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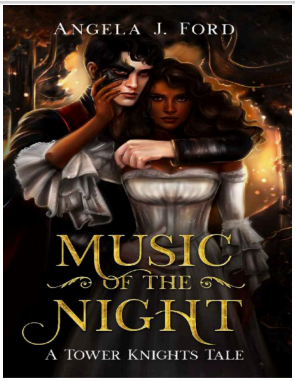
MUSIC OF THE NIGHT A GOTHIC ROMANCE (ANGELA J. FORD)



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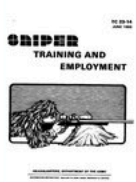

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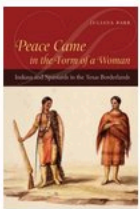

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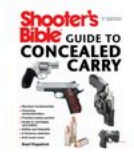

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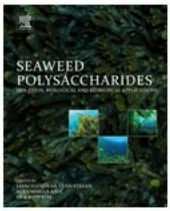

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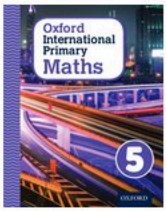

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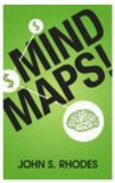

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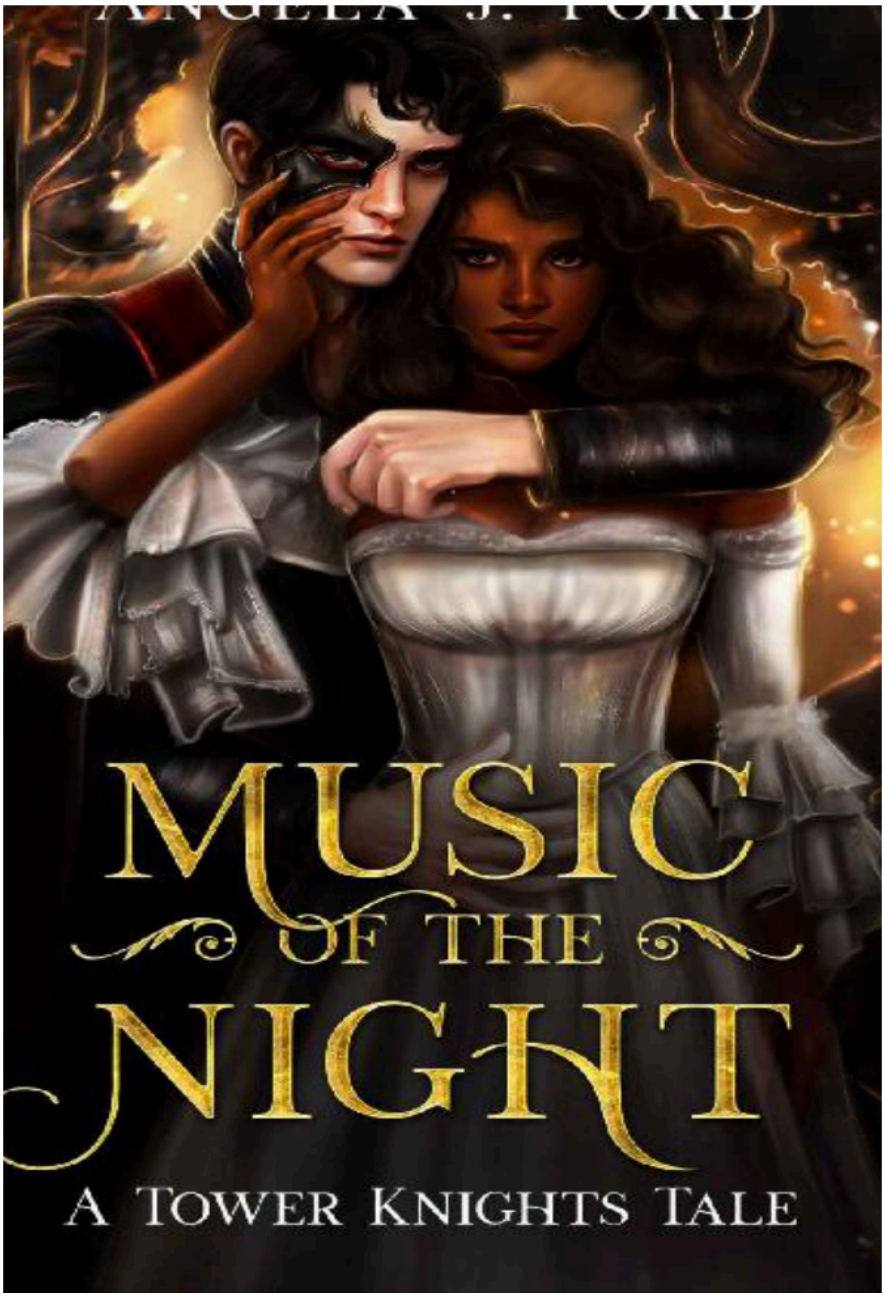
MUSIC
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A TOWER KNIGHTS TALE

MUSIC OF THE NIGHT

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Contents

Prologue
1. Aria
2. Aria
3. Aria
4. Uriah
5. Aria
6. Aria
7. Aria
8. Aria
9. Uriah
10. Aria
11. Uriah
12. Aria
13. Aria
14. Aria
15. Uriah
16. Aria
17. Aria
18. Aria
19. Aria
20. Uriah
21. Aria
22. Aria
23. Uriah
24. Aria
25. Uriah
26. Aria
27. Aria
28. Aria
29. Aria
30. Aria
31. Uriah
32. Aria
33. Aria

Acknowledgments
Also by Angela J. Ford
About the Author

Prologue

he first note pierced the silence as the orchestra warmed u

rst the strings, their mellow tones drawn out and haunting, follow
the chords of the piano and chimes. The audience filtered in, ladi
essed in fine gowns, their fingers and necks covered in the glitter
arkling jewels. Lords escorted them—dressed in their best, ea
rrying a rose for their ladies—and yet some wore masks to hi
eir faces for what was to come.

I stepped farther back into the shadow of the black draper
though no one would see me, hidden in my perch in the back of t
eater. Lifting a spy glass to my good eye, I took in the stage a
aited. A cocktail of scents wafted past me; the choking smoke
gars mixed with the floral fragrance of perfume. No expense h
en spared in the grand hall, decked with shades of crimson, curtai
velvet black and gold, shimmering crystals.

Hushed chatter filled the air as the audience took their seats, t
m of excitement potent as they waited to be seduced by the mag
the theater. Opening night was the highlight of the theater, a fre
rformance with exotic dancers and throaty singers giving a paro
life. I cared naught for such amusement, but I needed one of the
r my plans.

Shifting to a more comfortable position, I brushed at the ma
ting into my skin. The faint itch of my scars reminded me th
ding my loneliness and pain was no longer an option. My patien
d run dry, forcing me to act. My song was ready, all I needed to
as find a singer—a strong one—cast a spell, and the rest would f
to place.

Aside from whispered prayers, they'd forgotten me, the one w
unted the tower, who brought chaos and terror into their lives. I
turned in secret to haunt their steps, to make them realize that
ong, this place was mine. I was its master, and it was time to ta
y freedom.

usic, her eyes darted about the stage, and she missed a step or two
ondered what drew her attention, and why she was not as dedicat
the dance as the others. A heaviness pinched my chest and I sighe
I were a normal human, like the lords and ladies who filled the ha
go up to her after the performance, introduce myself and woo her
But tonight my purpose transcended the mundane, and I needed
nger, not a dancer. Still, watching her eased the ragged edges of pa
at plagued my soul and increased my resolve. I would move heav
d earth to earn a chance to live life, like the mortals.

I

Aria

t happened every evening, and tonight was no different. As t

ylight faded to shades of twilight, the unearthly cry of an org ayed with ardent passion. It filtered through my consciousne lling me to heed, to beckon to its mournful cry. My fingers move tching the cadence of the wordless song as though it were the w a creature in profound anguish, crying for what it suffere arning for solace just out of reach. It tugged on my heartstrings, ough the call were for me and me alone, as though I could answer d bring it comfort.

Rising from the warmth of my bed, I padded across the cool sto or, determined to locate the source of such heart-rending music. ack hair fell to my waist and swayed behind me as I approached t indow and threw it open, heedless of the cool kiss of autumn and t hisper of twilight.

I'd lived in High Tower for only a year, and I was still growi ed to the constant chill. All year long, the bayside town was cover a dense layer of gray fog that hung above the rooftops, occasional retching ghostly fingers in warning against those who prayed f nlight. Storms often rocked the harbor, flashes of lightning a oming thunder like nothing I'd ever heard before. It seemed ough High Tower was cursed by the gods to eternal gloom a ayness.

The storms matched my mood, for once, before High Tower, I en a young lady of wealth and status, living in a vibrant city wi y father who was a wealthy merchant. I had everything mon uld buy, given to me by my doting father—stylish dresses, brillia welry, a beautiful horse and private music lessons. Handsome suito ught my hand for marriage and I had many lovely—if somewh pid—friends among the ladies of the city. Suddenly, everythi ent wrong. Trade goods were lost, debt piled up, and my wealth a

art throbbed as the music filled me. I closed my eyes, lifted ms, and felt it wrap around me, like the arms of a lover, a spi hind the music who wanted to fill me with his presence, with h ft and only his.

"Are you real?" I whispered. "If so, come to me, send me a sig ach me the music, your music of the night and I will sing, I will si r you."

The music faded. Heart pounding, I leaned out over t indowsill, trying to peer beyond the mist. High Tower was suppos be a haven, but the thick gray mist made me feel trapped within coon of mystery.

A sudden gust of wind sent a blast of harsh air through my th ghtgown, scattering the mist just enough to provide a glimpse of ack structure, shining oddly through the gray. A tower. A tremor citement coursed through me and I leaned further out the windo ping to see more, but just as quickly as it had come, the mi oved, hiding it from view again.

Pressing my fingers to my mouth, I strained again. The towe at's where the music came from, the sorrowful melody I heard ea ening. It was real.

A soft rap on the door reminded me it was almost time for t ening performance. "Come in," I called over my shoulder, lingeri pefully by the window.

"Lord, it's cold in here," Samara, my maid, scolded as she slipp side. Damp blonde curls clung to her forehead and her bonnet w kew, her face pink with exertion. "Lady Aria, what are you doi ith the windows open?"

"I saw it." I pulled the window shut and latched it. "The hidd wer on the shore."

Samara set a tray of food on the vanity and crossed her arm owning. "You know it is bad luck to talk about the haunted tower e waved her hands to dispel the bad luck in the air.

I snorted and clasped my hands over my mouth, so not to offen mara had been my maid since my misfortune led me to the gates igh Tower Castle, the domain of my distant relative, Count Zorik, ndsome and enigmatic man who ran a thriving theater. As a way play the Count for saving me from the streets, I'd secured my sp ith the dancers, although my heart called me to sing. Music stirr e passion in my soul although I'd been warned, time and time agai

e massive, sprawling castle which lay like a sleeping beast on t ge of Esrum Bay. A dark road twisted like a snake out of the sli ees, stunted by the gray mists and lack of sunlight, to the town. Ev e coastal road was covered in shadows and long weeping trees un reached the outskirts of High Tower where the sun began to shi ain.

Tossing on my robe, I sat down at the vanity to eat my light me e cook had sent baked fish, seasoned with lemon and apples in nnamon sauce with potatoes on the side. The smell was heavenly.

"Samara," I gave her a pointed look before spearing a potato y fork. "I know you believe in the supernatural, but what do y agine is so terrible up in the tower?"

Placing her hands on her hips, which made her petite figure lo ite comical, she waved a finger at me. "Lady Aria—"

"It's just Aria," I corrected her for I did not deserve the tit ymore. Samara was only a few years older, and we were mo iends than lady and maid. Although I usually followed her advic r she'd grown up in High Tower Castle and knew the superstitions e town. "How many times do I have to tell you?"

"How many times do I have to tell you to respect the spirits?" s ipped.

We glared at each other until I burst into laughter and s llowed shortly after, giggling until she wiped her eyes.

"Aria," she sighed, flinging open the wardrobe. Dresses glimmer the low light, endless silk and petticoats and yards and yards ills and fabric that would make anyone jealous. "I swear, you're t rious for your own good. You need a man, no, a lover to calm y wn and make you happy again. Then maybe you'll forget abo sturbing the ghosts of High Tower."

My hunger vanished at her words and I put the fork down, stari ghtlessly at my half-eaten fish and potatoes. How could I forg out ghosts and spirits? I had to admit, ever since my father's deat had a childish hope he'd send a spirit from the afterlife to teach w to sing like my mother. I still recalled his words as he held nd, his voice shaking with pain.

Count Zorik of High Tower is the only one who might help, but he is n man you should become indebted to. I've made too many mistakes, a u might be saved this once. If you have nowhere else to go, call up m, and he will come. But do not tarry in High Tower. If you can use yo

ar the music this evening?”

Samara jerked, then continued to shake out my dancing dress. as low cut, form fitting, and gathered at the waist. The skirt end st below the knee, layered with fine black silk. The gown was mea move and swirl with the music, despite its revealing style. I had mind myself I was no longer a fine city lady, but a connoisseur e music of the night.

Samara laid the dress on the bed and picked up my hairbrush. d not hear the music,” she began, glancing around the room sure no one was listening. No one was, but all the same she lower r voice to a conspiring whisper. “But we saw another sighting.”

“A sighting?” I raised my eyebrows.

“Aye, of the ghost. Word is, he haunts this castle by night and t wer by the wood by day, sneaking in to cause chaos. The co aimed he tricked her today. The Count wanted roasted quail, a e swears he requested baked fish, no seasonings. You can’t imagi e uproar dinner was. He was livid, all red in the face and shoutin or cook.” Samara wagged her head as she untangled my curls. “S ould have known better. No one likes baked fish without seasoning t that’s not the half of it. Earlier today, a strange man borrowed t unt’s favorite horse, and the horse keeper, poor Lawrence, claims as the Count himself who took it out earlier.”

The ominous tone of her words made me shiver. Unexplainab ents took place within High Tower Castle, nothing more th nocent pranks, yet there was a distinct tilt toward slighting t unt, making him seem stupid in front of the lords and ladies a rvants.

“What does the ghost have to do with the music?” I asked.

Samara’s eyes widened. “Some say the music is only the win owing through the old pipes of the tower and giving it song. iries playing a joke. What if it’s a spirit whom the Count h ended? Coming back from the dead to haunt him?”

And there’s where the story lost me, for how could it be a spi hen the music felt so genuine and compelling? I could sense ithin, just as real as the stone floor beneath my feet.

I dressed quickly, waving away Samara’s help to smooth the lin the dress and clench it tight around my waist. The neckli unged, displaying an expanse of cleavage that left comfortable, with almost transparent gossamer sleeves. I snatch