THE FOWL TWINS

GET WHAT THEY DESERVE

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PROLOGUE

THERE ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT TRUE LOVE is humankind's greatest motivator.

Those people are sweet but completely wrong.

Certainly, true love is a powerful force, but the actual greatest motivator of all is undoubtedly revenge. Humans will climb the highest tower for love, but then murder everyone inside that tower for revenge.

And then possibly demolish the tower.

Once someone commits to a course of vengeance, the changes inside begin: their heart becomes petrified so that love may not enter. Their senses of reason and perspective are cauterised so that good judgement shall never prevail. And any code of decency that they may have lived by is replaced by a single commandment: *Thou shalt do whatsoever needs to be done.*

This is the story of one such revenger and the children he would cheerfully go to the ends of the earth to have his revenge upon. It is also the story of what those children were up to that summer, as these were

not the kind of youngsters to simply laze around, waiting for vengeance to be visited upon them.

The man was Lord Teddy Bleedham-Drye, the Duke of Scilly, and the children, you may be less than surprised to learn, were the Fowl Twins.

It may seem unlikely that a peer of the British realm would devote his precious time to the killing of twelve-year-old Irish twins, but these particular boys had grievously wronged the duke, and Lord Teddy was determined to repay them in kind, by which he meant slay them in a convoluted and epic manner.

For decades, Lord Teddy had been consumed by two objectives:

1. Live as long as possible (one hundred and fifty years plus so far). And . . .
2. Mount a claim to the British throne. But for this he would need the Lionheart ring, which we shall come to later.

And now Teddy had developed a third obsession: killing those blasted twins.

It may also occur, if a person is at all familiar with the notorious Fowl Twins, that the duke's chances of

putting one over on Myles and Beckett were slim at best. But Lord Bleedham-Drye was something of a specialist in the art of vengeance. This was not, as American humans might say, his first rodeo.

In point of fact, Lord Teddy considered the Fowl crusade to be the third epic revenge campaign in his one-hundred-and-fifty-year life. His first was hunting the border-fens fox to extinction simply because one had stolen a salmon sandwich from Queen Victoria's fingers at a picnic he was hosting, which was simply devastating for the duke, as it put the brakes on his plan to become her second husband, the most direct route to the crown.

The second quest for vengeance is quite famous in the annals of American crime history, as there was quite a gruesome spate of homicides of snake-oil salesmen in the western states during the mid-twentieth century. Lord Teddy had visited such a salesman in California and purchased a life-extending elixir. The concoction had brought on a series of catastrophic bowel movements while he was attending an opera at the governor's mansion. So outraged was the duke by this public humiliation that he did away with the entire network of salesmen over the following season.

Of course, Teddy had dealt many other swift retributions, but he did not count these as proper revenges, as the duke agreed with Charles Dickens, who wrote: *Vengeance and retribution require a long time; it is the rule.*

Lord Teddy considered the Fowls worthy of a campaign because he could honestly say that no human beings living or dead had infuriated him more than the twins. Not only had they avoided being permanently murdered, but they had also utterly ruined Lord Teddy's birth body, thus forcing the duke to have his living brain transferred into a cloned host. To cap it all, they put a rather big hole in his front lawn. And, as every royal correspondent knows, nothing matters more to a duke than his daffodils.

No, Teddy old boy, the duke told himself, *the Fowl blighters simply have to go, and that's all there is to it.*

And so Lord Teddy laid his elaborate and unnecessarily complicated plans, resolving that on this occasion he would take pains not to underestimate the Irish boys as he had in the past.

Ishi Myishi, Lord Teddy's closest friend and arms dealer to the world's criminal masterminds, had once told him, 'He who commits his life to revenge is already

dead,' but this did not deter the duke from his course in the least, because his plan actually depended on him being dead.

I will be completely and undeniably deceased, thought Teddy as he reclined in the brass bathtub of electric eels where he did the lion's share of his plotting. *And that will be my advantage*.

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CORPSE

The Southbank Centre,
London

MYLES Fowl had travelled to London to present a lecture to the **Cor**oners' and **P**athologists' Association of **S**outhern **E**ngland, or CORPSE, in London's Southbank Centre on the river. Beckett had tagged along because he thought CORPSE was a fabulous name for a group, plus he instinctively felt that a coroners' convention in London was exactly the sort of setting where a classic Fowl Adventure might kick off, and he would be simply devastated to miss the initial stages.

Also, Myles had promised that he could wear a disguise.

Beckett was absolutely right to tag along, for a Fowl Adventure did in fact *kick off* in the Southbank Centre. However, it was not to be a classic Fowl Adventure, as those generally tended to ramp up

towards an explosive climax, whereas the Fowl Phantom Solution (as the affair would be named in fairy Lower Elements Police files) started with a big bang, followed by a series of smaller bangs, then another big bang.

Myles Fowl stood front and centre on the lacquered wood of the Southbank main stage in an auditorium that was packed with the cream of Europe's coroners and pathologists. For even though CORPSE was a British organisation, doctors had flown in from all over the world to hear the Fowl prodigy speak, and Myles had not disappointed. Unless one were disappointed by the fact that the pompous twelve-year-old dressed in a formal tuxedo, bow tie and gleaming patent-leather loafers had not tripped over his own inflated ego and fallen flat on his smug face. Myles had expertly covered molecular pathology, computational pathology and the clear advantages of medicological investigators being recognised as first responders, and he was finishing up with some coroner-related puns.

'And so my *examination* is over,' he said, deactivating the laser pointer in his eyeglass frames. 'And, while I

am certain there will be many *postmortems* in the bar, unless there is an *inquest*, this twelve-year-old body must be released.'

Not exactly hilarious stuff, but the members of CORPSE were not expecting stand-up comedy and so, for the most part, they were content to applaud politely. But not everyone was content. A hand shot up from the clumped gloom of the audience.

'Before you go and hang out with your amazing and much more interesting brother . . .' said the short man attached to the hand. He wore thick glasses and sported a bushy moustache. 'Maybe I can ask you a question, *Master* Fowl?'

Myles appeared to fall for the bait. 'I hate to stand on ceremony,' he said, 'but I do prefer to be addressed as *Dr* Fowl when the occasion calls for it, or even *Professor* Fowl in specialist situations like this.'

The man stood, his head jutting into the beam of Myles's spotlight, and read his question from a card. 'That's just it, isn't it, *Master* Fowl? I've done a bit of digging, and you may have doctorates in other areas, but it seems that your PhD in criminal pathology does not exist. It seems very much like you are here under false pretences.'

'Oh, that,' said Myles, as though misrepresenting himself were nothing. 'I can explain that.'

This admission was met with gasps and chatter. Could it be that Myles Fowl was, in fact, a charlatan? A fake?

The questioner flicked to a second card and read the statement written there: 'I think we would all very much like to hear you try.'

Myles gave his full attention to the moustachioed man who had dared to question him. 'It is true,' he said, 'that earlier this morning I had no *official* qualification in pathology. But if you'll allow me a moment to check my email . . .' Myles switched his focus to the lenses of his graphene smart glasses and refreshed his mail feed. 'Ah yes, here we are. As promised by University College London, my doctorate was conferred several minutes ago. I think you'll find that I actually achieved an unprecedented perfect score.'

With a series of blink commands, Myles cast the email to the large screen behind him. The attendees saw a copy of Myles's latest doctorate along with an animation of a digital Myles in a cap and gown, this supplied by NANNI, the **N**ano **A**rtificial **N**eural **N**etwork **I**ntelligence system that lived in his spectacles.

The questioner was melodramatically aghast. 'Are you telling us that you qualified *during* your lecture?'

'That is true,' conceded Myles.

'What kind of poopy-headed move was that?'

Myles frowned. 'Poopy-headed move? Is that the question you were instructed . . . I mean, is that the question you wanted to ask?'

The moustachioed man cleared his throat and tried another question. 'So you began the lecture unqualified?'

'Technically, perhaps, but actually no,' retorted Myles. 'I began the lecture without an email from the university. That is all. There was never any doubt I would graduate – after all, I spent three whole weeks on this doctorate. Your quibble should really be addressed to the university's communications department, as I was promised my degree several hours ago.'

This was met with murmurs of sympathy from the audience members, who had been forced to deal with university communications offices themselves over the years.

'It is historically true that progress is hindered not by lack of ideas, but by the slow grind of bureaucracy,' concluded Myles. This actually won him a second round

of applause, which did not surprise him, as this entire mini inquisition had been part of his plan, the supposed interrogator being, in fact, his twin, Beckett, in the promised disguise.

'Thank you, lesser academics,' said Myles. 'That concludes my lecture, but just as every killer signs his own kills, and every artist signs his own work, I will sign bound copies of my thesis in the foyer. I have instructed my AI to unblock your phones shortly so that you may tell your children that you listened excitedly to a Myles Fowl presentation.'

And indeed that would have been the most exciting moment in many of the audience members' lives had there not been a loud echoing *bang* as the roof peeled back. This was a surprising enough development in and of itself, as this particular auditorium did not have a retractable roof, but it was eclipsed by the appearance of an ultralight aircraft in the space where there had, until recently, been a ceiling. This aircraft dipped inside the theatre itself, hovering at the rear of the hall, and Myles could not help noticing that the craft's stubby wings were adorned with mini machine guns.

'Well now,' said Myles, seemingly to himself but actually to NANNI. 'That is unexpected.'