

SONG TO THE SIREN
THE HALFWAY HOUSE



BY BARB LIEN-COOPER AND PARK COOPER

Copyright



Copyright © 2025 The Shooting Star Press Inc & Barb Lien-Cooper and Park Cooper.
All rights reserved.

The events and characters in this book are factitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

This book may contain content that some may find to be troubling. If you are experiencing distress or need support, please reach out to a trusted professional or local support resource.

No part of this book may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without express written permission of the publisher or the creators.

ISBN

(print) 978-1-987884-70-8

(ebook) 978-1-987884-71-5

Praise for Song to the Siren

Praise for *Song to the Siren* Book One:

“As soon as I jumped into this book it was hard to put down. When I wasn’t reading it, I couldn’t wait to pick it back up again and often found myself thinking about Reed. The authors [made] this . . . fascinating, creepy, and heartbreaking all at once. Reed has earned a spot in my [list of] favorite characters. He is broken, flawed, but still so caring. I finished this book days ago and I still think about his character. That’s how much I love the guy. The ending was hauntingly beautiful and moving . . . Rating: 5 Stars”

–Indie Book Addict

“It’s old school, with a lot of the creepiness appearing in the shadows . . . Could we be witnessing a mental breakdown and delusion, or are we seeing something truly supernatural? Honestly, this book could appeal to the romance crowd equally as much as it could to any lovers of quiet horror. What it is, is a damn good story. It is engaging, entertaining . . . well-written . . . You really could suspend disbelief and think this was a true transcript from a real magazine or documentary. I, for one, thoroughly enjoyed it.”

–kendallreviews.com

Praise for *Song to the Siren* Book Two: *A Lovers’ Concerto*:

“While an outstanding read on its own, if you have read the first book in the series, *Song to the Siren*, and it left you satisfied, yet wanting to know more about the characters, this companion book is a must-read (that could also work on its own).”

–Carol Seufert, Educator and Reviewer

Also available from these authors:

[Song to the Siren, Book One: Good Night, Sleep Well](#)

[Song to the Siren, Book Two: A Lovers' Concerto](#)

[The Talking Cure, Book One: Magic Through Psychiatry](#)

[The Talking Cure, Book Two: Transference](#)

[The Talking Cure, Book Three: A Light in the Darkness](#)

[Hungry Ghosts \(the graphic novel\)](#)

[Hungry Ghosts: Three Oni of Blood](#)

Chapter 1: Dr. Woodard

Prince Michael turned to David. "The way the trees burn to the south isn't natural," said Michael. "It can only be dragon fire."

Tap Tap Tap....

Why the hell can't Dr. Woodard stop tapping that stupid pencil? Reed thought.

Before Dr. Woodard had come into his life, if Reed didn't like something someone was saying, he could ignore them, keep them from intruding on his private thoughts, by finding something else to focus on. Reed almost always got away with this because adults almost never actually cared what his response was when they were lecturing him, as long as he didn't talk back and point out how unfair they were being and make them madder.

Reed looked, without actually turning his head, around the white walls of his psychiatrist's office. *Hal, Reed thought, I need you. Please talk to me. It wasn't my fault. I didn't want to break our connection. This bastard doctor put me through shock therapy. I can't use any of my gifts anymore. I can't see you. I can't even play my music. Please forgive me for not being able to hang onto you.*

But Reed's dead brother Hal was nowhere to be seen, not even by Reed.

Despite his efforts to not be detected, Reed's mother caught his eye. Her look said: *You can't escape your problems by thinking about your imaginary worlds anymore, Reed, so stop trying.*

Reed broke away from his mother's disapproving stare and focused his attention about six inches above her eyes: he focused on her hat. It was a black, furry, almost shapeless thing that perched on her head as if it might spring forward and attack him. The last time Reed had seen that hat had been when his mother wore it to Hal's funeral.

Reed hated that hat. Some poor little creature had to die just so his mother could have a new hat... just so she could look like a concerned parent. He wanted to snatch the hat off of his mother's head, but he resisted the urge.

"Impulse control is an important part of the journey to adulthood," Reed heard the psychiatrist say.

"Reed, did you hear what Dr. Woodard just said?" Reed's father asked.

Reed *wanted* to say, *Sure, I just don't like what he's implying*. Instead, he said: "Sorry, sir, I have kind of a hard time concentrating lately."

Tap, tap, tap...

"That's all right," said Dr. Woodard. "A common side effect of electro-shock is a slight difficulty concentrating, at first. It'll go away eventually."

Dr. Dave Woodard, Reed thought, as if he were narrating a police show on television. Suspect is a Caucasian man, early fifties, too-wide jaw, frown lines around his eyes, and tortoiseshell glasses, light brown hair, stands maybe 5 foot 9. Suspect has a compulsive habit of tapping pencils on desks and frying the brains of teenagers with electricity. No names have been changed to protect the innocent...

"Did it hurt much, Reed?" Reed's mother asked him.

Reed *wanted* to scream: *They held me down on a table, shoved a big piece of rubber in my mouth so I wouldn't bite my tongue off, and then they shocked me until I couldn't see straight. Of course, it hurt, you stupid—*

He didn't, though. After all, impulse control is an important part of the journey to adulthood.

Doctor Woodard cleared his throat, which always meant trouble for Reed. Reed looked the doctor square in the eyes. In the olden times, pre-electroshock therapy, Reed could stare down any adult. All adults had been afraid of Reed's intelligence, honesty, and sense of self. They had known he was stronger than they were. That was why they felt such a compulsion to break him.

Tap tap tap... "So, Reed... Do you still see Belle?" Dr. Woodard asked.

Reed sighed. The adults had never believed him about Belle, any more than they'd believed that he talked to the ghost of his dead brother. They did not believe that a *leanan sidhe*—a fairy woman of the hills, a dark muse bent on driving Reed to madness and eventual suicide—could possibly be real.

“No, sir,” Reed said. “As every adult has told me so often, there are no such things as malevolent fairies.”

Reed felt, rather than saw, his father stiffen up in his seat. *What are you so damned afraid of, Dad?* Reed thought. *The beautiful cruel-hearted fairy bitch is after me, not you...*

“Good,” said Dr. Woodard, either not registering Reed's father's reaction, or ignoring it. “Fairy tales are for frightened children, not teenagers who are nearing adulthood.”

Woodard waggled his pencil in the air for several seconds, but the office clock ticked harshly, as if waiting in anticipation for Dr. Woodard's next question...

But it was Reed's father who cleared his throat next. “So, essentially, the shock treatment *destroyed* Belle?” he asked Dr. Woodard.

Reed looked at his father... thinning gray hair, gold-rimmed glasses, a face that looked like it'd been healthy and firm for years and then started aging suddenly in the last several years—except that he'd always looked like that, as far back as Reed could remember. *Today, though, Dad looks almost as colorless as the walls,* Reed thought.

Dr. Woodard chuckled his usual educated, patronizing laugh. “Mr. Sinclair, we destroyed a *delusion*. We cannot treat Belle as if ‘she’ ever actually *existed*.”

“Of course,” Reed's father said quickly. “How foolish of me.”

“Is she gone for good?” Reed's mother asked.

Reed tried to look at his mother's face as if he didn't know her. It was easy... except that he saw so much of himself in her. He saw his own yellow hair, slightly wavy, his own arched eyebrows (striking on a woman, but on Reed, they'd always made him look a little like Peter Pan), the same cheekbones... and the same fear that Reed's eyes always had when he talked about Belle.

Reed was starting to think that maybe, on some subconscious level, both his mother and father did believe in Belle, just a little more than they'd let on when they'd first visited him in the hospital...

"The answer to that question," said Dr. Woodard, "depends on Reed. He must use his inner strength and his, ah..." the psychiatrist said.

"Impulse control?" Reed suggested.

They all looked at him, as if surprised he could even speak, even though he'd done so just a minute before. "...Yes, impulse control. Very good," said Dr. Woodard.

His tone of voice sounds like he's talking to a dog who just learned a new trick, Reed thought. *Good Reed, good dog, there's a good boy...*

"So, it all depends on Reed giving up his belief in... Belle—and the supernatural?" Reed's mother asked.

"It's always depended on that, Laura," Reed's father told her.

Oh, yeah, like it's that simple, Reed thought.

Tap tap tap...

Dr. Woodard cleared his throat. The clock ticked. Finally, the doctor asked: "Do you see the ghost of your brother Hal, Reed?"

Reed noticed that his mother winced when she heard Hal's name. His father stayed stoic.

Reed wanted to yell *Don't you **dare** talk about Hal! Hal was worth ten of you!*

"No, sir," Reed said instead. "My brother died in the Vietnam war. The dead do not come back to comfort the living. You've told me that many, many times."

"That's right, son," Reed's father said. "As much as it might comfort us to think the way you did, Hal is gone."

Reed looked at his mother. His mother looked at him. Reed could tell that they were each thinking the same thought, and that thought was about Reed's father: *If you*

hadn't been so eager to have Hal be a war hero, we wouldn't be talking about ghosts, would we?

The *tap tap tap* of Dr. Woodard's pencil became a *rap rap rap* instead. "If we may continue...?" he said.

Reed's mother nodded at Reed, as if to say, *You and I understand about Hal, but they never will—so we must move on.*

"Please proceed, doctor," Reed's father said.

"...Do you still obsess about Samantha MacNamara, Reed?"

I love Sam, Reed wanted to yell, *and Sam loves me*—but Reed also wanted out of the mental hospital. He bit his tongue.

Reed's father noticed Reed's hesitation. "Doctor, the MacNamara girl was his closest friend," he told Dr. Woodard. "They grew up together. Whatever delusions Reed has, I don't think that his relationship with Samantha is anything but healthy..."

Reed looked at his father in disbelief. His father, the man that never understood a damned thing about Reed or Reed's life, understood about Sam? Would wonders never cease?

"Mr. Sinclair, we've spoken about this before..." said Dr. Woodard.

Reed glared at the doctor. "You spoke to my father about Sam?" Reed asked. *So much for impulse control*, Reed thought belatedly.

"Reed, a mentally ill patient has no right to privacy," said Dr. Woodard. "All of the factors in your mental illness are on the table, including the MacNamara girl."

Reed looked at the doctor in disbelief. "...All human beings have a basic, fundamental right to privacy," Reed said quietly.

"We'll have to agree to disagree on that point, son—" said Dr. Woodard—

"—I am *not* your son," Reed said.

"I always told you that she was bad for him," said Reed's mother. "I always said that a child like that—"

“—A child like *what?*” Reed asked.

“A child who does not act like a *typical female*,” said his mother, “a child who’d rather climb trees or play football than wear a dress. Now, Cathy Murphy, that was a girl who was good for you...”

“H’mph. Reed could *talk* to Samantha,” Reed’s father said, “which was a lot more than I can say for that shallow Murphy girl...”

The pencil went *rap rap rap*... “Mrs. Sinclair, we agreed not to talk about the Murphy girl,” said Dr. Woodard. “Reed still feels a lot of survivor’s guilt about her accident...”

*But it **wasn’t** an accident*, thought Reed. *Belle **made** that car plow into Cathy, breaking poor Cathy’s leg...*

“The girl was *drinking* at that party,” Reed’s mother told Dr. Woodard. “Everyone knew that. It wasn’t Reed’s fault in the least...” Reed noticed that “Cathy” had become “the girl” when his mother wanted to say something bad about her for a change...

“We need to focus on the subject matter at hand,” said Dr. Woodard.

“I still say that you both have painted an innocent girl like Samantha as the villain in this piece...” Reed’s father said.

Hooray, Dad, Reed thought, *you’re not totally useless, after all...*

“Mr. Sinclair, your son is not psychologically ready for a caring, adult relationship with anyone,” said Dr. Woodard, “let alone a girl who is two years younger than he is...”

“Since you have never even bothered to talk to Samantha, I respectfully disagree,” said Reed’s father. “She is a very mature young woman...”

“Unfortunately, your son is not a very emotionally mature young man,” said Dr. Woodard.

“This argument is getting us nowhere,” Reed’s mother said.

“You’re right. Now, Reed...” said Dr. Woodard, turning back to Reed...

Shit, his attention's back on me... Reed thought. He'd been sort of enjoying watching Dr. Woodard learn the hard way that it was impossible to try to force his parents to stop arguing...

"Are you," Dr. Woodard asked Reed, "still obsessed by your relationship with the MacNamara girl...?"

What a loaded question, Reed thought. *If I tell the truth, I'm stuck here. If I lie, I lie about how much I love Sam. But I need to get home so I can talk to her brother Pete about our band—and I need to get back to playing guitar—and I can't do those things in a mental hospital, so that leaves lying—* Reed looked Dr. Woodard square in the eyes and lied through his teeth: "No sir," Reed sighed.

The adults had won. For years, he had stood up against their wicked, foolish, unhappy ways, but they put him in a psychiatric hospital. Adults had the power, and they used it and misused it as they saw fit. He was just a teenager—a teenager without Sam, the only living person who made life worth living for him.

Dr. Woodard and Reed's mother smiled at each other, as if to say, *We broke Reed! He'll never trouble us again...!*

"Now," said Dr. Woodard, addressing Reed's parents, "let's talk about the halfway house Reed is going to be sent to..."

Reed blinked. "—Halfway house? You're not sending me home?" Reed asked.

The adults looked at each other. "Where did you get that insane idea?" Reed's father asked.

"We don't use the word 'insane' here, Mr. Sinclair," Dr. Woodard gently chided.

"I was under the impression that if I played by your rules, that I could go home," Reed said.

"The doctor believes that you need more supervision than we can provide you with," Reed's mother said.

"Isn't that abdicating your responsibilities as my parents?" Reed asked.

“It was a difficult decision to make, Reed,” Reed’s mother said, “but...” She just trailed off, as if surely an acknowledgement of the emotional difficulty said everything that needed to be said.

Reed glared at his mother. It wasn’t difficult at all. She didn’t want him around. He wasn’t Hal. He was Reed, the *problem* child. She was throwing him onto the trash heap with the rest of the trash.

“Reed, you still have issues with authority,” said Dr. Woodard, “and you still have problems with following the rules. You still have a lot of hostility toward society.”

“A lot of teens do,” Reed said.

“Not a lot of teens have near-schizophrenic delusions about Irish mythology,” Reed’s father said.

“Mr. Sinclair, you’re not a doctor,” said Dr. Woodard. “Please stop throwing around psychiatric diagnoses.”

“The plural of diagnosis is diagnoses,” said Reed, “not—”

“—That’s what I’m talking about,” said Dr. Woodard, turning to Reed’s parents. “Reed still has an attitude problem—”

“I simply corrected your grammar, sir,” Reed said.

“Yes, but it was rude, impolite, and uncalled-for,” the doctor said.

“Apologize to the doctor, Reed,” Reed’s mother said.

“I just corrected his grammar. How does that merit an apology?” Reed asked.

“See, this is why you have to go to a halfway house,” Reed’s mother said.

“You’re punishing me because I know the plural of diagnosis?” Reed asked.

“We aren’t punishing you, Reed,” said Dr. Woodard, “we want to help you.”

“You’re punishing me for knowing the English language,” said Reed. “You’re a psychiatrist, you should know the proper word for...”

Reed heard his father chuckle.

They all looked at Reed's father. "Why are you laughing, Mr. Sinclair?" the doctor asked.

"Because the plural of diagnosis *is* diagnoses..." Mr. Sinclair said...

Reed suppressed a giggle.

"...*If* we may go on, Mr. Sinclair..." said Dr. Woodard.

"Yes, Reed is a behavioral problem," said Reed's father, still amused, "yes, he is psychologically damaged. But he knows his grammar..."

Mrs. Sinclair glared at her husband. "How long will Reed have to be in the halfway house?" she asked Dr. Woodard.

"Until he's eighteen," said Dr. Woodard.

"No, you can't do that to me," Reed said, "I have my band to think of. Pete is keeping my band together, but it'll fall apart if I'm not there..."

"Reed, a teenage pipedream is not worth your mental health," said Dr. Woodard.

Reed just stared at the doctor in disbelief. "I fail to see how my ambitions for my future have anything to do with endangering my mental health," Reed said coldly.

"You must have *realistic* goals, son," Reed's father told him. "*Obtainable* goals. The doctor says..."

"You made me take piano lessons all through my childhood—was that just on some kind of whim, or do I have musical talent?" Reed demanded.

"Of course, you do, Reed," said his father, "however, the doctor says—"

"—You don't really want to get back home to play music," his mother told him, "you want to come back so you can talk to your friend Pete about his sister Samantha."

"Mom, I'm a talented musician. My music keeps me sane. You can't just yank that away from me like that—"

"Do *not* take that tone with *me*, young man," his mother said.

“What tone? I’m just stating my needs. I am trying to act in an *adult* way. I was told by the doctors that I had to state my needs,” Reed said.

Rap rap rap the doctor’s pencil went.

They all looked at Dr. Woodard.

“Our time’s just about up,” he said. “I have paperwork I need you to sign...”