

Destiny Calls His Name

CHAPTER 1



A shimmering scroll materialized before Ethan Grey, signaling the summons he had expected for so long. Despite his preparation, its sudden appearance startled him. The parchment was neatly bound and sealed with the Academy's wax crest,

looking far more intimidating now that it was actually in front of him.

Ethan sat tucked away in the quietest corner of the massive library, where enchanted lamps gave off a soft, golden glow over the books in front of him. Somewhere between the towering shelves, an enchanted ladder rolled along its brass rail with a soft metallic whisper while the occasional page turned itself with a dry flutter.

The air smelled of old parchment and lingering magic, a combination Ethan found strangely comforting. Surrounded by rows upon rows of towering bookshelves taller than his confidence, he felt right at home. As he looked around, the

shelves rose like ancient trees, their leaves bound in ink and memory.

Immersed in the study of forgotten prophecies, Ethan had been tracing each symbol with purpose, his quiet translations shaping a rhythm of focus and intent. The book breathed of secrets older than the stars, its symbols winding beneath his touch. Ethan's voice, a soft hum of translation, carried through the still air like a spell half-remembered. Then, the silence broke. His searching finger brushed a page that was never meant to be, parchment born from nothing, whispering to be found.

Adjusting his glasses, Ethan turned back to the scroll, his heart pounding in his chest. The wax seal gleamed beneath the library's golden light. Ethan drew a slow breath, slipped a finger beneath its edge, and broke it with a soft crack. His stomach tightened as he unrolled the parchment and looked down at the words waiting inside.

The letter didn't waste any time:

Ethan Grey,

The Celestial Convergence project will be starting soon. Your presence is required at the Hall of Assignments at first light tomorrow. There, you will receive your task and meet your partner.

Regards,

Orion Galen

Headmaster of Aetherion Academy

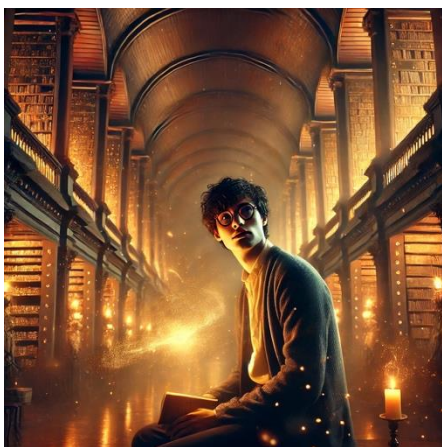
Ethan read the summons again, slower this time. Around the Academy, older students still traded horror stories about sleepless nights, disastrous partnerships, and projects that had collapsed days before completion. Every junior and senior eventually faced the Celestial Convergence, and nobody got to choose when their summons arrived. Ethan had known his turn was coming sometime after the first month of school. He just had not expected the parchment to appear today.

Fate drew names as it pleased, and this time, it had whispered his sooner than he'd expected. Perhaps that was the point: destiny never waits for the perfect moment. He had spent so long preparing for the future that he'd almost forgotten one simple truth: eventually, the future had to arrive.

The Celestial Convergence counted for nearly a third of the grade required to graduate and earn the title of Arcanist. Messing up wasn't an option - not for someone like Ethan. Coming from a low-class family, the first in his bloodline to even set foot in Aetherion Academy, he couldn't afford to fail.

If he was going into the Hall of Assignments tomorrow, he refused to go in blind. Ethan pulled a worn reference guide to past Celestial Convergences from a nearby shelf and quickly copied the most common failures, partner conflicts, and scoring penalties into his notebook. Whatever assignment waited for him, he would meet it prepared.

The distant chime of the clock tower drew Ethan's attention, prompting a weary sigh. Although eager to visit the Hall of Assignments, duty required that he wait and attend his scheduled classes in the interim.



Reluctantly, he closed the book, marking his place with a blue ribbon before standing up and stretching his stiff limbs. His spine popped in protest, a not-so-gentle reminder he'd been sitting far too long. At this rate, he'd look like a wizard-in-training

hunchback before his seventeenth birthday.

Ethan stuffed his notes into his bag, flipping his slightly too-long black hair out of his eyes. Still, his mind wandered among the prophecies' tangled verses - endless echoes of meaning. There was always more to learn, always more to discover. More riddles that seemed to lead to more questions than answers.

As he navigated the intricate corridors of the library, Ethan found himself admiring the place all over again. Generations of students had worn shallow grooves into the stone floor between the busiest shelves, and Ethan could feel the slight dips beneath his shoes as he walked. High vaulted ceilings painted deep blue stretched overhead, scattered with millions of tiny stars, while enchanted chandeliers floated between them and cast a warm glow across the shelves. It was quiet, beautiful, and just mysterious enough to make studying feel more important than it probably was.

To Ethan, the library was basically holy ground, minus the sermons, plus a lot more dust. It was the one place he could get lost for hours and feel like it actually counted as productivity. Within the Realm of Knowledge, it was top-tier real estate, where brains came to worship books instead of sleep.

Outside the library, the word nerd followed Ethan through the Academy often enough that he barely reacted anymore. A muttered comment in a hallway, a laugh when he answered too quickly in class, a look exchanged when he carried more books than anyone else. Ethan had learned to let it pass without affecting him. If knowing too much made him a nerd, he could live with that.

The four realms of Zephyra's society shared the Academy, but that did not mean they mixed easily. Students from the Realm of Light tended to claim the brightest tables in the dining hall, while those from the Realm of Shadows kept mostly to their own corners. Nature students moved comfortably between groups, but Knowledge students were often sought out only when someone needed help with an assignment. Ethan had learned early that where you came from, and how powerful your magic was, could decide how people treated you way before you ever opened your mouth.

Leaving the library behind, Ethan headed for his Ancient Magical Languages class. Endless halls branched in every direction, opening into towering lecture rooms and laboratories where potions bubbled beside enchanted tools humming with quiet energy. Everywhere he looked, students were hard at work, chasing the secrets of magic and trying to understand the universe one spell at a time.

The Academy halls carried their age in quiet ways. Fine silver runes were set into the marble floors, flashing briefly beneath passing footsteps, while faint scorch marks along the lower walls hinted at generations of spells that had not gone quite as planned. Portraits of distinguished scholars and mages adorned the walls, their solemn gazes serving as a constant reminder of the illustrious tradition to which Ethan now belonged.

As he got to the classroom, he lingered at the threshold, eyes lifting to the view beyond the glass. From the second floor, the Academy's towers stretched toward the sky like overachievers, their stone walls covered in carvings of ancient runes rumored to hold powerful spells. Ethan had never known whether the stories were true, but he liked the symbolism anyway. Scholars reaching for the stars? That felt about right.

Ethan stepped into the classroom and headed straight for his usual seat near the front, already pulling a notebook and quill from his bag. The room carried the sharp scent of fresh ink and chalk dust. Along the front wall, enchanted pieces of chalk scratched softly across the board on their own, copying ancient symbols that shimmered for a moment before settling into place. Around him, students were already deep in study, their focus mirroring his own.

"Hey man, where were you at breakfast?" someone said, giving him a friendly clap on the shoulder.

Ethan looked up to see Alden Thorne grinning beside him, wearing the familiar look that usually meant Ethan was

about to get a hard time. He started to answer, but Alden beat him to it - laughing and smacking his own forehead like he'd just remembered something obvious.

"Oooo. The library. Duh. Obviously." Alden stared at Ethan like he'd just announced he enjoyed homework for fun. "We've barely started the year, man. Ease in a little. At this rate, you'll speed run academic burnout before the first month's over."

"It's never too early to be prepared," Ethan said, pulling a small stack of books from his bag. "Besides, the Celestial Convergence assignments could be handed out at any moment."



He arched a conspiratorial eyebrow, pinning Alden with a look. His friend's honey eyes widened, and he leaned in closer, ash blond hair slipping over his forehead.

"Wait, were you summoned already?" he

whispered.

Ethan said nothing, just kept that smug little look, clearly enjoying the suspense. "Ethan, c'mon-"

"Shhh," Ethan murmured, glancing toward the front. "The lecture's about to start."

Alden shook his head, but when Professor Liora lifted her hand, he faced forward and fell silent. She was a woman carved by time but lit by brilliance, her eyes sharp as truth itself.

At her gesture, the chalkboard behind her came to life, displaying complex scripts and symbols that danced in mid-air. Ethan's eyes lit up as he followed her every word, his quill moving swiftly across the parchment, tracing the heartbeat of magic itself.

"Today, we'll examine the linguistic structure of the Arcane Scripts," Professor Liora said, her voice carrying easily through the room. Her sharp gaze settled on Ethan. "Ethan, translate the passage before you and identify its primary meaning."

Ethan adjusted his glasses and focused on the floating text. "In the dawn of the first age, when the stars aligned in perfect harmony, someone forged the Celestial Sphere from the purest starlight, a beacon of hope against the darkness that consumed the world," he translated smoothly. Then he added, "This passage describes the creation of a powerful artifact that harnesses the energy of the stars."

The scratching of quills slowed, then stopped. A few students turned in their seats, and Elara stared at Ethan with her eyebrows raised as he finished the translation.

"Accurate translation, and a strong interpretation of the archaic phrasing," Professor Liora said with a satisfied nod. "Well done, Ethan."

The similarity in the names had snagged Ethan's attention. Celestial Sphere. Celestial Convergence. Maybe it was coincidence, but he wasn't willing to assume that. Before Professor Liora moved on, Ethan copied the entire passage into the back of his notebook and wrote one question beneath it: Connection to the Convergence? He would look into it after class.

When the lecture concluded, Ethan was organizing his notes when several classmates approached him. At the forefront was Elara Wren, her eyes wide with admiration.

"Ethan, that was incredible," Elara said, hesitating for a moment before continuing. "I kept losing the structure halfway through, but you... you made it sound almost simple."

Ethan felt his cheeks flush slightly. "Oh, it's just practice," he mumbled, looking down at his feet.

Elara smiled, touching his arm briefly. "It definitely paid off. The way you handled the older phrasing... I would've gotten completely lost halfway through."

She politely departed with her companions, soft laughter echoing as she cast one last glance over her shoulder before exiting the room.

Behind him, Alden let out an amused chuckle. "Oh, come on. She was practically glowing at you," he said, smirking.

Ethan waved him off, rolling his eyes. “You’re hilarious, Alden,” he said, shaking his head. “She was just being nice.”

“Sure, Ethan,” Alden said with a smirk. “Just being nice.”

The bell tower’s chime filled the air, calling students to their next class.

“Ugh, spell craft time,” Alden groaned, grabbing his things. “But don’t think I’ve forgotten, bookworm. I expect a full, dramatic retelling of your grand assignment later. Bonus points if there’s a plot twist.”

Ethan opened his mouth to tell him he didn’t even have the assignment yet, but Alden was already halfway down the hall, calling out to friends and waving like he didn’t have a care in the world.

Shaking his head, Ethan turned in the opposite direction and headed for the alchemy lab. The closer he got, the stronger the air smelled of hot metal, crushed herbs, and something faintly acidic. From somewhere ahead came the steady bubbling of cauldrons and the occasional sharp clink of glass against copper.

The Academy organized four distinct branches, each aligned with one realm. Students generally studied within their branches, but they all took shared introductory courses like Introduction to Arcane Arts, Elemental Manipulation, and Alchemy. To reach the alchemy laboratory, Ethan needed to pass the central courtyard connecting the four divisions. That was Harmony Court. It was what happened when four

architects from different realms couldn't agree on a style. By all logic, it should have failed - but it didn't.

Enchanted fountains bubbled with glowing water, exotic plants from different realms perfumed the air like an enchanted greenhouse, and bright flowers leaned against serious stone statues, doing their best to add some flair. Every few steps, the air seemed to change with the realms represented around him. One corner carried the cool, mineral scent of rain-soaked stone, while another breathed out warm floral air that made the nearby leaves rustle even when there was no wind. It shouldn't have worked, but it absolutely did.



The sun poured golden light over the courtyard as Ethan made his way down the cobblestone path. Heat radiated from the sun-warmed stones beneath his shoes, while a cool mist drifting from the enchanted fountains brushed across his face.

His thoughts were a jumble of excitement and anxiety about the upcoming Celestial Convergence. But something ahead caught his attention. A crowd had gathered near the center of the courtyard, watching a lone figure perform a demonstration. Curious, Ethan stood on his toes for a better look and froze when he saw who it was.

Luna Silverwind stood at the center of the crowd, performing a dazzling light spell. Her hands moved with practiced grace, weaving beams of light into shimmering shapes that twisted and danced through the air. Her pale blonde hair caught the sunlight, glowing almost as bright as the magic itself. She flicked her wrist, and the light obeyed instantly, spiraling higher as the crowd leaned in. No wonder she was the top student from the Realm of Light and the star of the dueling team. She never hesitated or seemed to search for the next movement. Every gesture landed exactly where she wanted it, and every smile drew another cheer.

Friends and admirers crowded close around her, laughing at every remark and shifting aside whenever she moved. Making room for her came naturally to them.

A quiet ache bloomed in his chest. His stomach tightened when the crowd cheered again, but he still could not look away. Everything Luna did looked effortless - every gesture, every flicker of light perfectly under control. It was hard not to notice how easily she commanded everyone's attention, especially when he always seemed to fade into the background. Ethan watched another burst of light ignite above Luna as the crowd cheered. He adjusted the strap of his bag and wondered what it would feel like to walk into a room and have people notice him before he ever said a word.

Lost in his own thoughts, Ethan almost didn't notice when Luna's eyes met his. For that single heartbeat though, it felt as if the world had paused - a spark of recognition, or maybe curiosity? Then she turned away, her attention returning to the

light she was commanding, leaving Ethan's pulse racing with possibilities.

Cold doubt slipped through his chest like a shadow. Perhaps her gaze had never truly met his? Perhaps, it had passed through him, unknowing, unseeing. To her, he was only a ripple in the crowd, nameless as mist beneath the light.

Ethan could feel it - the sideways glances, the not-so-subtle whispers. "That's him?" someone said, as if he were some rare creature at a zoo exhibit. Another student snickered, unimpressed, probably expecting someone taller, flashier, or less perpetually anxious.

Ethan's instinct was to look away, but he stopped himself this time. He lifted his chin and met the nearest student's stare until the whispering faltered. He tightened his grip on his bag and quickened his pace, eager to leave the courtyard behind. The place that had seemed so alive and bright a moment ago now felt suffocating. Ethan kept his eyes on the path ahead, counting the steps until the whispers finally faded behind him.

By the time Ethan reached his next classroom, he had his notebook open and his quill ready before he even sat down. The comforting rhythm of the classroom, the rustle of paper and the quiet energy of study, steadied his pulse and cleared his mind.

By the time the last lesson ended, Ethan's shoulders ached from carrying his bag all day and his patience felt just as worn down. When he finally reached the dorm, he shut the door behind him, dropped his bag beside the bed, and let out a long breath.

The room was its usual mess of books, scrolls, and magical odds and ends. Alden liked to call it a disaster zone, but Ethan preferred organized chaos. Papers and notebooks filled with his careful notes buried his desk, and shelves overflowing with ancient tomes lined the walls. It was cluttered, yes - but it was his.

Alden's half of the room looked almost untouched by comparison. Three books sat in a neat stack on his desk, his clothes were folded instead of draped over furniture, and even his shoes rested side by side beneath the bed. Ethan glanced at the clutter spilling across his own half and smiled. Somehow, the contrast worked.

Ethan melted into his pillows, enjoying the rare silence of the dorm. Of course, his brain had other plans. It replayed the day like a bad highlight reel - the whispers, the looks, the whole awkward spectacle. He sighed. Luna shone without any effort, her light unquestioned. He wished, just once, he could feel the world look at him the same way.

Ethan sat up and pulled his notes closer. The image of Luna standing at the center of the courtyard flashed through his mind once again, surrounded by people who watched her every move. His fingers tightened around the edge of the notebook. Someday, he wanted to earn that kind of attention for something he had accomplished, not because someone needed help with an assignment or wanted to whisper about him afterward.

Ethan shook his head, pushing away the doubt. Instead, he focused on what lay ahead - the project. For once, Ethan wanted to step beyond the books and quiet corners and let his work speak for him. He could do this. He would do this!

There was a catch, of course. There always was. The Celestial Convergence required students to team up with someone from another realm. It encouraged unity and collaboration, but in reality, it was more like a forced peace treaty. Ethan had seen enough failed partnerships to know how quickly old rivalries could resurface. Students often argued over methods, refused to share credit, and sometimes stopped speaking to each other before the project was even finished. Ethan had seen Knowledge students hunched over shared projects long after their partners had left, finishing calculations, rewriting research, and fixing mistakes that were not theirs.

Whatever tomorrow brought, Ethan was done fading into the background.

He made himself one promise. When he met his partner tomorrow, he would speak first. No shrinking back, no waiting for someone else to take control. Whatever the assignment was, Ethan would make sure his voice was part of the plan from the beginning.

Would someone from the Realm of Nature be his partner? That wouldn't be so bad. They were usually calm, patient, and fairly easy to work with. He could handle that. But the thought of being matched with someone from the Realm of Shadows made his stomach twist; he never knew what to say to them, or even how to act. And worse still, the Realm of Light.

If he got one of them, his life would turn into a nightmare of smug smiles and superiority. No way was he letting one of those glittering perfectionists tank his grade.

Enough worrying. Ethan crossed to his shelves and pulled down three books, one on each of the other realms. If he couldn't control who his partner would be, he could at least make sure he understood who he might be working with. By tomorrow morning, he fully intended to know their customs, magical strengths, and anything else that might help keep the partnership from becoming a disaster.

As Ethan was still thinking, the door swung open, and Alden strode in, tossing his bag onto his bed with his usual flair. "Long day, huh?" he groaned.

"Yeah," Ethan said absently, his mind still wandering through worries about the upcoming project.

Alden's gaze darted to the scroll on the desk, and his grin was back in an instant. "Ha! I knew it. You got the summons!"



Ethan gave a small nod. “Yeah, but the assignment’s tomorrow.”

“Right,” Alden said, dropping onto the edge of his bed. “So basically, tonight you panic, overprepare, and pretend you’re totally

fine until morning.”

Alden gave a low whistle. “Still, that’s exciting. I wonder when mine’s coming. Probably right after I finally finish last week’s homework.” He beamed, clearly amused by his own track record.

Alden flopped onto his bed, laced his hands behind his head, and stared at the ceiling with an easy grin. Ethan smiled despite himself. Maybe, he thought as he straightened his posture, he could borrow a little of that ease. Just a little.

The next day would mark the beginning of the most demanding project of Ethan’s academic career. As if summoned by the thought, the scroll on Ethan’s desk gave a sudden pulse of golden light. He sat upright as new letters slowly burned themselves across the parchment beneath the Headmaster’s signature - words that hadn’t been there before.

PARTNER DESIGNATION IN PROGRESS.

Ethan snatched the scroll from the desk and brought it closer to the lamplight, studying the fresh lettering for any symbol, spellwork, or clue he might recognize. Whatever was happening, he wasn't going to simply wait for tomorrow to understand it.