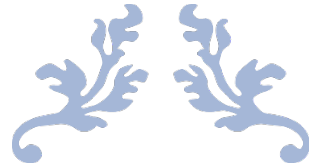


A Fairy's Tale



By Lynn Marie



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Prologue

Pop, pop, crackle, whoosh, sparkle, twinkle, Crash!!

My Granny always said there would be days like this. It started out the way most do in our little cottage.
Now it was five days later...

Let us start at the beginning.

Chapter 1

Granny was making breakfast while I was tidying up the rest of our little home.

“Now who could that be at such an early hour?” Granny called from the kitchen.

The knock on the door came more insistent. I came running down the stairs to answer the door. Even though the sun was up when I opened the door it was totally dark. Standing in front of me was the biggest and most beautiful male I ever had the pleasure of meeting.

At that exact moment Granny came flying from kitchen the spoon swinging wildly in the air.

“Who’s disturbing my peace and quiet so early in the morning?”

“I am so sorry to intrude madam, but my sister sent me here on urgent business,” replied the man.

“And just who is your sister, pray tell?”

“The Lady Arabella of Stonewood Manor.”

“Well come in. Why didn’t you say so in the first place?” Granny led the way to our parlor.

“Now what is this urgent business your sister has sent you on? Don’t be shy young man, speak up. My hearing isn’t what it used to be.”

“Er, ah, well my sister, her ladyship, she said to ask you and your granddaughter to come at once to the manor. She said to tell you...” If it were possible the gentleman acted like he wanted to be anywhere other than in our home about to tell us lord knows what. “She said to tell you that the fairies are in trouble.”

“Well why didn’t you say so in the first place? Gabby, quickly get my basket, we must leave at once, there is no time to lose.”

“Her Ladyship had me bring her carriage to convey you back to the manor.”

Once we were in the carriage, overdue introductions were made.

“My manners have been completely remiss. I am Jonathan Longman, the Earl of Wexly, at your service.”

Granny nodded slightly and introduced herself first, “I am Lady Jennifer Hawkins and this is my granddaughter Gabriela DuPue. People around here just know me as Jenny. It makes life a lot simpler.”

“Your secret is safe with me,” Johnathan said as they pulled up in front of his sister’s manor house.

The manor was a beautiful structure of aged yellow stone with many palladian windows facing the drive. The sun had been caught by the panes and sparked like huge gems.

The door opened before they had reached the first step.

“Thank heavens you are here. Come quickly please!!”

As the three ladies headed off to who knew where, Jonathan finally had time to think about his meeting with two of the most remarkable women he had ever met.

Lady Jennifer 'Jenny' must have been the catch of the season when she made her debut. The woman didn't hesitate even a blink of an eye when he told her why he was disturbing their early morning peace. Johnathan himself was embarrassed with his mission.

He had told his sister just that. "Are you mad; you want me to do what?"

But she did not relent. "Please do as I ask or I will go myself."

"I will go, his lordship sent me here to watch over you until he is able to return. He would have me thrown in the tower if anything happened to you or the child you carry."

With that said, Johnathon left to do her bidding thinking perhaps he was the one that was mad. When the door had opened at Glimmer Cottage, he was sure. Standing in the opening was the most amazing creature he had ever seen in his life. To say she was petite did not do justice to the girl. She was willowy, her skin almost translucent. Her hair was loose and the color of spun gold in the sunshine. Jonathan could not take his eyes off her big eyes, the color of wild periwinkles, in a face that was almost surreal.

The words of the old woman had brought him out of his stupor. He delivered his message and within moments they were rushing back to Stonewood Manor.

Jonathan's sister had been acting strangely since his arrival a fortnight ago. Worrying over the small garden just outside her bed chamber.

Yesterday he had found her on her hands and knees talking to the plants. At least he had thought it was the plants. Could the old lady and her granddaughter be trying some kind of rouse to get money from her? He truly hoped that was not the case for he would very much like to know Gabriella better.

Then again if they all were seeing fairies and the like, would that be the wise thing to do?

"Ah well, that can wait to be answered another time," he said to himself.

The three ladies had rushed to her ladyship's rooms and out into the garden. It was in total disarray. Plants pulled out by the roots, small structures tipped over and the overall joy and happiness of the garden was gone.

"Oh no!! What could have done this?" cried Gabby.

"I am not sure," said her granny, "but I will do everything in my power to right it."

Lady Arabella had begun wringing her hands and crying.

"Something has to be done. I should have sent for you yesterday. I felt something was off yesterday. Johnathan found me on my hands and knees here in the garden and insisted I go to lay down and rest. It was already dark when I awoke. When I went out at sunrise I found the garden like this."

"Do not fret my lady, it will do you and your babe no good. I will get to the bottom of this and set things right. Gabby, bring my basket closer."

Gabby did as she was bid, moving the basket closer. In all the years she had lived with her granny she had never seen so much destruction to a fae area before.

“What do you think has done this Granny? Could it have been an animal of some kind?”

Granny did not answer for the longest time, “It was an animal alright, but not the kind you are talking about. It was an attack by the dark fae.”

“But why? What would the dark fae want to attack here for?”

“That is what we need to find out,” was Granny’s reply.

“We need to go back home. We have to pick up supplies and make up a plan.” Returning to her ladyship’s bedroom, Granny talked to Lady Arabella.

My thoughts were on her brother, the Earl of Wexly. He was the handsomest man she had ever even seen let alone actually met. He is tall and broad. His hair was a warm, rich brown. His eyes that had been staring at me were unforgettable. They were the green of the forest with flecks of brown and gold. His nose was a perfect fit to his god-like face.

“Gabby... Gabby!!” her granny was talking to her.

Blushing rosily under the looks from both ladies. “Sorry my mind was gathering wool I guess. “

“Come, we have much to do before coming back to the manor.”

It was a constant buzz of activity. Jenny had made short work of cleaning up their spoiled breakfast. She went down to the root cellar packing up jars and cloth bags full of mysteries and common ingredients.

Gabby, in the meantime, had eaten the sandwich her granny had made and insisted she eat. She had also changed into a beautiful diaphanous lavender gown that matched her eyes. Her granny had told her it had belonged to Gabby’s mother many years ago.

She asked, “Why am I wearing this now?”

“All in good time, all in good time, my dear,” was the only thing granny had said before she headed for the cellar.

Once Granny had gathered all the supplies she needed and gabby had changed her clothes and eaten, they were off, back to the manor.

Chapter 2

"I believe we will need the aid of Jonathan."

"Why ever for?" a blushing Gabby queried.

"My plan calls for you to go deep into the forest quickly and once you change you will not be able to move with much speed thru the thick undergrowth."

"Change? What are you talking about? I already changed at home."

"Yeah, well, I will explain everything when we are back at the manor with her ladyship and her brother. Everyone must do their part if my plan to rescue the fairies is to work."

"Please Arabella, sit down and relax. I don't understand why you are so upset. So, an animal got in your little garden. It can all be righted with a few hours of work," Jonathan said as he watched his sister pacing across her private parlor carpet.

Arabella stopped looking at her brother in disbelief. "Have you not been listening to anything that has been said in the last two hours? I assure you it was not 'just' an animal that invaded 'just' my garden!!

"But fairies? Arabella? I understand you are under a strain with your husband away, but really!!"

Jonathan shook his head in total denial and a little bit of shame for his sister.

Jonathan was beginning to think that perhaps her condition was addling her brain. There was no time for further reflection as there was a knock at the door.

"Your ladyship, Mistress Jenny and her granddaughter have returned."

"Bring them up immediately, James."

As the butler turned to leave, Jonathan turned to his sister, "What are they doing back here?"

"They have come to save the fairies from dark fae," she replied in a voice more calm than she had been all day.

Once Jenny and Gabby were in the garden things started moving swiftly. Jenny set all her powders, herbs and potions out in the garden area. She packed a small satchel and gave it to Gabby. "I have put instructions on each item. Follow them exactly or there could be severe consequences."

"Yes Granny, I understand," Gabby replied shyly.

"Now where is that handsome young man? I need to explain a few things to him before you leave." With a twinkle in her eyes she called for Jonathan.

"Gabby is going to need help getting through the forest and complete the task at hand."

"Fine, I will be happy to escort your granddaughter."

"First you will need to change your clothes. I have brought just what you will require."

Thinking it rather odd, Jonathan replied "I have plenty of clothes with me I am sure will be quite adequate. After all we are just going to ride through the forest together."

"There is where you are mistaken young man. Gabby will be the only one riding. You sir will be carrying her on your back."

The look of total shock lit up Jonathan's face. "You expect me to carry Gabby on my back running around the forest to lord knows where?"

"Not exactly, you will be carrying Gabby on your back as you fly through the forest to the dark fae's compound. There you will help her carry out my plan to rescue your sister's fairy friends and return them to their garden here at the manor."

Too stunned to reply, Jonathan just sat down on the nearest chair and simply stared at the women, his mouth wide open. She had said he was to fly Gabby to the dark Fae's encampment and rescue his sister's friends. Had the whole area here in the country gone mad! Perhaps it was something in the water or something in the food people were eating.

"Are you for real? This is all a big joke you are playing on a city gentleman. Right?"

"This is no joke, I assure you young man. Now get your clothes changed. You and Gabby will need to fit in when you get to the encampment."

Jonathan took the clothes Jenny was handing him. He left his sister's rooms, heading for his own bedroom to change. He looked as if he was in shock.

Turning to Gabby, Granny told her "We will go out into the garden. There you and Jonathan will take these potions. When you get to the dark fae's compound you must give Jonathan this second potion."

"Will he turn back to his normal form?"

"Heavens no! Can you imagine a human tromping around the area around the dark fae's homes? They would disappear before you could even think about your rescue mission. However, I suggest we don't tell Jonathan any of this right now."

At that moment, the person of their discussion appeared in the doorway. His outfit revealed a body that was one to be worshiped. He definitely kept himself in top shape. The brown tights showed strong legs that could hold their own if he was forced to run a long distance. His body was covered with a green tunic that matched his eyes. The complete picture of the man before her had Gabby's face turning red and her heart beating faster.

When Jonathan entered the room, he was very self-conscious. However, when site of Gabby, he forgot all about his appearance. She was absolutely beautiful in the flowing gown of a color that matched her eyes. To him she looked like the fairies of his long-ago childhood stories.

"Aah, good, now we are ready to begin," said Jenny. "Here, each of you drink these once we are outside in the garden."

They all returned to the garden. Gabby and Jonathan drank as they were told. Lady Arabella and Jenny watched the transformation of the two young people. Gabby was holding the satchel her granny had given her close to her body. Jonathan was also watching as Gabby seemed to disappear before his eyes.

At the same time, he did not realize he too was changing. Supposing he would change the same as Gabby it was a total shock when he caught reflection in the windows.

He was not in a human form. Staring back at him was a "BIRD!" yet he could see and think as a normal human being. He began turning to the right and the left looking at his reflection the whole time.

Jenny's voice brought him back to reality, if you could call any of this reality, "Enough of the preening. I never know what kind of bird one will turn into, but I must admit you are the first falcon I have ever seen. Yes, and quite a handsome falcon too. Being a bird of prey however, you must not fly to close to the fae or you will spook them. Once you land, gabby will have another potion to change you. She will also explain the rest of the plan at that time." Gabby climbed onto Jonathan's back and they were off.

Wringing her hands, Lady Arabella sighed, "I do hope everything goes well. I need the fairy folk back before my babe is born."

Patting her ladyship's hands, "Everything will work out as it should," Jenny cooed. "Let's have some tea and relax. We have done all we can here."

Chapter 3

Jonathan had been soaring above the forest that ran along the border for almost an hour when he felt gabby tug on his feathers.

“There is the compound we are looking for. Please, find a safe place to land that is not too close.”

Scanning the area with his bird of prey eyes, Jonathan found a perfect spot to come to rest. Gabby slid off his back and started looking thru her satchel. Quickly finding the right bottle, she gave it to Jonathan. Expecting to change back to his human form, he was again shocked to find himself looking like one of the dark fae.

“The plan is that we go into their camp. I am to be your captive and you are looking for safe haven to rest up before you take me to your home”

“Okay, let’s go. Give me your satchel. It would look a bit strange if you were going to carry it in. I am going to tie up your hands too.”

They had walked for about ten minutes when their way was blocked by four dark fae with weapons.

“Halt!” a course voice shouted. “You are not authorized to be in this area.”

“I am just passing through. I was hoping for a meal and a safe place to keep my captive while I get some rest.”

The fae that seemed to be in charge grumbled, “why would you think we would allow this.”

“if you were the ones traveling a great distance my fold would accord you the same courtesy.”

“Well maybe if you are willing to share your captive perhaps we can extend you our hospitality” said the leader with an evil smile.

“I am sorry that is not going to happen. I am planning to score some big points with a certain overlord I know. Besides rumor has it that your group scored a whole village in the last couple of days.”

This was a dangerous ploy on Jonathan’s part but he needed the distraction away from Gabby.

“Where did you hear that?” one of the other fae asked.

“Oh, I have my sources. Now are you going to allow me to enter your camp or not?”

“Very well you can come. She,” he said with much distain, “can stay with our captives tonight.”

Gabby was more than happy to stay with the fae from Lady Arabella’s village. Together perhaps they could go over the plan her granny had come up with the free them all.

As they approached the compound Jonathan could tell it was nothing like the village in his sister’s garden. It was dark, almost like everything was dead, except the fae themselves. It was so quiet you could hear every foot step on the dry leaves. There were no birds singing, no water babbling in the fountain. The feel of doom and gloom was everywhere.

This really is a place of evil thought Jonathan. It is not the light and happiness of my sister's garden. I need to think of a way to keep Gabby with me. I can't let her be exposed to this darkness any more than is necessary.

As the group reached the center of the compound, Jonathan told the others, "I would rather keep this one by my side where I can keep my eye on her. She has already tried several times to trick me. She is very crafty."

"So, one little fairy can get the best of you, a big dark fae?"

"As you can clearly see she is still my captive and I now know all her tricks. If you put her with the others there is no telling what havoc she might cause."

"Very well, perhaps you are correct. You may keep her with you for the night. If you change your mind our captives are in the stockade. You must let me know if you want to put her in with the others as we have a spell cast over the area to hold the captives in place. It dampens their magic. When you have her taken care of come join us at the fire."

"I will meet you soon. It won't take long to secure this one."

Inside the hut allotted them, Jonathan untied Gabby. "Okay now that you are free, you need to go through your bag of tricks and decide what we will need to free the fairies. I don't want to have to stay here any longer than is necessary. I do not trust the dark fae to keep their word of granting us safe harbor."

"I will need to talk with them before we can free them. They may know how to remove the wards that are keeping them prisoners. I have potions that can put the fae to sleep but we need to remove the wards once they are."

Jonathan was watching Gabby as she was arranging the contents of the satchel. "How can you remember what each of these do?"

"Granny has been schooling me for years and she also has each and every one labeled clearly. When we get rid of the ward keeping the fairies prisoners, they can fly back to Lady Arabella's garden. You and I will be on our own."

Gabby had her back to Jonathan the whole time she had been talking to him. When she turned around she found him staring at her with the strangest look on his face.

"What is the matter?" feeling herself over thinking perhaps the spell was wearing off.

Once they had gotten under the cover of a shelter, she had secured her golden head of hair into one large braid that went down her back. In doing so it had exposed her ears.

"No, No! I had not seen your ears before now. I did not think you would look so much like the fae. I thought the spell simply made you small. You are, by the way, stunningly beautiful, with or without fae ears."

Gabby was blushing like a bright sunset by the time Jonathan had stopped talking, blushing a bit himself.

"I am sorry Gabby. I am usually not so forward."

“There is nothing to forgive. I am quite flattered you would think so, considering that you most certainly get to mingle with all the London beauties.”

“Not one of them could hold a candle to you.”

They were interrupted the a gruff voice from outside, “need som help in there securing your captive?”

“Bugger off, I will join you in a moment.”

Looking at Gabby, “I must go or they may become suspicious and try to come in here. Before he left, he took her by the shoulders and kissed her on the cheek.

Outside the dark fae greeted him with a little jeering about the amount of time it took to secure his captive. “She is a mighty fine looking, even if she taint one of our kind,” said one of the others gathered around the circle.

Jonathan lied “She is a special gift for my uncle. He has a tast for young light fay. He tries to bend them to the dark way.”

Chuckling, they all nodded their heads, “sounds like some interesting fun.”

“I would like to stay here a few days. It will be a long stretch before I reach home.”

“A few days twill be fine, but no more. We have our own agenda that will need to be taken care of.”

“If I may ask, what is your plan for the fae in your compound?”

“I guess we can share with you. Out group has outgrown the area you see here. We have been trying to widen the size, but those do-gooders keep interfering with our plans. With them captive and under our wards there is nothing to stop us. We can take over the whole forest. They will shrivel and die under those conditions. We hope to drive away the big ugly people by destroying crops and making the land barren and unsustainable for humans.”

Shock ran through Jonathan as he listened to the plan. “That will be quite the undertaking. Do you really think your plan will work? What of the humans? They may not be as easy to banish from here.”

“I have no fear of the humans. They don’t know about us or even care about anything but making a profit off the land. If it doesn’t make a profit, they will leave.”

“Well, good luck to you and your plan. Now I must bid you goodnight. It has been a long day for me.” Giving a nod, he left the circle and returned to the shelter and Gabby.

Gabby had fallen asleep thinking about Jonathan. He was the most handsome man she had ever met. He was not simply good looking, but he was polite and caring. She knew this because he had come to the aid of his sister even when he thought one and all a little mad. Now he was in the middle of a dark fae encampment facing unknow dangers and all he said was she was beautiful.

What would he say if she was to tell him that her ears were really her ears. That she herself was half fae. Most humans did not know there were many, many different varieties of fae throughout the world. Fae were all shapes and sizes. Some had wings, some did not. Some were good, some were bad. Some were

mischievous and liked to play tricks on humans. Some were evil and simply liked to destroy everything in their way. All, however, were magic. The amount of magic was different for each and every fae.

He father had been one with more knowledge of magic than many. He had watched Gabby's mother grow up. He would hide in the woods near her home, watching as she ran and played. She would sit in the meadow making daisy chains or watching the small animals and birds go about their business. He grew to love her gentleness as she became a beautiful young woman.

When she was eighteen, he could wait no longer, he was so smitten. He had approached the cottage where Granny and her mother had lived. He said he was a traveler and had been set upon and robbed. Her father had asked for shelter and food in exchange he would do chores or any repairs that needed done.

Granny was more than happy to agree. Her husband had died when Gabby's mother had been just a babe. Her grandfather had not been good with his money. When he passed Granny had to move them to the country. The meager income had not allowed for any extras or major repairs. Some free labor would go a long way to get some long-needed repairs started. Besides he seemed to be a handsome, well mannered, but down on his luck, gentleman. Elizabeth, her daughter, was not going to have a season in which she might find a husband. "Beggars cannot be choosers" Granny had thought to herself.

Gabby's mother and father had fallen madly in love. (Of course, her father was already in love.) they were married almost immediately. Nine months later Gabby was born.

"My goodness," said one of the neighbors paying a visit to the newborn, "She could pass for one of the fae the folk tales are all about."

Granny had simply laughed and said she was sure as the child grew that would not be the case. Gabby's father had been silent the entire visit. When the neighbor had left Granny turned to the couple "Is there something the two of you would like to share with me?"

"We... we did not mean to keep it from you exactly. It just did not seem that important."

"I see... and now? Do you think you will be able to raise the child here? The people will always talk."

"I know of a place we can move to. The people living in the villages and surrounding area believe in my kind and even help to support us" said Gabby's father.

That is how they came to live near Stonewood Manor. Gabby had been told unfortunately her mother, Elizabeth, became ill shortly after the move. She made Gabby's father promise to teach her his magic and what it was to be fae. It was a promise made to her on her deathbed. Gabby's father was heartbroken but determined to keep his promise.

He began teaching Jenny all he knew, because Gabby was so young. Being fae he knew deep in his heart he would not live to see his beautiful daughter grown if he stayed.

With tears in her eyes, Gabby drifted off to sleep, visions of her parents' long gone faces in her mind. She was also still thinking of a way to tell Jonathan that she was half fae. She really wanted to know him better and was afraid knowing would scare him away.

Chapter 4

The next morning Gabby was very quiet. Jonathan noticed she had arranged everything from the satchel in some type of order.

“Is everything ready to carry out our mission?” Jonathan queried.

“I must get in to talk with Elsa. She is the leader of the group and she might have an idea how to lift the wards keeping them contained.”

“If she has any ideas why wouldn’t they just try them from inside?”

“Wards are a complex of lines of power. They must be untangled in a certain order or it could have serious consequences. It will be easier to see outside the enclosure to untangle. Though Elsa and the others have had time to study the ward or complex of wards. Once I am back outside I can start to work on this side. I have a few things that will cause some distractions. That is where your help will come in.”

“Whatever you need me to do. I got some very bad feelings talking with the fae leader, Jacko, last night. He has definitely got evil in mind for the whole area. He seems to blame humans for all number of things and wants us all gone. “

“Please,” Gabby said with a worried look, “do not let him hear you call us human. His magic is strong and harm could come to you.”

“I promise to be more diligent in the future.”

“Now, how do you want to get me into the enclosure? I want to be close when the ward is opened to let me in.”

“Let us go over these diversions you have. I will tuck them in my pockets. I will then take you out and tell one of the fae I dropped something out in the woods and I will need t to get home. While I am out there I will set up the diversions ready for when you need them.”

Gabby explained each one. She told him what everything was, how it worked, where to place it whether to cover or bury them. When they were both satisfied Jonathan knew what he was doing, Gabby helped him stash them. It was like secret pockets would appear, as they filled one, the next was there.

Her fingers repeatedly touched his bare chest as she tucked away the packets. Heat and tingles replaced each touch. By the time they finished loading everything, both were breathing hard. Jonathan looked at Gabby with a want in his eyes and she returned that look.

Jonathan took her by the shoulders, pulling her close to him. The kiss was soft and gentle. He had no desire to scare Gabby.

Gabby opened her eyes wide with surprise and gasped for breath. She had never been kissed by a man. It made her warm all over, yet she thought there was something missing. There should be more. *I feel an ache deep inside me. Is there something wrong with me?*

Because of the strange look on Gabby’s face Jonathan felt like a first-rate cad. “I am so sorry, that was unforgivable. I had no right to take advantage of you like that. I can promise you to keep my distance in

the future. Your grandmother put your protection in my hands. I have abused your good nature. For that I am truly sorry.”

“Are you done now? I was as much to blame as you. I may be an innocent but I wanted the kiss as much as you!”

“Still...”

“No more about this. We have a plan to put into effect.”

They left their shelter to find someone who could lift the wards on the fae prison to allow Gabby entry.

“So, has the lass proven to be too much for you to handle? I will be glad to take her off your hands. I’m sure I can teach her some manners. She needs to learn how to treat the hand that feeds here with respect.” The leer on Jacko’s face made Gabby shake with fear and disgust.

“I told you she must be pure and unharmed. My uncle was very clear on those points. He is not one I would want to cross.”

Jacko grunted but agreed to place her with the others. He worked swiftly opening the wards only large enough to shove Gabby into the enclosure. The wards were back in place before Gabby barely had time to get all the way inside.

Elsa and several of the others were right where she had entered. They had felt the wards changing and were hoping it was a chance to escape.

“Gabby, what has happened? Why are you here” You are in terrible danger.”

“I am here with the Earl to rescue you. We have a plan and I wanted to let you know. Once you are free fly straight back to Stonewood Manor.”

“We cannot leave you here. We would never forgive ourselves if anything were to happen to you.”

“I will turn Jonathan back into the falcon and we will fly home as soon as you are on your way.

Blushing Gabby said, “Jonathan would never let anything happen to me. Now listen carefully. I could see the wards being worked and I believe I could start to untangle them on this side after I go back out. When the dark fae have been diverted away from here I will untangle them from the outside. Working together we should be able to make short work of them. Make sure not to go to fast of they may notice something is up.”

With a plan in place Gabby was told how the dark fae had managed to attack and capture all the fairies from Lady Arabella’s village. They also talked about a plan to keep them all safe in the future. Gabby’s grandmother had made sure that as she was growing up she spent time with the fairies in the village. They had been lucky se was not there when the attack had occurred.

Suddenly the feel in the enclosure changed. Gabby knew it was time to leave. Pretending she did not want to come out, Gabby stood away from the entrance they had shoved her through.

She heard Jacko in his leering, gravelly voice yell, “Ye better come out if you know what’s good fer ye and the others.”

Stepping through the gate, Gabby was grabbed and pulled out and away from the enclosure. By the time she got her bearings the wards were back in place.

“Jacko is good and very fast. I will need to be faster. I hope they are able to start breaking the wards down from inside.”

That night in their small hovel Jonathan said everything was in place for the next day.

“Once the fairies have escaped they are to fly back to your sister’s. We will follow them once you have eaten the bread, turning you into the falcon once more. If everything goes as planned, we will be home in time for tea.”

“Not only are you beautiful, you are clever and smart too. You made Jacko think you wanted to stay with the fairies instead of coming out. He got quite a chuckle at that even if it was at my expense. I replied that since you knew was in store for you, of course you would choose imprisonment. That shut him up.

“Why are you shaking? Are you cold? Come here I can warm you up. I promise to be a gentleman. No more kissing, at least until we get back to Stonewood. I plan to speak to your grandmother about going forward with our relationship.”

Gabby’s eyes opened wide staring at Jonathan in disbelief. She began to stammer. “You... I... it could never work. I am...” She began sobbing, unable to tell Jonathan what she was. She had come to care for him a great deal in the short time they had known each other. There was no way she could ever burden him with the truth of her parentage.

“Gabby, whatever is the matter? I thought you felt the same as I do. I have hopes of asking for your hand in marriage once we become better acquainted.” Jonathan wrapped his arms around Gabby, rocking her until the tears finally stopped and she fell asleep.

When she woke, the hovel was still dark. Jonathan had his arms gently wrapped around her, surrounding her with his warmth. She would have to tell him, but not now. What they were about to undertake call for clear heads and quick action. The rest could wait until they were back home.

The sunrise held the promise of a beautiful day. Gabby hoped it was the sign of a successful day.

Together they went over the plan one more time. Jonathan would take her out to get some exercise. They would slip into the cover of the woods behind the enclosure. Jonathan would then start what would be a chain reaction sounding like an attack on the dark fae compound. The hope was that the fae, or most of them, would rush the surrounding woods. While they were scattered, Gabby would finish taking down the wards keeping the fairies captive.

The plan was working exactly as planned. The wards came down fast and the last of the fairies were on their way back to Stonewood.

Chapter 5

One of the dark fae must have seen them flying to safety. A shout rang out and before Jonathan and Gabby could make good their escape the dark fae had surrounded them.

“So, what do we have here?” Jacko said as he signaled the others to close in. One of them grabbed the satchel from Gabby. She tried to snatch it back but was backhanded for her effort. Jonathan jumped to her rescue only to be set upon by several more who were in the mood to hurt. They punched and kicked until there was no fight left in him. Dragging him to a post in the middle of the compound they tied him, arms stretched wide, and striped him of his tunic.

Gabby had been watching in horror as they dragged him away, his eyes already swollen shut, his hair matted with blood, head hanging down.

“Please,” she begged “let him go he had nothing to do with this. I tricked him into bringing me into your camp. I take full responsibility for what occurred.”

“Oh, ye will pay for what ye have done. But first my men deserve to have a little entertainment with our friend over there.”

While they had been discussing responsibility two of the fae had been pounding a couple of stakes in the ground near Jonathan’s feet. They were far enough away that it became clear that his legs would be pulled apart almost beyond bearing.

“If he survives you can nurse him back to health and we will start all over again with a new game. I plan to make an example of you both as a warning to any others who try to challenge me and my plans of destruction.” Laughing he walked away. “Bend her arms behind here back. Make her watch the fun.”

“So, you are back with us hey? Just in time to join the fun.”

Jonathan hurt everywhere. He could barely see thru the slits of his eyes. Breathing was a problem and his arms and legs felt like they were being pulled from their sockets. All he could think about was Gabby. He had failed her. Had failed to keep her safe. “Where is Gabby? What have you done with her?”

“Shut your mouth. The only one around here who will be asking questions is me,” Jacko replied as he backhanded Jonathan and laughed. “Now who was behind this plan? I must warn you if I don’t get an answer you will not care for the consequences. Now who came up with this plan?”

Jonathan was mute. Suddenly his right arm was pulled even tighter, increasing his pain. He let out a low groan.

“Well, let’s start with an easier question. Who are you?”

“The Earl of Wexley, if you must know.”

There was laughter all around the camp but Jonathan only heard the groan that came from Gabby. He tried to find her. There, sitting on the ground was his beautiful Gabby. Her cheek was bruised, tears running down her dirty face. He started jerking at his bonds.

“Now none of that your Lordship.” Jacko sneered and nodded his head to one of the men at Jonathan’s side. The rope around his left ankle was pulled tighter.

“Stop, you are going to kill him,” screamed Gabby.

“Oh, he is not going to die yet. I have big plans for his lordship. I want to see how much his high and mighty can take.” With a nod of his head, the men on either side of Jonathan gave the ropes another pull. Then Jacko walked up to him, looked into his face and spit.

“We will let you rest up here for a while. Perhaps you will feel more like talking later.” Having said that he walked over to Gabby grabbed onto her braid and arm, “Come along, I ‘ave my plans for ye too.” Jacko practically threw her inside his tent. “Welcome to my ‘umble ‘ome. I ‘ave wanted a taste of you since you came into my camp.”

“If you hate humans so much I doubt you will want to even touch me.”

Before she could continue, Jacko grabbed her from behind and started to fondle her breast. He squeezed so hard she knew there would be black and blue marks. Through clenched lips she whispered, “I’m a human.

“That’s a lie, ears don’t lie. Your ears are fae through and through.”

“I have been intimate with a human. I am only half fae, my mother was human.”

“Ack, get away from me. I could get past you being ‘alf fae but take up with a human’s leftovers is too much even for me.” He yelled for one of his followers, “take ‘er back to the ‘ovel she shared with the human. Don’t think you will find anything to help in an escape it ‘as been thoroughly searched. Give this to the prisoner I’m sure it will bring him around.”

The leering smiles on his face made Gabby question what they intended to give Jonathan. “What did you hand that man?”

“I thought perhaps his lordship would like a bit of liquid. I’m sure his throat is quite dry after hanging around in the hot sun all day. I want to question him further so I can come up with a new plan.”

Gabby and Jonathan had decided on a cover story before putting their plan into action. Jonathan was to say he didn’t know how he had come to even be in their camp or why. He was simply to say he had been walking in the woods. The next thing he knew was standing in the middle of their camp.

“I told you he does not know anything. I found him walking in the woods and tricked him into aiding me. He does not even know I made him look like a dark fae.” She groaned “You were not ever to find out he was human. None of this has been his fault. I beg you, let him go.”

Jacko laughed, “You would really love that wouldn’t you? I think I will follow my own plan for now, sorry to disappoint you.”

Gabby suddenly heard Jonathan’s screams of agony. “What have you done to him now? What did you give him to drink?”

“No need to concern yourself. It was simply a small amount of fae wine. It was not enough to kill him, but I have a feeling he will wish he was dead.”

Gabby tore out of the leader’s tent. When she got to Jonathan’s side he was writhing in agony. The muscles in his arms and legs were spasming pulling the ties tighter still. His head had been buckled to

the post with a heavy strap around his forehead. Because he could not move his head every movement pulled on his neck muscles.

“Please cut him down. He is hurting himself.” Gabby was almost hysterical.

“You seem very concerned about someone you claim is a stranger. It makes me think there is something more between you. Perhaps he is the human you have been intimate with. Since I hate humans almost as much as life itself he stays up there. Now, throw her in their ‘ovel before I do something regretful. When the effects of the wine wears off cut him down and pitch him in with the fae witch. She can keep him alive for us. Maybe we can have some more fun with him in a day or two.”

He laughed so hard it shook his chest as he walked back to his tent.

Chapter 6

Something had gone wrong.

He saw the fae take off after Gabby had released them. They were ready to make good their own escape. That is where things got fuzzy. They had come up with a story to tell if the dark fae captured them.

One of Jacko's men had hit Gabby. He attacked the man and was jumped upon by several more. They took great pleasure in pummeling him into submission. After that things become very sketchy. He had heard Jacko say "if I don't like your answers there will be consequences." I guess he must not have liked his answer.

I remember seeing Gabby on the ground, hands tied behind her back. Her face was bruised and dirty and tears were streaking that beautiful face. Why? What had he said that would make his love cry? Had he called her his love out loud? Was that what had made her cry or was it something else? They had pulled the bindings tighter and he sank into darkness. Jacko had said they would let him rest awhile before they came back for more fun, games and questions.

Jonathan didn't know how long he had been out but there was no one about the compound. The sun was still beating down on him so it could not have been too long.

A half hour or so more passed when one of Jacko's men came out of the tent he had been told was the leader's temporary home. He was carrying a flask containing a clear liquid. It seemed to sparkle a little but Jonathan told himself it was just his imagination.

The man walked toward Jonathan, "Jacko seems to think you need a drink after your afternoon of just hanging about." The man thought himself a comedian.

Jonathan's mouth and throat were so dry he gladly accepted the offering. As soon as the liquid touched his tongue he knew it to be a big mistake. His whole mouth was on fire from just a few drops. He shut his mouth and turned away from the offending liquid.

He suddenly realized they were not alone. Someone from behind him grabbed his head and pulled against the pole. They somehow got a heavy strap buckled around his forehead.

"Why are you doing this to me?"

"This is a gift from our leader and said to make sure you drank every drop, so bottoms up." Holding Jonathan's nose the man took great pleasure in pouring the substance down his throat. "Besides we all hate you humans."

He was already beyond the ability to speak. His tongue had swollen to the point he felt he might choke to death. The liquid burned like the fires of hell the preachers all warned his block about. Once it hit his stomach the real pain set in. It felt like his insides were being twisted in knots and pulled out of him. The muscles in his arms and legs contracted pulling his bindings even tighter. He heard the screams of a tortured soul think someone should come to the aid of that poor soul. Even though the evil dance of Jonathan's body continued for another hour he was thankfully oblivious. He had faded into darkness before it had come to an end.

“Gabby!!” He tried to sit up but was too weak.

“Lay still, your body has been severely damaged. I have been working on you all night. The men threw you in here when the effects of the wine had run its course.”

“Wine? I have drunk more wine at one dinner than I was forced to swallow. It was really only yesterday? It seems like weeks ago.”

I suppose that is a good thing. It must mean the memory of the pain is fading. If I had been allowed to keep the satchel the healing would go a lot faster.”

“Would you clear something up for me? I remember asking why they were treating me so badly and they said it was because they hate all humans. What I would like to know is how did they discover I was human? I am sure you would not have sold me out. I remember you saying they cannot find out were are human. What happened?”

“You told the yourself. You announced, proud as a peacock, you are the Early of Wexly. I don’t think you even realized what you had said because it was after you were beaten bloody by half of the fae in camp”

‘Is that why you were crying as you sat on the ground?’

“Yes, I was afraid for your life once they found out. I thought they had succeeded when they gave you the fae wine. Luckily they did not give you enough to kill you. However, you were screaming in pain for hours.”

Jonathan snorted “As I remember hearing a poor soul and wondering why nobody was trying to help him. All that time it was me.” Unwanted tears came to the corners of his eyes. I have failed to keep you safe. Please forgive me my love”

It was Gabby’s turn to tear up.

“Why are you crying. You cried the last time when I told you I was falling in love with you.”

“It is my story to tell you and once you have heard it you will not want to love me anymore. I am destined to die an old maid. I promise to tell you once we are free from here. They are planning to notify your sister that we are being held hostage. If their demands are not met our families will never see us again. While they wait they plan to play with you over and over and over again. They will force me to heal you quickly so you are aware of each new game they have planned for you. We need to escape soon because with each game you will become weaker. I cannot properly heal you without my satchel.”

“I do not think they will carry their games to the extreme they did the first time but still.”

Jonathan finally felt strong enough to sit up. When he did he took Gabby’s face in his hands. He wiped away her tears with his thumbs.

“I don’t know what your story is yet, but I know I could never not love you. Gabby, you are my moon and stars. You are like a meadow in spring full of wild flowers. I do not care what you tell me, I can never stop loving you.”

“I care deeply for you. Once we are safely away from here, even though we will not marry I would want to know you in an intimate way just once. You are a good man with a title to pass on. You deserve a woman who can give you the chance. That woman is not me.”

Jonathan just shook his head and looking into her eyes kissed her breathless.

“When you can stand and walk on your own we will make our escape. Before all the excitement started yesterday I put a slice of granny’s bread in my pocket. They took the satchel but they did not search me. When you eat it we can soar away to safety as a mighty falcon. Until then I am afraid you must endure at least one more day of the fae’s evil games. They will be here at any moment to drag you back to the center of camp for more fun and games as they call it.”

Chapter 7

No sooner had she finished speaking when two henchmen pushed their way into the hovel. "Well look at this. It's so cozy. It appears our guest of honor is ready for the party to begin again."

"No he's not strong enough. He can't stand or walk yet. I need more time to heal him." Looking at the men pleading.

"He don't need no legs for today's fun."

The men each grabbed on of Jonathan's arms and dragged him out of the shelter.

That night, true to their words, Jonathan had not needed the use of his legs all day. They had brought him back to her once more. He was unconscious, beaten, bloody and bruised.

Her biggest concern now as his arms and shoulders. Even if he turned into his falcon would he be able to fly? Today they had tied his hands together and pulled hi by rope over a limb so he would swing freely above the ground.

Gabby had heard Jacko tell Jonathan, "You spoiled all the fun we had planned with your sister's fairies. I hope you are enjoying our plans to let us repair that little disappointment. If you get thirsty please let one of my men know. I will be happy to give you another drink like yesterday," Jacko walked away again, laughing.

He turned around when he heard Jonathan's strong retort "Laugh now, soon you and your men will be the ones who are defeated. The world may have once been yours to rule. Now the humans rule and your days are numbered."

"That may happen down the road, your lordship will not be around to see it come true. I have decided to change today's game to prove my point."

Now Gabby was once again trying to heal Jonathan. Because of his statement, Jacko had told his men they could have at the captive. The only think that was not allowed was to kill him.

Gabby had again asked for the contents of her satchel and been denied. She was given water to cleanse the wounds. They had not bothered to carry Jonathan but decided dragging him across the dirt packed ground was good enough.

"My beautiful, beautiful man." Gabby sat over Jonathan. She had cleaned him as best she could. With tears falling freely she caressed his face. She ran her hands over his injury marred chest. Even though his legs never touched the ground the fae had cut off his pants so they had easy access for their increased game activities.

During the night Jonathan began shaking "So Cold" was all he said. Fearing he was developing a fever, Gabby lay down at his side, carefully wrapping her arms around his body, hoping to share her body heat and ward off a fever that could be fatal.

When the first light of day was just breaking, Gabby woke with a start. Her patient was no longer laying next to her. Panic struck immediately. Had they come and hauled him away. She could not believe that was the case. Gabby caught a slight movement a few steps away from where they had been sleeping. Jonathan was standing up flexing different muscles. He was bending his knees and running in place.

There was a big smile on his face. "I don't know how you did it but I feel like a brand new one hundred pound note. The fae were talking about how the game they were playing was so tiring that once the game was over for the day they would need to relax and have a few drinks. I am thinking if we are going to escape, now is the time to do it.

Gabby was staring with her mouth open. She had fallen asleep holding on to Jonathan like their lives depended on it. Her dreams had been so real she was still aroused.

IN the dreams she and Jonathan had become lovers. Jonathan had been a very gentle and caring lover. He didn't rush her. He kissed her gently on her lips. Moving slowly to her eyes and back to her mouth. Seeking entry into her mouth with the loving pressure of his tongue. He then worked his way down to her neck across her shoulders. His lips slowly worked down to her perfect breasts. Gabby had inhaled deeply at the amazing sensations heating her body to its very core.

Even thinking about the dream had her blushing. Would it really be like that, she wondered. Could Jonathan be that gentle and loving even after she told him everything.

Shaking Gabby out of her daydream, the subject of her dream was talking again. "What do you say? Are you ready to return home right now?"

"If you are sure you are up to it. I am more than ready to be home. I don't want you to go through another day of torture." Reaching into her pocket and pulling out the bread, they left their shelter.

Jonathan began eating the bread as they walked away from the compound. The whole compound had been eerily quiet as they left.

Suddenly there was a pop and another pop, then a crackle and whoosh followed by sparkles, twinkles and ending with a crash.

The fae had set up a warning all around the camp. It was to alert them of anyone trying to sneak into the compound.

Panic ran through Gabby as they began to run. She wondered how long it would take the fae to catch up to them. Would there be enough time for the bread to work? She could hear shouts and running coming toward them.

Please, Please, let the magic work now. She looked behind her and saw Jacko and his men close behind. Time was up. Ten steps ahead was the clearing. In the clearing sat a beautiful falcon. Short of breath, she ran the last few steps and leapt onto the back of Jonathan, the falcon.

They rose from the ground swiftly. Gabby heard what must have been arrows flying toward them. She thought they were high enough not to worry about them.

They were almost to Stonewood when they started to go down, fast. Jonathan kept telling himself he could do this. He knew they were close to home. Jacko and his group would follow. He wasn't sure how fast they could travel. He did not realize that it would take the fae half the day to cover what he had in just an hour.

Something was very wrong however. His vision was beginning to blur, his head felt like it had been stuffed with cotton. He tried to keep flying but he could not quite remember how, or why he was flying in the first place.

Down, down, down he went, not even aware of Gabby sitting on his back holding on for dear life. The falcon crashed to the ground throwing Gabby to the ground with a thud.

Having the wind knocked out of her, it took several minutes to recover. She was looking around when she saw the falcon laying on his side several steps away. He wasn't moving. She rushed to his side trying to understand what had happened to make him come down the way he did. When vision caught the glimmer of an arrow lodged deeply in the upper part of his left leg.

Since it was an arrow shot by the dark fae she was sure there was magic attached to it either by a spell or a potion. As deeply as it was imbedded she was surprised they had made it this far. She did not dare remove the arrow before checking it out thoroughly. Besides, if it was as deep as she thought it was it would need to be cut out.

She jumped up trying to get her bearings. They were still a ways from Stonewood, but only walking distance from Glimmer Cottage and Granny. She tried to let Jonathan know what she was going to do but got no response when she shook the falcon.

Once she got to the cottage, Granny would bring her back to normal size. She could then go pick up the falcon and bring him back to remove the arrow and return him to his natural human form. Hopefully it wouldn't take too long to recover from everything he has had to endure the last five days.

Chapter 8

Finally reaching Glimmer Cottage she called "Granny, Granny!" a little louder. There was no response. Perhaps she is in the back, Gabby thought. The backyard failed to yield her Granny or any clue as to where she might be.

Of course, she must be staying with Lady Arabella awaiting our return. What am I to do? I cannot leave Jonathan out in the field much longer or Jacko and the rest will surely fine him.

At that very moment the answer came running around the corner of the chicken coop. Duncan, their pet corgi was chasing one of the hens. Gabby called to him. He was excited to hear her voice and ran in her direction.

"Stop" she screamed, fearing he would trample her. "Sit" she commanded, when he stopped. Duncan always wore a harness, similar to the ones worn by horses. Granny had even fashioned a traverse to hook onto the harness. She would have him help when they were out gathering herbs, flowers and such for their use in the future. She would hook up the traverse and go pick up Jonathan. The dog could make quick work of the trip both ways.

Once back to the cottage she would take care of Jonathan. She would also need to set up new wards to protect the cottage while they were there. She knew she would need to find a way to let her Granny know they were safe at the cottage.

Thankfully she was able to make short work of hooking up Duncan. They were on their way back to pick up the injured falcon in no time. Jonathan was still unconscious when they approached. Gabby had thought to bring some water. She splashed some in the falcon's face. It did the job. "Jonathan listen to me. You were shot with one of Jack's arrows and we crashed. We are only a short distance from Glimmer Cottage. I have brought back my dog. He has a traverse hooked up to his harness. Duncan can carry you back to the cottage, but I need your help to get you on the traverse. Try to stand up. I will support you as much as I can, but we need to hurry before Jacko and his men find us."

It took two tries to stay upright on his good leg. In just two hops he was able to collapse on the traverse. Gabby jumped on the dog's back and gave the signal to head home. On the way back, Gabby was working on the answer to the next obstacle in her way. How was she going to get the falcon into the cottage?

I wonder, she thought, my father was very good making people see him as a normal human being. Granny had forbidden her from even trying to alter her appearance. But right now it would come in handy. She had learned how to cast the glamour spell without Granny's knowledge. When they stopped at the front door of the cottage Gabby jumped off Duncan and cast the glamour spell. With the snap of her fingers, she was herself again. I wish I had thought of this sooner. It would have saved precious time.

Looking around she bent over and picked up the bird and entered the cottage. She laid Jonathan on the table and went back outside, unhooked the dog and patted him on the head, "Good job Duncan. You can go play now, your work is done."

Back inside she set up a bubble of protection over the house and yard. Not only to protect the cottage but also make it impossible to detect them. Once this was complete she went into the cottage to treat Jonathan.

Gabby started by gathering everything she might need when she began working on the injury. She collected hot water, bandages, several different salves and ointments. The arrow was very small by human standards, but it could have done quite a lot of damage to a bird. There was also the chance the arrow was poisoned or had magic tied to it. He would heal much faster as a human but he would need to eat the change mixture to do that.

There was no sense getting ahead of herself. First thing first. She laid the bird on a folded soft cloth, hoping it was comfortable. Not that he would notice since he was still out. Next, she gently pulled several feathers around the arrow and looked for any signs of magic. Finding none she probed the area around the arrowhead. It had gone deep but not all the way through. The arrow would need to be cut out. Making the cut as small as possible she pulled out the arrow. She could tell right away it had some type of poison on the tip. She let the wound bleed a little hoping some of the toxin would drain out. Shortly after packing the opening, she bandaged it up. Gabby covered Jonathan, the one she loved, and prayed she had been able to do enough.

Gabby built a fire and made a pot of tea. She found some stale bread and a piece of cheese. She made Jonathan, who was still in his falcon form, as comfortable as she could on the table near the fire. Then she dragged her Granny's rocker over also. Here she could sit and watch over Jonathan.

Around midnight, Gabby jerked awake. She hadn't wanted to fall asleep, but the day's activities had been too much. She had again been dreaming of her and Jonathan. It seemed her mind was continuing her dream from last night.

They were together in a lush green meadow. The sweet smells of spring surrounded them. Jonathan had laid out a blanket to lay on. He had slowly undressed her and began kissing her from head to toe. He was caressing her with his wonderful soft hands everywhere. He had her breasts standing at attention by the time his mouth reached them to suckle on their sweetness. The promise of more was creeping down her body. She knew there had to be more. Her body was telling this, but how?

That was when she woke with a start. Her body feeling unfulfilled and wanting.

Wondering what had awoken her she realized the falcon had been thrashing around on the table. Jonathan had developed a fever.

Feeling ashamed for falling asleep, Gabby rushed to his side. Picking him up gently in her hand, she walked back to Granny's rocker. She forced open his beak, hoping to get some cool water down his throat. He had seemed to calm down as soon as he had been picked up. Fearing he might throw himself off the table, she decided to keep him in her lap. Cradling him gently, Gabby ran her hands softly over the silky feathers of his back and wings. She decided that the bandage should be changed. Talking to Jonathan the whole time in a quiet, soothing voice, she put all new dressing on the wound.

"Hopefully by morning your fever will break and we can return you to your normal human form," she cooed to him. "I need you to get well and wake up. I need you my love."

Gabby leaned back in the chair with tears rolling down her cheeks and her mind drifted back to her dream. She continued stroking the soft feathers of the bird hoping to soothe the fevered body.



Jonathan knew something was wrong, but he could not figure out what it was. After all, it was his wedding day was it not? Gabriella was going to be all his in just a few short hours.

Shamefully he thought back two days ago. He had urged his love to go on a buggy ride. They went to a lush green meadow. Laying down on a blanket in the tall grass, they had come together as a couple.

Kissing her mouth that tasted of honey and strawberries ignited a fire in his stomach. He had to have more. The more kissing the more he wanted. He felt Gabby's response to the kisses and moved forward, touching her everywhere. He had to feel her bare skin. There was no objection on Gabby's part and soon they were both naked. The pink nipples of her perfect breast hardened under his care. Advancing slowly down to the apex of her womanhood, Jonathan marveled at her wanton reaction. He would swear he felt the fire inside her, wanting and not knowing what she needed to satisfy that need. In that moment he decided to show her.

Slowly he entered his love. She was so tight he was afraid he might hurt her. It was then he heard her say "don't stop, I need to know, need to feel."

Hearing her whispers was all he needed. Piercing her maidenhead, he stopped to let her adjust to him. There were tears in her beautiful blue eyes, but a smile on her lips. After a few minutes he knew she was ready to continue. They fit together like they were made for each other. There was equal give and take. A fire building inside them both. All consuming warmth seemed to wrap itself around the couple as they soared to the stars and back. Jonathan didn't know how long they lay in each other's embrace.

Chills started to wrack his body. *"No, this can't be happening, I am getting married today. Gabby and I are to become one today, for ever and ever. What is wrong with me?"* trying to fight his way through a dense fog. He could hear Gabby calling to him. He was trying desperately to find her. She had said she needed him and called him her love. He was so confused. Why could he not find her?



The falcon had lain in her lap for hours. One moment he would shake with a chill and Gabby would cover him with a warm cloth. The next moment would have he thrashing with a raging fever. Just as dawn was breaking the fever broke and Jonathan fell into a restful sleep.

Gabby placed the falcon on a soft cloth in the rocker and covered him. She decided to make a pot of tea while he slept. She wanted to figure out what or how or why the dream she had earlier had returned. She had physically felt every kiss and touch. She now knew exactly how making love with Jonathan would feel. What she didn't understand was how she was able to continue the fantasy having never made love before.

While she was still pondering the question, she realized there was a noise coming from outside. Someone was throwing pebbles that were hitting the shield. Fearing it was Jacko and the rest of the dark fae, she peeked through the curtains on the kitchen window.

To her great relief and joy it was her Granny. Running outside she let down the shield and into Granny's open arms.

"It's about time," she said, "my arm was wearing out throwing the pebbles."

They were hugging, crying and laughing all at the same time.

"How did you know I was here? I was wondering how to let you know I was here with Jonathan. He was shot with a poisoned arrow as we made our escape. He is still in his falcon form. I think the worst is over. He has been through a great deal in the last five days. I did not dare leave him alone to go to Stonewood. Come, I just made a fresh pot of tea."

"First we must send word to her ladyship that her brother has survived his ordeal. I will send word back with the coachman after I have seen him for myself."

After the coach was headed back to Stonewood with a long message, the two women went back into the cottage.

"Okay my girl, time for some questions and answers. First, in answer to your question, Elsa told me that a very strong magic protection shield had been put over the cottage. When it stayed in place all night I decided to come check it out. As soon as I saw it I knew it was yours."

"Now I have a few questions for you."

Granny asked how she had gotten Jonathan back to the cottage. Gabby explained how, when she found no one around, she had used Duncan to transport him to the cottage.

"That was very inventive on our part my dear. Now, tell me how you got into the cottage and were able to treat his Lordship. Lastly, how is it you are you?"

This was the moment Gabby had been dreading. She would never lie to her grandmother. So, drawing a deep breath "I know you told me to never use it. You must understand I didn't have any other options. I used glamour. I could not let Jonathan die."

Gabby heard a sharp intake of breath before Granny said, "I forbid you to use glamour because I didn't want you to hide who you truly are. That is not what you were doing. You used the ability to save a man's life. For that I am very proud of you. Now we must change you into your real self. We can do nothing for his lordship until he awakens."

Having had her say they both headed down to the cellar.

Feeling her human ears, "I suppose I did miss my real ears." They both laughed out loud.

In the cellar, they mixed what they needed for Jonathan. Gabby swallowed her potion and almost immediately felt like herself.

When they got upstairs the falcon was upright in the rocker. His eyes were clear, and he was looking around the cottage. He seemed to be at a loss as to where he was or how he had gotten there.

Jenny, Gabby's Granny, came into view. He recognized her. Beyond that everything was still a little fuzzy.

"Don't be afraid Jonathan, you were wounded and have been very ill."

Jonathan tried to ask how he had gotten to Glimmer Cottage but the only thing he heard was loud screeching noises. The more agitated he got the louder the screeching became.

"Calm down, take this and you will feel better shortly."

With great effort he calmed himself and did as he was asked. After about fifteen minutes he was feeling more like himself. His throat was dry, and he could barely speak. Gabby handed him a fresh cup of tea. It had been sweetened with honey which reminded him of the taste of Gabby's lips when he had kissed her.

"You should rest for a while before your sister arrives."

"Lady Arabella is coming here? Why? She should not be traveling over dusty, bumpy roads," Jonathan said as he tried to get out of the chair. A stabbing pain shot through his leg and he fell back into the chair.

"What the devil?" he remarked, reaching for his injured leg.

Gabby said, "We have been gone for five days. Today makes six and your sister would not be satisfied with a mere note saying you are okay."

"But why are we here in Glimmer Cottage instead of Stonewood Manor?"

"What was the last thing you remember? Try to think back" coaxed Gabby.

"I remember eating the bread while we were running through the woods. The next thing I know I woke up still a falcon in this chair. Oh, and I vaguely remember thinking it was my wedding day." Jonathan looked questionably at Gabby, "What am I missing?"

"About a day and a half" she replied, staring at him.

She could not believe what he had said about his wedding day. Was it possible they had shared that dream? Later, when Jonathan was gone, she would talk to Granny about the possibility of two people sharing the same dream. She would never be able to tell her what the dream was about, but she needed to know.

She also needed to tell Jonathan about her parents and her heritage. Gabby was sure, once he heard all her secrets, he would be long gone.

Jonathan had been talking to Granny while she was again gathering wool.

"What did you just say to Granny?"

"I told her I plan to court you. After a short period, I want us to be married. I was asking her for her permission."

“And I gladly gave it to him” she replied, grinning from ear to ear.

Gabby felt sick to her stomach. He had talked to Granny before he heard her story? This was going to be a major disaster, hands down.

Before anything more could be said there was a knock at the front door. No doubt it was Lady Arabella to collect her brother. Gabby answered the door leading her ladyship to Jonathan’s side. Once again, he was not able to rise because of his most recent injury.

“Jonathan, I have been so worried about you. I know your leg was injured. The fairies told us about the plan. They thought you would arrive back at Stonewood before they did. When several days passed I was nearly at my wit’s end. Jenny kept insisting you would be home safe and sound soon. If something had happened to you it would have been my fault. Can you ever forgive me brother dearest?”

“Relax yourself, I suffered only a small cut that will soon be healed. Thanks to the adventure I have found my future wife.”

“Wife?” *But who? When did this happen?* Lady Arabella puzzled.

“Gabby” was his only reply. “I believe I fell in love with her the very first time I laid eyes on her. I can never begin to thank you enough for making it possible to meet her.” This time he was able to rise to give his sister a kiss on the cheek, along with a big hug.

“Come, I want to get you to Stonewood. The first order of business is a big breakfast. The off to bed you go.”

“You can’t treat e like a small child. I have been a grown man on my own for several years now,” he acted like she had bruised his ego.

“Oh, la, you will always be my little brother whom I must look after.”

Thanking Gabby and her Granny for all their fine efforts they headed for the door.

Gabby decided she would aide Jonathan to the carriage.

“We need to talk” she whispered to him. “You promised not the say anything about courting or marriage before you had heard my story.”

“But you se my love I had the most wonderful dream about us. I know it was a sign that everything will work out.”

Gabby blushed at the mentioned dream and said no more.

“I will call on you as soon as I can convince my dear sister I am not going to break. Until then, my love, dream of me. I will be dreaming of you,” and with a quick wink he was off.

Chapter 9

“Ok, now what is up with you? I haven’t told Jonathan about my heritage. We agreed he would hear my story before he said anything to you about courting or marriage. He holds a title and family responsibilities. He needs someone who is an equal, not someone who is half fae. “ Gabby was half crying by the time she ended her speech.

Granny stood open mouthed, “I blame myself for this mess. Come sit down, it is time I tell you everything about your family heritage on both sides. If only apples were oranges. You would be a princess.

“You see your father was not just a run of the woods fae. He was a princeling. He was to become the leader over all the fairies. However, when he first saw your mother as a little girl he approached his parents, telling them he was going to marry a human. They were understandably upset.

“He had explained that your mother was his soulmate and that nothing would stop him. Eventually they forgave him. They said they would welcome her. You see, your grandparents on your father’s side are the king and queen of all the fae. If your parents had not perished you would have been living among the fae as a princess. When you were very young, your father and mother took you to visit his parents.

“They wanted you all to live with them. You would have lived in luxury and perhaps even become queen someday. However, your mother did not want to leave me alone. They told your grandparents they would raise you knowing both worlds. They also promised to visit you often. Your mother became pregnant soon after they returned here. It was bad from the beginning and before the babe was due your mother went into labor. It did not go well and neither your I learned about mother or brother survived. Your father’s grief was severe. His health declined rapidly but he was bound to honor his pledge to raise you as fae.

“He taught me as much as he could about the fae. I learned about the herbs and potions. The magic parts of being fae was not teachable. I have tried to almost discourage you from learning about it or using it. For that I am extremely remorseful. I could have gotten both you and Jonathan killed. Thank heaven the fae who captured you didn’t know who you are.

“One last thing, your father returned to his parent’s realm before he was too ill to return. I have never heard from your grandparents. I don’t even know how I can contact them.

“As for my side of the family there is not much to tell that you do not already know. Several of the men on my side of the family, as well as your grandfather’s side, hold titles. You, my dear, are an equal and more to Jonathan, the Earl of Wexly.

Gabby stared at her grandmother. She was unable to comprehend what her Granny was telling her. She was a fae princess. She had healed some of Jonathon’s wounds. Not knowing how she was doing it at the time. “Are you saying because of my fae heritage, I may have some special powers? Like when I healed Jonathan in the fae encampment. Oh! Do you suppose part of my magic could be the ability to share a dream?”

“I believe it would be possible if the two people sharing the dream are very special to each other. I think your mother and father had that connection. Did you have that experience with Jonathan?”

"I think I did," Gabby said as she turned red thinking of the dream. "I will know for sure when I talk to Jonathan again. In the meantime, do you think the fairies at Lady Aribella's manor are still in danger?"

"The fairies and I put up extra protection, but you can check on them when you go over there," Granny chuckled, "You will be going over won't you?"

Even if you think I am Jonathon's equal, I still must tell him that I am half fae. So I will go to the manor in a day or two. I am sure his sister will want him all to herself for as long as he will let her. "

Gabby had gone outside to feed the chickens and check on their small garden. Duncan ran off barking, all of a sudden he let out a loud yelp and then there was no sound at all.

"Here Duncan, come boy." Gabby waited a few moments then called again.

"Duncan it's time to go in for supper." She heard a voice that sent chills up and down her spine. Jacko was standing a stone throw away from her. Duncan was lying at his feet.

"Don't think he's up for supper just now" he said laughing.

"What have you done to him? I will make you pay if you hurt him."

"And just what are you going to do? You have me shaking in me boots," he snarled. He took a step toward her.

Gabby raised her hand in Jacko's direction. He stopped in his tracks.

"What the?!" was all he got out before he went flying through the air backwards.

Once Jacko was far away, Gabby picked up Duncan and ran to the cottage. She ran through the door carrying the dog. She called "Granny come quickly, Duncan has been hurt."

"What on earth happened to him?"

"Jacko, the leader of the dark fae did something to him. Please take him, I want to put the protective barrier around us."

"Here, I'll see what I can do for Duncan. Poor thing, I'm sure he will be just fine. Do you think we really need to put up the shield again?" asked Granny.

"I sent him flying, I doubt he took that very well. Until I come up with something the shield will have to do. I just don't trust Jacko to have us alone."

"You do what you think is best. Go, I'll take care of Duncan. He is too tough to let the likes of Jacko lay him low."

When Gabby was out of site granny spoke to the dog in a strange language. To herself she said, "*Please forgive me Gabby but the whole truth is not mine to tell.*" When she finished the chant, the dog was gone and in his place was a sprite. His wings fluttered reflecting the light from the setting sun coming through the window.

"You know what to do sprite. Go to him, tell him all that has happened. He will know what to do," Jenny said with an urgency. She opened the window so he could fly away.

Once he was out of site Granny went to the door and called to Gabby. "are you finished dear? I have made us some tea and sandwiches."

When Gabby reentered the cottage, she asked how Duncan was.

"Oh, he's right as rain dear. He came to his senses right after you went outside. I let him out the back, as not to disturb you."

"Come now, eat what I have fixed, then off to bed. You have had a very busy week and knowing you, you didn't get much sleep in the dark fae camp."

"True, Jonathan had to be healed several times. I was so worried about him.

When we escaped, we set off the same type of distraction that Jonathan had set up when we freed the fairies. When I think back the sounds and visual parts were not the same. They must have set up a similar warning system. When ours went off they realized it wasn't theirs and came back to the camp too soon for us to escape. I still don't know how Jacko and the men knew to go back to the camp."

"Well, you managed to find a way to escape and everyone is safe now. I have a feeling everything will work out just as it is supposed to. Now, off to bed with you. Tomorrow is a new day.

"Goodnight granny. I love you so much," Gabby said as she kissed her granny good night on the cheek.

Chapter 10

Jonathan's sister had insisted he go straight to bed when they arrived at the manor. As soon as his head had hit the pillow he had fallen asleep. When he awoke, his sister was sitting in a chair at his side.

"Thank heaven you are awake. I've been so worried about you. Earlier I came in to see if you wanted some tea or something to eat. You were almost feverish, thrashing to and fro. You were screaming in pain. I realized you must have been dreaming about your time as a prisoner. I am so sorry you had to go through anything like that. It was wrong of me to get you involved."

"I am glad I was able to assist you. Besides everything has turned out well. I am here safe and almost sound. Your problem also introduced me to my future wife.

"Now, am I going to get that tea and dinner. I suddenly find myself famished."

"Of course, Jonathan. I will see to it immediately. Just promise me you will stay in bed and rest."

"I promise, sister dearest." Jonathan replied. "Perhaps when I fall asleep again I will dream of Gabby instead of Jacko and his friends."

At Glimmer Cottage, Gabby was thinking the same thing about Jonathan Maybe we can explore each other more. If, or when, they were together for real it would not be so embarrassing. Besides she yearned to revisit the feeling of their last shared dream.

It was not long before Gabby was asleep. She began searching for Jonathan. She went to the meadow from their last dream, disappointed he was not there. She walked and walked until things surrounding her were unfamiliar. There was suddenly a beautiful home in the distance. It stood on a hill surrounded by gardens in full bloom. The air was warm and inviting. Two wings had been tastefully added, enhancing the overall appeal.

As she approached, she found herself walking up a drive lined with aged trees creating a canopy. The lawns were perfectly groomed and thick and green. Standing on the top step n front of the double doors was Jonathan.

"Gabby, I am so grateful you came!"

Confused, Gabby questioned, "Where are we? I don't recognize this place."

"It is my country estate. The place where Lady Aribella and I grew up. I hope you grow to love it as much as I do. I want this to be your new home soon. I'm glad I guessed right about dream sharing. Do you like it Gabby?"

Jokingly Gabby asked, "The dream sharing or your home?"

Jonathan looked at his love for a moment, then laughing he said, "I guess I mean both."

"Yes" was all Gabby said before she threw herself into Jonathan's waiting arms.

"Come, I want to show you my favorite place on the estate." He led her around the house and down the sloping hills.

She saw the pond sparkling in the sunshine. A pair of swans sailed across the still waters. Bright yellow water lilies grew around the back edge. A small rowboat sat ready for use on a sandy little beach. Off to the side stood a gleaming white gazebo. Lanterns hung from the ceiling, containing large white candles, that would be lit at night, giving the effect of fairies in the structure. Thick cushions covered the benches and daybed with warm colors. Thin curtains were tied back to each pillar. Untied they would create an oasis where two lovers could meet.

"I can see why this would be your favorite place. It is breath takingly beautiful down here."

"When I was still very young my mother would sit here and tell me stories about the magic all around us. I thought they were just stories until I met you and Granny," Jonathan confessed. "in the future I hope it becomes our special place together."

Wrapping his arms around Gabby, he kissed her on the forehead, then her eyes. Slowly working his way down to her nose and cheeks, before hungrily taking her mouth. Lingering there long enough to hear a groan deep in Gabby's throat. Jonathan wanted to explore the inside of her mouth. He wanted to find out if she would taste like honey. Pushing with his tongue, he entered her mouth. Their tongues met in a sensual dance, learning each other's taste and feel.

Jonathan finally broke the kiss wanting to continue further. He kissed the right side of her neck working his way across her naked shoulder. Every so often he would take a nibble of her soft pale skin. Once he got to her fingers he sucked and kissed each one. He started on her left side working up from her fingers back to her neck and mouth again.

The heat had begun to build in her stomach and worked down to the very core of her womanhood. She began to squirm. She needed to touch Jonathan. In her mind his body was naked. He was hers to touch, feel and explore. She wanted her hands everywhere at once.

His skin was smooth, but his muscles were hard. Her hands went over his chest, lower and lower. Jonathan groaned as her hands found his manhood and grabbed on to it.

"Jonathan, please make love to me. I need you inside me even if it is only in a dream. I need completion. I feel ready to explode. Please."

He was kissing her breasts. They hardened at the mere touch of his lips. Then down, down he went until he reached the apex between her legs. Before entering he made sure she was ready for him. When he was satisfied, he entered with one quick push.

They found their rhythm complimenting each other's move, the fire building between them with each stroke. Faster and faster, higher and higher. So close they both felt the explosion was near.

Gabby tightened around Jonathan's shaft, letting out a scream. After two more jabs, Jonathan joined her as his own release came. They were once again among the stars, soaring in the warmth and fulfillment of each other.

They fell asleep, arms and legs entwined. Blissfully content.

Next morning Gabby woke to hear voices. Who could granny be talking with? Secondly, how did they get past the protection I put up?

Fearing it was Jacko she put on her robe and ran down the stairs. At the kitchen table sat a stranger. Yet Gabby felt she knew him. Both Granny and the stranger turned at the same time to see her enter the room.

“How did you get past my safety barrier?” Gabby demanded. “Who are you?”

Deep inside herself she already knew the answer to both questions.

“Gabrella, you have grown into a beautiful young woman. You look so much like your mother.” The stranger, but not a stranger, said.

“Why?” was all she could say the hurt in her voice was clear.

“What was done was never meant to hurt you. When your mother knew she was dying, she made me promise not to take you away from here. She wanted you to have a normal life. Watching you grow up was so hard. I was selfish. You looked more like your mother every day. I could tell your powers of magic were strong. So, I taught Jenny all about the plants, herbs and potions. Most everything else I knew you would figure out yourself. When you were still too young to remember I left and went back to my parent’s realm. I left Duncan to keep an eye on you and Jenny. Last night he came to me at Jenny’s bidding.”

“I am here to take care of Jacko and his cohorts. They will never bother anyone again. AS prince of the fae my word is law and will be obeyed. They would not like the consequences if they are not met.”

“Can you forgive your father for father for doing what he thought was for the best? I have missed you so much but I thought you were better off without me and safer too.”

Gabby never moved the whole time her father was talking. She had stood staring at the man she thought dead all these years. He had asked if she could forgive him.

She looked at him with tears in her eyes, “There is nothing to forgive father” and she ran to his waiting arms.

He smelled just as she remembered so many years ago. Like a pine forest and something else that she could not figure out.

Suddenly she questioned, “Duncan?”

Both Granny and her father laughed. “I was wondering when that would sink in. He is really a sprite. He uses his glamour ability when needed. He can only take on the appearance of an animal though.”

“I want to hear all about this young man who has declared himself.”

Before Gabby could say a word Duncan, “the sprite”, flew in the open window and went straight to her father’s ear.

“I am sorry, but our further conversation will have to wait. Our friends are approaching. Duty calls. I don’t want them to get too close before I intercept them. I don’t want any innocents caught in a possible crossfire. “

“Please be careful, now that I have you again I don’t want to lose you so soon.”

“Relax, these boys are no match for me.” He was out the door in the blink of an eye.

“Granny, don’t you disappear. I have a few questions for you. My biggest one is why and how could you go along with my father’s departure?”

“First of all, I guess you should hear the whole of it. To start it is true that your mother made your father promise you grow up here when she was dying. You were never told why she died like she did. “

“You told me yesterday she died in childbirth.”

“She did but I don’t believe she would have if she had not been injured on the way back from your father’s realm. They were attacked, and your mother was hurt. She never recovered from the injury. The attack was because of your father’s family. He was devastated. He decided you would be safer if he faked his death and went back to his parents. Duncan was sent to watch over us. He is a loyal friend. Your father came back while you were still too young to remember, teaching me the way of the fae while he was here.”

“Poor father, the guilt he must have felt. I could never blame him for decisions he made. I can only hope he has no regrets. He is here now and that is what counts. No one could ever replace you, Granny. You have been my whole world all these years, “ Gabby said as she hugged the only mother she had ever known.

“Oh child, I love you so much. Now, go up and get dressed before your father comes back. Then we can have breakfast and talk more.”

Eyes bright with the wonder of the morning’s events Gabby ran off to do granny’s bidding. She could suddenly think of a million things to talk about. Jonathan was at the top of that list.

Chapter 11

They were all sitting around the table having finished breakfast, just talking of everyday things. Gabby's father cleared his throat. "I can now feel safe being here with you. The problems that led to you mother's death have finally been resolved. It is safe once again to travel either way without the worry of being attacked. My parents can hardly wait to be reintroduced to their granddaughter."

"Really? I can go there? I don't remember anything about it. I can hardly wait to visit."

"Soon my dear, soon. Now it is time you tell me about this young man of yours."

Blushing, Gabby replied "he is not my young man yet. Actually, we have only just met. He came with me to rescue the fairies from Jacko. I rode on his back. Oops, I'm getting ahead of myself. First he turned into a falcon after eating on of our magical mixtures."

"A falcon you say? Very curious." Her father said. "Tell me more."

"He was a very beautiful bird and strong. I rode him close to the camp. He led me into camp saying I was his prisoner. Jacko gave us a hovel to sleep in. That first night I showed him how to set up a diversion outside the camp area. While he was out doing that he had me locked in with the fairies. I relayed our plan to Elsa. She had been working on the wards from the inside."

"The next day, everything was going according to the plan and then it wasn't. Jacko and his men returned to camp before Jonathan and I could make good our escape. The beat Jonathan senseless and tied him so he couldn't move. I thought they were going to kill him. "

"They called it playing games. The wanted him and me to suffer. We had spoiled the 'fun' they were planning to have with the fairies. Jacko had taken me to his tent. He told me how he hated the humans and how he was going to rid the area of "goodie fairies' so the humans would leave. His plans for me were, let us say, less than honorable. I told him I had been with a human intimately. He never touched me."

"I'm glad I didn't know about this before we met. The outcome would have been the same, but it would have taken a lot longer. Please continue. I want to hear everything, " holding Gabby's hand.

"When disgust overtook him, I was dragged out to watch them play with Jonathan. After hanging in the sun all day, they bound his head to the post and gave him fae wine. The just left him hanging there. It was awful."

"When they finally cut him down they threw us both in our hovel. I was told to heal him. They had a new game to play the next day. I did the best I knew how. I had never done it before, so I did what I thought was right. When they took him the next morning he was conscious and talking. I guess what I did was okay.

"I knew we could not stay much longer. They wanted to ransom Jonathan, but they would have sent him back to his family in pieces. That night was a repeat. They drug him to the hovel and told me to heal him. They wouldn't let me have my satchel with all my remedies. Using what I had learned the night before I started the process again. That night Jonathan had a bout of chills. He was shaking so hard. I was unable to stop the shaking, so I wrapped myself around him. During the night it seems we shared the same wonder dreams. " Gabby blushed but didn't go into details about the dream.

“The next morning Jonathan was as good as new. Jacko and his men had celebrated well into the night. We took advantage of their drunken state and made our escape. We would have gotten away free and clear. We were not expecting the warning to be sent up. Jonathan had once again turned into a falcon and was flying away. They shot poison arrow at us. One hit the falcon’s leg. He was able to get almost here to Glimmer Cottage. I was able to get Duncan to help bring him the rest of the way. I used a glamour spell to get us inside the cottage. I couldn’t turn him back until granny came home. I did however cut out the arrow and pack his wound. I just hope he has no lasting effects from his ordeal. His sister, Lady Aribella, took him home and we have not heard anything from either of them.”

Granny was pattered her on her arm “I’m sure everything is going well. They would have sent word if Jonathan had taken a turn for the worse.”

“I am still determined to tell him that I am half-fae. He may never want anything to do with me once he hears the truth,” sighed Gabby.

When her father spoke, there was a note of caution in his voice, “I would ask you to wait a little while longer to say anything to your young man. I would like to meet him. It is not that I do not trust you or Jenny’s judgement. I have a strange feeling there is more to his story than meets the eye. He may not even know the all of it himself.”

Her father simply asked his full name and once supplied was off to find Duncan.

Gabby was confused but did not question her father. She was even more confused by Ganny’s reaction to her father’s statement and query. Jenny had a big smile on her face as she got busy with her chores. “Yes.” She said under her breath, “Everything is working out just as I hoped.”

Chapter 12

At Stonewood Manor Jonathan was becoming restless beyond reason. "Dearest Bella, if you do not let me out of this room today I shall go mad. My leg is completely healed. Gabby has done a marvelous job to that end. So please release me from my forced confinement."

Lady Aribella sighed. Seeing the futility in keeping Jonathan in bed relented. "I give up. You must at least promise not to leave the grounds. Can you do this much for me? It will ease my mind to know you are close at hand."

"Yes, Bella dearest, I promise. Now let us both retire to the family dining room and have a decent breakfast," laughing he took his sister's arm and led her out of his rooms.

"I think we should send word to Glimmer Cottage to let Gabby and Lady Jennifer know I have fully recovered. I would like to ask them to a dinner in their honor if you are up to it."

"Of course! That is a splendid idea. I owe them both more than I can ever repay them. I shall send a footman with the invitation. Shall we plan for two evenings hence?"

"I was hoping to see Gabby before that, but I guess I can wait." Thinking to himself 'hopefully I will see her in my dreams again.'

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Gabby was working hard to catch up on all the daily chores that had been neglected. The garden needed to be weeded, the chicken coop cleaned, some of the wild flowers needed gathering. Some would be tied and hung to dry for future use. Some of the blooms would be used fresh for their oils.

She had not seen her father all day. He was suddenly standing on the stoop of the back door. It appeared Duncan, the sprite, was delivering a message. She heard her father say "not a word to anyone for now. I will have to puzzle this out. Perhaps Lady Aribella might be able to shed some light on the subject."

Just as Gabby was about to ask her father what he was talking about a rider wearing Stonewood livery approached the cottage. Worried that it was bad news Gabby hurried inside.

"Granny, what is it? Is Jonathan okay? Are they sending for us?"

"Relax girl. They are inviting us to a dinner in our honor two nights from now. There is also a note saying Jonathan is fully recovered. The footman is waiting for a reply."

"Of course, we will go, will we not? We must ask to be allowed to bring father too. I want him to meet Jonathan."

"Yes my dear. I shall write our acceptance immediately asking to include a male guest. You may give it to the footman when I am finished."

When Gabby handed the response to the footman he handed her a note with a seal. "I was told to deliver this into your hands only. His lordship said there was no need to wait for a reply. Said you would understand when you read the note."

Taking the note and thanking the footman she ran into the cottage. She went straight to her bedroom. She carefully lifted the seal not wanting to break it. Her heart was beating so fast she was lightheaded. Sitting on the edge of her bed she began to read...

My dearest Gabriella, I long to see you again in the flesh but my sister has made me promise not to leave the grounds here at the manor. I have no desire to upset her this close to her time. I can hardly wait until the dinner.

Until then I truly hope to see you in our dream. They have only made me want you more.

Your humble servant,

Jonathan

After reading the note Gabby fell back on her bed wishing it was time for bed. The image of her and Jonathan in the meadow, touching and kissing had her aching to touch herself and relieve the pressure rising at her core. Knowing it was not possible now, she kissed the note "until tonight my love."

∞

"You know we have nothing to wear to a fancy dinner" Granny said. "I propose we go into the village and purchase something suitable for the occasion. I know we don't buy dresses made for us, but this is a special dinner and once and a while one needs to spoil oneself."

"That sounds like a wonderful idea. You and I would have to sew day and night to complete an outfit for each of us in time."

The next morning all three went into the village. Gabby's father said he had something to take care of and would meet them for lunch at the local pub. Both ladies were so caught up in the idea of shopping that they did not give the excuse a second thought. Once the ladies were out of site Ansel headed for Stonewood Manor. His objective was not Jonathan, but his sister Lady Aribella. He was hoping she might be able to shed some light on events that took place twenty-three years ago.

He knocked on the front door asking to have an audience with her ladyship. Handing the doorman his card he said he would wait. Lady Aribella was in her small private parlor when she received his card. She did not recognize the name when she first read it. She was about to refuse entry. Something told her to read it again. It was the same last name as Gabby. Could he be the male guest the ladies had asked to accompany them to their dinner? Curious she told the butler to show him to the blue salon. She thought about sending for Jonathan but quickly changed her mind.

She kept him waiting a few minutes as she checked her appearance. When she entered the room, he was standing in front of the empty fireplace He appeared to be about her age. He was tall, broad shouldered and had light brown hair. He was dressed as a gentleman. His carriage seemed to prove that out. His back was to her.

"How can I be of assistance to you Mr. DePue?" He turned at the sound of her voice. "You can only be Gabby's father. Jenny told everyone you were dead."

"That was to keep them safe. My family was at war for the last several years. It has since been resolved. I came to lean up the presence of the dark fae."

"I thank you for that. I will now rest easier knowing. That is not why you are here, is it?"

"No, I am here hoping you can help me clear up some things for me."

"I am not sure there is anything I can help you with. However, feel free to ask away."

"First, how old is your brother?"

"That one I can answer. Jonathan is twenty-two, soon to be twenty-three."

"That fits. Was your mother happy in her marriage to your father?"

"I hardly think that is any of your business."

"It is very likely the key to the whole of my query. Perhaps if I tell you why I am asking such personal questions you will understand. When Jenny gave your brother the mixture to change him into a bird, he should have turned into a lesser bird. Instead he turned into a falcon. Only one with fae blood should turn into such a noble bird. Gabby said that she and Jonathan dream shared. This too is very unlikely to happen unless both parties have fae blood. So you can see where my line of questions is leading. I ask again, was your mother happy in her marriage to your father?"

"I was only five years old, but I remember a lot of yelling. My mother cried a lot. I believe she had several miscarriages before Jonathan was born. I think father always blamed her every time. She used to go on long walks. She would be gone for hours on end. When my brother was born a peacefulness became the norm for the household. Father had his heir. He moved to the city and left the child rearing to my mother. There is one thing I remember though. Shortly after Jonathan was born mother had a beautiful gazebo build down by the pond. It was down the hill and out of site from the manor. In the summer she would take Jonathan there and be gone for hours. One day I asked if I could go with them. My mother said she was sorry but it was her and Jonathan's special place and not for me. Later she made a special garden for me to spend time with her alone. That is where I got the idea for my own fairie garden here at my own manor. My Mother said if you build a village the fairies would find it."

"I knew I was right," said Ansel. "Stories have been told about one of our own people falling in love with a lady who was human. They met deep in the woods of some estate. The woman was very sad and the male fae gave her comfort. It turned into love. Making a long story short the Lady got with child. It was a male child. The husband of the woman claimed him to be the heir. Not wanting to lose her lover the Lady built a wonderful gazebo. The gazebo is very close to a portal into our world. To protect our world from humans the portal is closed from our side. The male fae would visit the lady and her son often. When the trouble started in our world the portals were ordered closed. He was not able to visit anymore. It was not known what happened to the child or the lady. I have some searching for the fae. He is sure to know the name of the woman and her child. It will only confirm what I already know to be true in my heart. Jonathan is half fae just like my daughter Gabby."

Lady Aribella sat on the sofa just staring at Ansel long after he finished speaking. The whole thing sounded impossible, yet it also rang true. Her mother had become obsessed with everything fae. Stories, the village and the time spent in the gazebo. They all seemed to confirm the tale she had just heard. "When Jonathan was about six years old our mother went into decline. She was still rather young. No one was able to find anything wrong with her physically. She passed away before Jonathan turned seven. Not that it all makes sense. She must have died of a broken heart."

“It could well be the truth of it. All fae were forbidden to travel between worlds for several years. Please do not say anything to your brother until we have positive proof. Even though I am now convinced it is a fact. Your brother is half fae. Thank you so much for seeing me, let us keep this visit and all that has transpired our secret for now. Without further ado I bid you good day. “ Ansel departed quickly to keep the planned lunch date with his daughter and Jenny.

At lunch the ladies could talk of nothing but their successful shopping trip. They had each found the perfect attire. The dressmaker had promised they would be sent to the cottage the next afternoon. They had also purchased gloves, shoes and new bonnets. Jenny felt almost young again. It had been a long, long time since she had enjoyed shopping so much. Gabby had purchased a beautiful length of ribbon for her hair the color matched with the color of her dress and brought out the color of her eyes. Granny had been able to keep a few pieces of jewelry from her past life. “I have a pair of earrings that will be perfect with your dress.”

“Father we have been so neglectful of you. Did you take care of your errand to your satisfaction?”

“Yes, I think everything went quite well. You have not been remiss in your attention. I know from being around my mother and sister that when one is shopping it will be the only subject open for discussion.”

Gabby’s eyes lit up, “I have an aunt? What is her name? do I have uncles or cousins?”

Ansel smiled, “You have one aunt, my sister, and one uncle. He is married to my sister and they have a set of twins. She is **expecting soon** so you will have three cousins. The twins are a handful and keep both their parents on their toes.”

“Will I be able to meet them all soon? I love granny to death but having an extended family is a most exciting prospect.”

“Soon we will visit. Your grandparents are anxious to be reacquainted with you. You were so young when they last saw you.”

“I don’t have any memory of either of them or your world. It is like the worlds in fairy tales that humans tell their children at bedtime?”

“You can be the judge of that when you visit. Now are you ladies ready to be for home?”

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That evening Gabby decided to retire to her room as the sun was setting. “We have a big day tomorrow. I plan to get up early and get all my chores done. I want to take a long soaking bath and wash my hair. It takes forever to dry,” she told Granny.

Ansel had disappeared after supper. “Tell father I said good night and hope to see him in the morning. As Gabby went to her room she was thinking about Jonathan. *I hope I can find him tonight. I miss him so much.*

“Jonathan, I’m here. Please I have missed you so. I need you, I want you. You touching me, kissing, making love.”

“How can I resist such a lovely invitation Gabriel, my love, I have missed you as well. Come this is our time. We can make this our place. What do you see?”

“I see huge rocks and a waterfall. What do you see?”

“I see an area near the water covered with thick green grass. Fragrant roses are blooming. The moon is full and high in the sky, thousands of stars twinkling bright. This can be our secret place for now and always.”

“Love me my darling Jonathan, love me.”

Coming together on the sweet-smelling grass they embraced, kissing each other on their cheeks, eyes. Finally, their mouths found each other’s lips. They kissed long and hard, learning each other’s taste, tongues intertwining. They kissed until there was hardly a breath between them. Arms entwined they laid down in the lush green grass. Each exploring the other. Soon they had undressed. Gabby ran her hands over his smooth muscular chest. His hands found her perfect breasts as they hardened with his touch. He couldn’t resist suckling each one slowly with love. His hands traveled from her breasts to her stomach. Gabby arched her back wanting his hands to go further down. She burned at her core. She knew only his touch could ease the ache.

This time he applied pressure to her womanhood. Her breath became short and fast, she was so close to completion. Taking two fingers he entered her, sending her over the edge. She screamed his name, the inner walls of her se tightened against his fingers.

“Gabby, I need to be inside you.” Kissing her mouth and working his way down her body again, he spread her legs apart, moving between them. Holding her hips slightly in the air, ever so slowly he entered. Taking his time to feel the tightness as she took him in. They moved together as one, matching push to shove. Building and building, climbing higher and higher.

Gabby began to shake. Jonathan knew she was close. He increased his rhythm, so they would finish together. Pulling Jonathan closer to her she buried her face in his chest. Their world burst into flames. So intense was the climax, Gabby thought they would burn to ash.

It took forever to even begin getting back to normal. Finally, their breathing returned to normal. They laid in each other’s arms talking in quiet tones. Gabby asked “Is making love always so... so... I can not even find the words. I have nothing to compare ti to. It is like we crated something with magic and it worked.”

“I don’t know about every time. I do know it had never been like this for me before. I only wish we could wake up in each other’s arms in the morning. Hopefully that will happen in the not too distant future. I love you Gabriel DePue and I want to marry you soon.”

“I have so much to tell you, but I need to tell you in person, not in a dream. Maybe it will be possible after dinner. I feel the same way about you. I just hope after you hear my whole story you will feel the same way. Now I am going to sleep. I have a very big day coming up and I need my rest. Until dinner.” And she was gone.

Chapter 13

The next day the ladies' gowns were delivered after early tea. They took them up to their bedrooms. Granny joined Gabby in her room. The older woman caught her granddaughter holding her gown up to herself in front of her mirror swaying to and fro.

"I don't think there will be any dancing, but your gown would be just the ticket, Granny chuckled.

"Isn't it wonderful. The color is perfect. It matches my eyes and the overblouse with the embroidered flowers match the darker ribbon I bought for my hair. Will you help me fix my hairdo?"

"Of course. I am sure between the two of us we can come up with something lovely."

Later that evening found both ladies waiting on Ansel. He had been gone all afternoon again. When he returned humming to himself, looking very smug, they had asked him what had put him in such a state. "I believe all will come to light this evening. Now I must rush to get ready."

When he came down, his smile was greater, if that was possible. The room seemed to glow just because of his presence. "I haven't been this happy and excited in years" Ansel remarked. "Gabby, I would like you to wear this tonight. You were to receive this on your sixteenth birthday. Your mother had it mad on our last trip. A lot of love went into it."

When Gabby saw the locket her father held in his hand, tears shone in her eyes. Taking the intricate piece, she lovingly opened it to find like-like images of her mother and father. "It is so beautiful. I shall wear it always."

"It was made by the fae with magic. They put our love into it. I am just sorry your mother was not here to give it to you."

"In a way I feel she was. Thank you for such a wonderful gift."

Granny cleared her throat "the carriage is here to take us to the manor. Let's not keep it waiting any longer."

∞

Dinner was a private affair. The only guests were Gabby, Jenny and Ansel. The talk was pleasant, on no one topic. When the meal ended they all retired to the salon for tea and spirits.

Ansel took Gabby aside before they entered the room. "I think tonight would be a good time to tell Jonathan the whole of your heritage, including the fact that you are a fairy princess. I am interested to see his reaction. I have some news of my own. I will discuss it with Lady Aribella and your granny while you are talking with Jonathan."

"If you think the time is right. I am anxious to get everything out in the open."

"I believe tonight is the perfect time to reveal truths on both sides."

"Both sides? What do you mean?"

"All in good time my dear. By the end of the evening the whole will be out in the open."

Once Lady Aribella and Jenny were seated and had a cup of tea in hand, Ansel nodded to Gabby. It was her signal to ask Jonathan to take a walk in the garden. He was all too happy to extend his arm to Gabby and guide her to the French doors leading to the garden.

“I have been waiting three days to be alone with you, “ guiding her away from the manor. Once out of sight, Jonathan wrapped his arms around Gabby and began kissing her as they had in their shared dreams. “This is much better than a mere dream.”

Before he could continue Gabby sighed, “Jonathan, we have to talk. I mean I need to talk and you need to listen.” She told hem about her parents. How they fell in love and married. The trips to the netherworld. How they were attacked, her mother being injured and dying when Gabby was very young. “My father decided it was safer if he stayed away. I was told he died. With the trouble with Jacko and his band, Granny sent for him. Ansel is my father and he is the prince of the fae world. That makes me a princess in the fae realm. I had to tell you everything before you made up your mind whether you still want me to be your wife.”

“Do you truly think because you are half fae I would not want you? You are my heart and soul, now and forever. I could no more refuse you than I could stop breathing. Gabby DePue you are mine, “ sealing his statement with a breath-stealing kiss.

While Gabby and Jonathan were out in the garden, Ansel relayed the results of his findings to Lady Aribella and Jenny.

Jenny knew Ansel was looking into Jonathan’s background, but she thought it was strictly because he wanted to marry Gabby.

“First we found a portal on the Wexly estate. It had not been recorded. We believe it was made by a powerful fae. His name was Jonathan. He was a kind soul. When all portals were ordered closed he disappeared and has not been seen since. It had been rumored he fathered a child with a human. I am ninety-nine percent sure Jonathan Longman is that child. He is half fae just like gabby. I think a match between the two young people will be a blessing. Of course, that is up to them. I could never condone marriage if their hearts are not in it.”

As Ansel was relaying the last of his information, Gabby and Jonathan had entered room.

“What did you just say about my mother? Are you saying the late Earl was not my father? Just whom pray tell do you think my sire was?”

“Your mother was so sad and lonely. A fae by the name of Jonathan. He comforted her, dried her tears and they made love. They were together when you were born. Four years after you were born all portals were ordered closed because of a conflict. Jonathan was never able to return while your mother was alive. Some of his friends say he went back to the gazebo once but your mother had already passed. No one has seen him since.”

“You are saying I am half fae? Sir, if I may?” Ansel nodded, “I would aske your permission to marry your daughter.”

Ansel beamed, “You have my blessings Jonathan Longman, Earl of Wexly, man of the fae,” clapping Jonathan on the back.

“I have one question, why don't I have any magic?”

“You probably do but no one has ever shown you how to use it. Your father was a portal master. That takes training. I have a feeling you can learn the skill quite readily with a good teacher, if you are interested.”

“I think I should like that sir.”

Chapter 14

One week later the wedding plans were well underway. Once the banns were read they would be married in a private ceremony in the small church in the village. There would be another service. That one was to take place in the home of Ansel's parents. The king and queen of the fae. The couple would stay there a while so Jonathan could learn if he had power to build portals.

Lady Aribella had been reunited with her husband, thus ending Jonathan's obligation to watch over his sister.

Gabby and her betrothed had gone riding. They were going over the wedding plans. After the simple ceremony there was to be a wedding breakfast at the manor. There would be good-byes all around. Ansel would then escort them into the fae world. Ansel told them time was not the same on the fae plane as it was in the human world. After a nice visit and time to learn they would go to the Wexley estate.

"I can't wait to show you in person my home. I may have embellished it just a little."

"I already know I am going to love your home as much as I love you. My father's mother said she was having a dress made for me to wear in our wedding there. Things are moving so fast yet it seems to be taking forever."

"I know what you mean. I can hardly wait to make you mine. I want to wake up with you beside me."

∞

The wedding was over and the breakfast was coming to an end, all that was left were the good-byes. Granny had tears in her eyes, "I will miss you terribly sweet girl. At least I will have Duncan to keep me company."

"Once Jonathan can work the portals we will visit you. I will miss you too." Hugging her Granny. "I better move along. I don't want to keep father and Jonathan waiting too long."

∞

Ansel took the newlyweds into the woods near the manor. "Now we must hold hands. Do not let go until we reach the other side. You may feel disoriented when we first enter the portal."

The portal shimmered, looking a lot like a wall of water. "Why has this not been found by humans?"

"It may have been. However, a human will not be transported if they step through unless accompanied with a fae. Are we ready? My parents are waiting."

They clasped hands and stepped into the shimmering space. Gabby had closed her eyes and when she opened them it was like they were in a dream. The buildings were so different. There were spires of gold and silver. Everything glittered. Some of the buildings looked to be made of spun sugar they were so delicate, there were jewels everywhere. Flowers overflowed window boxes. Lush green grass and stepping stones led paths to the homes. Then as Gabby turned the castle from her childhood dreams came into view. It was made of crystal. Shining brightly in the sun.

"I must have dreamt of this place a thousand times," Gabby said in awe. "I think I could go straight to the king and queens' private chambers. I spent time there too in those dreams."

Ansel chuckled "I don't think that will be necessary today."

Up the steps to the grand entrance stood the king and queen of the fae world. The queen had her arms stretched out in welcome as Gabby ran to her. Just as she reached her grandmother, Gabby skidded to a halt and went into a curtsy. "Your majesties, I am honored to meet you."

"You are our granddaughter there is no need for formality," laughed the queen and hugged her granddaughter tightly. "We are so happy you came."

"Grandfather, Grandmother, I would like to introduce you to my husband, Jonathan Longman, the Earl of Wexly."

"We are pleased to make your acquaintance. We have heard some very interesting things about you. My husband says he remembers your father. He was a very talented portal master. We are anxious to see if you will be able to master the ability."

"I shall try my best. I am eager to learn everything I can. Not just about portals but anything related to the fae."

"We are glad to hear you are so enthusiastic to learn. It will be nice to have someone in the human world that can aide us if necessary."

"Your wish is my command. Only Gabriel could possibly overrule you." Jonathan said jokingly.

The castle inside was cool and inviting. The queen gave instructions to show the newlyweds to their suite of rooms.

"We will leave you alone tonight. There is food and drink already up there. If you desire anything else simply ring and someone will come to your aide. Let me repeat how happy we are to have you both here. Tomorrow I will bring you the gown I had made for the celebration of your marriage here." Continued the queen.

"Just not real early tomorrow your majesty," Jonathan said with a wink and a smile.

The queen actually blushed, as did Gabby. "Jonathan! I'm sorry Grandmother. My husband seems to have forgotten his manners."

"Think nothing of it my dear. I too was a newlywed many years ago. No off with your two."

∞

Once alone in their suite Gabby became very shy. "I know we met in our dreams but now that it is real I find myself at a loss. I have never done any of the things we did in our dreams. I don't want to disappoint you."

"You could never disappoint me, my beautiful, beautiful bride. I am here to love you and teach you, if you like. We will go as slow as you want. Let us start with a little wine and food."

"A little food would be nice but I think we should skip the wine. You know first hand fae wine does not agree with you."

“that my dear is a lesson I will never forget. To that end I asked your father to send several bottles of my favorite wine ahead of our arrival. So, would you like a glass. I can event open a bottle of champagne. Have you ever had a taste?”

“No but I would love to try some. I have heard it is wonderful fresh fruit.”

“My love you have no idea.” Jonathan walked over and popped the cork on the champagne.

Later... “ I would like to be your ladies maid tonight. I would love to undress you piece by piece if it won't make you uncomfortable.”

“I don't think I will be any more self conscious to have yu do it as a maid. I have never had anyone dress or undress me since I was old enough to do it myself.”

Jonathan didn't wait a moment longer. Picking up his bride he made for the bedchamber.

He started by taking the pins out of her hair, letting the long silky blond tresses fall down her back. He removed her earrings and necklace. He picked up the hairbrush. Long strokes caressed her hair as he laid kisses on her neck. Gabby's husband slowly unbuttoned the dainty closers of her dress. His hands smoothed over the soft skin of her shoulders. He bent over to get a taste of the skin on her arms. He brushed the hair away from his love's neck and nuzzled it. Standing Gabby up, the gown slid to the floor, leaving just her chemise. Jonathan pressed kisses on her forehead, her eyelids, down her nose and both cheeks before he got to her mouth. With their lips locked together he picked her up and carried her to their bed.

Laying on the bed in each other's arms they were learning each other's bodies. “You have too many clothes on. It's my turn to undress you. First was Jonathan's waistcoat and neckcloth. Slowly she unbuttoned his shirt and removed his cufflinks. Once his shirt was off gabby let her hands explore his warm, smooth, chiseled chest. She began kissing his neck working her way down. She liked his hard nipples and started going further down.

Jonathan stopped her, “Unless you want this over before we get started you need to slow down”

“Okay, I guess I was getting a little carried away. You are just a wonder now as you were in our dreams. “

“So are you and I want to make love to you completely beginning to end.”

“I want that too. I'm so ready to reach the stars for real.”

“Minutes later found both naked and under the covers in each other's arms aiming for the stars.

Kissing, touching, whispering endearments led to further explorations. Jonathan wanted to make Gabby's first time special in every way. He knew he needed his bride to be wet and ready for his entry to take her maidenhead. Gabby was already feeling a heat building in her core. She knew their was more to come and she was anxious to get there. Moaning, begging, “Please my love. I need more now. I need...”

Jonathan started rubbing in her crease. Entering with his fingers. Stimulating her nub he brought Gabby to a climax. While she was still enjoying the aftermath he entered her slowly and caringly.

"I am going to go further when you are ready. I want you to be comfortable with me inside you before I continue. It is likely to sting. I promise it will not last long. Do you understand my love. I would not hurt you if there was another way.

"I understand, and I am ready to go on now. I want all of you so much."

Before Jonathan could stop her Gabby jerked up to take him past her maidenhead. She drew in a sharp breath. Jonathan started to pull back. "No, don't pull back. Just give me a minute. You are big. I know you will fit perfectly. We were made for each other. Take me to the moon my love."

Just like in their dreams their bodies were in tune with each other. Gabby met each thrust. Soon they were reaching the pinnacle. Gabby's world shattered into thousands of pieces and Jonathan followed after two more thrusts as their souls met.

"You are mine now Gabriel DePue Longman for now and forever."

"And you are mine Jonathan Longman, Earl of Wexley."

Holding each other tightly they drifted off to sleep. They woke to eat and make love two more times before sleeping until late morning. The sun was shining brightly when they finally woke. "Oh dear, Grandmother will think something is wrong with us."

"I highly doubt that" Jonathan chuckled, "Come here my little vixen. I have a need for my wife this morning."

"In the daylight? Oh my, I don't think that would be proper," Gabby replied innocently.

"Gabby, we are newlyweds. Morning, noon and night is proper," he said kissing her with passion. Unfortunately, that was all he would get before there was a knock on the door.

∞

The girl at the door had a tray filled with fresh strawberries and cream. There was an assortment of fresh fancy pastries and freshly brewed tea.

"The queen asked that you join her in her chambers when you are done. Also, if you would rather have hot cocoa instead of tea I will go make you some."

"Thank you so much. Everything is just perfect. I will hurry. I don't want to keep the queen waiting."

"Oh, no! no! she said you were not to hurry. She is enjoying a relaxing morning for a change. There will be a bath waiting for you when your visit with her majesty is finished " and she was gone.

Jonathan came into the sitting room to find Gabby. " I was getting lonely in that big bed all by myself. What is keeping you from making your husband a very happy man."

"The queen has sent us a fresh tray of food and hot tea. She wants me to attend her in her chambers."

"Good, now I can see you in bed before I make love again" he picked up the tray and headed back into the bedroom.

"But the queen."

“I won’t keep you too long. Come now, I find I am quite hungry.”

Chapter 15

Two hours later Gabby found her way to her Grandmother's chambers. As she entered "I am so sorry it took me so long, but Jonathan was rather insistent."

"Think nothing of it my dear. I was young one myself. It was nice to just lay back and relax. Most days can get a little crazy. I have had this day planned for so long there is nothing left to do. Except, of course, to see to getting you readied for the big evening. You are to be introduced as your father's daughter, our granddaughter and crowned as a princess of the fae world. We will also be announcing your marriage to Jonathan.

"Is it really necessary to crown me a princess? Just because I was born doesn't not make me one. I don't know anything about being royalty."

"I understand Jonathan wants to stay here and learn how to cast portals. There will be plenty of time for you to learn everything you need to know too. No let me show you that gown I had made for you," leading Gabby into the bed chamber, "I hope you will like it. I think the color will bring out the color of your eyes."

Gabby gasped when she first saw the gown. The navy-blue gown was beyond beautiful. There were several layers of see through thin material that sparkled. The dress was cut just below the shoulders. The sleeves were made to wear of the shoulders. "Oh Grandmother, it is the most fantastic gown I have ever seen." She giggled a little, "Anyone would be proud to wear it. I can tell that the fairies had a hand in making this creation. The magic has been worked into it. Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"The gown is not the only thing I have for you. These slippers are part of the ensemble. They do not look comfortable. (They looked as if they had been woven in silver) but I assure you they will be like not wearing anything. Last, but not least, are the jewels." She handed Gabby a velvet box.

Inside was a necklace of silver, diamonds and sapphires in a youthful design. There were also matching earrings, bracelets and hairpins. "This is too much, " Gabby said.

"Nonsense, Gabriel, you are a princess and should be adorned as one. Besides you are the king and queens' granddaughter. We have not had the privilege of spoiling you as you grew up. Now your bath is waiting as well as that new husband. Scoot along, I will have these things sent to your rooms. You may want to rest. Tonight will be a long affair."

∞

When Gabby returned to their suite Jonathan was sitting in one of the wingback chairs reading what looked to be a very old book. The pages had yellowed and the leather cover was intricately tooled.

"Have you been here the whole time? What are you reading?"

"No, I met with your father and he introduced me to several portal masters. They knew my father and are very hopeful I will be able to learn how to throw a portal someday. They gave me this tome to read until they start my training. I could not read this at first. They said I might need a little help and gave me this cookie. When I ate it the words were clear to me. I guess it is because I am only a halfling. If all I have to do is eat a cookie that's not much of a hardship. How was your visit with your grandmother? Did she show you the ball gown?"

“Oh, Jonathan, it is the most fantastic gown I have ever owned in my entire life. It was not just a gown. There shoes and jewelry plus gloves that go above my elbows.”

“Well, it sounds like you will be the envy of every woman attending. Come her my amazingly beautiful wife, I have a special gift for you, “ he laughed.

“Grandmother said there was a bath waiting for me. I don’t want the water to get cold.”

“There is no need for worry on that score my love,” he led her through to the bed chamber. There was a door she had not noticed the day before. Now behind Gabby, Jonathan whispered “Open it and be amazed.”

Inside the room that was constructed of marble was what looked more like a pool.

“Oh my, I believe six people could fit in here.”

“Perhaps, but today there will only be two,” smiling Jonathan guided Gabby to the steps.

“Two, oh, surely you are not planning to bathe with me.”

“I plan to do more than just bathe with you. Into the water you go, your gifts await you.”

Gabby undressed, slipping down into warm, inviting water. The scent of the water reminded her of a meadow full of flowers, rich but not overpowering. Coming up behind Gabby her husband wrapped his arms around her. His hands found her perfect breasts, his lips her neck. Once again, he would take his love soaring.

∞

Later back in their bedroom, Jonathan insisted on continuing as her maid. In the bath he had washed her hair and wrapped it in a cloth while he washed and worshiped her body. The water had never cooled down and the room was filled with steam. Warmed soft clothes had been laid on one of the benches around the room. He quickly but gently dried her and draped a warm soft robe on her shoulders. Jonathan insisted of carrying her into the sitting room.

While they had been in bathing, someone had set up a grand tea just like back home would be. There was fruit, finger sandwiches, an assortment of sweets and of course, fresh hot tea. They had also made a fire in the fireplace. Setting Gabby in front of the fire he removed the cloth from her hair.

“While I attend to your hair will you pour the tea and feed me and yourself some of these delicious looking goodies. When we are done here I want you to rest until it is time to get ready for the ball.”

“Are you going to lay with me?”

“As much as I would love to I do not think that is a sound idea. If I were to lay with you I don’t think much rest would be involved. I can not resist making love to you when I am near you.”

“Oh, well” Gabby said blushing a pretty pink, “I feel the same way about you.” Turning, she began serving up tea.

∞

The ball was a spectacular affair. One and all, big and small were in attendance. They wanted to welcome Princess Gabriel and her husband into their hearts and homes. After all the pomp and ceremonies were finished the real party began. There was dancing, entertainment and food. The ballroom was decorated from ceiling to floor. There was cloth that looked like clouds hanging from the ceiling. Tiny bright lights looked like stars above. (Gabby later learned that they were actually wood fairies, more than happy to watch everything from above the crowd.) There were garlands of flowers and material draped everywhere. Some of the wood fairies had decided to get a little close to the action making the whole room twinkle.

“I wish Granny was here to see this. She truly does embrace the fae world.”

“Maybe someday we can bring her for a visit. We can ask the queen. I think it is time we dance,” and he led Gabby onto the dance floor.

∞

Next day everyone slept in as the ball went on until the wee hours of the morning. Once all the family made it to a late breakfast the king declared it to be a holiday and the order of the day was fun and relaxation. Jonathan suggested that the two of them take a walk and perhaps have a picnic. Gwen, Ansel’s sister, overheard the conversation.

“I think that is a wonderful idea. I know the perfect spot. The children can run and play while we lay in shade. There is even a small pond where the twins can wade. I’ll have the kitchen pack some baskets. There is probably food left from the ball. This is going to be so lovely. It has been a long time since we have had a family outing.

Jonathan sighed. A family outing was not what he had in mind. He also knew there was no way to get out of it. Well at least I will have her all to myself tonight.

“It all sounds quite lovely but I think I will pass and simply spend the day inside. What about you’re your grace?” the queen asked a small smile and raised eyebrow.

Caught off guard the kin stammered. “Oh, yes, I still have a few things that need taken care of. I shall have to decline also.”

“Brother of mine, tell me you will join us.”

“Yes, Gwen dear, I will join the family outing. Shall we meet back here in say one hour?”

Everyone agreed going their separate ways to prepare for the outing. Back in their bedroom, Jonathan tried to talk Gabby into making love, “After all, we are newlyweds and it has been almost twenty-four hours. I just cannot get my fill of you.”

“You will just have to wait until tonight. We need to get ready for the outing. I want to change. We will also need blanket. Maybe I should wear a sun bonnet.”

“Come here, we have a few minutes to spare. I need my wife in my arms. There is even time for a long kiss.”

Jonathan had to admit he enjoyed the outing with his new family. The twins got Gabby and himself to join them in a game. The four of them went exploring the rocks around the pond. They found a small

cave. Inside were a couple of old toys. Running back to where their parents rested they cried out, "look what we found in a cave." They displayed the toys.

"I believe those were left in that cave by me. The cave was my special place when I was just a little older than you are now." Ansel told them.

Everyone appeared to have a good day.

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For the next three weeks the routine was much the same every day. Jonathan studied and practiced five days a week. While he was studying, Gabby learned the routine of the castle. Got better acquainted with her family and improved her abilities of healing. At night they would make love. Learning each other's likes and dislikes, what heightened their love experience and what did not. Every night was a new and wonderful experience.

News came via Duncan the Lady Aribella had delivered a healthy baby boy. He was to be christened on the weekend and his parents wanted Jonathan and Gabby to be his godparents. Because the passage of time between the two worlds was different were carefully made. A portal was arranged so the couple could go thru at the last minute because some days equaled what was hours and sometimes weeks. Now it was already fall in England even though it had been early summer when they had left three weeks ago.

The couple visited Glimmer Cottage after the christening. Granny said she was fine, just a little lonely. Gabby promised she and her father would try to visit soon. Granny still would need her elixirs and potions on hand for winter and Gabby always helped with the preparations.

Jonathan's training was coming along very well. Some days the master he was working with would allow him to take time off to take care of his business affairs on his estate. Once they even transported him into his home in London. He would only be gone three or four hours, but that was days on earth. When he came home to Gabby on those days he didn't want to let her out of his sight.

"I missed you so much. Time dragged by while I was at the estate," he would say.

"I will be glad when the training comes to an end, so we can both go home. I want to show you everything and take you to London and introduce you as my wife. I think it will be spring when we go home. The meadow should be in full bloom."

"I cannot wait to see all the places you shared with me in our dreams," Gabby told him.

Chapter 16

One-month later Jonathan was told he was proficient enough to be on his own. All he needed was practice. It was decided they would leave for his estate in two days. It was hard saying goodbye to her new family, but she was excited to start a new life with Jonathan on his estate. "I promise I will visit before summer comes. Jonathan has so many things planned that it will take that long to do everything. I will miss you all very much." Hugging the twins "give your mother a break and behave once in a while. Maybe you can come visit some time if you do."

True to his word it was spring when they arrived at his estate. One week after their arrival the day had dawned with the promise of a perfect day. The temperature would be warm but not hot. The sky was bright blue with billowy white clouds. The grounds keeper had told Jonathan that the meadow was in full bloom.

"Good morn my love. Today is the day we are going to the meadow. I have it on goo authority that the flowers are at their peak. I am having a basket made up. We will leave after breakfast and be gone most of the day. I can hardly wait to roll around in the high grass and flowers with you.

"Oh my, your sure can turn a woman's head with your talk. Are we riding horseback so I can wear my new riding outfit?"

"What ever you would like we will do."

"It is such a marvelous day, I think horseback should be the order of the day."

"I will let them know in the stable we will need two mounts for the day. I can't wait to see you in and out of your riding outfit."

They rode at a leisurely pace enjoying the day for about thirty minutes. Jonathan stopped "we can leave the horses here and walk to the spot for our picnic." Taking the hamper in one hand and Gabby's hand in his other, they took off across the meadow. One hundred yards from where they had left the horses under the shade of a tree.

Jonathan had a strange feeling, "Something is wrong. We need to get back to the horses. As they turned an eerie fog started to roll across the meadow from the direction of the horses.

"Well, well, look who we have here. A princess and an Earl all by themselves."

The familiar voice sent goosebumps down Gabby's back. "Jacko! I though my father had taken care of you."

"Guess he did not do as well as he thought. Now just stay where you are. I have some lovely plans for the both of you."

Jonathan said under his breath, I am going to throw a portal right behind you. You can take a step backwards into it. I will erase it as soon as you are thru. Go to your father to bring back help."

"Jonathan, I cannot leave you alone. I know what Jaco is capable of."

"You must, I need to know your are safe my love. Now the portal is open step back quickly, we can't let Jacko or any of his men get through it." Throwing her a kiss he took a step back to distance himself from

the portal. As soon as Gabby was in he erased all evidence of the portal. Seconds later he was jumped and knocked to the ground.

“Don’t mess the clothes up boys. I have need of new attire. Now strip him and find the lovely princess.”

“She is gone, you will not find her.”

“Where would she go, my men had the place surrounded.”

“I am sorry, I cannot help you. My lips are sealed.”

“Well, we will just have to unseal them for you. Once he is striped, tie his hands together. Take him over by the horses. I want to take a look around. If she truly is gone maybe I can find a clue as to where she is. I want the ransom she could get us.”

Jacko looked around a few minutes finding something very interesting but decided to keep it to himself for the moment. Reaching into a bag he carried at his side Jacko produced a set of shackles. “Put these on his wrists. The metal will block his ability to use magic. He has acquired a new skill since we last met. I would not want him to escape before I learn his secrets, if ever. Back to camp boys. It’s time for a little fun.”

Without the benefit of his boots, Jonathan quickly lost his footing going through the woods. He was dragged across the rough ground. Atop Jonathan’s horse Jacko asked “What is the problem, can’t you keep up? Give the lead a dug just as Jonathan tried to stand, making it impossible to get to his feet. Broken branches, tree roots and stones battered his body most of the way to Jacko’s camp.

Once in camp they went right to work securing their captive. Before they had set out to kidnap the pair of halflings, the men, at Jacko’s instructions, readied the camp. There were different areas to hold and contain the captives. They tied Jonathan’s feet together and hauled him in the air a foot off the ground, upside down. Once he was in the air, different magic dampening shackles were attached to his wrists. His arms were stretched out away from his body and secured.

“Now that we have you secure perhaps you like to share how your beautiful wife disappeared into thin air. I know you used magic. The remnants were still in the air.”

“I will never reveal my secret to you.”

“I was so hoping you would say that halfling. I was able to recruit a few new men on my way here. They have taught me some new ways of persuasion. Okay boys, gloves on. Let the wrapping begin. Start with his arms. Pull the chains a little tighter first.”

Once they pulled the chains Jonathan thought his arms would be pulled out of their sockets. The burn was unbelievable. What came next made that burn fade in oblivion. They took fines wrapped in something green. They started at his wrists. The pain was immediate. They had intertwined some type of nettles and vine with long thorns and were circling his arms tight enough for the thorns to poke him but not penetrate his skin. He was helpless. He was stretched in every direction. Once they reached his torso they stopped.

“Now that you have had a taste of my discovery would you care to change your answer?”

The pain in Jonathan’s arms was white hot. He, however, managed one word “Never!”

“Very well then we shall continue to try and persuade you. Okay men, you may resume.”

They released one arm chain and threw it over the same limb that held his body off the ground. They again pulled tightly pressing his arm into his body. They then did the same thing to his other arm. With the vine pressed to his body, it too began to burn. Jonathan thought perhaps they were going to leave him hanging as he was. That was when he heard rustling in the tree above him. Vines were being dropped around him. They were put between his feet and secured. Multiple lengths of vine were lowered to the ground.

“Did you ever have the privilege of wrapping a Maypole, your lordship? Sadly my men never have. I have decided to rectify that. Let the game begin. Music please.”

Someone produced a flute and began to play. The men grabbed the ends of the vines and began weaving them around Jonathan. Again they wrapped tightly but not enough for the thorns to go into the skin. By the time the music stopped the vines were at his neck. So the vines would not unravel they tied all the ends together with a magic chain. Jonathan had passed out from the pain before they were done.

“Well I guess he isn’t too tough after all. We will just leave him there like this. Maybe in the morning he will be more willing to talk. Come, you have worked hard today. Let us eat, drink and sleep. Our captive won be going anywhere.”

Jonathan became aware of his surroundings near dawn. His whole body was in pain. Even though his skin still burned from the nettles he was cold. His body began shaking of its own accord making the burn intensify. His throat was so dry he could hardly swallow and whatever was around his neck seemed to be getting tighter. He could no longer feel his feet.

I guess that may be a good thing. I hope Gabby is safe. She will send her father to take care of Jacko. I just hope I will be able to survive until that happens. With those thoughts in his head he succumbed to the darkness again.

By the time Jacko and his men were stirring the sun was already high in the sky. This added to Jonathan’s pain and thirst.

“Well I see our guest is awake. I think he probably needs a drink. Do you want to bend up so you can swallow some water?”

Jonathan didn’t answer, unable to make a sound, besides, if he were to bend the pain would increase and that was something he could do without.

“Not answering, never mind, we can take care of it for you.”

Jonathan thought they would lower him, so he could drink. His hopes were soon dashed. Jacko approached with another length of chain. Jonathan began to struggle. He did not know where the chain was intended for. He just knew what was planned would cause more pain.

“Relax, we’re going to lower your legs. They are turning your right side up so you can drink.”

The process was not that simple. The chain was attached to a ring at the front of his neck. They raised his body by pulling on that chain, digging the thorns into his skin. At the same time they lowered his feet putting more weight on the collar around his neck. Jonathan was not sure he wanted a drink or if he

would be able to swallow at all by the time he was upright. Remembering the last time they made him drink, he fought the first attempts from the fae to give him the water. When the liquid didn't burn or numb his mouth he stopped fighting and swallowed as best he could.

"See that wasn't so bad. I can be reasonable. Now how did you make your wife disappear? Still no response? You are one very suborn man. Okay, secure his feet to the ground. Put your gloves back on and retrieve your paddles. It appears our guest needs more persuasion."

Jonathan was stretched to his limits. His feet were secured to the ground while he still hung from the collar around his neck. Aware of the men milling around him, he tried to prepare himself for what ever was to come next. It didn't take long to figure out what they were to use him as a punching bag. The first blow to his stomach took his breath away. Some of the men used gloved hands, some had clubs. As they hit him, it drove the thorns into his skin deeper and deeper. They hit him from neck to his toes. His screams echoed in the trees. They broke his ribs, the bones in his hands, and feet. The bones of his right lower leg and upper left are were under constant attack.

He didn't know how long the beating went on. He had passed out after a sever blow to his kidneys. They had brought him to several time by throwing water at him. *Please Gabby, hurry my love, I don't think I can last much longer.*

"I can't believe the halfling has held out this long. I am running out of ways to convince him to tell us what we want to know. Perhaps if we remove the vines he will be more talkative. I want him awake when we remove them. The barbs on the ends of the thorns could be a very big incentive to talk. If he wakes up during the night give he a drink. I don't care what you give him. Just don't kill him. Event if he doesn't talk he can be a good bargaining chip."

Jonathan slowly joined the land of the living well into the night. He begged the men guarding him for a drink. He knew the moment he took the liquid into his mouth his mistake. It was not water as it was before, but diluted fae wine. He prayed to any who listened to let him die, his agony was so great.

"Jonathan, can you hear me? You must stay strong. Your life with Gabby is just beginning. The two of you are destined for great things. I know your are hurting beyond belief but you need to live. Your father and I are together and very happy. It is not your time to join us yet. I cannot tell you your future. That is for you and Gabby to make. You need to survive this ordeal, they are coming to your rescue soon."

He recognized his mother's voice even though he was only six when she died. He had questions, so many questions. But she was gone before he could ask one single question. She had said he needed to live, to live for Gabby and a future. It felt like she had kissed him on his forehead. It was just like when he was little. Then she was gone.

The wine was coursing through his body. Any place that didn't hurt from the injuries inflicted by the fae, hurt from the wine. He tried not to move, it only brought more pain. He told himself he could get through this, help was on the way.

Sunrise next morning, help still had not arrived. At least the affects of the wine had worn off and Jonathan felt ready to deal with whatever came his way.

“Well now, don’t you look chipper this morning. Ready for more fun and games? First I think the fines have worn out their usefulness. We are going to remove them. Perhaps there is a butterfly inside that cocoon,” Jacko laughed at his own joke. “Slow but not to easy boys. Start unwrapping our guest.”

Jonathan was not prepared for the pain. Each thorn ripped his flesh as it was removed. He would pass out,. The would revive him and the whole process would begin again. By the time the sun was high in the sky they finished removing the last of the fine.

“Now we are going to take you down. We have a spot over here a ways. You will be laying down so maybe you will feel more like talking to us.”

Suddenly he was falling to the ground. Jonathan Simply laid in a heap. “Oh dear, I am so sorry, the chain slipped out of my man’s hand.”

They picked him up and carried him a few feet. The men took him by his hands and feet and threw him on top of a huge log. Attaching chains to his shackles. Jerking his arms down and back they were fastened to the ground. They repeated the procedure with his legs.

“Now we are going to leave you to your own thoughts while we go on a little raid. It seems we are in need of some supplies. You have a nice day now,
Jacko said as he walked away.

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That was how Ansel and the rest of the rescue party found Jonathan. He was barely breathing. Blood seemed to ooze from his entire body. They could tell there were several broken bones and possible internal injuries. Through the fog of pain Jonathan was aware of voices. At first he thought it was just a dream. It sounded like Ansel giving orders. Turning his head slowly towards the voice he whispered, “Ansel, it is you. Is Gabby...” he had no more strength to talk but kept his eyes on Ansel.

“No more talking. Gabriel is safe in the castle awaiting your return. I am sorry for what you had to go through. We came as soon as Gabby told use what took place. You must rest now, the whole story can come later.”

Ansel’s men carefully released the bonds trying not to cause more damage. Not surprising Jacko or one of his men had cast several spells on the shackles and chains. By the time he was freed, he had slipped into a coma.

“It is probably for the best. Load him onto the stretcher and get him to the healers at the castle. The rest of you spread out and hid. Jacko and his reign of terror ends today. No one threatens the royal family and survives.”

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Several hours later Jacko and his men returned to camp. “Well, look what we have here boys. The prince has come to trad places with the halfling,” laughing in the prince’s face.

“Laugh all you want, your time has come to an end. You all are to be taken to the royal city. A trial will be held. It is only a formality before you are put to death.”

“Just how do you plan to get us all back to the royal city There are a dozen of us and only one of you. Get him boys.”

That was the last command Jacko ever gave. The clearing was suddenly filled with the Prince’s men. Jacko’s men were bound and shoved into the portal in a blink of an eye. Ansel took great pleasure in securing Jacko with the same shackles he had used on Jonathan. As he tightened the cuffs he said, “You should have taken my advice and disappeared the first time we met. Now you and your men will pay the ultimate price. It is just too bad we don’t believe in torture back home. I bet you would squeal like a little pig.” Jerking on the chain, Ansel and his prisoner entered the portal.

Chapter 17

When the litter carrying Jonathan returned to the castle, his condition was grave. A team of healers worked tirelessly around the clock. They started by repairing the internal injuries. One lung had been damaged by his broken ribs. Both kidneys were badly bruised. His throat was swollen making it even harder to breath. Once they were satisfied the most dire injuries were on the mend they started to knit his hundreds of broken bones back together.

Gabby never left his side. For three days the healers worked on her husband. In the end they said everything that could be done had been and it was up to the lord and Jonathan whether he would live or not. For another five days Gabby stayed at his side. At times he was delirious and they had to tie him down so he would not re-injure himself. A fever raged thru him for three days. Once the fever broke he was deathly still. His chest barely moved up and down.

Gabby had fallen asleep at his bedside on the night of the eighth day since they had brought him to safety. A hand was touching her head. When she looked up Jonathan's beautiful green eyes were looking at her. He tried to talk but nothing came out.

"You have come back to me my love. Don't try to talk. Here take a sip of water," she helped him to raise his head for a drink. He managed two swallows before sinking back into the darkness. This time though, Gabby knew in her heart he was going to live.

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Two weeks later, Jonathan was up against his pillows eating his breakfast "When will I be able to go eat with the family?"

"Whoa, today is the first day you were able to sit up by yourself. You have to take this one day and one victory at a time. You need to learn to use your hands again so you can feed yourself."

"But I like having you fee me. That way all my efforts go to watching you. I was so afraid I would never see you again. Have I told you how much I love you?"

"I was so scared when I went through your portal. Your location was off and it took me several fae hours to reach the castle and father. That night I tried to dream search you. I couldn't find you anywhere."

"That was because I blocked you. There was no way I wanted you to share the nightmare I was living at Jacko's hands. However, I as not alone the whole time. My mother came to me. She said I needed to live, that you were my destiny. She also said she was now with my father and very happy."

"I'm glad you had someone. Now eat. You need to build your strength, so we can go home." With a smile on her face that seemed to light up the room she continued, "after all, the hair to an Earldom should be born at home. Don't you think?"

"A babe? We are having a baby? How long have you known?"

I was going to tell you the day we were to have our picnic. The babe should arrive close to Christmas."

Epilog

Their child was born in early December. All the arrangements were made to have the christening and a Christmas gathering at the same time. They had invited Jonathan's sister and her family. Granny had been at Wexly for the birth and would stay until spring. Gabby's father and grandparents were coming any day. Lady Gwen, her husband and the twins would not arrive until the day before the christening.

Life had fallen into a normal quiet routine. That was just fine with Lady Gabriel and the Earl of Wexly. They were both looking forward to spring and picnics in the meadow.

P.S. Jonathan has been practicing his portal skills for accuracy of destination, just in case.