present that terror-filled night.

Looking about her, Sophie Anne knew, that for most of the children gathered on the outskirts of the commotion, this was their first taste of the true cruelty of man. Because of her father.

Because her father had seen a greater future for them all.

But here they all were (these children that had been born into, and grown up in, a kinder world than any their parents had known), now suddenly witnessing the total denigration of the human spirit, right before their eyes.

And all for what?

***I’ll tell you what... so that these men could make their already outlandishly-wealthy bosses even wealthier.***

Sophie Anne took a deep breath then, in through her nose, and tasted the salty whiff of blood that was floating like a mist in the humid night air.

Walter Cannon had her by the elbow, at this point, but Sophie Anne never once noticed.

All of the men that were gathered about the doc, were all suddenly staring at her, but Sophie Anne hardly paid them any mind either. Because all of her focus, just then, was on Doc Collins and the length of rope he held in his hands.

“My mama is in labor, inside the house!” Sophie Anne yelled then, at the top of her lungs, trying her best to hold the shaking to a minimum.

But, being a Gilmore, and more like her daddy than even he could’ve guessed, her voice came out commanding, and strong.

But when nobody said anything, Sophie Anne repeated herself with even more vehemence.

“I mean... she’s in labor INSIDE the house,” she said, through a snarled lip that made her pa proud. Though, just as soon as the ramifications of her words set in, he let out a loud groan of anguish.

“You’re supposed to be savin’ lives... ain’t you?” Sophie Anne asked directly of the large man with the big pot-belly and crooked nose.

“Ain’t you sworn anyhow... to ‘first do no harm’? Yeah, I do my homework,” she said, pulling her arm away from the man who had her by it, with a mighty tug that sent her stumbling a few steps forward; and that much closer to Jacob, and his looming demise.

“And you... Josiah James, didn’t I see you kissin’ on that colored girl, back behind Miller’s swamp?” Sophie Anne asked, turning her laser eyes upon a boy that was barely two years older than her.

He was the butcher’s assistant, and he was enormous... taller than an oak, and bigger than an ox.

And one time... why, one time... Sophie Anne had seen him so angry he’d punched a hole clean through a solid pine door.

“Didn’t you once tell me you’d do anything to protect her, if they ever came calling for her? Well?” Sophie Anne asked, with a huff, as she stomped a single foot on the ground.

“And what do you think you’re doing here? Cept propping up the same people that would throw a rope around her neck, just as sure as I’m standing here. Tell me... would you just stand-by if this was happening to her?”

Sophie Anne waved a hand back to Jacob at this point, who was still clawing at the noose around his neck.

But Sophie Anne hardly paid any mind to that, because she was boiling up enough steam to fry an even larger fish.

“And YOU...” Sophie Anne hissed loudly, as she turned and saw the boy who was nine years her senior, and the one everyone assumed she’d eventually marry.

“Why Chuck Nordström, you two-faced lying piece of...”



## Evermore – Chapter 16

*“A coward dies a thousand times,  
a soldier dies but once.”*

Tupac Shakur

In all the commotion, Sophie Anne had forgotten that she still held her father’s shotgun at her side.

But as she stood there, staring up at the boy, that had spent the better part of the last year trying to convince her that he’d like nothing more than to ‘love, honor, and cherish her’, she suddenly remembered.

And so, before Albert could get a word out edgewise, or otherwise, he suddenly found himself staring down the barrel of her gun.

“Now listen here, Sophie Anne,” his father, who was standing at Albert’s side, began. But old Mr. Nordstrom was the county drunk, and everyone knew it.

So, Sophie Anne paid him no mind, and instead focused entirely on his two-faced son.

“Why Albert... haven’t you been telling me that you, and your family, is different? And that you believe in treating humans equally, no matter what their color? Why... Albert Nordstrom... were you just telling me what you thought I wanted to hear?”

Sophie Anne took another step towards the boy. (I refer to Albert here as a ‘boy’ even though he was clearly of an age where he should’ve been called a ‘man’, however, seeing as how he’d yet to demonstrate any actual ‘manly’ characteristics I don’t feel he can honestly be classified as one.)

(So... I’ll just go on referring to him as a ‘boy’.)

(Ya?)

Anyhoo... Sophie Anne took another step towards the boy, that was nine years her senior, and put the barrel of her father’s shotgun right up in his face.

Blood dripped from her hand, and her finger felt slippery on the trigger, but she hardly paid that any mind.

But the others gathered around her did.

“You’re bleeding, Sophie Anne,” Albert said then, putting up both his hands, no doubt in an effort to protect his pretty face; which made Sophie Anne laugh, cuz she knew he always appreciated his looks way more than he ever did hers.

“What are you laughing at?” the boy asked Sophie Anne, cuz in all honesty he had no idea why he was suddenly the center of everyone’s attention.

“I’m laughing at a little boy who can’t stand up and really say what’s on his mind. What? Are you too afraid of what your father will think? Or what everyone else will think? Well?” she demanded of him, as she waved the barrel around in front of his face.

“Well?” she barked again, when he still did not answer.

“You know what I think, Albert? I think you’ll say anything that’ll make you look good to whomever you’re talking to. Why, you just sidle right up to them and start spewing their views right back at them, as if they were really yours all along.”

Sophie Anne looked around her at the growing crowd, as more and more of the black tenants were coming out of their homes, and hiding places.

“But you know what? I don’t think you do it just so’s people’ll like you. I mean... sure, it helps, I suppose. But do you know what I really think?” Sophie Anne asked him, in a voice that was steadily growing weaker.

But her eyes... why, Sophie Anne’s eyes still held the same penetrating intensity as ever. And so, the terrified boy answered her.

“No... no...” he began in a trembling voice, and then he coughed and went on.

“No, I don’t know what you really think,” he told her truthfully, ducking his head a bit, as if he expected a physical blow to follow.

And for a split-second Sophie Anne reconsidered taking the next swipe at him.

I mean, clearly, he’d been raised not to have an opinion. That much was clear. His oppressive father’s presence was obvious enough. And when Albert had flinched at her mere words, well... she didn’t need any more proof than that.

But Sophie Anne was here to save lives, and if that meant stepping on this boy’s wounded ego, so be it.

“I think you’re too stupid to have an opinion of your own. That’s what I think,” Sophie Anne told him, even though she didn’t, for a second, believe it was true.

Though she suspected it was the banner he hid himself under most days, so that he didn't have to explain to others, or more importantly to himself, why he actually never formed any of his own opinions.

“I think you don't really even understand what's going on here... do you?”

## Evermore – Chapter 17

*“I want to grow. I want to be better.  
You Grow. We all grow.  
We're made to grow.  
You either evolve or you disappear.”*

Tupac Shakur

Love, honor, and greed... those were the three biggest motivators of mankind, or so at least to Sophie Anne's mind. Maybe not in that order, but those were them.

And maybe shame too, as she had tried to shame the doc; who still had her Jacob by a rope tied around his neck.

But the doc, well... he seemed to be of a variety that felt no shame at all. And sadly, this part of world seemed to be positively saturated with men like him these days.

That's why Sophie Anne had switched to targets she'd been more familiar with, for all the good that'd done her.

In fact, standing there, Sophie Anne was beginning to worry nothing she was saying was having any effect at all. And meanwhile, her stomach was a tight knot and her fingers were cold, cramped claws; especially the one wrapped around the trigger.

Which made Sophie Anne smile, as she suddenly recalled how her pa had never bothered to teach her how to shoot.

“Sophie Anne, please put down that gun, and let's talk,” a man's voice said from somewhere behind her. A voice that sounded awfully familiar.

But just then, she spied a new target for her venom.

“And you! Ezra Buchanan!” she said with an amount of effort that left her winded.

And her arm slumped just a bit, as she redirected the gun; this time pointing it at a tall, gangly man standing next to her kneeling father.

And, I guess I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that everyone watching her was openly witnessing the not-so-slow decline of the young woman, right there before their eyes; with her faltering step, and slurred speech.

But, due to the fact that she was wielding a loaded weapon, and seemed half-a-second from pulling its trigger, well... no one seemed too willing to jump in between her and the person she was aiming at.

“You were always going on and on, about the benefits of the new system, and why it makes sense, for not just us, but for everyone. Of course, you ONLY speak when friendly ears are listening. Ain’t that about right? Always yammering on and on at the dinner table, about how much we’re saving and earning, and how it’s all gonna work like this in the future.”

Sophie Anne’s gun arm slumped again, for a quick moment during her long tirade, and this time more than a few eyes made note of it.

But Sophie Anne was a stubborn mule, just like her father.

“Why don’t you tell these people here now, what you’s always preaching ta my pa? Go on Ezra... explain to these fine people why farming this way makes more sense!”

Sophie Anne waggled the gun at him, waggled it as if she was picturing herself hitting him upside the head with it, actually. So angry was she, looking at the tall, lanky man with the dark hair, and big nose, who barely had a scratch on him, while her father was bleeding out next to him, on his knees.

Life was just so fucking unfair.

***It just never once was, not for a single second, FAIR!***

Sophie Anne screamed inside her mind then, as it all came crashing in around her, the total and complete unfairness of life in general.

But she didn’t have time to contemplate it for long.

Because just then, a hard fist came down on the back of her head, sending her sprawling into the mud and blood-soaked ground.

***“It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves.” William Shakespeare***

So many things happened at once that night, beginning with Sophie Anne getting knocked to the ground.

Too many things to recount here, to be sure.

And you must understand, any order given to them... doesn’t for a second imply that any of it happened before anything else did.

Because, like I said, it all happened at once, and there just wasn't anything to be done about any of it. Not at this point.

No... because, by this point, the train had already picked up full momentum; and the only thing any of them could do now was to clear the tracks, the best they could.

And, if you're paying any attention at all, you'll wanna note here, that it was Walter Cannon who pronounced the young woman dead.

## Evermore – Chapter 18

*“Sometimes when you sacrifice something precious,  
you're not really losing it.  
You're just passing it on to someone else.”*

Mitch Albom

The moment Walter Cannon pronounced Sophie Anne dead, about a hundred different things happened all at once. Or so it seemed to her father, who let out cry of such pain and anguish all other commotion stopped, and everyone looked at him, for a moment.

And then a second later everyone erupted back into their own moment of panic.

Ezra Buchanan, who'd been standing next to the injured plantation owner, broke out immediately with his version of things, “It’s true,” he said. “Everything Sophie Anne said is true, Gilmore is set make double what any of y’all have made this year,” he told the portion of the crowd that was listening to him.

“Yeah, sure,” James Ackles said with a sneer. But everyone knew that Ackles and his whole entire family were money grubbing jerks, that would do just about anything to pinch a penny, including regularly beating their workers, even the youngest among them.

“No, it’s true!” Ezra shouted above the din of the crowd.

“Then where’s his money at? From the looks of this place, he ain’t got two pennies to rub together,” the angry and bitter landowner said.

“Why, that’s cuz he’s bought up three more plantations this year, and that’s after taking over the Cavanaugh’s and the Johnson’s places last year,” Ezra quickly explained.

“It’s true,” Johnathan Stapely said from the crowd. “He bought up my sister-in-law’s place last year, and my cousin’s this year. That’s why you ain’t seen Broadmoor, nor the Doyle’s, here tonight. Neither of ‘em said it straight, but I betcha now, that’s why they wouldn’t come.”

“He’s right,” Ezra told them all. “And Bethel, he’s not here cuz he made a down-right fortune when Gilmore, here, offered him - offered them all, top dollar for their land, and then promised to take on all their hands as well.”

“But surely he can’t afford to keep paying these negros here top wages, if he’s taking on that kind of burden,” Lindsey Drevlin said from somewhere in the crowd. But everyone could easily enough recognize the high-pitched nasally voice of Mr. Drevlin.

“He sure can, and he’s payin all the new help to match, and offering them land to boot,” Ezra said now, his chin set about as high as it could get – as he realized all him and the far-sighted Henry Gilmore had done in such a short amount of time.

“Henry here knew them that work for their own kind, for their future, will work ten times harder than those working for some whip-weilding master. Love has always been a much better motivator than fear, gentlemen. It always has been. Love, respect, and the chance to improve their lives. But all you men ever see is you getting less... if anybody else is getting a share. But that’s simply not the way of things. Cuz there’s more than enough for everyone, once we stop all this ‘hoarding’ mentality. Once we can all be happy seeing others prosper equally.”

It was sometime during Ezra’s eloquent speech that Henry Gilmore crawled on his bloody hands and knees over to his daughter, whose body he pulled up into his lap. Though it just lay there, like it was nothing more than one of her rag dolls she’d always begged him to play with.

But the man with high hopes for everyone else, had always been too busy for his daughter. Too busy to show love, where it was needed most.

But it was his cry of anguish then, that settled the crowd just enough for them all to hear the screams and pleas of the pregnant woman still encased in the hiding-hole within the walls of her husband’s modest home.

“Dear lord,” Walter Cannon said then, “That woman can’t give birth inside the walls of that home.”

“No, she can’t,” Josiah James, the butcher’s assistant said then, as he stepped towards old, Doc Collins, who still had Jacob by a noose tied around his neck.

“Now are you gonna step up and save that woman, and those babies, or is this town gonna have to find itself a new doctor?” the very large man asked, as he flexed a few of his more outrageously sized muscles.

But it didn’t take long for the doc to drop that bit of rope, and high-tail it towards the Gilmore house. “Come on Ezra, you show us where she’s at. We’ll see to her,” he said, hauling the tall land-agent into the house by his arm as he went.

“I’m so sorry, about your daughter,” Walter Cannon said then, looking down on the distraught man who still cradled his teenage daughter’s lifeless body in his arms.

“I’m so very, very sorry,” he repeated, though the wise man knew his words would do no good.

Though, I should point out here, that no one else died that night. Not Jacob, nor any of the other workers were harmed that night. And even Mrs. Gilmore and the twin boys were all pronounced healthy, if not exactly happy, by the end of the night.



And soon it became a normal thing, the higher wages, the land ownerships for former slaves, and a bit more respect for the man with vision enough to make it all happen.

But as so often happens with real hero tales... the true heroine of this story was largely forgotten, and her name was simply lost to the annals of time - as just some footnote, as some great man's daughter.

But those of us who were there still know... it had been the brave and stout heart of a teenage girl, who simply gave everything that she had, in order to save everyone that she loved. Even Doc Collins, because he'd been saved that night too, saved from becoming a murderer, and a killer, and a destroyer of lives.

Still, if you'd like to visit her, her father made up a special place that you can go. A spot down by the river, where she often liked to sit and read, and when no one was looking...

to dream.

The End.

## Evermore – Epilogue

*“My mama always used to tell me:  
'If you can't find somethin' to live for,  
you best find somethin' to die for.”*

Tupac Shakur

For a long time, Sophie Anne sat on the bench that her father had made for her, waiting for a man she'd dreamt she was gonna meet.

Not because the man was late, mind you, but just because Sophie Anne quite liked the spot her father had picked to come and sit and remember his beloved daughter. And in a way, sitting where he normally sat thinking of her, felt like she was once again a child, sheltered safely in his arms. At least for a time.

“Thank you, for meeting me here, Sophie Anne,” Larry Carmichael told the girl, as the handsome twenty-nine-year-old took a seat on the bench next to the perpetual teenage ghost.

“You said it was important, and that everyone I love will die if I didn't come,” she reminded him.

“I'm afraid it is that serious. But I think together, you, me, and a few of my friends can do something about it. I think we can save them all, Sophie Anne. So, will you help me? Will you come fight with me?” he asked, his dark eyes twinkling in the soft summer sun.

“Seems saving people's the only thing I'm good at,” Sophie Anne remarked then, as she stood up and brushed off her dress. “So, when do we leave?”