



THE
BANSHEE
INITIATE

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The Banshee Initiate
by Kelly Matsuura

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“**T**hanks for lunch, Mrs. Xenakis,” Alyssa took her plate to the kitchen and helped my mum scrape the dirty plates into the rubbish. She was wearing a pair of my old jeans and I admired the way she filled them out as she bent over. She had the typical Greek girl body – all curves.

“Blayne! Bring your plates too, please.” Mum’s glare showed she had caught me perving at Alyssa. Oops.

“Sure, Mum.”

“Mrs. X, your moussaka is even better than my mum’s. Don’t tell her I said that!” Alyssa laughed. Always chatty, she had such a natural way with parents. I was a bit envious. Although outgoing at school, I never felt really comfortable talking to adults for some reason. Maybe I cared too much about what they thought of me.

Mum smiled and wiped her hands on a dish towel. In tight jeans and a t-shirt, she could almost pass for a teenager herself.

“Thanks, love. My mother-in-law taught me well.” She gave Alyssa a one-arm hug. “Do you have tennis practice this afternoon?”

“Yeah, sorry, I have to get going.” Alyssa glanced at the clock.

“No worries. Drive safe,” Mum said.

“Cheers! Thanks again.” Alyssa beckoned to me with a finger. “You’re quiet, Puss. Walk me to my car?” She took my hand and waved to Mum as we went out the front. Alyssa turned eighteen last month and got a car for her birthday; a little black mini with pink furry seat covers. Very Lyssa.

“What’s up with you today?” she asked as we walked down the front path.

“Nothin’. I was just watching you and Mum together. She really likes you. You’re bubbly, like her. I’m more of a nerd.”

She punched my arm.

“Yeah, you’re a nerd. But a hot one! Hey, are we going to Mel’s pool party on Saturday? Say yes!” She jumped up and down a bit to get me excited.

“Sure!” I faked my enthusiasm. I loved pool parties, but the problem was, I couldn’t actually go to this one. I just had no idea how I was supposed to explain that to Alyssa; a nice, normal, human girl. We’d both dealt with a lot of change over the past year, and I didn’t want to ask her to go through it all again.

“Great! Well, see ya at school tomorrow.” We kissed goodbye and I stood and watched her drive away. In that moment, I envied her so much. Her future was wide open to possibilities and dreams. I still had plans to go to university and to live a reasonably normal life, but I had a duty to uphold and it had to be kept separate from most people in my life. Forever. If I kept hiding who I was from Alyssa, she’d never have to worry about me, but how would I cope living a lie? And if I told her the truth, would she accept it and want to stay with me?

“You didn’t ask her.” Mum’s tone was slightly accusing as we sat down to have a cup of chai tea together.

“Ask her what, Mum?”

“To go to your awakening ceremony.” She said this like it was the school social, not a banshee’s initiation into the Sisterhood and her first soul-delivery.

“Ah, inviting her to the ceremony means telling her everything, and I am not ready to do that.” I was being a wuss, I knew it, but somehow I couldn’t do it. Alyssa and I had grown up together: we were sisters, best friends, and now girlfriends. She’d be furious that I had kept my family heritage a secret all these years.

“I don’t see what the issue is, you’ve known her forever. And you looked your eighty-eight-year old grandpa straight in the eye and told him you were gay. Now, don’t try and say you don’t care what he thinks of you either. You love him to death.”

“Well of course I do. But telling someone you prefer girls to boys is not the same thing as telling an ordinary human that banshees are real and help you cross over when you die. And, a banshee cry is about as normal as...I dunno...riding a zebra to school or something.”

“Oh, Blayne.” Mum shook her head.

I knew I was being rude. But I was a week away from transforming into something mystical and surreal, so I was shit-scared and doing my best to hide it. Don’t get me wrong, I wanted to go through the ceremony and take Mum’s place in the Sisterhood of Banshees, but then there would be a long adjustment period while I got the hang of my powers. How could I expect Alyssa to be cool with that?

For once I bit my lip and tried not to upset Mum. I let her speak.

“I think you should give Alyssa a bit more credit, hon. Yes, it’ll be a shock for her and she might even feel disappointed that we haven’t told her before. But she will not turn her back on you, I promise. That girl was in love with you long before you understood your own feelings. She’s strong and she’ll handle it.”

I mulled this over for a minute while crunching on a coconut cookie.

“Mum?”

“Yes?”

“I guess...I guess it’s me that I’m worried about handling it all.” I dunked my cookie to avoid looking at Mum’s face.

“Honey! It’s a big deal, but you couldn’t be more prepared. And if you have Alyssa there with you, you won’t be scared.” Mum’s beautiful Irish accent, and her sensible advice, always soothed me.

“I can’t believe the mistresses are even okay with her being invited,” I said, changing the subject.

“They’re very open-minded. A new mistress can invite one support person from outside the family. Many banshees invite a human, and their relationship isn’t questioned.”

“Did you take Dad for yours?”

“No. It was before we met. I took Julia, my cousin.”

I nodded and sipped the last of my tea.

“I really do want to take Alyssa. I just don’t know how to tell her the right way.”

“Scared-y cat.” She kissed my cheek and took the teapot off the table. “Just tell her. Tomorrow.”

I hoped Mum was right. I just had to get through all the questions, things I’d never had to explain to anyone before now. Then, I could look forward to the ceremony and my first banshee task.

Alyssa was the one who turned our relationship from friends to lovers. She took me on a picnic down by Mansgrove Lake and packed all my favorite foods. She didn’t eat much, but I stuffed myself with chicken and avocado salad and cold chili prawns. While I was eating a large slice of cheesecake she leaned over and licked a spot of cream from the corner of my mouth.

“I love you, Blayne,” she whispered in a tone that gripped my heart. She kissed me for real then, and I had never been so sure about who I was in my life.

That place was sacred to us, somewhere we could go to bare our souls and explore feelings that we didn't quite understand. I felt safer there than anywhere else, so I asked Alyssa to skip Greek club and take us there after school.

She must have known something was up, but she didn't seem worried. At our spot I spread out a blanket while Alyssa took off her sandals and rolled her Capri pants higher. She lay face down on the blanket and sighed.

"Want a coke?" I offered. I didn't want one myself; I knew the caffeine would make me even more jittery.

"Nah, I'm fine. Hey, on Saturday, Deon said he can drive us to the party. He's going with Natalie." Deon was Alyssa's brother and a pretty awesome guy.

"Um, yeah. I need to talk to you about Saturday, actually." I coughed and kicked my sandals off, wiggling my toes to cool my body down.

"Don't say you're not going!" She pushed up and crossed her legs, facing me.

"Look, there's something else on Saturday night that my family has to go to. I have to go to – it's for me. And I really want you there too, babe." God, I sounded like such a dork.

She shook her black hair loose and huffed.

"It had better be good, Xenakis. Everyone's going."

"I know, I know. It's just...this thing of mine...it changes a lot."

"What do you mean?" She looked at me curiously.

"My mum and I, we're different."

When I was silent, she prodded, "Different, how?"

"I think you believe in the supernatural, don't you?" I took a deep breath. "Well, humans aren't the only kind of people on earth." Alyssa often spoke about ghosts, but I wasn't sure where she stood on actual fae beings. I knew many people liked to believe in strange things but would still totally freak out if they saw any kind of proof.

"Wait, you're talking in circles. What about you and your mum? Oh God, are you vampires?" She grabbed my arm, but was smiling.

"No, we aren't!" I pushed her lightly, trying to smile too. "But, we are supernatural. Lyss, we're banshees." I couldn't believe I had actually said it. It sounded like the dumbest thing anyone had ever tried to tell someone.

She just stared at me, I guess waiting for me to laugh or babble on with more make-believe. My heart was pounding hard and I felt tears prick my eyes. I was about to lose it. If she didn't believe me or she rejected me, I would fall apart.

"Banshees?" Her eyes widened.

“Yes. I’m not joking, I swear.” I took her hand and she squeezed it back. A good sign.

“I know you’re not. Joking I mean.” She turned slightly and picked a daisy from the grass. I watched her twirl the stem in her fingers and I gently brushed my hand across her back. I didn’t speak. I was prepared to sit there all night if necessary; as long as she needed to process the news.

“Banshee’s are Celtic, right?” She finally asked.

“Yes, originally. But now they’re spread all over the world, helping souls move from this life to the next.”

“How do you do that?” she whispered, like she was dreaming the whole conversation.

“We see a person’s death approaching and stand by, waiting. Then, we use our power to draw the soul out and send it to the next plane. To peace. Banshee’s mostly help people who have died suddenly or violently – the ones who don’t understand what has happened and might get stuck here.” I was amazed she hadn’t bolted, but I could see she really wanted to know everything. “I haven’t actually done it yet. That’s what the event on Saturday is, my awakening ceremony.”

“You...you’re going to pull someone’s soul from them?” Her face tightened in concern.

“It’s not as bad as it sounds. It’s just freeing energy that has been held in a physical form here on earth. We don’t do it on living people, of course.”

“What about the screaming thing. What’s that like?”

“A banshee’s wail is completely unique. I can’t describe it. It’s beautiful though – like the highest note on a harp.” I smiled and wrapped my arms around her, relieved that she seemed to be coping okay.

She twisted to lean back against me and faced the water. “It sounds amazing. You’ll be able to help people in such a meaningful way.”

“Yes, it’s scary for me, but I’m also excited,” I admitted.

“You know, part of me has always seen something magical about you and your mum. It’s great to know the truth, even if it’s a bit hard to believe.”

“Thanks, Lyss, for being so cool about this. I’ve been going crazy imagining the worst.”

“Hey, I’m sure I’ll have loads more questions later, but right now I just feel privileged that you shared this with me.” She shifted to kiss my neck. “Can I really go to the ceremony?”

“Hell, yes! I’m not going if you don’t!” We fell back onto the blanket together, laughing. I pulled her on top of me and kissed her softly.

“You’re the best, babe.”

“Oh, I know, Puss.”

“You are not seriously wearing that.” Alyssa sat at my desk pointing a finger at my sheer gown.

“It’s tradition.” I defended it, but honestly as I looked at myself in the mirror I was thinking the same thing. The gown was made and worn by the first banshee in our family line and had been passed down from mother to daughter for generations. It felt like a light breeze blowing over my naked body, not a piece of cloth wrapped around it.

“I can see your nipples,” Alyssa said, “Which is never a bad thing between us, but you’re gonna be on display in front of a dozen people. And, your father.” She laughed at this.

“Shut up or I’ll practice raising your soul from your body right now.”

“Hey, that’s not funny!” But she kept laughing.

I looked at my reflection again. Okay, my tits were somewhat visible in the right light, but at least I was allowed to wear underwear. White silk, of course.

“So, who are the other girls doing the ceremony with you?” Alyssa asked.

“Um, I haven’t met them before, but my mum knows their mums. They’re both from other cities though.”

“Cool. How are you wearing your hair?” She came over and twisted my long ponytail up to experiment with an arrangement.

“Don’t care. You can style it for me if you want. But, I’m gonna do some really cool nail art. I’ll do yours too so we match.” I’m not real girly-girly, but I never leave the house with bare nails.

We mucked around looking at nail polish and colors, and Alyssa tried a few styles out on my hair. It was just a few hours before my awakening, but I felt completely relaxed. Knowing Alyssa supported me and would be there made everything easier.

The ceremony took place on sacred land, several hundred acres of native forest with a clearing in the centre for secret fae gatherings.

After greeting the mistresses and introducing everyone, I had to leave Dad and Alyssa. They would watch the ceremony from the guest area.

“I’m really proud of you, Blayne.” Dad kissed my forehead and gave me another strong hug.

“I love you, Dad.” Poor Dad, it must have been hard to watch me go through this, but it meant Mum would be free to travel and do things she’d never been able to before.

Alyssa was jumpy, but in an excited-puppy kind of way.

“You’ll be amazing. Love you.”

“Thanks, Lyssa. Love you too. Always.” Damn it, I choked up again.

“Blayne, they’re ready to start now.” Mum came over and put an arm around Dad and Alyssa. “I’ll settle these two and join the group in a minute. You go on over and meet the other initiates.”

“Okay, Mum.”

“Good luck!” Alyssa blew a kiss and went to sit with Dad.

Mum and I sat in a circle on the grass with the other banshee leaders, mentors, and initiates. Candles burned and danced around us. A quartet of faeries played ambient music in harmony with our voices. We sang a Celtic song about sisterhood and the eternal bond of our connection; Mum had been singing it to me since I was little and it was one of my favorites. I was an only child, so I had longed to grow up, to join this circle and meet all my sisters. It felt just as special as I had dreamed and I squeezed Mum’s hand while we sang. She smiled back, knowing what I was thinking.

When we finished singing, the three retiring mothers rose and joined hands in the centre of the circle. They chanted a vision prayer and soon all three were wailing in unison. This time, they were not being called to witness death, but to visit the banshee angels and be thanked by the souls they had saved. The music stopped. There was only the high-operatic calling of the banshees filling the air with their melody.

I looked over my shoulder at Alyssa. She was staring at the three wailing women, a big smile on her face.

The wailing ended within a minute, but I knew that where the women had gone, time passed much slower. They’d had another party of sorts there and I looked forward to hearing Mum repeat the details of her experience later.

The banshee mothers turned their backs to each other and faced us daughters. It was time to pass the light, for the mothers to let go of their gifts and allow their daughters to take over their responsibilities.

I stood up and raised my hands towards my mother. We were several metres apart so couldn’t touch, but the second we started chanting, I could feel our energy connect. Her hands stretched out towards me, and I could see her concentrating on pushing her ‘light’ over to me. I felt the energy coming and had a moment of nervousness before I could open myself to receive it. I allowed myself a second to look over at Alyssa. I needed her strength for this final step.

She was standing up and watching, gripping her hands together. I had the sensation that she was holding both my hands to reassure me she was there. I knew it was my imagination helping me cope with the tension, but it worked. I relaxed and all of a sudden was flooded with light and strength. My mother’s love was like a giant bow on this precious gift I was taking into me. I

chanted harder, focusing on grounding the light inside me so it would not escape or be compromised by dark forces.

I wrapped my arms around my chest, and took a few deep breaths to calm myself. Mum came over and hugged me.

“I love you, my beautiful daughter. Guard the light well.” Tears swelled in her eyes, but I knew she was happy and proud.

“Thank you, Mother.” It was the only time I ever called her that instead of ‘Mum’ but it was right for the occasion. “I will honor your legacy.” We kissed on both cheeks and on each other’s forehead.

The other initiates and I were given spelled-wine and we prepared ourselves to be called by the light. I stood barefoot on the cool grass, my eyes closed. My lips mumbled the awakening prayer I’d been practicing with Mum for months. It was a light song in old Celtic language telling the banshee angels I was ready to serve. I only had to do this once, and from then on I would be called by my own premonitions.

Raylee, my mentor, held my hand and sang softly with me. I don’t know how long we sang for, but time seemed to pass quickly. One pair of banshees’ song grew louder and curled into the death-wail induced by a premonition. I wasn’t supposed to break my own chant but I opened my eyes in time to see one girl completely enthralled in a trance. Her hands were out wide, her head thrown back and she cried to the moon and stars.

Raylee squeezed my hand hard: a vision was coming. Before I could think or speak, I felt a sudden wave of nausea, as if someone had picked me up and hung me upside down. I opened my eyes and Raylee and I were now standing on a dirt road. I could see a sign for the local camping area in the distance and realized we were near the lake. A red pickup truck was flipped over ahead of us, its lights beaming into the woods on the left side of the road.

“Come on. There are two boys inside.” Raylee started towards the truck but my legs shook.

“Oh, God. No.” I recognized the truck. Alyssa and I would have been in it tonight if we had gone to the pool party. “Raylee wait! The car – it’s my friend Deon’s.”

“Okay, don’t panic. Let’s take a look.”

We went to the truck and Raylee yanked the driver’s side door off with one hand. I’d never seen a banshee with strength like that; typically they just stand still and sing.

Then I remembered we were in a vision.

“This isn’t real yet, is it?”

“No, not yet. But we don’t have long. The premonition is just to get us to where we need to be.” She pulled the unconscious driver from the truck. “Is this your friend?”

I looked closely at the boy’s face but didn’t recognize him.

“No, I don’t know him.” I ran around to the other side of the truck to check the other boy. The door came off before I even touched it.

“Whoa! Did I do that?”

“Yep. With a tiny bit of help.” Raylee grinned. “In this spirit-form, we can manipulate what we see just by concentrating our minds. It usually takes more practice though. Good work!”

My mum had described this state-of-being, but it was different to what I expected. I was a ghost, but alive; a wraith-like shadow of my human self, but more powerful. I felt...timeless.

I focused back on my task and bent to check the other boy. His seat belt was undone and his head had crashed through the windscreen at an odd angle. “Please, don’t be Deon.” My heart pounded and my throat tightened. I pulled the body out of the car and laid him on his back. It wasn’t Deon, but this boy was definitely dead. He was young too; I guessed about my age.

“Oh, God.” I didn’t know him, but I still felt a deep sadness for his passing.

“Not your friend? Poor kid though. Looks like he’s your first.” Raylee said, moving beside me. “The driver is alive, but has some injuries.”

Before I could reply, I felt the nausea attack again. I closed my eyes, expecting to open them and be back in the circle, but we were still on the side of the road. Only, the car and the boys were gone.

“Where are they?” I looked to Raylee.

“Listen.” She pointed just around the bend.

“Oh no, we have to watch?”

I heard the screeching tires, the roaring engine and the muffled sound of music playing. Then, bright lights shone from around the corner, growing closer.

The driver took the corner too fast and the truck flipped and rolled a couple of times before everything went still.

“I can hear another car in the distance. Come on, we have to release the boy’s soul and get out of here.” Raylee was already going around the other side of the truck. “We have to leave him inside; we can’t move him. Hold my hand and I’ll support you.”

“Wait! Should I start singing?” It was like I’d forgotten all my practice sessions.

Raylee laughed.

“You are! Back in the circle. Try to tune in to hear yourself.”

I took a second, imagining myself back in the clearing with the others and I connected to my body. I was wailing; it vibrated through me and felt incredible.

Raylee pulled me back to the accident scene.

“Good. Now release him.”

I was ready. I steadied myself with my palms facing the boy and began drawing my hands upwards, imagining I held his delicate energy within them. I felt the heat of his soul growing and rising out of the vehicle and saw its colorful patina glowing in the dark, starless sky.

“That’s it!”

The boy’s soul drifted away until it became part of the moonlight.

My knees shook and Raylee held me up.

‘I’m so proud of you. Now, let’s go back.’”

Right before we vanished, a light blue sedan skidded around the corner and two men leaped out. The passenger, a tall, muscular guy looked right through me to the wreck and I saw the agony and pain in his eyes. But I had to smile for him; Deon was alive and I could go back to Alyssa and tell her he was okay.

I woke up on the ground, Mum and Alyssa’s faces hovering above me and talking.

“She’s fine. It’s perfectly normal.” Mum reassured Alyssa.

“She must be cold.” Alyssa started taking off her jacket.

“Hey, I’m awake.” I said.

“Hey! Are you okay? You fainted.” Alyssa put her jacket over my chest and took my hand.

“Yeah, I’m good.” I pushed myself up and Mum put an arm around me.

“Raylee said you were a natural.”

I looked to Alyssa and she was smiling. Raylee mustn’t have told them about Deon.

“Ah, yeah. She was a good mentor. Where is she?”

“Just over there, checking in with the Head Mistresses. Do you want me to get her?” Mum asked.

“No, I can thank her later before we leave.”

“Here, drink some water.” Alyssa passed me a bottle. “So, how was it? Did you...” Her cell phone rang and cut her off. “Hang on, that’s probably Deon. A couple of butt-faces took his truck for a joyride. I hope he didn’t punch ‘em up too bad.”

“Lyss, wait.” I stopped her answering the phone.

“What?”

Maybe it was better he told her what happened.

“Um, I’ll meet you at the car okay?”

“Oh, sure, just give me a sec’.” She stood up and answered the phone. I heard her voice as she stepped off to a quieter spot but couldn’t hear what she was saying.

“Blayne, what happened?” Mum asked, concerned.

She helped me up and I filled her in on what I had seen and experienced.

“That kid shouldn’t have died tonight, Mum. It was just a stupid accident.” I started crying, all the angst of the evening pouring out. She pulled me close to comfort me.

“I know it’s hard. We have to see so many lives wasted and can’t stop it. But if we’re not there to take the good souls to peace, darker spirits are lurking to steal them away.”

“I didn’t see anything bad.” My Mum had told me about the evil elements she had encountered, but it wasn’t a common occurrence. She almost always got there in time.

“That’s good. I’m so proud of you. This is what you were born to do, and I’ve always looked forward to the day I could bring you into the circle of women. Many banshee mothers hate to see their daughters join this life, but I’ve always known that it would be good for you. With time, Blayne, you’re powers and abilities will strengthen and you’ll be able to do more. Tonight, you sent a young man onto the next plane and he will have a good life there. I promise.”

I could have talked with Mum all night about our duty and how best to help people, but Annou, the head banshee came over to congratulate me.

“Well done, Blayne! Raylee told me you handled a difficult situation with surprising strength and focus. I look forward to monitoring your growth over the next few years.”

“Thank you, Mistress. My mother has been a wonderful teacher, and I can’t thank Raylee enough for her support.” I bowed my head in respect.

“You’re a marvelous prodigy for your mother, I’m sure. Do you feel well, with your new powers?” Annou asked.

“Yes, I feel pretty normal now. Just tired.”

She kissed my forehead.

“Go home now and rest. I’ll see you at the next gathering.” She bowed to me and returned to the main group of women and their families.

Mum hugged me again.

“I know you’re tired, but you should say goodbye to everyone. Then we can make sure Deon is okay.”

“Of course.”

Mum and I spent a few minutes chatting with the other banshees, and I was happy to hear that the other girls hadn't had any trouble with their first tasks either. We exchanged numbers and email addresses, like any normal teens would, and said goodbye.

"See? You're not alone, Blayne. You'll feel like you are sometimes, but you'll cross paths with other banshees and fae people more and more as you grow stronger." Mum said.

"Thanks, Mum. That's good to know." I put my arms around her waist and my head on her shoulder. We were the same height, but for a second I was her little girl again.

Alyssa came running over. Mum let me go, and it was my turn to comfort someone.

I held her as tight as I could. She wasn't quite crying, but I felt her body shake from the shock.

"Come on. I'll take you to Deon. He needs you," I said.

"You were there?" She looked up at me in surprise.

"Yes, I saw Deon there too."

"That boy.....you, helped him?" She wiped her face with her arm and shook herself up straight.

I only nodded, not sure what to say.

"Good. I'm glad he had someone. Deon's at the police station now."

"I'll get your Dad to drive you both there," Mum suggested. "Alyssa, how about I take your car back to our house?"

"Sure, thanks, Mrs. X."

Alyssa and I waited in the back of the car and held hands quietly, both lost in our thoughts.

"Deon said he saw an angel," Alyssa whispered.

"What?" I'd been looking out the window and barely heard her.

"He saw you. At the accident. He said he saw a dark-haired angel who reminded him of you." She smiled.

"Really? I don't know how he saw me. Maybe because we know each other we have a bit of a connection."

"Maybe. Anyway, you calmed him. Thank you."

"I wanted to do... so much more. It was all so surreal." I felt myself weakening again, doubting my abilities.

"Blayne, you're amazing." She hugged me again. "You're the best, Puss."

I laughed quietly and hugged her tight. "Oh, I know I am."

--The End--