

Morgan's Spell

by Susan Cerniglia

A blown kiss to Lilith, a wink to Talia, and Morgan strolled away from the camp and Bristol with the same capricious ease that she joined it. The gypsies didn't know what to make of her, and she found herself enjoying the mystique. She was their guardian, something they were in short supply of, and that must satisfy them.

Beyond the walls, the summer twilight was hot and sure to be met with a steamy morning come dawn. It would make for uncomfortable travel unless she continued through the evening. They didn't know where she went when she left Bristol and none but blunt-headed Ignis had asked her. It was the first time she could recall him catching her off her guard. Only a short walk passed before a wagon slowed, light from a day's selling at the festival, and offered her a ride as far as she would go.

Settled to her comfort and that of her hosts, Morgan kicked back and let her eyes close, the day's events replaying for her. Gaia had summoned her back. Well, no, the egg summoned her as it had from the start and, seemingly, would do for as long as it needed her. Gaia, though, had added her own plea with foretellings of danger. Not that Morgan was of particular aid against the unliving hordes, but she enjoyed watching the more experienced spellcrafters manage them – and, of course, keeping Lilith from being eaten, despite the thief's best efforts to spite her.

'Fool girl.' A chuckle came close on the heels of a sigh. At what point she'd started looking after the gypsies' young charge, Morgan couldn't say.

From there, other words of Gaia's played across her mind and left Morgan more pensive. While Master Terranus lamented the mutability of Morgan's watery nature, he suggested Illyria as a more stalwart replacement for her. Gaia reprimanded him – kindly – and countered that each guardian was needed. One could not replace another, and each's destiny was different.

Morgan gave a wry smile in answer to Gaia then and did so again while nestled back onto the boards of the wagon. Truer words were never spoken – at least where destinies were concerned. On one side, the Lunar Guardians were well-complementary. Ryder and Sky made – in addition to a handsome pair – a formidable one. His brash confidence bolstered her reserve, and her intelligence tempered his headstrong skill. They were always on the outside, however, looking in. The ranger and forest-child too at ease in the wilds to ever fully welcome the city walls.

Nanus and Illyria were much more the heroes of contemporary tales, the public faces to the Guardians of the Egg. The young firebane and brigand, strategist as well as sword-fighter, travelled with the ever-illusiv sword-dancer Illyria, the most accomplished warrior among the band. While, Morgan conceded with no small humor, they may not wish the fame their names had garnered, they would be among the first to live in legend when this tale was done due as much to their popularity.

The Order guardians, Morgan did not know as well. It was her deficiency and she was making few pains – for it must be painful - to fix her ignorance. Rowena had a sweet smile, to her recollection, and a determined air, if a quiet one. Morgan'd long ago started thinking her suited as the healer for this group, a woman to live in Vashta's footsteps if she'd follow them. Fal.. i... mor... Faldamor... Falidor... whatever the devil his name was, on the other hand, was the only one with an air of nobility in the group, and one of the few who tired – tried, of course, being the key word – to challenge Morgan's oft-uttered disparagements of the Order. And then there was the little pup Sir Gage, truly knighted. More than any of them, she assessed, he took the word guardian to heart and was as protective and loyal as any of them might wish.

Morgan was none of these things, though. She had not Ryder's practical skills nor Sky's mystical ones, Illyria's strength nor Nanus' aptitude for strategems. Even among the Order, she lacked Rowena's charm, Falidor's bearing, and Gage's pure and untainted devotion to a cause. She gave them voice, though – acerbic though it often was – and they needed that from her, for now. Each guardian had her role to play.

And, if Morgan was to live up to her part, she needed to do it away from Bristol, where it was too easy to sit among people she was growing unwillingly fond of and celebrate heartbroken triumphs to the soothing melodies of Dan's songs. Stirring, the sky long-since turned violet above her head, she dug through her bag looking for the letter a friend of sorts had sent, summoning her to London – again – presumably because she had word of the disciples actions outside of Bristol.

The rose Morgan'd stuffed into it fell loose, and after a debate she replaced it where it was. She wasn't the sort of girl to get flowers from mysterious strangers, but she was more than willing to lay the blame at Raven or Isabella's feet, as a gracious gift for a Guardian in thanks for her labors, and be done with it. (That she couldn't stop fussing with it for the length of a day, Morgan found less amusing.)

Odd that she hadn't noticed before that a piece of paper was attached to it. In fact, more than odd – there hadn't been a piece of paper attached to it. Squinting in the dull light, Morgan unfurled the parchment. It was small scrap of a thing and bore three verses in unflourished script. Morgan frowned at the paper with a ripple of anger. The words were hers, but the writing wasn't -

“Maddy, sweet, my name it be.
Not two, nor four, nor five, nor three,
There is only one of me.
Why will you not come and see?

For you are tall and I am small,
And all can hear you when you call,
And I think you care here not at all,
Even though I am WONDERFUL!

Maddy, sweet, my name it be,

And you are all that I would see.
You must prove thee not heartless be,
So now will you come and be with me.”

She'd recited this on Maddy's behalf – a bit of a rhyme to further prove that if you wanted a bard, wait for bloody Talia to have a free moment. The original still rested in her pocket, a sloppily-scribed thing incomprehensible and scribbled on the back of an old spellsheet.

Morgan's anger hadn't abated. It wasn't the poem. It was only a little the fact that someone had slipped this into her bag without her notice. The anger centered on the fact that she hadn't taught anyone the rhyme. Maddy was surely unteachable and, further, discretion was not precisely the mad woman's strength.

Which meant someone else about the camp had an exceptionally good ear and exceptionally good memory.

Or worse.

And, in fact, seemed quite gleeful in letting her know so. A bump on the road caused Morgan's elbow to slam into the side. She yelped, grimacing. The Guardian of Words hadn't noticed a thing amiss during the day, and it was her saving talent to know her audience. If someone was listening that closely to her, who knew what else they were hearing.

Feeling chilled in the fading light, Morgan rolled the paper between her fingers. Even if an innocent prank, it had taken advantage of a weakness she hadn't thought herself to have. The Bristol walls were closed, and she'd be as like to be killed as slip back inside unseen, especially given the wards the gypsies were sure to have raised. Which, Morgan admitted, seemed a bit extreme of a fate for communicating something that could potentially be a harmless prank. Harmless. Aye.

Several hours later, four sardonic and whispered words danced across the fountain waters that fell near the gypsy's camp so close to Gaia's frequent haunting place. “You have an eavesdropper.”