

# Silvit

## Book One

# First World

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To Béa and Kaylie

### *Three Springs Lake (Paul)*

Paul noticed the fog in the dawn light, just before the sun crested above the hill on the other side of the lake. It had appeared suddenly, drifting strangely from the bank toward the water rather than the reverse. Paul had come many times early morning at the lake this past month, to jog or fish, and he had never seen fog before. Not during these hot and dry days of midsummer.

He was on the west bank, seating among the thick bushes and the tall trees of the wood that made the water cooler on this side of the lake. As his father had told him many years ago, the fishes liked it, and Paul was rarely coming back empty handed at home.

The fog was on the opposite bank, in the area near one of the three springs that gives the lake its name. Suddenly he noticed someone walking out of the mist. It was a short man wearing a strange long and dark coat with white dust on it. He looked around slowly, like if he was checking if there was anybody watching him. There was something odd and furtive about him that made Paul think about the stories.

The lake was one of Paul's favorite spots. It was only a 20-minute walk from his parents' vacation house in the old Breton seaside resort of Port-Serrac, and yet far and isolated enough from the tourist crowds. The lake was nestled in a long narrow vale enclosed between a wood in the west and a moor in the east. Port-Serrac was beyond the small hill at the south end of the lake. There were plenty of tourists in town during the summer, but they were mostly interested in the yachting harbor, the rocky coves with the sandy beaches and the old medieval castle. Few of them even knew there was a lake nearby, and even less came.

But Paul suspected that another reason for the tranquility at the lake was because the place was surrounded by a halo of mystery. The old people talked about korrigans and witches seen on the banks of the lake the nights of the full moon. In some of the tourist books he had read stories from the past about people disappearing; about strange noises, mysterious tracks, and unexplained lights. In public, people were laughing at the rumors... But not many locals were coming by the lake after dusk or before dawn. But it was dawn now, so he should be fine.

As the strange man continued scanning the banks, Paul froze, trying to blend in the bushes. With his gray shorts and dark green T-shirt he knew he was not very visible. If he didn't move maybe the man would not notice him. Apparently the man did not spot him. Once he had checked that nobody was around, he walked toward the spring, went behind it and kneeled down.

Paul registered with surprise that the fog had disappeared. He took the small pair of binoculars he kept in his backpack, in case he wanted to watch the big herons that sometime came to the lake. The man was apparently digging with a large knife. He had a small bag near him that Paul had not noticed before. With the binoculars Paul could see that the man's clothes were really strange. Baggy pants, leather riding boots, and that heavy coat. It had some kind of white dust on it. The morning was not very warm yet, but still far too warm for such clothes.

After quite a long time digging, the stranger took the bag and dropped it at the bottom of the hole. Then he started to fill back the cavity. When that was done, he did his best to hide the disturbed soil, stomping on it and scattering twigs, dead grass and pebbles over it.

After a last look around, the man walk back at the front of the spring and took something from one of his coat pockets. It looked like a short shiny cigar. He put the object to his lips. A whistle. Paul could not hear anything from where his was, but he was sure it was some kind of whistle.

The fog started to appear again. It was really strange, it seems to come from the ground or the air itself, not from the lake, like Paul would expect from a normal fog. The bluish mist started to thicken. Suddenly the man turned around, as he had heard something. Paul looked in the same direction and saw what had caught the man's attention: a squirrel. He looked at the little animal for a few seconds. When he turned his binoculars back to the man he could not find him. He looked without the binoculars. The fog was now rather thick in the area and the man was probably hidden by it. Half a minute passed, nothing moved. The fog covered a limited surface, hiding only about four or five paces of the bank, but Paul could not see where the man had gone. Then the fog quickly dissipated again. The man was nowhere to be seen.

Paul scanned the opposite bank with and without the binoculars, but could not see anyone anywhere. That was strange. There was no path going anywhere on the other side of the lake, only the trail around the lake that connected with the exit road at the southern end, toward the town.

After spending several minutes looking for the man, Paul gave up, assuming he had somehow missed him passing through the south end, or the man had crossed the pathless rugged hill to the east. The fog was long gone now. The first rays of direct light were running down the moor on the bank in front of him, splattering the heather and gorse bushes with liquid gold. Paul did not pay attention: Driven by curiosity, he left his fishing pole and binoculars with his knack pack and trotted around the lake to get to the spring.

The spring was a tiny and almost silent dripping of water from a jumble of rocks. It traced a muddy course across the trail to drop straight into the lake. If Paul's recollection was correct, that specific spring was called the Fountain of the Fairies. Paul easily found the place behind the old tree where the strange visitor had buried his pouch. The stranger had probably stepped on the springs' tiny stream because one could still see wet tracks going toward the old tree. Something attracted Paul's attention. He crouched above one of the prints and looked at it closer. Frowning, he touched small whitish speckles around it. They dissolved immediately into a drop. Strange, if it wasn't summer and already warm, he would have almost sworn that it had been snow.

Paul moved at the place where the soil looked freshly turned, took a flat stone and started digging. The bag was well buried, about a forearm-length deep. It was a leather satchel, tightly closed with a small cord. Inside, there was an oilcloth wrapped around another leather pouch. It contained two things. The first was a roll of thick and rough-looking paper; a dozen pages filled with lines in an alphabet Paul had never seen before. The second was a whistle. It was about as long and as thick as a thumb. It had three small holes and was made or carved in a strange hard and dark red and shiny material that looked like wood but felt smoother and heavier, more like a stone.

Paul took the whistle to his lips. The material felt strangely cool, almost cold. He tried it.

No sound.

He tried several more times, placing his fingers on the different holes in turn. But no combination worked either.

After trying the last hole, he noticed that the strange bluish mist was rising once again above the trail; and rising fast.

He stood up and stepped toward the peculiar fog. From up close, it looked even bluer and darker than before. The thin tendrils moved slowly in the still air of the morning summer, like the fingers of a living being, reaching around blindly.

Paul touched one of them.

A brutal wave of cold engulfed him. It was like being shoved into a freezer. The fog was suddenly all around him, turning so blue and thick that he could not see his feet or his hands. A strange dizziness overcame him. He felt like falling. He stumbled forward losing his footing, falling head first on something hard.

Then everything went black.