

GABRIEL IS CURSED

NYMPH'S REVENGE BOOK 2



JULIA GOLDHIRSH

Copyright © 2020 by Julia Goldhirsh

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

✿ Created with Vellum

To my mother who instilled in me a love of nature and who proofread all of my books without a single complaint.

CHAPTER 1



The only things remaining from their battle with Nightshade were the broken mirror and a gnawing sense of dread.

Nightshade's plans ran through Gabriel's mind like a mantra. *We'll kill those damned humans for what they've done.* But the information only came in fragments, and the location and details of the poisoning eluded him, making him restless.

After hours of lying on the floor beside Rose's bed and staring up at the holes in the wooden ceiling, Gabriel drifted off.

Remnants of Nightshade's memories cycled through Gabriel's mind as he slept. The nymph stood before a muddy brown river as it turned soot black. Red and orange flames licked at the trees of the forest and children screamed.

Belladonna tried to douse the flame, but it only leapt higher. Beside her, a nymph boy cried out. "Please save him. Nightshade, you told me you'd save my friend."

The fire blackened the tree from root to the treetop, but it still raged, leaping from tree to tree, killing even more nymphs in its wake. The water in the river only stoked the flames. There was no saving the forest.

Nightshade threw a glass bottle filled with muddied water to the

ground. It shattered into tiny pieces. "They'll pay. Water for water and blood for blood."

Nightshade stormed out of the forest towards a factory. It was the source of the tainted water. *Strange. I don't remember seeing that building*, Gabriel thought.

Nightshade's eyes darkened as he approached the building. People rushed in and out of it as they headed to and from work. In his hand were two dangerous items: a discarded bottle of alcohol and a match. "The very things they discarded in my forest will kill them. If they weren't so selfish, they wouldn't need to suffer." Belladonna raced towards him. "Don't do it. Whatever they did, it doesn't justify mass murder."

Nightshade sneered. "If getting revenge for my people makes me evil, then it's a small price to pay."

"If you do this, then you will be my enemy. I'll make your life a waking nightmare."

Nightshade smirked. He stared at Belladonna as he threw the alcohol to the ground and lit the match. "I'd love to see you try."

He threw the match into the alcohol, and the factory went up in flames.

* * *

ROSE WOKE to the all too familiar thump of a fist slamming against the wood of her parent's front door, accompanied by the shatter of glass and a spine-chilling yell. No light streamed through the window of her bedroom. Next to her, Gabriel still slept soundly on the floor beside her bed.

As the banging continued, her father shouted, "I'm gonna get you for this. I'll beat you black and blue, you ungrateful wench."

A shiver snaked its way up her spine at the slurred words. She crept out of bed and left her garden-shed-turned-home, being careful not to wake up Gabriel.

There was still a large hole where her front door used to be, a remnant of Nightshade and Belladonna's battle. As she tiptoed

through the greenhouse, she passed some scorch marks on the footpath and overturned earth where Gabriel had dug his heels in when attacking Nightshade.

After sneaking through the greenhouse, she fumbled with the latch until the door popped open. She poked her head out to see what damage he was causing this time. The shards of glass from the broken beer bottle shimmered in the moonlight. Rose wrinkled her nose in disgust as her father swayed on his feet.

Her father continued to bang on and tug at the door, but it wouldn't budge.

If mother locked him out, maybe she's ready to seek help after all, Rose thought as she watched her father struggle with the door. After several more minutes, he realized he wasn't getting in and ground his teeth together in frustration. He yelled, "When I get back inside, I'll make you pay for this in blood." Then he stormed off.

Rose tucked her head back inside the claustrophobic greenhouse and guided the door shut. When the door closed, she cringed at the slight clinking sound it made and whipped her gaze to her retreating father's back.

Her knees buckled when her father didn't turn around. She crept back to her room through the hole in the garden shed, and when she reached Gabriel, she bent down over his prone form.

He'd risked his life for hers, but why? Despite her pleas, he'd slept on the floor after the battle, refusing her offer of the bed. Why did he value his life, his comfort, so little? What was wrong with him? Rose's forehead scrunched up as she watched his sleeping face.

When she pushed back hair from his forehead, he cried out in his sleep. "No. Please, don't." His hand flailed forward, reaching out to her, and she grabbed onto it.

"It's okay," she said, but he tossed and turned, muttering nonsense. He didn't wake.

She gave his shoulder a light shake. "Gabriel, wake up," she said.

He rolled over. "Why are you doing this?" he mumbled.

She shoved him harder.

At that, his eyes flew open, and his gaze fell to where her hands

touched his. She pulled away, and his eyes narrowed at Rose. "What do you want this early?"

She huffed and lifted her chin. "You were talking in your sleep. Loudly. You seemed upset."

A grin spread across his face. "Is that why you were holding my hand?"

Her face flushed. "You... tried to grab me in your sleep, so I stopped you." Rose's gaze flickered to her parents' house and back to Gabriel.

Gabriel reached out for her, but she pulled away. "Something tells me my talking isn't the only reason you woke me up."

Guilt turned her stomach. He'd already done too much, but leaving her mother would be a death sentence with her father still in the picture. She couldn't leave her to be tortured by the monster who was supposedly her father.

Lailah didn't have many choices. Financial independence wasn't exactly easy as a single woman in the early 1900s with no living relatives, aside from her previously invalid daughter. The silence stretched out, and she bit her lower lip, knowing she would not like what she had to do next.

Her words came out just above a whisper. "Will you help me get my mother out of here too?"

He cupped his ear. "I'm sorry. Could you repeat that?"

Rose rolled her eyes. "Forget it."

His easy smile cracked the silence. "I'm sorry. I was only joking. Of course, I'll help you, but we'll do it later after I've had some sleep. I'm still exhausted."

The tension in Rose's shoulders relaxed a little. She could always count on him to come through when it mattered. Rose wrapped him in a hug. "Thank you."

"It's no problem," he said with a yawn. "Since you're up, I'm taking your bed." He crawled under her covers and drifted off to sleep. She watched over him until he was snoring away. Then she went out to the garden to come up with a plan.

The sun filtered through the glass panes of the greenhouse, staining the sky a salmon pink. She grabbed a stick and started

drawing a map of her parents' house in the dirt near the walking paths. Their room was on the top floor, so she'd need someone to watch the ground floor in case her father came back.

She only had vague memories of the top floor, but the layout of the first floor had been burned into her mind, untouched by time. *Maybe my trauma will pay off after all.* She sighed.

Even though she hadn't seen it in eight years, she still remembered the placement of the kitchen cabinets and the gas range. She winced as memories of her father flickered through her mind and she felt the phantom burn of the stove. Her hands shook as she stared down at the faded red marks on her hands, a constant reminder of that night.

Rose gulped, pushing the thoughts aside as she continued drawing the house's layout. When the sounds of Gabriel yawning reached Rose's ears, she strode to her room to get him, tugging him over to the map.

"You need to know where everything is before we do this. If my father catches us, it could be dangerous for both of us."

He listened intently, his eyes skimming over the map. "Is he the one that caused the injury to your hands?"

Rose's face flushed, and she crossed her arms, hiding them behind her back. "Yes. He's violent and fast, so if he shows up, hide."

Rose's heart hammered in her chest, her breath catching when his fingers lazily traced her arm until he reached her hand, drawing it from behind her back. "You need not be self-conscious of the scars. Every part of you is beautiful."

Her mouth went dry, and she gulped. "Do you think me easily swayed by false sweet talk?"

"Who said it was false?" His eyes warmed her from head to toe. His face was so close to hers, but she couldn't bring herself to kiss him.

She'd drunk poison and because of that he'd had to walk right into Nightshade's territory to find a cure. Those thoughts sobered her. She didn't deserve his kindness. The color left her cheeks, and she cleared her throat.

"Anyway. Getting back on topic. You should find some pans near

the stove that would be heavy enough to cause him some serious harm."

Rose looked him up and down. "Do you think you can take him in a fight?"

Gabriel flashed her a cocky grin. "If I can keep my horse in line, I don't think your father will be a problem."

Rose's heart squeezed in her chest, and she pulled him into an embrace. He rested his hand on her head, and she buried her face into his chest. "Thank you. I don't deserve your kindness."

"You deserve a much better hand than the one you've been dealt, but you should learn to be more careful about drinking strange liquids after I warned you they might be dangerous."

Rose rolled her eyes. "Perhaps I was a bit too desperate to escape the greenhouse before."

Gabriel gave a short laugh. "You don't say?"

Rose's gaze turned serious, and she squeezed Gabriel's hand. "When we go in there, I'll do my best to avoid getting caught, but if it gets too dangerous, run. I don't want you getting hurt because of me."

Gabriel stroked her hair. "I can't promise that. I don't want to leave you behind, not again. Your safety is more important."

Rose looked up at him. Wanting to say more, but unable to find the words, she lingered in his embrace for another moment before pulling away.

Gabriel helped Rose pack a few of her skirts and blouses, some bread from one of her mother's most recent deliveries, and the remaining pieces of Belladonna's shattered mirror. She tensed up when she saw the charred grass beside the mirror, a reminder of the battle that had happened only two days ago.

After sunset, they waited for her father to leave the house for his usual night on the town, or rather his night at the town bar, before they snuck into the house.

Rose carefully picked the lock and painstakingly turned the handle so it wouldn't creak. She cocked her head, but only heard the ghostly bellows of the frogs. She placed a finger to her lips, urging Gabriel to

be quiet. However, as they entered the house, his feet thudded on the wooden floors.

She leaned close to his ear. "Stay here and keep watch while I get my mother."

Gabriel took her hand in his. "Be careful."

Rose gave his hand a squeeze. "The same goes to you." She slipped her hand away from his. After one last glance back at him, she continued down the hallway until she reached the stairs.

She crept up the staircase, being careful not to lean on the creaky, wooden banister or step on the squeaky board in the middle of the first flight of steps.

When she arrived at the top of the stairs, she snuck down the hall until she reached her parents' room. Rose opened the bedroom door and found her mother in bed asleep.

Rose's gaze darted around the dim room, searching for demons she knew weren't there. "He's not here," she whispered to herself, but the heart racing in her chest said otherwise.

They needed to work fast so they could leave before her father came back. Rose gave her mother's arm a gentle nudge. "Mother. Wake up. I'm getting you out of here."

Her mother didn't stir, but she didn't want to risk being too loud. Rose shook her again, but she still snored away. Bile rose in her throat as panic gripped her. She yanked the bed sheets off, and the snoring stopped.

Her mother sprung upright in bed, her hands protecting her face, her eyes wild.

As Lailah saw red eyes and dark hair, recognition flashed through her eyes, and her shoulders relaxed, but her mouth gaped open in surprise. "Rose? What are you doing here? It's dangerous. He could be back any minute." Her gaze searched the room in a panic.

Rose placed a hand over to her mother's mouth. "Shh. I'm here to help you. Pack some clothes and personal items. We're leaving. Now."

Lailah shook her head. "If I leave, he'll hurt me... and you. I can't."

Rose put both hands on Lailah's shoulder and looked into her eyes. "We don't have time to argue about this. I have a friend here. He's

going to help us escape. You'll be safe, I promise." Lailah mumbled the words back to herself like a prayer. Rose shook her shoulders, which brought her out of her daze.

Her mother rushed to pack some things into a small, worn cotton bag which already had some Victorian style corsets, a wrinkled striped blouse with long sleeves, and a long, checkered skirt in it. It looked like the remnants of an old escape plan that never happened.

Rose's eyes darted to the clock on the wall and then back to her mother. Her heart thumped in time with each tick. The walls closed in. It had already been thirty minutes. This was taking too long. They needed to leave, *now*.

She tapped Lailah on the shoulder. "Let's hurry. We don't know when he'll be back."

Her mother flinched away from her touch. Rose rolled up the sleeve of Lailah's night shirt and saw a violet bruise the size of a fist blooming on her shoulder. Her eyes narrowed. "Did he do this to you?"

Her mother gave a slight nod as she shrunk away from Rose, her gaze focused on the floor. Rose sighed. "Sorry. Here, let me help you." Rose shoved the remaining clothes into her mother's pack before grabbing her by the hand and leading her to the staircase.

They tiptoed down the stairs and Rose kept the pack precariously perched on her shoulder, gritting her teeth together as she attempted not to jostle it. Her mother trailed behind her, and she kept looking back, pointing at where she wanted her to walk.

The crash of a glass bottle shattered the silence as they reached the first step, sending a shiver down Rose's spine. Rose pushed Lailah back, so they were both hidden by the wall in front of the stairs.

A slurred voice shouted, "Where are you, you whore of a wife? I've got a surprise for you." He clenched a jagged bottle in his fist.

Lailah's hand gripped onto Rose's wrist so hard that it ached, and she looked back to see her mother's entire body tensed and her eyes wide. Lailah's mouth gaped open, and Rose clamped a palm over it, barely stifling the whimper that clawed out of her mother's throat.

Rose leaned in so her lips brushed Lailah's ear. "Be quiet. We don't want him to find you. Gabriel's going to take care of him."

Rose frantically searched for Gabriel but didn't see him. Fear settled into her stomach. *What if he left? No. He wouldn't, right? He must've hidden when he heard the door open.*

The tension in her stomach eased when she glimpsed a pan peeking out of the kitchen's entrance.

Gabriel crept along the walls of the kitchen, towards her father. She held her breath when he raised the pan above her father's head and then brought it down with full force, hitting him with a swift *thwap*.

Her father yelled out in pain, and his hand flew to his head. Then he swiveled around to face Gabriel. His eyes gleamed with hate, and her body screamed at her, telling her to run, but she remained still in their hiding place, taking shallow breaths that she hoped weren't loud enough to draw his attention.

"Who the hell are you?" He stumbled closer to Gabriel, who tried to swing the pan at him again. But this time her father caught it. He lashed out at Gabriel with the broken bottle, and it grazed his arm, leaving red tracks on his skin and staining the glass.

Gabriel clenched his hands together in a fist, and his nose wrinkled. He crouched down and rushed her father, hitting him square in the chest. They both tumbled to the floor.

Gabriel turned to the stairwell and yelled out, "Run. Now."

Rose grabbed her mother's hand and sprinted through the living room, past Gabriel and her father. She gave them a wide berth as her father squirmed and bucked under Gabriel's weight. He pinned her father's arms and legs, holding on for dear life.

As they ran through the front door, Gabriel slammed his fist into her father's head, causing the man's head to snap to the side in a jarring motion. Gabriel yelped when his knuckles connected with her father's jaw. His skin split open and blood trickled from his knuckles, but the punch had the desired effect.

His eyes rolled back in his head, and he went limp like a puppet with its strings cut. When Gabriel wiped his forehead, it came away

with blood. He gave a nervous laugh. "I think I got him. Now let's get out of here."

They raced out of town in the dead of night. The only sounds accompanying their departure were the chirp of crickets and the whisper of leather as he untied the horse's ropes from the post.

Rose clung to her mother. "I'm sorry I blamed you for his actions. It's him I really hated."

Tears streamed down her mother's face, and she opened her arms. Rose curled up in them as she sobbed. The clop of hooves against the soft ground reminded her they were both finally leaving their former prisons behind.

Rose's head smacked into the wall of the cart when it came to a stop. She rubbed her sore temple and narrowed her eyes at Gabriel's back. "Sure, drive like you're in a horse race. It's not like I needed my head or anything."

When he turned around, he gave her a sly smile. "My sincerest apologies. If you'd like, I can nurse you back to health to make up for it." He winked.

Her cheeks heated, and she turned her gaze to the floor of the mail cart, scooting herself over to the ledge. "That won't be necessary. Just be more careful next time."

As Rose slid to the ground, she surveyed her surroundings. A familiar grey-blue house stood before her. The forest green trim snaked around the house like vines.

Rose turned back to Gabriel, her brow raised in question. "Why are we at your house?" She thought they'd want to get as far away as possible with her father still on the loose.

He clenched the reins of the horse so tightly that his knuckles went white. "I'm just going to grab a few things before we depart... some keepsakes. You might want to pack some food for the journey," he said with a tight-lipped smile. The tension in his grip kept her from asking any further questions.

They all headed into the house together, and Gabriel wandered off toward his room. Rose made no move to follow him. Her mother

gazed around the house in awe. As if to herself she said, "He seems kind...but sad."

"He's been that way since we met," she said and pursed her lips together. Her eyes skimmed the house, and she thought about his mention of food.

"Mother, why don't you help me grab some food. We'll need it for our journey. I'll go check on him."

Her mother shook her head, and her lips curled up in a wistful smile. She slid a strand of Rose's hair between her fingers. "I'm afraid I can't do that."

Confusion and worry twisted her stomach. "What do you mean? Aren't you coming with us?"

She shook her head, and her gaze flickered to the hallway Gabriel had gone down. "You've grown up to be so beautiful... just like a rose. However, you need room to grow. I'd be like a flower pot that's too small, holding you back. You go on with Gabriel. I'm going to stay in town and solve my own problems. But thank you, my darling, for giving me the strength to take the first step." She gave Rose a kiss on the forehead and turned, walking towards the mail cart before Rose could protest.

Her mouth dropped open and a thousand questions flooded her mind as she stared at her mother's retreating back. Lailah was speaking in riddles. *What did she mean hold her back? What would her mother do if he came after her? Why would she risk staying so close to the man that harmed her? Where would she stay?*

Rose couldn't accept her mother's decision. Her legs moved before she could think. Her face flushed with anger as her hand caught her mother's wrist and squeezed it so hard that she winced. Her mother halted halfway out the door.

Rose's voice rose to a yell that burned her throat, sounding too much like her father's. "You'd throw away everything after what we tried to do for you? If you go back there, he'll kill you. Gabriel could have gotten injured or killed. We both put ourselves in danger for you. Where are you going to go? We risked everything for you!"

Rose's voice cracked when she met her mother's tear-filled gaze.

She let go of Lailah's wrist and saw a pink mark where her hand had been. "I'm sorry, mother. I didn't mean to."

Lailah shook her head and placed her hand over Rose's. "I understand you're worried, dear. It might not seem like it, but I'll be okay. I won't go back to our old home, even if it means working at one of those factories that wheeze smoke from dawn till dusk. I'll find a new place to live somehow."

Rose's heart squeezed at the thought of her working from dawn to dusk, coughing from the smoke. She didn't like the thought of her slaving away in a factory, but if she was safe from him, that was what mattered. She let out a breath. "Just promise me if he comes after you, you'll leave town and never come back."

Lailah pursed her lips. "I promise."

Maybe I take after my mother, she thought as she reflected on her own actions. Taking poison in an attempt to flee her glass prison had been dangerous, but there was always a reason behind her risks. Rose hoped that her mother wouldn't come to regret this decision.

Her mother cupped her cheek, and Rose's gaze flickered to the hallway. Gabriel still hadn't returned. "I'll be right back, Mother."

Her mother gave her a knowing look. "Check on him. I won't leave just yet."

Rose smiled and strode down the hallway to check on Gabriel.

She snuck down the corridor that led to Gabriel's room and poked her head in the door, but he wasn't there. *Where is he?*

She heard muffled sobs through the walls. *The woman's room*. An image of the room she'd stayed in before flashed through her mind.

As she crept closer to the room, the crying got louder, echoing through the hallway. She pressed her back flat against the wall, then poked her head into the slightly ajar door.

Tears streamed down Gabriel's face. His chest heaved as he cried. He held a thin, silver ring in his palm.

"I'm sorry I couldn't save you. Somehow helping Rose feels like a redemption I'll never get with you. I loved you," he whispered. He pulled a small photo out of a crevice in the dresser drawer, kissed it,

and slid it back into its hiding place. Then he tucked the silver ring safely away in his pants pocket.

Rose wanted to reach out and embrace him, but instead she turned away. She'd just intruded on a private moment, and the thought made her skin itch and her fingers fidget.

After the sobs had subsided and he'd wiped his eyes, Rose made her presence known with a light rapping on the door despite it being ajar.

"Gabriel. Are you there?" Rose peeked her head through the crack in the door.

Gabriel's back straightened in alarm and he tucked his soiled handkerchief into his pocket, but the red-rimmed and blotchy skin gave him away. She wanted to pull him into a hug, but refrained herself. She hadn't realized how much the woman's death still pained him and wondered how long ago she'd died.

He smoothed his pants with his hands and straightened the collar of his cream-colored shirt before saying, "Oh, Rose, how long have you been there?"

"Not long. I just wanted to know what our plan was since you saw some of what Nightshade was plotting."

His sullen gaze took in the room one last time. "Let's go talk about this somewhere else." He shuffled out of the room and over to the study, where he collapsed into an armchair. His body sank into the cushions, and he rubbed a hand over his face.

When Gabriel gestured to the chair across from him, she plopped down, eager to hear where they'd be going next.

His mouth opened and closed, but no words came out like a marionette doll without a puppet master. Rose tilted forward, her hand reaching for his, but she stopped herself. Her hands folded into her lap instead.

After several painfully long moments, he shook his head. His gaze moved to hers, but it was unfocused. "Nightshade's allies plan to make humanity pay for destroying the forests. But when I saw his memories, it wasn't clear where he would carry out this plan."

He paused, his gaze catching on something behind them. She turned back to see a painting of a flower. "That's a beautiful painting."

"She'd always been an amazing artist." The ghost of a smile played across his lips. "Sorry. There are a lot of memories in this house."

Rose shook her head. "There's no need to apologize, Gabriel. You can tell me anything."

The start of tears shone in his eyes, and he stared down at his hands. Her heart squeezed as she remembered the silver ring. "Where was I? Right, Nightshade had memories of a nymph who lived in Lullin, an ally of his named Hawthorne."

Gabriel's gaze unfocused once more, his eyes looking at her but also past her. He mumbled something under his breath, but she couldn't make out the words.

This time Rose didn't hesitate. She reached over to place her hand over his. His fingers felt like ice. "You rarely lose focus like this. Are you okay?"

Gabriel looked down at her hand on his. His eyes glistened with the start of tears, and she threaded her fingers with his, thawing his frozen fingertips. He gave a half-hearted smile and continued speaking.

"Hawthorn was meant to disguise himself amongst the humans and gain their trust. But he disappeared before he completed his mission. He might know more about the plan. Nightshade doesn't know the shape he's taken. We need to find him before Nightshade's allies do. Perhaps he can tell us where to find the nymphs before they destroy humanity."

Rose's jaw dropped, and her eyes scanned his, searching for any hint of a joke, but there was none. The thought of everyone she knew dying overwhelmed her. She pictured April, her mother, and Gabriel on the floor, their chests unmoving, their eyes glassy.

The walls closed in around her. Her lungs constricted. Her breaths came in rasps. She grabbed at her throat, clawing at it with her fingernails, willing air to enter her lungs.

Gabriel's arms wrapped around her, and he mumbled something, but it came out muffled. She couldn't hear the words. The

surrounding bookshelves swirled and blurred, and tears burned her throat.

Just focus on what you can still see. Take deep breaths, she thought to herself.

First her eyes caught on an oil lamp that lent soft light while reading, then to the comfortable lounge chairs. Some air entered her lungs, and she kept counting the images that weren't entirely blurred by tears. The books she loved to get lost in, and the chair Gabriel had sat in.

With each object, her breaths came more evenly. The blackness encroaching at the edges of her vision faded.

She could feel the steady thump of his heartbeat as he pressed against her. Her cheeks warmed when she looked down to see her chest was flush against his.

Gabriel's hands ran through her hair, and he mumbled. "You're going to be okay. Please be okay." *Were those the words he'd been saying before?* Rose lingered in his grasp for a little longer, wanting to believe that this could be more than a fantasy. But she'd only be setting him up for more heartbreak. There was a chance she wouldn't survive this, that they wouldn't survive this.

With a sigh, she pressed a hand against his chest, putting distance between them. "Thank you, Gabriel. I'm okay now."

"Are you certain?" His eyes warmed with concern.

She pressed away from Gabriel's grip. "I have to be. We have no time to waste. We need to get rid of those nymphs right now!" She held her head high despite her legs feeling like rubber.

"You've been through much. You're allowed to be upset. It doesn't make you weak."

Rose bit at her lip and muttered, "Perhaps you should take your own advice."

"Was that an insult or a sweet nothing?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" she said with a grin and marched out of the room to face her mother before they left to fight the coming storm.

* * *

LAILAH WRUNG her hands and mumbled to herself as Rose approached. When she got close enough, she laid a hand on her mother's shoulder.

"Mother, we're going to leave soon. Please reconsider your decision. I don't want to worry about you being in danger from my father."

Lailah pursed her lips, but her voice was calm as she said, "If it makes you feel better, I'll continue to the next town, but I won't entrap you further by accompanying you on your journey."

Rose paused for a moment before she spoke. "I will respect your wishes if you promise you won't go back home."

Lailah touched a hand to Rose's cheek, "I've already promised you, but I will tell you once more. I will never go back to that wretched place, my child."

Clunky footsteps warned her of Gabriel's arrival, and when he was close enough, she reached a hand back, grabbing him by the arm. She looked up at him with tears pricking her eyes. "My stubborn mother doesn't have a place to stay, but she doesn't wish to accompany us on our journey."

Gabriel's frown curved up into a lazy half smile. "I suppose the apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

Rose glared at him. "I was requesting help, not unwarranted comments."

He took her hand in his and feathered a kiss on her fingertips. "But I love the faces you make when you're flustered." Her face flushed, and she turned away from him.

"Forget it. I don't want your help," Rose hissed. She placed a hand over her mouth, regretting the words the moment she'd spoken them.

He laughed. "Oh, but I think you do, even if you refuse to admit it."

Gabriel turned his attention to Lailah. "If you have no place to live, how can you guarantee Rose your safety? How can you promise not to go back to your husband's home?"

Her mother shifted uncomfortably before she spoke. "I'll find a job at a factory if I need to. I'll do piecework or toil away in the fields."

Gabriel clicked his tongue. "No. No. That won't do. If you want to stay behind, then I insist you use this house as your own. You shouldn't have to risk your safety or your pride. Leaving is hard enough."

Rose looked up at Gabriel, blinking as if to wake herself from a dream.

Her gaze drifted to her mother, whose mouth hung open in shock, but she whispered a silent, "Thank you."

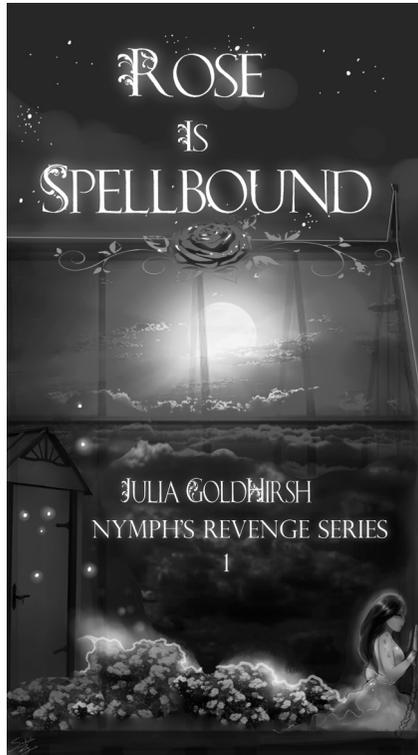
With some trepidation, Lailah entered Gabriel's house, *her* house. Lailah was finally free.

YA FANTASY FAIRYTALE

Did you know there's another book to this series you may have missed? If you like strong women and Rapunzel retellings, check out the first book in the Nymph's Revenge series.

Only \$2.99 or FREE on Kindle Unlimited!

[Click here to read the first book](#)



LGBTQIA+ ARTHURIAN FANTASY

Did you know I have another series in the works? It's an upper YA Arthurian fantasy with some crossover into NA territory. There's an **enemies to lovers romance**, glass magic, sorceresses, gemstone familiars, and a **magic war**.

Only 99 cents!

[Click here to see the prequel](#)



AUTHOR'S NOTES

If you liked this story and would like to know what else I'm working on, you can sign up for my newsletter by clicking [here](#). I send weekly updates, new releases, sneak peaks of new stories, book giveaways, and author events.

Thank you so much for reading this story. If you'd like more stories like this don't forget to leave a review. You can review *Gabriel is Cursed* on Goodreads, Amazon, and Bookbub.

You can also connect with me on the following social media sites to find out about fun competitions, giveaways, and writing and self-publishing tips:

Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Tiktok, My website

Happy reading!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Wow this book ended up being the longest and the most editing intensive project I've done so far with a whopping seven rounds of self-edits, two rounds of beta readers, and three different editors. I want to start by thanking the amazing people who helped with those beta edits especially Val and Sam. They were both amazing at catching my weird POV slips and historical inaccuracies, and my mother sniffed out any of the remaining mistakes like a bloodhound. Additionally, I want to thank Kent for encouraging me to try method acting to really get to the heart of who my characters are. It was incredibly helpful. Anyone who reads this book is amazing, and I hope you enjoyed my first full-length novel. Finally, I want to say thank you to the amazing team of people that got this book ready for production and my ever patient cover artist. You can check out their services below.

Cover Artist- Sukesha Ray (She sings too!)

Content editor- Charlotte Blowe Stanley/ N-D Scribble

Content/Line editor- Erin/ Survivor Bunny

Proofreader/Line editor- Willow Oak Author Services

