

KAIDA MISTWEAVER

CHARACTER BIO

- Kitsune
- Bard (College of Emotion)
- Alignment: Chaotic Good with social tendencies

THE OTHER SIDE

"They're in bloom!" I shouted with a squeal as I wandered through the meadow. The scent of pink clovers and lavender filled the air, prompting a tickle from my nose.

I sneezed like a human, thin and vulgar. The flowers from the mortal plane always had that effect.

"No sense attracting too much attention," I whispered, gathering a few blue-petaled flowers before hurrying back. The gate stayed open as long as it was tended on the other side, but it wasn't a good idea to risk some poor critter wandering in. My world could be a shock to the unprepared, though dangerous wasn't the word I'd use. The mortal realm seemed far deadlier by comparison.

Strolling back to the gate, I took a last look through the meadow. Feywild energy from the other side surged the growth here and led to magical abundance. The grove brimmed with vibrance.

I smiled and turned toward the Torii, birds gathering on its red-painted rim in the sunlight. My eyes stung. The brightness on this side weakened them.

Passing through the portal with my basket in hand, I was met by home. The sun in my world was low on the horizon, as always. Instead of a meadow of flowers, I returned to a lively world of vivid colors. Pastels of all shades greeted me in the mid-day twilight.

I turned up to greet our side's birds. A pair of Tengu guards, watchers who kept our borders safe, were posted on the rim of the Twilight Skulk's Torii gate.

With them was an unexpected visitor.

"Lady Kaida, you are most welcome back from your excursion," one of them greeted me.

"Hello, Karasu," I said to him quizzically, looking at his prisoner. "Who's the girl?"

She looked terrified, aside from vaguely resembling my own human disguise. A human of young adulthood or adolescence, hazel green eyes and black hair. I could never tell their ages at a glance. They grew far too quickly for it to matter.

"She passed through the gate just now, my lady," the shorter of the two Tengu guards said. "Karasu and I stopped her from heading deeper into the realm, but she's unharmed."

"Looks harmless enough," I said to Suzume. "Can you bring her down here?"

Both guards grabbed the girl by an arm and gently swooped their wings, landing in front of me. As they



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landed, Suzume turned and stilled the portal while Karasu kept a hand on her.

"You can let her go," I told the taller guard. "She doesn't look like she came here to start a fight. Look at the robe she's wearing."

"It's called a jinbei," the girl said.

My eyes went wide. "You can speak our language?"

"It's my language too," she said. "My family's tended the Torii gate at the shrine for generations. On my mom's side, anyway. My dad taught me Common, though. I speak that too."

My eyebrow raised on its own. "You don't seem scared now," I pointed out.

"I've heard stories about the bird people before, but I never thought I'd meet one," the girl explained. "My Baa-chan warned me about this world. I also didn't think I'd meet another human on this side of the gate."

I laughed and dropped my disguise, unveiling my true form. I saw my snout grow in front of my eyes.

The girl let out a yelp, but was quickly enthralled.

"A Kitsune!" she said, circling around to see if I was real. She grabbed my tail lightly, surprising me.

Rude, I thought, side-eyeing her and flicking my tail away.

"Sorry, I just can't believe this is real. By the way, I'm Karimi. I go by Callie though, because no one who speaks Common can pronounce it correctly. That's what my friends call me."

"Callie," I said, the word sounding awkward on my tongue. "I'm Kaida. Nice to meet you. We should probably get you back on your side of the gate, though." I looked to the two Tengu guardsmen.

"Pardon, Lady Kaida," Karasu said. "This gate has seen much use today, and it should remain closed to



TENGU SAMURAI
ANDREWDeFELICE (DEVIANTART)

recharge its magical energy. We can reopen it tomorrow at sunrise, if that is acceptable. Or you may try one of the others.”

“I guess it can’t be helped,” I said, annoyed at myself for being responsible. “This is the only one that leads to her world. It’d be too dangerous to take one of the three gates to the greater Feywild and look for another route. You’ll have to stay here tonight, Callie.”

“You mean I get to see more of this place?” she asked, looking around in wonder.

“Yep. Follow me. And welcome to the Twilight Skulk.”

THE TWILIGHT LANDS

“They guard the illusory barrier that keeps the rest of the Feywild separated from our realm,” I explained as we strolled. “Only the Tengu and my mother have control over the Torii. I’m getting there, though.”

“You mentioned three gates before, plus the one we went through. How many others are there?”

I grinned at her curiosity. “Seven total in this small realm. There’s one to the Astral Sea, another to the Elemental Chaos. Those are off-limits except during times of need or when visitors from those lands are expected. And the last one is...” I trailed off.

Her brow raised.

“Well, we don’t discuss that one,” I said. “It doesn’t work, anyway.”

Callie’s eyes wandered to the trees, filled with forest spirits.

“So this forest covers the whole western half of the Twilight Skulk?” she asked, changing the subject. “And all of the Kodama live here?”

“They live in most parts of the realm,” I said. Their heads made a gentle clicking sound as we passed. “Don’t worry, they’re harmless. Most of the denizens here just want to live out their lives in harmony with each other.”

“Most?”

“Well,” I started to clarify before I spotted something in the distance. A boat had moored on the river, and a short man with a grey mustache down past his chin raised his bamboo hat in greeting.

“Lady Kaida! So good to see you!”

“You as well!” I called back as we approached.

“Callie, this is Ogawa, one of the Kawauso. River folk.”

“He’s an otter?” she blurted out, confused.

“Ahaha! Cute human you’ve got there,” the old man said jovially. His mood quickly changed. “Apologies my lady, but I bring urgent news from the river for you. There’s been another skirmish at the lake. We have wounded.”

“Wounded?” Callie asked. “Everything here’s been so peaceful.”

“Let’s go,” I said, concerned.

We boarded Ogawa’s boat and he rowed down the river, standing on the bow and steering around the schools of fish.

“They’re so huge,” Callie noted, amazed. “So much bigger than the ones back home.”

“The ayu here grow to about twice my size,” I said as several jumped out of the water, racing us. “Their komochi is delicious.”

“And those mouse guys in the rice fields?” she asked me as we passed near the paddies along the hillside at the center of the realm.

“Nezumi,” I said. “They’re our farmers, growing the magical rice that feeds the entire realm and most of the greater Feywild. We trade with both of the courts to get anything we need that doesn’t grow here. Thanks to my mother though, there isn’t much we want for.”

“Who is she?” Callie wondered.

“Inari Mistweaver.”

“The goddess of abundance is your mother?” Callie seemed astonished.

“And rice. And tea. And fertility,” I rattled off, disinterested. “And a dozen other things, probably.”

Callie grew suddenly quiet, as if afraid to speak.

“Don’t worry. She’s very charitable, especially to visitors.”

“It’s not that,” Callie said. “I just can’t believe this is all real. That there’s this other world somehow parallel to my own, and it’s been here the entire time just like Baa-chan said.”

“The mortal world is just as unfamiliar to me,” I told her.

“You call it that. Does that mean people here are immortal? No one can die?” she wondered.

"If only that were true," I said as Ogawa docked our boat at the mouth of the river.

A dozen or more Kitsune warriors stood around, all tense. A few Kawauso were there as well, distraught. One of the river folk knelt on the ground.

Callie gasped. She noticed the body just as I did.

The flesh was mangled, bitten in several places. Huge chunks were taken out of her torso, and an arm was gone. Worse yet, the otter girl's head was twisted at a horrifying angle.

"What could've done something like this?" the human said, covering her mouth and looking away.

My face seized with anger.

"Naga," one of the Kitsune bushi said. "The Kawauso girl wandered too close to the lake."

"We do not blame victims, Kouka," I said, putting a hand on his shoulder and looking past him.

"Apologies, my lady," he said, looking to the ground in shame, hand resting on his saya. "If our warriors arrived any later, it would've ended in greater tragedy."

I looked at the scene and saw the wounded. Two other Kawauso and two Kitsune sat along the beach where our shugenja healers tended their wounds with sacred water.

"Even one life lost is a tragedy," I said in sorrow before remembering my position. "Clear the area. Let's get everyone back to the palace. Post a guard here for the night to ward any wanderers away from the lake. Tomorrow, the hunt begins."

HUNTED

"Why now, though? The Naga haven't been aggressive for years," I wondered aloud.

Callie shrugged her human shoulders, an odd-looking expression with a warm towel on her forehead. We both sat in the palace's bathhouse resting after a day of travel.

"They hunt small game. At worst, a deer. No one's been killed by a Naga since before I was born." I sighed, vexed.

"We'll solve it tomorrow, yeah?" Callie rubbed her eyes and yawned.

Despite living a hundred years longer than her, we were at about the same point in our lives. Twenty years for a human was equivalent to a hundred and twenty for my people.

"I'm still stuffed from that amazing dinner," she said. "I didn't know ayu could be so sweet. And the tea was incredible. Thanks again."

I smirked, wondering what kinds of food she ate in her world. I'd have to visit later.

"You can stay in the guest room tonight. Just don't try to leave the palace, okay? It's not exactly dangerous outside, but with a Naga attack at the lake, we can't be too careful."

We dressed in nightwear and left for the palace residence.

"Your home looks just like the ancient castle at our shrine." Callie put a hand on the wall and smelled the wood. "It feels just as old here."

"My mother's been around for a very, very long time," I said, not even knowing myself how old she was. "She built this palace herself."

"She must be a great craftswoman," Callie said.

I let out a small giggle. "Not exactly. The Twilight Skulk is a reflection of her thoughts and dreams. It's manifested magically through her will. She can change anything here on a whim, though she hasn't in a long time."

"She must be happy with it the way it is."

"Here's your room," I said. "If you need anything, you can call for one of the otsugi servants. They'll bring you anything you ask for."

Callie smiled, her tired eyes looking in mine. She looked down, a small laugh coming out.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Nothing, I just —"

A crash.

The far wall of the hallway exploded. Wood shrapnel hit us both, blinding our vision briefly. We smelled them before we saw them. Like fish swimming in rot and foulness.

Naga.

Their snake bodies writhed through the hall, leaving scales in their wake. Armed with swords, three of the beasts cut their way toward us. An unfortunate otsugi stood in the way and was cut down and trampled.

Callie let loose a scream in horror. I grabbed her hand and yanked, running as fast as my legs would carry me. My friend quickly caught on and matched pace with me, heaving her breath as we scurried down the hall of the palace.

Two Kitsune guardsmen came with katana raised, letting us pass. One chanted a spell while the other placed his body in harm's way, clashing blades with the first snake man as it curled our way.

The guard's skill was unmatched, but the Naga proved crafty. Another sidled up alongside him, wrapping its body around his and crushing his chest before tossing him aside like a children's toy.



NAGA ASSASSINS
ALEJANDRO MIRABAL

KAIDA MISTWEAVER
WRITTEN BY JOE CLIFTON

The third Naga attacked the other guard as he channeled magic through the air, but was too late to prevent the spell from taking hold. The snake's body froze in midair, and the guardsman expertly pierced the Naga's defenseless skull with his blade, slaying it instantly. The other two beasts would prove his demise, however. They tore into the brave bushi as he pulled his sword out and left him limbless and bleeding.

We ran all the while, tripping over carpets and decorations. The palace residence wasn't designed to be defended from a breach, and so we fought against our own avarice as we stumbled.

I let out a gasp as I felt the snake's body coil around me, fighting to escape my fate. I prepared for the end, but it wouldn't come so quickly.

I felt a dull pain at the back of my head. Callie suffered the same fate before my vision turned black.

When I came to, Callie was kneeling over me, shaking my shoulder lightly to stir my attention.

"Don't fall back to sleep on me," she begged, whispering. "We're not alone."

"Where are we?" I winced, grabbing my aching head. Blood oozed out.

"It's too dark. Can't see a thing," she said. I could tell she was holding back a whimper.

"My vision's a little better in the dark," I countered.

"We're in a cave. I'd say the Feydark entrance near the lake. Been here a few times," I added dimly.

"Feydark?" she asked.

"Shut up, back there!" A deep, angry voice came out of the darkness. "Keep up the wind and yer bound fer Mag Tureah instead of the Court!"

My ears perked. I recognized the accent, and the mere mention of the Court triggered dread. I didn't know which Court, but neither was ideal.

"Who is that? What's that Mag Tureah place?" Callie whispered.

"An empty threat," I told her. I started to piece together what'd led to our abduction. "He's a Fomorian. A giant from the darker part of the Feywild."

"I'm guessing we aren't friends with him?" Callie asked sarcastically.

"Gloaming or Summer?" I directed the question toward the giant standing guard and currently scratching his armpit.

"Whichever one pays more." His nonchalant attitude turned my dread to anger.

"Wonder what they're waiting around for?" Callie was twitching nervously in the dark, staring at nothing with her weak human eyes. I felt a tinge of pity for her inability to see.

The two remaining Naga stood watch, and a massive cyclops sat snoring against the wall of the cavern. As if a giant and two snake men weren't enough, they needed something that could bring the cave ceiling down on us.

Footsteps, light and clumsy. A high voice rattled our ears.

"Well then, she's here!"

"A gnome?" I asked with an off tone.

"A proud Svirfneblin, girl. Name's Borri. And don't be makin' fun of my height. The deal's to get you to the queen. She didn't say nothin' about the state of your internal organs when you get there!"

He wore lavish robes of indistinguishable color in the darkness, but I could tell the threading was gold or silver. A monocle covered his single eye, the other having been gouged out by some creature or savage master. The deep gnomes never had easy lives. It did little to explain their cruelty, but pain always begat pain.

Callie was breathing hard. I put a paw on her back and rubbed lightly, calming her.

"We'll be fine," I whispered. "My mother will do something."

"I hope so," she said under her breath.

"Inari doesn't even know where you are," the gnome chuckled. "Imagine bein' so obsessed with your wealth and power that you don't even know what goes on under your domain. Not to mention she's a little preoccupied right about now, I'm thinkin'."

"With what?" I asked, raising my voice. "You think you can get away with this? You know I won't go quietly," I said, magic filling my hand.

"Nuh-uh-uh, little lady. You try to cast anything, you're gonna get another sword hilt to the back of the head. Or maybe we'll slice and dice your human slave here," Borri threatened. "You people always care about your slaves too much for your own good."

I scowled, silencing the weave.

"Once we get the signal, we'll – AHHH!"

Borri's leg's slipped out from under him as he fell into the dirt face first. I heard a thud followed by a tender sound from him.

The giant made a curious groan as he turned his head toward his boss. I counted five figures swooping down silent as the night. They severed tendons and muscles, leaving the Fomorian reeling across the stone.

The Naga swung their blades at the air while claws wracked their faces. Eyes blinded, they resorted to flicking their snake tongues out to taste the air, and those too were removed relentlessly. One Naga managed to slither up the trail toward the outside, and the other found his grave.

The cyclops seemed unbothered by the whole ordeal, remaining asleep.

All the while, I bid Callie to stand still. I had to hush her screams.

"Calm," I urged. "Breathe. They shouldn't harm us."

"Shouldn't?!" she shouted, dismayed.

"Lady Kaida," one of the warriors greeted me with a subtle, raspy voice.

The Koumori. Bat men who guard the realm from below against incursions from the Feydark.

"I don't know you," I said to the creature. "But I thank you for the rescue. I'll see you rewarded."

The five Koumori lined up and performed a strange salute.

"Come. We should return you to your mother quickly," the leader said. "We tracked the gnome from deeper in the Feydark conspiring with a particularly nasty hag. One of the Unseelie, we believe."

Callie was now panicked to a state of breakdown. She twitched as her eyes darted quickly left to right.

"Yes, the palace is the safest place," I said, biting my tongue when the words crossed them. Callie's eyes widened.

Poor girl's probably never been around death, I thought. This is all becoming too real for her.

I put a soothing arm around her, instinctually casting a spell with my words. I spoke them in the language of magic that transcends the barrier between thought and understanding.

"All is as is, and all will be shall be," I told her. "No moment in time, no scene in twine, no pain shall see to thee."

Instantly, her shaking ceased. She hugged me, letting out a few tears on my shoulder as she sobbed.

"You're safe now." I smiled gently.

A wicked voice from deeper in the cave.

"*Titin gám éirí ort!*"

My mouth went agape as the curse struck Callie in the back.

The five warriors sprung into flight immediately and were on the hag. I saw one of them fall in mid flight to her dark magic while the other four attacked her ferociously.

"Callie. Callie!" I said, lifting her off the ground. Her body failed and her eyes glazed over, pupils widening in the dark. They turned to sickly gloss.

"I can see you," she said weakly, her voice rising and suddenly desperate. "I can see them dying! So much life, and it's all dying"

"Come on. Don't lose me," I said, dragging her up the cave toward freedom. The sounds of battle and screams of the dying were behind us.

"The trees. The sky below. The dark above," she said in whatever delusion grasped her.

"Callie, you need to resist the curse," I pleaded. "Your mind makes it real. Fight it."

I grabbed her by the arm and hoisted her over my shoulder. I could barely carry her, but adrenaline fueled me.

We escaped into the night as fresh air hit our lungs. Callie was hyperventilating on my shoulder. I lost my grip and dropped her.

Without shugenja aid, she'd surely be overtaken. I searched around in desperation, seeing lights over the bend past the lake. They were out of place and ominous but much closer than the palace or the village. If the guards were there, healers would be with them.

"Callie, we need to get you aid," I said, taking her hand and pulling. "Let's go, now."

"Three frogs hop-hop-hopping. I watch them squirm and start hop-hop-hopping too! Heehee!" she said, repeating the line supernaturally fast. She cradled her arms on the ground and rocked forward and back.

"Callie!" I shook her by the shoulders to snap her from the daze.

Her face contorted as we locked eyes. She shrieked, her jaw unhinging. Her voice echoed throughout the realm.

I covered my ears and fell to the ground, the pain overwhelming me. Through blurry eyes, I saw Callie run off, her legs twisting together in demonic fashion as she sped toward the lights in the distance.

"Callie!" I called once more in futility.

QUEENS OF LIGHT AND DARK

I pulled myself up, devastated by my new friend's fate. To be full of life and curiosity only to have it turn so suddenly. The cruelest end.

Running into the night, the lights approached quickly. They massed beyond the illusory border to the realm where one of the three Great Gates to the greater Feywild stood. I saw the massive Torii, the size of a castle itself, towering over a hundred Kitsune bushi, Tengu watchers, and Nezumi shinobi.

Seven shugenja held their hands up behind the group, restraining Callie with water and air. Her frail human body resisted the magic well beyond its means.

She pushed forward toward the gate, inactive and locked. Our warriors ignored her, however. A greater threat apparently loomed beyond.

"Okaasama!" I called to my mother, seeing her floating above within the gate's precipice. She turned her head to acknowledge me, her radiance glowing in the evening.

GREEN HAG
DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS



Beyond the gate, the lights outshined her despite being dulled by the fog of the border wall. With them, the sound of thousands of creatures prattled on. An army had gathered at our doorstep. Far away, but their sheer number caused a cacophony of noise.

No, two armies. The forces were separated by at least half a mile in each direction.

"Okaasama, this human girl has been cursed!" I yelled up. "A hag's curse! She'll die if we don't save her!"

Mother's divine face fell gently, and a wisp of sadness crossed her eyes. She said nothing and turned away, focusing on the armies outside.

"Can't you do anything?" I begged the shugenja. The onmyouji, leader of their order, spoke while channeling his magic.

"The curse is not of this world, Lady Kaida. Fey magic will do nothing to exorcise it."

"So she needs to return to the mortal plane? I'll take her myself," I offered.

"If only it were that simple," the onmyouji countered, struggling. "It's taking all our combined might just to restrain her."

My friend seethed, pushing herself against the mystical force of shugenja magic. Guttural sounds escaped her mouth, as if she'd become an animal with only instinct to guide her.

The Torii gate opened on its own and an ethereal image appeared in its threshold. The two armies were massing near each other, cackles and howls from each creature snapping across to the other. Hundreds of dryads, satyrs, and nymphs from the army on the left spat insults and threw bits and bobs at the hundreds of spriggans, darklings, and boggarts on the right who returned the gestures.

Old hatreds.

Our warriors formed a concave underneath Mother and drew weapons. They'd be useless against what now walked toward them.

Two terrifying sights. One, a tall elf with hair like a maple or oak. As she moved, the leaves changed from green to orange and fell at her feet. Her body was strong and lithe, exposed to the elements as if nothing could harm her. The other, a stark white, nearly featureless elven woman, Spikes going straight back crowned her hair like shards of ice, and she floated forward with all the threat of an arched ballista ready to impale anything in her path.

They faced one another, walking cautiously.

"Sister, you mustn't be serious," the left one said with a laugh. I knew of her only by reputation.

"Quiet, fool," the white queen responded like lightning. Her voice shook the sky.

"Both of you, silence," my mother said with finality. They obeyed reluctantly.

"You invade my realm with the gall of gods above your station," she continued. "Should your reason displease me, know that both of your courts will fall this night."

"Oh please, Inari," Titania said with a scoff. "As if you could. We can't kill you in your realm, but we could both decimate it and leave it burning. And you know why we're here. The Dark Gate is too handy for you to leave it sitting in disuse."

The Dark Gate? I wondered to myself. *It doesn't even work.*

"And you believe idle threats grant me cause to join you?" Mother's fury escalated, but she remained reasonably cordial, considering. "You come here with armies. You kidnap my daughter as leverage. You barge through my fey crossing without permission. So much for the etiquette of the Seelie court. Devils show more propriety."

Queen Titania's eyes grew wide at the affront.

"Pointless drivel," a lightning crack came from the white queen. "Join me and we can destroy her together!"

"And what would the great Queen of Air, Darkness, and Murder have to offer me?" Mother asked from above. "A proverbial knife in the back once my realm is yours? No. You're both beneath me at this moment."

"I really wish you hadn't said that," Titania sighed.

Suddenly, a lurch came from the shugenja holding Callie at bay. All seven of them were blown back simultaneously, leaving Callie free to rush forward with supernatural speed. She leaped over the warriors and aimed her hands directly at Titania's throat as she spouted Sylvan curses like the one that branded her.

I ran through the armies, maneuvering between the bushi and shinobi with my small form. They were too at attention to notice me ducking beneath them until I'd passed.

"What's this?" Titania asked with human hands around her throat. She let loose another laugh, confident that Callie could do nothing against her. "Why is a human girl here, Inari?"

Titania waved an arm and Callie helplessly floated away from her. I saw the marks my cursed friend had left on the queen's throat, though. Black bands across the archfey's neck.

"Far be it from me to draw first blood, but let's get her back home, shall we?" Titania offered. "Your fey crossing to the mortal realm is that way, isn't it?"

She flicked a finger and Callie flew miles through the air. A choked gasp escaped my throat as I reached for her, entirely helpless.

Mother floated in the air and watched. Her power, even here, was dwarfed by the magical might of these two monsters.

"Answer," the Queen of Air and Darkness commanded, shaking us all with her thunderous voice. "Join me. Now. Or we take the gate and your land with it."

"You may try," Mother said, a powerful spell coalescing in her hands. Winds swirled as she channeled magical energy into the gate, forcing it closed.

The two sister queens flew into the air to stop her, arrows flying from our Tengu marksmen to impede their assault. The impact splintered wood and sent fletchings aside. Mother lost concentration and the magic fled, but she was far from defenseless.

She drew her blade and began cutting their bodies relentlessly, her expert swordsmanship a match for their magical onslaught. The white queen threw bolts of lightning and gushes of frost, all deflected by magically enhanced blade strokes.

Titania, more cunning than her sister, saw their clash and descended upon our forces. She ushered her own army through the gate. Onward they came, spewing forth their angry mass of bodies to slaughter my people.

The other army followed suit, and both of them poured through the gate ready to slaughter everything in front of them.

I moved forward toward them, clearly no combatant. I had nothing to contribute to battle, and I'd surely die.

If only I could somehow...

I chanted a spell. Fey weave appeared in my right hand as words flowed from my soul.

"Two armies come to threaten home and land. From air and dark I conjure strife to cross these fools' command."

The image of a fomorian giant appeared in the ranks of the Unseelie army, the roar of battle hiding the fact that the image was silent. I commanded the giant to heave a boulder on top of the Seelie army.

Please be enough.

Between the lightning crackles of the white queen's voice and the rumbling of the armies' combined marching, no one noticed when the boulder made no impact. It was enough to draw attention away from our warriors.

The two armies, untrained and chaotic, fell upon each other.

Their old hatreds had won out over some meaningless order from their leaders to take over a small realm on the edge of the Feywild. Sylph slaughtered redcap just as spriggan destroyed dryad. Our bushi and shinobi easily fended off any wayward fey, and as quickly as the battle began, the armies were pushed back through the Torii gate.

A roar of shock and disappointment escaped the white queen's stark form. With a final lash of lightning, she fled through the gate toward her retreating army. Titania had already seen the turn and disappeared from the field.

Mother finished closing the gate, leaving any unfortunate Seelie and Unseelie fey left on this side to their demise. She descended as the last of them were quelled, her blade sheathed.

"Okaasama!" I said as I ran up to her, embracing her in a hug. She returned the gesture.

"You're safe, daughter," she said, a gentle smile appearing as the ferocity of battle left her. "I saw your

bravery and cunning. You alone turned the battle in our favor."

"We need to save Callie," I said, panting and ignoring her compliments.

"The human?" she asked. "Why?"

I looked at her baffled. "She was cursed. She's an innocent girl."

"From the mortal world. It's their fate to die quickly," Mother said coldly. "Their lives are fleeting mist compared to ours. You know this."

I backed away, shaking my head.

"No, Mother. We've been through too much to throw that away. To throw her away. I'll find a way to save her. I'll find a way!"

I ran. Away from that battlefield, and away from Mother. She didn't raise a finger to stop me.

My legs burned as I dropped to all fours, assuming my fox kit form for greater speed. I sprinted through the fields toward the Torii gate to the mortal plane.

An impact crater. It smoldered and reeked of fey magic and something darker.

Footsteps led away from it. I sniffed the ground and tracked them toward the mortal gate, resuming my run.

The Torii gate was open, an ethereal visage of the mortal plane's flower field in the distance. I returned to my normal form and recoiled at the sight.

Karasu and Suzume both lay dead beneath the gate. Their bodies were gnarled and filled with black smoke, feathers shorn and covering the floor.

They deserved better.

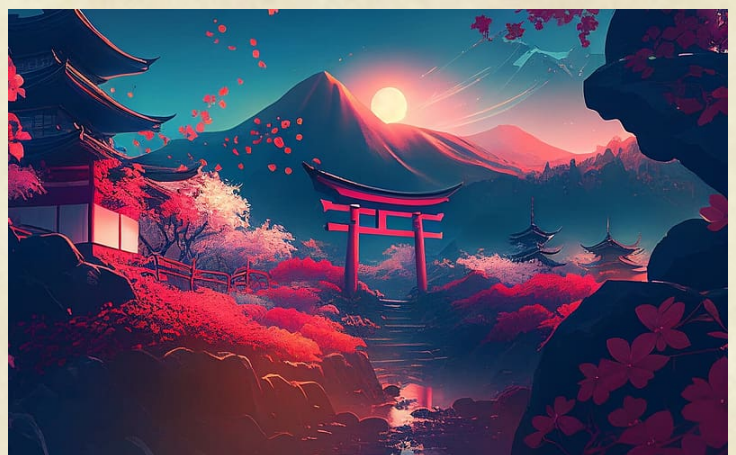
I walked through the gate and into the twilight of the mortal plane, Callie's sun just below the horizon.

Black footsteps covered the ground, decay in their wake. Flowers withered and died near them. I could see a thin swath of death through the field. It disappeared into the forest beyond the meadow.

I stared at the night sky as it grew darker in this foreign world. Stars twinkled into view one by one as the minutes passed.

The gate began to close behind me with no one to tend it, prompting me to return.

"I'll find you someday," I said. "I owe you that much."



TORII GATE AT SUNSET
ARTIST UNKNOWN

KAIDA MISTWEAVER'S TALE

This story takes place one hundred years before Kaida's current life, when she last saw Callie. Despite only having spent a day together, Callie and Kaida managed to introduce each to the other's world and both left a great impression on their new friend.

Kaida was born into a vivid world of chaotic life and unpredictable turns, and so this version of her embraces the unexpected. She appears carefree while being held down by the responsibilities of being born into her role as the daughter of the local archfey. As such, she enjoys great freedom in her own land but balances that with her duties.

Her land, the Twilight Skulk, is born from her mother Inari's soul. It was created as a place of abundance, prosperity, and fertility to mirror the real world goddess Inari Okami that she's based on. When Inari created the Twilight Skulk, it was a place where her people, the Kitsune, could flourish. Indeed, this is where the name comes from (a group of foxes is a skulk!). The land grew naturally and encompassed other parts of the Feywild, taking in the denizens of those lands to join in the abundance offered there. With her plane, Inari created six fey crossing gates to facilitate passage to other realms – three gates to other parts of the Feywild, one to Atune, one to the Elemental Chaos, and one to the Astral Sea.

A seventh gate mysteriously appeared (since seven is a sacred number in Japanese lore, and all things must remain in balance) leading to a dark, foul, unknown world. It's this gate that Titania and the Queen of Air and Darkness seek. Where that gate leads will be up to you and the DM to decide. An obvious choice would be the Shadowfell, but one of the Hells or the negative energy plane are also great candidates. It's left open enough that any decision that works for your campaign should be able to fit.

This version of Kaida is a century in the past before she acquired her skills, and so she's still a young girl coming into her own. She expresses some skill in magic, naturally using oration and poetry to cast her spells. She only has the home ethics and morals of her realm to guide her path, and so she represents Chaotic Good. Her attempts to balance freedom and duty cause her to lean toward Neutral on both axes. How she changed in the hundred years leading up to your campaign to where she's at now is up to you.

Callie's fate is left open enough to make it easy to add her to any ongoing story. Did her curse take her to an even darker place, or was she able to resist it and integrate it into her being? Did she overcome it entirely and seek vengeance against the hag who instilled it in her, becoming an adventurer and gaining the skills she needed to slay the evil fey? If she's still alive all these years later, did something else happen that would cause her to meet up with Callie? And how is she still alive at over a hundred and twenty years old? The choices are limitless with her.



MAP OF THE FEYWILD