

Celestina Silvenfare
Book One: The Legend Begins©
by Kelly Lynne

Chapter One

The late evening sky appeared to undulate as streaks of lightning arced and danced across the horizon. The enthralling light show was quickly followed by a deafening cacophony of cascading thunder so intense it shook the castle walls, rattling doors and windows and reverberating down to the foundation of the many-tiered, multi-leveled keep. The angry sea that lined the western perimeter of the immense compound swelled, spewing frothy foam onto the rocky cliff face that supported the stronghold known as Castle Silvenfare. The storm had blown in swiftly from the northwest and seemed to be building in intensity as the evening progressed, somehow mirroring the rising alarm that was palpable among the castle residents.

“The baby’s coming this very night,” Myrtle said. She was not speaking to anyone in particular since she was quite alone at the moment, but if someone were listening, they would detect an anxious quality to her spoken voice, a nervousness that matched perfectly with her current state-of-mind. Perhaps it was the uneasiness she was feeling that led her to speak rather than think those words, as if saying them out loud might somehow shake off the foreboding feeling that was settling upon her, causing her to act in ways that were far from normal for the nearly unflappable woman.

She was gathering fresh linens and towels in preparation for the delivery when the realization of what she might soon lose came crashing down on her. She would be no good to anyone if she completely lost her composure, so she took a moment to collect her thoughts and calm her nerves. She continued with her spoken monologue hoping it might distract her from the increasingly disturbing thoughts churning through her mind.

“Everything is going to be okay. The babe's wanting to come out a little early, that's all. Carrianna will wake up and everything will go right back to the way it was before...”

Myrtle caught herself before she could finish the thought. What had happened to her niece was unspeakable and she was realizing that her efforts to make herself feel better were just making her feel that much worse. The truth was their lives were never going to be the same and she no longer believed Carrianna was going to be all right. The poor girl had been in a comatose state for the entire pregnancy and was hardly in any condition to deliver a baby.

Renewed fear for Carrianna and her unborn child set Myrtle's heart to pounding wildly in her chest. The slightly round, pleasantly featured woman struggled hard to collect herself once more. A few wisps of her long reddish-brown hair had fallen free of the casual loose bun she typically wore, so she stopped for a moment, removed the hairpins holding the bun in place, and let it fall completely down. She took several long, deep breaths hoping to give herself a quick break from the non-stop "*what if*" scenarios that had been running rampant through her mind for the last few hours.

She peeked at her reflection in a nearby mirror to see what all the tension had done to her appearance. She noticed immediately that the stress had chased away the usual twinkle in her dark green eyes. Her normally cheerful expression had been replaced with a mask of worry and fear. She certainly wouldn't want Carrianna to awaken and see her in such a state, so she made a concerted effort to compose herself and improve her appearance.

Myrtle's only comfort at the moment was the knowledge that she and her three sisters were all powerful elemental sorceresses, gifted with both the ability to harness and wield the elements of nature and the ability to work powerful sorcery to protect those they held dear. And yet, even with all their talent, training, and skills, Myrtle knew all too well that they did not have the power over life and death, and therefore, neither she nor any of her formidable sisters could guarantee their niece or her baby would survive this night.

Myrtle ran her fingers through her long thick hair and worked to twist and sweep it back up into a bun. As she busied herself with this task, she flashed back to memories of the many evenings she and Carrianna had spent talking, laughing, and planning for the girl's future. Many of their conversations centered around Carrianna's hopes and dreams, of her plans to travel the realm, and of her desire to learn more about her ancestry on her father's side. He was of the elven race and events that occurred prior to Carrianna's birth had led to his disappearance. Her father's whereabouts were unknown, but Carrianna often spoke of wanting to someday reunite with him; though given her present situation, Myrtle feared the girl's dreams may never come to pass.

Carrianna's mother, Fayrhetta, died tragically while giving birth to Carrianna a little over 18 years ago, leaving Myrtle and her three other sisters as the only close family Carrianna had ever known. The bond between Myrtle and Carrianna was more like mother and daughter than aunt and niece, and the thought of losing her filled Myrtle with renewed dread. Once again she forced herself to put her fears aside and focus back to the task at hand. She finished gathering the items she needed and quickly headed back to Carrianna's bedchamber.

Just as another round of lightning lit up the sky, Myrtle walked in to Carrianna's room bearing her load of clean linens. Her younger sister, Bonnie, was already inside, tending to

Carrianna, along with Dollie, the oldest of the four living sisters, who was briskly walking back-and-forth across the room and evidently causing her sister unnecessary aggravation.

“Myrtle, thank the Mother Goddess you’ve returned,” said Bonnie. “Dollie is wearing a trench in the floor with her nervous pacing and if she barks one more order at me I won’t be responsible for what happens next.”

“Come now, sisters, we’ve too much to worry about to have the two of you at each other’s throats,” Myrtle scolded.

“Of course, you’re right, Sister, forgive me,” Bonnie said, though Myrtle could clearly read the look on Bonnie’s face as one of irritation rather than capitulation.

Myrtle loved and admired each of her sisters, not just for their varied strengths, but also for their unique and endearing personalities. She knew that if the circumstances weren’t so dire, Bonnie would be her typical light-hearted and humorous self. Myrtle took a moment to appreciate her sister and all she had done to prepare them for this evening. There was much to admire about Bonnie, including her appearance. She was taller and thinner than Myrtle, and she fashioned her jet-black hair short, but very sassy, mirroring her usual demeanor perfectly. The overall effect enhanced her prominent cheekbones and dark blue eyes, further adding to her natural beauty and regal appearance.

Myrtle knew her sisters were feeling the same stress she was feeling, perhaps Bonnie more so than any of them, given her presage gift and the fact that she had predicted much of what had led up to this evening. Aside from her elemental and sorcerers powers, Bonnie was also a very gifted oracle and had spent the past several years charting and cataloging signs of the ancient prophecy known throughout Meréllier as *The Nevrium Prophecy*. Myrtle listened as Bonnie recited the words to the prophecy aloud; a habit she had begun when they first learned that Carrianna was pregnant following the brutal attack that resulted in her current mental and physical state.

“In a time when the land is in unrest and the ruling class leads with head and mind over heart and grace,

A great evil will seize the opportunity to rise up and slowly spread throughout the realm.

But hope will appear in the form of a savior.

Look then, on the eve of a twin moon eclipse, from a death and birth twice visited on an ancient bloodline,

For a female child will be born as the prophesied savior of the land and all the races.

Her journey will be fraught with danger, and much will be asked of her to do,

Thus she will be gifted with tremendous powers and many allies will rally to her cause.

Let those with eyes to see, recognize her coming and lend her aid.

But be warned.

For should the feminine influence overreach, then evil may yet prevail in ways unforeseen.

Mend the imbalance to restore peace;

Fail...and the land and all the races will suffer an unimaginable fate.”

For the past several hundred years, those loyal to preserving the teachings of *The Pantheants*, the authors of *The Nevrium Prophecy*, had pledged their lives in service to keeping watch and waiting for indications that the prophecy was unfolding. Prior to the dire circumstances of this evening, many signs had already appeared, and those true to *The Pantheants'* teachings had known for some time that the land was out of balance and had been for many years. There was growing mistrust among all the races, leading to fighting and more segregation between the humans and the ancient races, putting further strain on the entire realm.

Bonnie had charted all of the earlier indications that the prophecy was unfolding, but the most recent sign, the double-eclipse of the twin moons, had actually occurred earlier in the evening and was one of the events that had put the sisters on high alert. Bonnie was rarely, if ever, wrong when it came to her presaging gift, so the sisters were taking no chances with the evening's preparations.

The Nevrium Prophecy existed to warn the inhabitants of Meréllier to not repeat past mistakes that led to horrible consequences nearly one thousand years prior. Bonnie had shared with her sisters her burgeoning belief that Carrianna's pregnancy was a part of the prophecy, which meant there was a good chance they could well be headed for a rough and devastating night. However, if their niece's child was the prophesied savior, the result of the evening's

trials could set in motion a series of events that would revolutionize the entire realm, restoring much needed peace between all the races.

“How’s our girl been, Dollie?” Myrtle asked, still hopeful that Carrianna would wake up at any moment.

“The same, but maybe that’s a blessing,” said Dollie. “She’ll need all our focus and energy to get her and the baby through the birth, though if you ask me, it’s been increasingly apparent that she’s fighting harder to let go of rather than stay in this world. And given what she’s already endured in her short life, I fear the former might well be the case.”

Myrtle hated to admit that Dollie was right because it would mean giving up on Carrianna and she just wasn’t ready to do that yet. She and her sisters were no strangers to heartache, or even to the eerily similar circumstances they found themselves immersed in this evening. When Fayrhetta died after giving birth to Carrianna, she and her sisters were understandably consumed with grief over the tragedy and thoughts of the prophecy never entered their minds. Now it occurred to Myrtle that there was something much more ill-omened about the tragic events of that day and she was dreading what the outcome of this evening would mean for her precious niece. She stared helplessly as her sisters continued their preparations.

“Bonnie, have you finished the *Spell of Protection* to encircle Carrianna?” asked Dollie.

Dollie was as fierce, strong, and powerful a woman as could be found anywhere throughout Meréllier and her reputation alone kept many foes away from the sister’s front gates. Her actions were always motivated by love, but Dollie was by far the most imposing personality of the four sisters, as well as a natural leader. It didn’t hurt her intimidation factor that she stood at a height of 6’2”, or that she kept her flowing mane of grayish-black curls slightly disheveled and askew so as to add a couple of additional inches to her impressive height. Many had sworn to have seen her dark brown eyes turn a crimson red when her ire was up, and given her ability to wield the element of fire, it was likely the case.

When Bonnie didn’t answer Dollie immediately, Myrtle thought for sure her sister would launch a litany of choice words at her sister, but thankfully she seemed to realize Bonnie was still focused on her task. Although typically very impatient, Dollie gave her sister the time she needed to work her powerful magic.

After a few more minutes Bonnie answered. “I’ve closed the circle, positioned the moonstones, and finished the spell. She’s as safe as I can make her at the moment.”

Bonnie looked down at Carrianna who was still in the comatose state she had existed in for the past several months. “I’d prefer it if she was awake and laughing at my bad jokes, but I haven’t heard her laugh in a very long time, and that is a tough thing to think about when your

heart holds so much love for a person. I need Doodle to hurry back so we can add her energy to the spell to keep it in tact through the birth.”

As if on cue, Doodle burst through the door with the remaining supplies. She closed the door behind her and secured the latch. She was the youngest of the Silvenfare sisters, and many would argue the most attractive. Doodle had always exuded class and elegance for as long as Myrtle could remember. From her playful, bobbed hair style and light blue eyes to the way she always made her attire look so much more refined and fashionable than everyone else, Doodle was always turning heads and getting noticed wherever they went. That fact had always been somewhat irritating to Myrtle and her sisters, but her feminine charms were also very useful in many situations, so mostly they let it pass, though they often enjoyed teasing her about it during happier times.

The mood in the room had grown quite somber and by this point each of the sisters sensed that they were about to face much more than a premature birth during the night ahead. Evil did exist in the land, and apathy among many of the inhabitants had allowed it to flourish. There were some in the realm who would see harm done this night in an attempt to thwart the prophecy and allow the land to fall into ruin. The sisters could not be certain they were in danger of a direct attack on the castle, but they were taking no chances and had been making preparations accordingly.

A sudden banging and scratching on the door startled all four of the sisters, until Myrtle realized they had left Humphrey, the gentlest of giant grizzly bears, though fierce when the situation called for it, out in the hall. She rushed to let him in, knowing he would not be silent unless he was by their sides, and realizing also they might all be safer with him in the room.

Once inside, Humphrey immediately shuffled over to Carrianna’s bedside, sniffed at her sweat-soaked face and began keening. Though heartbreaking to hear, the sound from the giant bear actually caused a reaction in Carrianna. The sisters all rushed to her side to see if she might open her eyes.

“I think Humphrey might have brought her out of it,” said Bonnie, suddenly hopeful. “It would sure be better for all of us if she were awake for the birth.”

Just as Bonnie finished speaking, Carrianna’s eyes began to flutter open and she whispered Humphrey’s name.

“Thanks be to the Mother Goddess, it’s a miracle,” cried Myrtle.

Dollie, ever the leader, immediately resumed barking orders. “Don’t just stand around gawking, someone get the girl some water and wipe her brow.” Turning toward her niece she said, “Carrianna, girl, can you hear me?”

“Yes, Auntie,” Carrianna responded, though weakly. Carrianna had always been a delicate child, small for her age though strikingly beautiful, and elf-like in her appearance, which made sense given her half-elven heritage. Her face was fair and unblemished, and at times seemed ghostly set against her raven-colored hair and sky blue eyes. Her hair ran almost the length of her back, much like Myrtle’s, who had been a constant presence at Carrianna’s bedside since the girl had been attacked, stroking and brushing the girls hair, all-the-while praying for her to regain consciousness.

“Oh, Carrianna, we never thought you’d wake again,” cooed Myrtle. “It’s good to see those beautiful eyes. How are you feelin’ darlin’?”

“Lots of pain,” she managed to say. “Why am I in so much pain?”

Doodle stepped in to try and explain. “You may not remember the last several months because you’ve been unconscious for most of it, but I don’t want you to worry about what you can and can’t remember because that’s not what’s important right now. You’re in pain because you are about to give birth, and we could really use your help to deliver this child.”

“A child?! What child? I don’t understand. I can’t be giving birth. This doesn’t make any sense!”

Myrtle could tell that Carrianna was beginning to panic, and as a mercy she placed a rose quartz on Carrianna’s forehead to help calm the girl. The stone had an immediate effect and Doodle was able to continue.

“Carrianna, the babe is two months early by our calculations, so it’s going to take all of us, including Humphrey, to get you and your baby through this unharmed. I’m sorry you had to come back to so much unpleasantness, but now that you’re awake, it just might make the difference for you both. Can you try and stay with us?”

“Yes, Auntie,” she replied.

“That’s my good girl,” said Myrtle as she stepped back in to take over at Carrianna’s side. She felt as though her heart might shatter in a million pieces seeing Carrianna like this and knowing what she had been through, but she needed to soldier on, for the sake of the girl and her baby. “We’ll explain everything once we’re through this night, but right now I need you to hang in there and push when Bonnie tells us it’s time.”

Myrtle felt it was nothing short of a miracle that Carrianna was awake, and she began feeling a little lighter and more hopeful as she and her sisters finished their preparations. She even dared to think that perhaps all this talk of threats and danger had been unwarranted, so she relaxed a bit and actually began to look forward to the delivery and to meeting the newest member of the Silvenfare clan.

Bonnie signaled to Myrtle that the baby's head was crowning and that Carrianna needed to push. But just as Myrtle turned back to Carrianna to begin coaching the girl through the rest of the birthing process, a tremendous alarm sounded, alerting the sisters to an attack on the castle.

Based on Bonnie's predictions about the prophecy, the sisters had already prepared for a possible assault on the castle. They had spent the past several months setting alerts, erecting barricades, and casting magical traps as part of an initial defensive action. Those precautions would give them much needed time to mount a counter-attack once they knew what they were up against.

There were few in the realm unaware of the sisters' reputation for being a formidable team of elemental sorceresses, and so it would take a strong foe indeed to dare such an attack. The sisters were very skilled at their craft and deadly effective when necessary, especially when they had so much to protect.

"Myrtle, stay with Carrianna and do what you can to deliver the baby," instructed Dollie. Turning to Doodle she asked, "Can you tell us what's out there?"

Doodle drew forth her scrying crystal and waved her right hand over it while saying a brief chant. An image of the castle perimeter appeared above the crystal.

"I see hundreds of flying creatures approaching from the northeast. They're not overly large in size, so I suspect many of those will be taken out by our initial defenses."

Just then the night sky lit up with several mini-explosions, followed by ear-piercing screeches from the injured and dying creatures. In Doodle's crystal, she could see there were just too many of the dreaded things for many not to make it through to the interior of the castle walls.

"Prepare for battle, Sisters!" she cried.

As well as being very skilled at hand-to-hand combat and having a hundred or so magical tricks up their sleeves, each of the sisters is attuned to one of the four elements of nature, the creative energies of the universe. Dollie wields fire, including flame, lava, smoke, and ash; Myrtle wields earth, including soil, rock, metal, and plant-life; Bonnie wields water, including torrents of rain, flood waters, steam, and water spouts; and Doodle wields air, including high winds, tornadoes, lightning, and atmospheric changes.

The sisters' typical attire includes robes of different colors to further signify their connection with their elements. Dollie's is red, Myrtle's is green, Bonnie's is blue, and Doodle's is yellow. With the exception of Myrtle, who prefers a long skirt but still manages to be very agile, they also wear black leather leggings so they can maneuver with ease in the event that physical combat becomes necessary. The robes are designed to accommodate several magical

tools and accessories to complement each of the sisters' unique gifts, allowing them to be ready for just about anyone or anything they encounter.

Within a few minutes of the initial alarm, the first of the creatures entered the room from the window closest to Dollie. As she took a moment to assess what they were dealing with, the hideous winged creature morphed into a goblin-like beast standing at least five feet in height, brandishing razor-sharp fangs and talons, and looking every bit like a living nightmare. Wasting no time, the elemental sorceress hurled a ball of molten lava, engulfing the creature from its grotesque head to its long, thrashing tail. In agony, the beast turned and headed for the window, taking with it two more of its unfortunate brethren before they could morph and cause any real trouble.

"Well there won't be much work for us to do if they keep taking one another out," cackled Dollie.

On the opposite side of the room, Bonnie waited until a few of the creatures had finished morphing and then called forth a water spout, sucking up the lot of them and sending them flying back out the same window they dared enter. She then conjured a hailstorm outside the room to take out more of the bat-like things before they could fly through the window and overwhelm the sisters.

Humphrey joined the fray as more and more of the flying creatures, with their sheer numbers, began penetrating the sisters' defenses and morphing at incredible speed. Whether flying or walking, the beasts proved no match for Humphrey, and he eradicated a dozen without a single scratch to his furry hide. Any that made it past Humphrey were then zapped and obliterated by Bonnie's *Spell of Protection*, but it was causing the spell to weaken at a more rapid pace. Additionally, the close quarters was making it more difficult for the sisters to fight off the monsters without causing possible harm to Carrianna and the unborn child.

While her sisters were engaged in battle, Myrtle soothed and coaxed Carrianna through the birthing process, totally blocking out any of the fray that was happening around them. "You're doing so well, Carrianna, we're almost done," she coached.

Meanwhile, Doodle had begun to notice that though the creatures were many in number, they were defeated quite easily. That led her to wonder if perhaps the attack was intended to distract them, and if so, did that mean something far more sinister was trying to circumvent their defenses and get to Carrianna? Quickly she signaled to Dollie and Bonnie and they formed a line of retreat back to within the spell protected area. Once they were safely within the spell area, Dollie called forth a wave of fire to rid the room of any remaining creatures. As a result of her onslaught, the room was suddenly devoid of a single living creature. The effect cast an eerie silence that left the sisters feeling a bit uneasy.

As the battle-weary siblings turned their attention back to Myrtle, Carrianna, and the emerging child, Carrianna screamed in exertion and pain, making a brave effort to push one last time. With tears streaming down her face, she looked intently at her Aunt Myrtle and said, "I remember what happened, Auntie. It was so horrible. How could he do that to me? He was supposed to be good..."

As Carrianna's voice trailed off, her eyes moved away from Myrtle's face and settled on a spot just above her beloved aunt's head. She screamed aloud once more, but this time the sound was unmistakably from fear, rather than pain. Then, mercifully, she fell quiet and drifted back into unconsciousness. Myrtle had turned her attention to the newborn, wrapping the tiny bundle in a blanket and holding it close while it cried for the first time. But as Carrianna fell silent, so, too, did her little infant.

"What in the name of Pandora's pajamas is happening here?" asked Dollie.

Without receiving an explanation, the sisters were suddenly inundated with a bright light that permeated the room, temporarily blinding and immobilizing them. Time seemed to stand still and the sisters were helpless to take action or make any move whatsoever.

After what seemed like an eternity, the room began to clear and the sisters snapped out of their "mental fog" created by the bright light. Immediately they began to assess the situation. Each of them was a bit confused, but hyper-alert, wondering if they were still under attack.

Looking around they saw no evidence of anything out of the ordinary. None of the creatures remained, in fact there were not even any corpses left to show proof of the battle that had just ensued minutes earlier. Each of the sisters, along with Humphrey, was alive and well, having suffered no apparent injury and the newborn was resting quietly in Myrtle's protective embrace.

Even so, none of them could shake the feeling that something sinister had just been in the room, something other than the horrible goblin-like creatures. They all felt a sudden chill and Dollie became convinced that something else had in fact happened. Although she couldn't be sure of exactly what it was at the moment, she had ways of getting to the truth and whoever or whatever was responsible would pay dearly.

A heart-wrenching cry went out and the sisters snapped their attention back to Myrtle who was standing over Carrianna's lifeless body. At some point after the bright light had flooded the room, Carrianna had left this world without ever having seen or held her newborn baby girl.

Humphrey lumbered over and nosed at Carrianna's arm, wanting the girl to reach out and scratch him on the head in her special way...but her arm lay motionless. When he didn't get a reaction, he sat back on his haunches and began whimpering. The sound he made was

the most pitiful noise the sisters had ever heard him make. It was almost more than they could stand. They did their best to comfort him and each other, but their grief was too raw and their pain too fresh to do anything more than cling to one another and cry stinging tears of loss.

Myrtle, who was still holding the baby, realized she would need to be strong in this moment for all of them if they were going to get through this horrible night. She handed the baby to Bonnie and spoke to her sisters gently but firmly.

“I know this all seems senseless and horrible, especially after having gone through it before those many years ago with our sweet sister. But Carrianna is back with her mother now and no longer suffering the pains of this world. She endured too much heartache in her short life, and although she’ll never know her tiny babe in this lifetime, we can try and make it right, somehow.

“I’ll not allow Carrianna’s death, or my sister’s before her, to be for naught. If Carrianna and her babe are in fact a part of the prophecy, then I pledge to do everything in my power to see it fulfilled, and to punish those that have done or will do harm to those we love. There is more that went on here this evening than we know right now, but we will have the truth of it one day. And when we do, I swear before the Mother Goddess herself, we will see justice done.”

Myrtle’s sisters stared at her in awe. What she said was completely out of character for her, but they did not doubt her words or her conviction for a second. They stood back as Myrtle turned to Carrianna and whispered a gentle goodbye in the girl’s ear. She then picked up a brush from the bedside table and brushed the girl’s long hair for the last time. Folding Carrianna’s arms and hands over her chest, she crafted a single white calla lily from thin air and laid it next to the girl’s now still heart. When she was done, she motioned for each of her sisters to come forward and say their goodbyes.

Dollie, who was usually the one who could be counted on for strength and courage in any situation, was at a total loss. Doodle wrapped her arm around her sister letting her know she understood and said what she knew Dollie could not.

“Goodbye for now sweet niece, but not forever. We’ll all be reunited again when the Mother Goddess calls us home. We’ll take excellent care of this little babe and not a day will go by that we won’t tell her how much she is loved and how proud her momma is of her. She’s a Silvenfare woman and her legacy is just beginning. Rest well knowing she will have the best we can provide.”

Buoyed by her sister’s support, Dollie removed her trademark lava stone necklace and wrapped it around Carrianna’s hands before kissing the girl gently on the forehead. Sensing she was about to lose control again, she turned away and sought comfort again from her sister.

Doodle embraced Dollie but was still able to reach down and stroke her niece's now peaceful face before saying her final goodbye.

Still holding the baby, Bonnie sat down on the edge of Carrianna's bed and motioned for Humphrey to come closer. The great grizzly bear was still visibly distraught, but did as Bonnie instructed. He sniffed the baby and somehow recognized that the little pink wrinkled creature was a part of Carrianna and he snorted his approval. Bonnie snipped a lock of Carrianna's hair and removed the emerald ring from the girl's finger that had belonged to her mother, Fayrhetta, to put in safekeeping for when the child reached an age to understand what had happened to her mother. She then whispered her final goodbye and signaled to Myrtle that she was ready to let Carrianna go to her final rest.

The sisters and Humphrey surrounded Carrianna's bedside and Myrtle began to chant and wave her arms over the girl's motionless body. They all knew Carrianna's spirit had moved on, but they needed to provide her physical body with a proper resting place. Starting at her feet, Myrtle wielded her elemental power to envelop Carrianna in a perfect crystal encasement.

Just as she finished, the dawn broke and early morning sunlight poured into the room, illuminating the crystal casket and sending a cascade of prismatic rainbows dancing around the room. The beauty of the moment provided a brief respite from their grief, and helped the sisters to realize that when they had rested, they would be able to find the strength they needed to bury Carrianna alongside her mother in the castle courtyard within the grove of weeping cherry trees.