A Family Curse

Morgan’s mother, Rowan, had been the victim of a limited family curse. The curse was passed down from parent to child, at the time of conception, and granted the victim immortality through polymorphic regeneration. It was a shape-changing curse—specifically, a sex changing curse. Passing the curse on to a new generation had been the only known cure, allowing the parent to choose a permanent sex by conceiving a child in that form. If the child died, the curse reverted back to the parent. Morgan was divided into male and female incarnations as the result of an attempt by her grandfather to break the curse by having his son’s forms split apart. Having fallen in love, Rowan had decided to remain female and embrace her alter ego in order to marry her lover, Moran. Unfortunately, her father had discovered the truth about his cursed son and could not accept Rowan’s decision or the loss of Rohan. He was obsessive in his pursuit of a cure for the curse, going so far as to make a bargain with a demon to get it. The demon offered to split Rohan and Rowan apart, intending to assume possession of Rowan in the process to escape its prison. Unfortunately, because Rowan was pregnant at the time, the demonic cure her father attempted affected Morgan instead, splitting her into separate incarnations in the womb. Surprised and enraged when nothing seemed to happen, Roman unwittingly betrayed his knowledge of the curse and revealed how he intended to split Rohan and Rowan apart.

Roman and Rowan’s shock was nothing compared to the trauma the demon experienced. Oblivious to the pregnancy, focusing its attention exclusively on the magic of the curse, it became overwhelmed by the purity of the unborn soul. Distracted in that critical moment, the demon became so absorbed in what it was dividing it became split in the process, torn in half and exiled to the depths of the unborn couplet’s minds. Rowan and Roman had assumed the demon’s spell had no effect at all until Morgan was born. Rowan had attempted to pursue marriage with Moran only to be foiled by her father again. As loath as he was to have a daughter in place of a son, he remained adamant that no child of House Arden would be allowed to marry into House Arduin. As long as their houses were at war, the lovers were doomed to remain separated, but confronted with a divided child they decided in secret to split the couplet between them. In spite of the decision to raise the children separately, they were both named Morgan to reflect the fact that they remained incarnations of the same soul. The daughter remained with her mother and the son was taken by his father. Thus, the boy became Morgan Av Arduin and girl became Morgan Av Arden. They grew up in rival houses, each as an only child of a parent striving to keep their true lineage from being discovered. Either house would have sought the destruction of both children if they were recognized as the product of interbreeding.

Morgan Av Arden was raised by her mother, and occasionally her mother’s mentor—in truth, her grandmother. She had her mother’s patron for a father-figure, and his children for surrogate siblings. Several candidates for a father presented themselves as whispered rumors—but Morgan never found anything to prove any man was truly her father. Her formal training as a gymnast, a dancer and a courtesan came courtesy of and at the insistence of her grandmother, while childhood adventures and misadventures granted her an unusual knowledge of the ruins of Aeslyn Tear and an informal apprenticeship in the Order of the Ruins. She developed her skills as a fencer, fighter and thief by posing as a boy while growing up. Among those who observed her upbringing, the unique mix of abilities she possessed marked her as an exceptional prospective spy or assassin. This brought on increasing pressure from the house elders to exploit Morgan. In contrast, the house was under pressure to submit Morgan to an arranged marriage with a boy from House Arduin to end the feud. Morgan was oblivious to all of this until she began to suspect that her mother was more than a courtesan. Her curiosity led her to discover that she was a member of a house in exile, a house that exploited her mother as a spy and assassin. Her mother had fought fiercely to keep her daughter from being forced down the same path. It did not take Morgan long to realize that her house was at war with a rival house.

Morgan Av Arduin was raised by his father.

Inevitably, Morgan encountered her fiancé and alter ego, Morgan Av Arduin. Their resemblance, and shared name, caused some intense rivalry at first. As they overcame their antagonism, they dubbed each other Dusk and Dawn. Through the course of their adventures they became friends and eventually fell in love. All was well until the couple started to probe their parents’ past, disturbed by the growing suspicion that they were actually brother and sister. It never occurred to them to imagine they were alternate incarnations of the same person until they merged in a moment of intimacy. Dawn surrendered absolutely and Dusk took her in a passionate, devouring embrace. He was flesh born of spirit—her spirit. As a projection of her, born of the curse, but at the same time the embodiment of the one predator she feared and admired most and a manifestation of her untapped potential, the embodiment of her completion. The consummation of their union triggered the consumption of her flesh by that spirit. Or, more accurately, Dusk discorporated as they reached the climax of their passion. Freed of the limitations of the flesh, his spirit engulfed her, penetrating and permeating her as it consumed her, devouring and digesting her until they were incorporated together in her form. This translation of flesh and spirit was the fundamental action of the curse. The combined euphoria of transformation and the ecstasy of climax combined into a prolonged and paralyzing orgasm

On assuming the full burden of the curse, Morgan was finally taken into her parent’s—and their patron’s—confidence, educated about the curse. The form the couple merged into had revealed that Morgan was conceived as a girl and would be female by default. Morgan finally learned that her father had also been exploited by his house. By chance, Morgan’s parents had been peers, initiated together at the academy. Her father had fallen in love with her mother, in spite of the curse and the fact that they were sworn enemies when she was a he. Morgan was told of her parent’s efforts to end the feud between their houses, and introduced to her cousin—another victim of the curse. A few generations previous, a victim of the curse conceived twins, passing the curse on to both children. Her cousin, a boy by default, was the one who helped Morgan cope with her singular duality and encouraged her to go out and unwind at a party.

Morgan came to the attention of the rival immortals by offering her services as a guide to the Ruins of Aeslyn Tear to their mutual enemy. Her dual infection was an assassination attempt gone awry as the result of the regenerative powers she gained upon assuming the full weight of the curse. Her survival recaptured the attention of the rival sires, prompting a wager over the result of her turning, and the ordeal itself created flaws in her psyche the demon trapped within her could exploit. In assimilating the were curse, Morgan was led to believe that her tiger form replaced her male form, when in fact it simply displaced it, becoming an intermediary form. Her male form could be accessed, but only by shifting through her tiger form to reach it.

Dusk and Dawn’s intimacy had enabled the demon to reconstitute itself and begin vying for control. Their union was essential to reuniting the shattered pieces of the demon, and the ordeal of Morgan’s turning created a flaw the demon was able to exploit in order to assert itself. Because Morgan identified naturally with both of her forms, the demon could only challenge Morgan’s grasp of her tiger form. Unfortunately, it would not be enough to conquer and separate that form from Morgan to resurrect itself. Instead, the demon was compelled to exploit the potential awakened in Morgan to devour her alive.

The demon devoured her, body and soul. In the process of being consumed and used to fuel the demon's resurrection, her mind was forced open and the powers harvested and exploited by the demon, during the dissection and reconstitution of her body for its own use, were seared into her psyche. Her latent psychic potential had been refined into telepathy and telekinesis powerful and precise enough to dismember and digest her. Her thrice-cursed regeneration was enhanced and exploited by the demon to resurrect itself in her image. To escape the prison the demon left her soul in, Morgan replicated the process to resurrect herself.

Family Legacies

Rowan seemed a fairly normal girl, the daughter of a muse and a muse herself. Unfortunately, she was neither a normal girl, nor the daughter of a normal muse. Rowan had been born Rohan of the House of Arden, son of Roman. Rowan was merely an alter ego, the expression of a curse Roan inherited from Rhiannon of the House of Avon. Rhiannon was a muse, but she had concealed her curse from Roman until she passed it on to his son. Initially, it had been easy to keep this legacy a secret. Rhiannon helped her child understand and cope with the advantages and disadvantages of the curse. Rohan was quick to comprehend need to keep his curse a secret. Rhiannon raised Rowan and Rohan according to form, emphasizing the characteristics and habits of one gender that were a deficit or detriment in the other. Compelled to keep the curse hidden, she had been forced to introduce Rowan as her apprentice when puberty made it impossible for Rohan to conceal his alternate form with mere clothing. Unfortunately, because Rohan was schooled abroad, Rowan was often left deal with the ordeals she faced on her own.

Moran was a normal boy. A son of the House of Arduin, the only legacy he had to endure was the tradition of strong leaders and warriors that proceeded him. Fortunately, that legacy had lent him a number of superior traits. Handsome, intelligent, curious and indomitable, he promised to be a man among men. A natural athlete, Moran was certain to be a competent warrior, but due to his intelligence, he promised to become a respectable artist as well. The confidence and pride that came with his abilities and heritage were his prime, potential weaknesses. Moran, like Rohan, had been singled out to be trained as agents of their houses. Born into rival houses, it was inevitable that they would become fierce rivals growing up. Both boys had possessed the talent and potential for advanced magic, but their exiled houses lacked the public authority to sponsor them to the academy. House Avon had the authority to sponsor them, since they were officially members of that house, but then the rivals would technically be in the service of that house. Ultimately, that complication was outweighed by the need for the best training.

The academy prized such talented children and wasted no time in recruiting them. Rohan and Moran were raised to believe that they were enemies fighting against each other for the restoration of their native houses. Fortunately, they were both conditioned to conceal their true affiliations, so initially there was no obstacle to their friendship when they encountered each other at the academy. As their friendship grew, however, it became inevitable for them to confide in each other. Inevitably, Moran and Rohan had learned the truth about each other and became bitter rivals. Nothing could reconcile them until Rohan formally adopted the identity of Rowan and apprenticed as a muse. As Rowan, Rohan soon discovered a different, seductive side of his old enemy. The teachings of the academy further encouraged her to overcome her hereditary prejudices. By the time they graduated, Moran and Rowan had become an accomplished team, an artist and a muse paired by the academy by virtue of their extraordinary compatibility. In spite of their mutual attraction, Rowan was firmly opposed to having sex as a girl. Not surprisingly, her resistance to his advances only encouraged Moran.

After graduating, they were recruited together as protégés of a powerful Ardean psychic who taught them a few things even the academy remained ignorant of. The revelation of a common foundation for antagonistic schools of magic, which played a part in the feud between their houses, helped Rowan overcome the last remnants of natural enmity with Moran. Not that she was any more inclined to become her former nemesis’s lover. Rowan and Moran devoted themselves to their mentor campaign against a wizard, a man who had mastered conjury, magery and sorcery and was determined to establish a new order in which most people would be subordinate to those more evolved; psychics like himself. A former colleague of the Athean wizard, their mentor was firmly opposed to the wizard’s radical agenda. Several times over the next ten years, the couple was forced to engage their mentor’s adversary or his agents. In their most climactic battle, Moran and Rowan were forced to pool their resources as an artist and a muse to an exceptional degree to survive an engagement with their mentor’s nemesis.

The intimacy engendered by the conflict burned away the remaining obstacles between them, causing Rowan to finally admit and surrender to her attraction to Moran. In that one moment of weakness, she conceived Morgan. Not that she realized this until her father tried to break her curse. Even though she was already committed to spending the rest of her life as a woman, Roman’s betrayal was the true death blow for Rohan. Moran and Rowan conspired to split Morgan between them, obscuring the lineage of daughter and son to permit them to grow up as a normal boy and girl. They were both twenty-seven by this point. Moran simply claimed his son as a courtesan’s gift, named him his heir and devoted himself to raising and training him. Rowan’s mentor, a widowed man with several children, offered to become her patron and take her into his household. Because a muse was technically a courtesan, her children were considered legitimate, if embarrassing, additions to her patron’s line. As her mother’s firstborn daughter, Morgan was the legal heir to her mother’s mantle, an honor she would eagerly have passed on if she had any younger sisters.

Clippings

History is riddled with tales of individuals burdened by family curses. Some are famous, others are infamous, but often a family endeavored to keep such curses a secret. Roan had not been content to simply hide the family curse. He, or sometimes she as the curse would have it, had sought a cure even at the cost of his immortality. Roan had become involved with two lovers, a man and a woman, and the only hope Roan had of a future with them was to reveal the curse—and the double life that came with it—to them and hope they would share her, if the truth did not drive one or both of them away. Rather than risk losing everything because of the curse, Roan resolved to sacrifice one life to pursue happiness in the other. As was typical of such curses, there was no cure, but Roan was willing to pay the price to break the curse. The individual who proposed the extreme solution split Roan into separate, male and female incarnations. Unfortunately, Roan had been pregnant and the child was affected by the cure as well. Roan’s daughter was split in the womb, her other half becoming her twin brother. When the couplet was born, the girl remained with her mother and Roan sent the boy away with her other half acting as his father. In spite of the decision to raise the children separately, they were both named Morgan as they would always be incarnations of the same soul. Roan had been born in the Line of Arduin of the House of Avon, so his son became Morgan Av Arduin. Roan had married into the Line of Arden of the House of Avon, to the true father of Morgan, so her daughter became Morgan Av Arden. By coincidence, the two encounter each other at the academy—or by deliberate arrangement, are engaged and introduced to one another as teenagers.

An eternal moment, bridging the beginning and end, now. A dragon’s initiation is implicit in their union, a manifestation of power that devours the embodiment of the self. At the same time it is a phoenix’s initiation, a devouring of the self by a manifestation of power. The first is a consummation, a predator consuming its prey and assuming its form. The second is a consummation, consumption and rebirth in the flames. A dragon initiation does not specify the predator manifested, nor the method of consumption. A phoenix initiation can be prompted by the passionate embrace of death. A woman is often a man’s prey, his seduction never too far removed from the hunting stalk. Their union is unquestionably a passionate, mortal embrace. Thus, he is a projection of her, the embodiment of the one predator she fears and admires most. As the manifestation of her power, he is the key to unlocking her potential. As for how he devours her, he is flesh born of spirit—her spirit—the consummation of their union would trigger the consumption of her flesh by that spirit. Dawn would disintegrate and Dusk would take her form. Or, more accurately, Dusk would discorporate at the climax of their passion, causing Dawn’s discorporation, and they would be incorporated together in her form. She would inherit his form as her alt.

The revised approach supports the childhood influence of the demon nemesis. It presents the option of a coital fusion that results in Morgan being mistaken for a demon. Emerging from the fusion in a gestalt form, an androgynous default form in the absence of asserting either sex, she possessed the one physical characteristic useful for identifying demons or angels from humans. Further examination would reveal that she was not a demon or angel, and extensive testing would reveal that she was immortal. That immortality would principally be due to the powers of regeneration she possessed as a polymorph, though the depths of her psychic potential held other resources against death. In flight from the authorities, Morgan is forced to slip into the underworld to escape capture and sort out what has happened to her. At that point, she would draw the attention of the cult that would introduce her demon nemesis, through whom she would come into her full powers. The wager can unfold in the midst of this, as part of what helps Morgan realize her potential. Her nemesis could present Morgan with a way to end her existence, but Morgan realizes Morduin’s true intentions in the midst of being devoured, unconsciously resurrecting the magic that split her in the womb in her struggle to thwart him. As her personal nemesis, the demon is actually a ghost—the ghost of an entity born of a fatal fusion of its parents that grew to challenge the gods. Passing herself off as one of their immortal offspring, she was instrumental in ending the age of gods, and was virtually annihilated for it. She is the dark phoenix to Morgan’s phoenix.

As is obvious in the abstract of Thrice Cursed, Morgan has evolved into an overly complex character. Many of the same possibilities can be explored starting from a more modest foundation. A way to mute her back story a little requires limiting her to being the child of feuding houses, uncertain of her paternity, with her mother’s patron for a father figure and mentor, training as a courtesan due to her grandmother’s influence prompting the rebellious exploits and misadventures that establish her familiarity with the ruins and association with the underworld, with those last two combining in her exploiting her talents as a guide to the ruins to pursue a life of adventure. The party that hires her would include the paladin on a mission to probe the ruins. That, in turn, prompts the rival immortals to attempt to assassinate her, provoking the paladin into inadvertently sacrificing himself to save her. Most of Hunger and Thirst can proceed from there.

Influences

Of all the options explored to establish the main character, the simplest starts with a phoenix familiar. In some legends, phoenixes have the ability to shape-shift and are capable of parthenogenic rebirth. Thus, the phoenix familiar of the Magus adopted human form on some mission for its master, during which he was seduced by a courtesan who hoped he would give her a favored daughter. The nature of that intimacy triggered a parthenogenic inception, but a human male was not a suitable vessel for the full potential of a phoenix, so the phoenix reflexively turned female and conceived a daughter to compliment the son. The division ensured the children would be born human, while imposing human limits on the phoenix. Ironically, the two children were both given the name Morgan. The boy was named for his father, and the phoenix passed on the name she had used to her daughter, having adopted a different alias, Maureen, to establish herself as a courtesan once she realized she was trapped in her human guise. In spite of these minor problems, their lives proceeded pleasantly for seven years when the girl was abducted and offered as a sacrifice to a demon. The phoenix risked everything to come to her daughter's rescue. Seeing no other option, the phoenix tricked the demon into possessing her and then sacrificed herself to protect her offspring. The demon attempted to capture her soul and inadvertently became trapped in the split between the children's psyches, until they encountered each other and become lovers. Following the death of the phoenix, the girl became a ward of the goddess and both children developed the power of regeneration, and gained access to some of their psychic potential, losing the ability to learn magic in the process. Their psychic abilities qualified them to study as muse-initiates at the Academy, where they first met each other and adopted the nicknames "Logan" and "Morgan" to eliminate confusion over their shared name.

In the wake of Maureen's death, the only individual to know the truth of Logan and Morgan's origins was the phoenix's former master, Alvin, the Magus. She had informed her master of her predicament as soon as she had been able, and he had helped establish her in her new life. Not surprisingly, he took a paternal interest in her children. He established that the two were capable of miraculous things if they worked together—which he explained to them as the result of being soul mates. Of course he did not explain that he meant that in the same way two people sharing a dorm might be called room mates. Thus, Alvin inadvertently encouraged them to become lovers. It took a significant amount of time for them to progress to total intercourse, but their intimacy presented the demon inside them with the possibility of escape, and its struggles set off Morgan's nightmares. Inevitably, the demon escaped, stealing Logan's body and leaving him trapped in Morgan, setting the events of this first book in motion. The nightmares gave Morgan a place to begin her mission to retrieve Logan's body. However, her interest in the ruins brought her to the attention of those who sought dominion over them.

The focus of the story is Morgan's transformation into a vampire-were-tiger. It opens with the events that bring her to the attention of her sires and ends with her exposing herself to the sun. That leaves her transformation as the main focus of the plot. The movement of the plot takes her from the City of Avon to the heart of Ruin's Deep, moving from a human community to the center of vampire and were communities. The most significant part of the story unfolds during her arduous turning, presenting a space where she is presented with the decision forced upon her and the outcome of her transformation. It is also a time when she faces the beginning of her indoctrination into the mysteries of weres and vampires. It is plausible to have her turning complete prior to her escape, assuming that she could be cured at any time up to the point where she feeds, in which case more emphasis can be placed on exploring her introduction to the immortal clans. There, we can witness the modification of the wager, where Morgan becomes the personification of Ruin's Deep. Possession of the lost city could only be achieved through possession of Morgan, upon whom the mantle of authority rested until another conquered her.

This approach also opens a window for Morgan to question the impact her transformation has on her mission. Most importantly, her turning might even occur prior to her admission to Ruin's Deep. Thus, it is possible to give the plot significantly greater depth. Obviously, that would present two stages in Morgan's evolution, her initial fusion of were and vampire natures, and the acceleration of the refinement of those natures when she confronts the dawn. It is even possible that her flight to the sanctuary of the goddess is based on a misunderstanding, an obscure belief that vampirism can be undone on sacred ground—when in fact there is simply a rite that can be conducted on sacred ground that allows a vampire to revert to a dormant state closely approximating mortal existence. Morgan's motivation ultimately would be to sustain her humanity, which would make feeding on human prey her breaking point, the point past which she can not find redemption. So, instead of trying to prevent her transformation, she moves in the pursuit of redemption with the hope of returning to her original life. She strives to control her impulses, feeding on animal prey—which is made easier by virtue of her tiger aspect.

When the opportunity comes, when she discovers the possibility of a cure, she attempts to reach the sanctuary only to be waylaid by a band of rogues. During that fight, she loses control of herself and ends up feeding on her assailants, recovering from the euphoria of feeding on human prey in the depths of the sacred forest, or on the cliffs overlooking the ocean, but ultimately one step away from where she will die. Even employing the phoenix origin of Morgan, the prospect of snatching the future incarnation of Morgan to host the refined ember remains viable. At the time of her transformation, Morgan was already a fusion of Logan and Morgan, and the embodiment of Morgan's masculinity withheld from her by the demon—waiting to serve as a catalyst for turning Morgan into the demonic-angelic singular duality. If "Morganna" is drawn into the story, it will be because it serves to feature the refinement of Morgan's hybrid nature, give substance and meaning to Morgan's sacrifice, and fully merge the psyches of Logan and Morgan. Given that, the ocean *was* featured in her "arrival" after Morgan is consumed in the fire of her absolution, reduced in a couple of breaths to a single ember that floats out on the breeze to be cast upon the waves. Her witness, Logan, would approach the site of her immolation and look out upon the ocean to see Morganna materialize around the ember and fall into the water.

Looking back to one of the oldest influences on the evolution of this character, the first step in her life of adventure was the tragic death of her lover. That element survived as the tragic theft of her lover's body. However, the plot evolved to feature her death and rebirth, diminishing the prospects of a quest to recover the lover's body. So, once again the original impulse proves to be correct.

Her bloody metamorphosis

Her trial and sentence

Her reprieve

Her shady past

Her appeals

Her paramours

Her death

Her unexpected rebirth

Her hunger and thirst

Her hope and despair

Her destruction