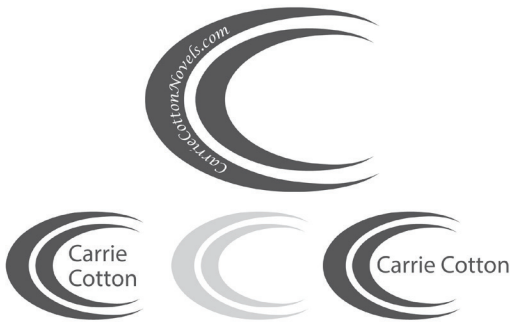


MAGIC  
IN THE  
MYSTIC CIRCLE



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# **FLECK BOOK SERIES**

Magic in the Shadows  
Magic in the Mystic Circle  
Magic in the Shale

This is a Young Adult Fantasy Novel.

This novel includes a teen mother  
and some sexually suggestive content.

Dear Reader:

I have come to understand that my life will be a long one. When I was young, I believed the people I loved were not disposable. Now, I realize the value we place on any one individual is based on our connection with them. The raw truth is, we all matter or, none of us matter.

This awareness gives rise to a question that itches at me. What do we do with those individuals that fester, chafe and will not live in harmony? Who is responsible for soothing the troubles they provoke? I have come to understand that, if you are the person with the authority to correct a wrong, and you allow the wrong to persist, then you become one with the wrong. If left uncorrected, that wrong will nip at you, then it will bite.

I would rather be a leader of ideas than of people. Ideas can sometimes haunt you, but they don't list commands on scrolls and demand your servitude. I understand now that how you behave can shift who you become. I have been slow to learn that watching and thinking aren't enough. It's the doing that makes the difference. How we are is who we are.

Sincerely,

Fleck

MAGIC  
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CARRIE COTTON

## MAPLE'S COMMAND

I AM ASTOUNDED AT how much change took place in what seemed like such a little speck of time. Looking back, I can honestly say I didn't change out of the goodness of my heart. No, I did it for much more practical reasons than goodness.

There was a quiet, an internal calm followed by strife, just before the upheaval between the natural talents of mystical creatures and the scripted magic of humans. During that calm my heart acted like a spoiled willful child that couldn't be trusted. Back before Linden closed his eyes, I used to be good at ignoring my heart and my heart was content with being ignored. The breaking of my heart was a type of new beginning. The mystical creatures cluttered the area around the cottage, watching, concealed behind the trees. The sisters were gone, thankfully.

I tried several times to approach Maple, to talk with her. Each time she saw me, she picked up Laurel and walked away. I didn't insist on her attention. I didn't call out to her or stand in her way. Initially, I thought she needed time to grieve on her own. Then we could talk. Days slipped into weeks. I began to understand the truth. I failed her by failing

Linden. For me there is no unloving Maple. For Maple there was no loving me.

My heart shattered in a cascading tumble, splintering into piercing shards. At first, I tried to sooth my heart. I tried to nurse it back to health by giving it time to settle down and mend.

Sometimes my heart would beat so slowly it made me gasp for breath. Other times it raced so frantically, I thought I'd faint. Still other times I could feel it quivering in my chest, like a cold shiver that reminded me of Hectare's foot shadow.

Gavin called to me on a breeze. He sounded kind and cautious. When the trees saw me turn my back against that gentle wind and cover my head with my arms, they kindly blocked Gavin's calls. I was grateful that they also blocked him from approaching the cottage. For that hushed stretch of time, I wasn't ready to speak with anyone, without the sting of regret dripping off my face.

I spent my time sitting on my thinking rock, trying to reason with my heart. Those were the days back before I understood the truth of what actually happened to Linden. Back when we believed Linden was gone forever, not simply lost. Back when Maple's grief beat on me without mercy. Back when I believed Laurel would grow up and forget me.

One sunny morning, when I was sitting on my thinking rock, things began to change. I took the blue marquise sapphire, that was Gem, out of my pocket and held him in the palm of my hand.

"Is being in my pocket dark and lonely?" I asked, feeling guilty for having left him so confined.

"I'd wear you around my neck, if you will make a little hole for a bit of string?"



I watched the stone hoping he'd miraculously turn into a bead. Nothing happened. Gem lay on my hand, glinting blue sparks in the sun.

"Ok."

I hadn't the heart to put him back into my pocket straight away. Instead, I sat with him on the palm of my hand, petting him with my curled fingers, letting him soak in the sun. Wildflowers swayed in a breeze chattering and whispering to one another. A buttercup flower, at the base of my thinking rock, tippy-toed across the grass towards a small cluster of bushes. I closed my eyes and lifted my face to the sun.

"Maybe I could find that kind dragon. Maybe he could turn you back again. Gem, would you like that?"

A branch from a *Choysia* bush startled me when it tickled my shoulder. At the end of a slender branch hung a modest twist of a knot on a long strip of woven bark. The bush reached out a thin branch and plucked Gem from my palm. Quickly it tucked Gem in the knot and tied the string around my neck.

"Thank you." I took the knot in my fingers to make sure Gem was safe and secure.

"Better?" I asked Gem. The *Choysia* bush looked like it intended to stay. If I let it stay, then all the watching creatures might think they could crowd in.

"Thank you, now go away." The cheeky thing offered me a posy of white flowers. I heaved a sigh. "Take your flowers and go away." The bush waited a moment, till I turned and frowned at it. Then it retreated with its branches drooping.

I always tried to make sure Gem rested on the outside of my shirt, so he could see what was going on. I felt relieved

for him. Being in a knot had to be much better than being at the bottom of my pocket.

Fred took to following me around. He was a solitary puff of white in an otherwise bright blue sky. I liked Fred because he was quiet, he made good shade and he never rained on me. Lying back on my thinking rock, I watched Fred float above me. He did his best to entertain me by changing into different shapes. I appreciated that he tried.

Today he was shifting through a series of shapes miming a story of a couple of giants having a grand time, sliding down the far side of a mountain in a mud slick that had once been a stream. I couldn't help but smile at the silliness of Fred's story. That was how Fred reported what was going on in the Mystic Circle. He only brought me fun news to cheer me. He was at his best, most kind self during that time, when I was at my worst.

It had been weeks since Linden was tucked into the Linden tree. Without notice Maple walked up to me with Laurel cradled in her arms. I was startled, because I wasn't expecting her and I didn't notice her approach. I sat up and stared at her. My heart was still for a long moment before it rolled over, stretched, and sighed.

"I'm too angry to be near you without slapping you." Taking an even, calming breath she said, "And I'll never forgive you."

I held my breath as Maple glanced toward the prying eyes of the mystical creatures, watching – hiding in the trees circling the cottage. That was my first hint that she'd been pressed into talking to me. She settled her angry eyes on me.

"Laurel loves you and she misses you. When she's old enough, she'll decide if she wants to be friends with you or

not. Stop sulking. The creatures are all groaning over you.” Then she screeched, “Everything’s a mess!”

She put Laurel in my arms. When Laurel saw me, she giggled and reached for me with her hands. Maple’s chin wrinkled and her face scrunched, then she turned and walked quickly away. I rocked Laurel back and forth and kissed her head. Maple didn’t look back, but as she paced away she command me.

“Do something about the creatures.” Then she repeated, “Everything’s a mess!” Nothing about them was my fault, but I didn’t dare try to defend myself.