

Chapter I

Mary-Anne's mother was always so particular about security. Especially on the full moon. "Mary-Anne!" She'd say, "Close all the windows, lock all the doors, fasten the bedroom locks and especially make sure Peter's window is closed up tight and the curtains are shut and the cupboards and wardrobes are closed."

Mary-Anne, never understood any of these strange and absurd rituals. Sure they lived isolated within the forest, far from the rest of the town. In fact, a drive from the little cottage to the far off town was an hour, sometimes less and sometimes more, but was this still a reason to be so protective. Maybe, the fear was of a woodland creature entering the home and gobbling them all, like a wolf, or a bear. Or maybe it was of robbers who would take all their belongings and steal away in the night leaving them all homeless beggars. Or maybe it was something more than she could ever imagine.

Her mother always went to work at five in the morning with Mary-Anne and her little brother Peter, she'd leave Peter at the nursery then Mary-Anne at her school. Then she'd pick them up approximately at 5 o'clock PM and make them supper and lay them both to rest.

Peter was only 3 years old and could speak a handful of words such as "Mummy" or "Kettle" and oddly "poopy" but never "Anne" as Mary-Anne called herself for she liked the "Anne" part, better than the "Mary" part. However, the spring holiday finally began meaning the 14 year old Anne was left each morn till evening at home with her little brother to care for him, and she was quite motherly. When Anne awoke, usually a minute or two after her mother began her walk to the school, she would hop out of bed and boil a kettle upon the stove and remove the giant rusted pot from underneath the kitchen cupboard and prepare for herself and Peter some

oatmeal porridge. There after she'd wait for it to cool and take Peter from his bed and bathe him. After Peter was fully dressed she'd feed him she'd finally eat herself. Then on, her and Peter would frolic through the open fields outside the little home, only till the fence though, for their mother warned never to go beyond the boundary and into the dark woods.

Anne would then read to Peter or sometimes when her creativity was at it's peak, create a story on the spot. Her mother had many books on the old shelves in the living room, and the majority of them were all books of fantasy and magic, goblins and faes, mermaids and pirates and other mythical creatures (Anne particularly enjoyed the tales of mermaids and secretly wished to be one). These were the stories Mary-Anne grew up with, thus her childhood was always filled with magic and wonder. Sometimes she even swore to have seen a fairy swiftly fly into a mouse hole or a goblin dive into the gorge beyond the fence. Anne wished her life was just as exciting as the heroes and heroines she read of every day, with all sorts of magic and talking creature and warlords and wizards and mystical things, but alas, her childhood was a simple one. A beautiful life never the less, but still so simple.

At lunch, she'd warm the left overs her mother had prepared the previous night over the stove and her and her brother would eat, then Peter would sleep until the arrival of their mother whilst Anne would sit upon the window sill of her cozy room and draw what she saw, or what she thought she saw. Upon her walls were pictures of all manner of creatures, dwarfs and sprites, dragons and unicorns, fairies and mermaids. And she'd watch the sun slowly sink into the hills and the sky turn from blue to red to purple and then to black, and the stars slowly ignite upon the sky. Then she'd begin the instructions her mother told her once again, closing and locking of doors, windows, cupboards and wardrobes and light the lamps along the walls of the cottage home. She'd

then sit within the darkness and patiently wait for her mother to knock, seven times (because seven was an unusual number of knocks for a person) and she'd open for her.

Her mother would then prepare supper, sometimes soup or mash potatoes or on special occasions; pie, and they'd gather in the living room and eat together while conversing with one another (well Peter didn't really say so much, he'd just roll on the carpet and dribble a little).

Now, our story begins on one of these nights when Anne decided to ask the question that always nudged at her mind. She emptied the leftover into a plastic and leaves them on the side, she washes the dishes within the sink and packs them quite neatly upon the shelves. She then boils a kettle of water as requested by her mother and seats herself by an the old armchair whilst waiting for the water to heat. Peter was in his cradle, snoring away and her mother was slouched with the couch, looking at the ceiling in deep thought.

"Mother?" Anne said softly.

"Yes, Mary?" Replied her mother for she liked the "Mary" part better than the "Anne" part.

"Why are you so particular about the locking of doors and things, especially on the full moon?"

Her mother thought for a while, then replied softly "I knew you'd ask eventually, how could you not?" Then she beckoned Anne to seat in front of her, right under her nose."

Now Anne's mother was a very good story teller, the best Anne ever knew, and when her mother wrinkled her nose, and twiddled her fingers

and a certain sparkle shown in her eyes, she knew she was in for a story for this was her mother's deepest passion.

"Now, let me tell you of a little thing called a changeling." A changeling, what a new notion Anne had never heard before. In all the books she read, in all the tales she heard, changelings had not once popped up within them.

Anne's eyes widened, full of anticipation. "But before I tell you of what they are, I must first tell you a little tale."

Anne nodded vigorously, she adored her mother's tales. "There was once a woman," she began "Of long ago, who so desperately longed for a child. Her husband and herself, prayed and prayed, but it was to no avail." She then smiled sweetly "until, years later they finally had a child, a boy to be precise, and they both loved him dearly with all their hearts." Then her mother leaned in close, one eyebrow raised "but they did not follow through with tradition." Whenever Anne's mother eyebrow rose, it meant something terribly wrong would happen within the story. "One night, a day or two after the baby's birth, they left the window wide open, and something snuck into the room."

"Really, what was it?" Anne shrieks, full of excitement.

"A fairy."

"Wow."

"Not 'wow'," replied her mother, "for the fairy was full of bad intent, it stole the little child, so tender and young and flew away in the night."

“Are fairies bad?” Anne interrupts.

“Not all dear,” replied her mother “like humans, fairies are both good and bad, but mainly mischievous, and this was all done out of mischief and sport believe it or not.”

A fairy taking a child just for fun! What an unusual sort of game and a cruel one too.

“But the fairy did give the family something in return,” continued the mother “A changeling. A creature that disguises itself as a human child and lives off the love and care of a mother or father or both. The more you give it, the more powerful it grows.”

“How horrible!” Exclaimed Anne, “What fairy would do something so cruel!”

“Many,” replied her mother “they do it all the time, taking and stealing away human kids and taking them to the realm of Fae,” and her mother points outside the window, “deep in the woods.”

Anne follows her mothers finger, looking at the woods, “Don't fear them though,” her mother continued, “just as there are bad things in the woods, they are good thing too.”

“Mom.” Anne says, “please tell me more about these changelings?”

“Of course,” she said “Well, they look and seem like normal children, cute, red cheeked just like the child they stole, but their hearts are black as coal. They do acts of mischief, sometimes harmless, sometimes dangerous and enjoy bringing misery to their poor parents. But a mother or father can never abandon their child and must only endure it. However, these changelings are an eternal curse.”

“How?”

Her mother say back in her arm chair and hesitated for a moment, “They never grow.”

“Never?”

“Not ever, time has no effect, they stay young forever because they can only take the form of something they know, and are uncertain of how a child might look once they reach adulthood. So they stay a menace to their parents, until end of their lives.”

All of a sudden the kettle whistled and Anne turned her head towards the kitchen. She was so taken in by the take she forgot of the kettle on the stove.

“Go now,” said her mother. “Go upstairs to sleep, I think I’ve kept you awake too long.”

“Yes mother.” Anne said as she rushes to her room, but stops mid step, “Are the changelings really real?” She whispers.

“Only as real as you want them to be.” Her mother finally said as she disappears into the kitchen.

Only as really as you want them to be. She thought before tucking herself in bed and falling asleep.

Then I decide their not real.

Chapter II

Anne's holidays were filled with boredom. She was quite content with the life style she'd made for herself and her brother Peter, but as time past she slowly grew bored of the same rituals day in and day out. She'd exhausted every book on the shelf, read each one a million times over, the space on her walls for pictures grew smaller and smaller and every inch of the garden was already explored as far as she could go and the forest seemed to call to her. She began to look over the fence with such

longing, always craving to adventure beyond it. Wanting to see if the changeling and faery really did exist.

Peter, was not helping her plight however, his constant yelling and moping made Anne head pound. His excessive eating, his gnawing of her stuffed toys and books and socks. Yes, it was true that Anne was very motherly, but she was also a child, one that was tied down to her responsibilities preventing her from finding fun. She so disliked him sometimes, not to say she didn't love and adore him which she obviously did, but sometimes he'd make her head spin and teeth going and even make her yell but Anne knew deep within herself he was just a child.

However, an important day was drawing closer, a day Anne was both excited and thrilled for. The day of her mother's birthday. Anne had been planning her surprise for months waiting patiently for the holidays in order to finally give her mother the greatest gift of her 40th birthday. Ever since Anne was but a toddler, she had always been interested in the tiny , shiny pebbles she found laying in the grass, she'd stuff them in her pockets and keep them deep with his closet, only the prettiest. She found deep purple stones, or smooth white rocks or on luckier days, the sapphire rocks you had to dig deep for. She collected the treasures religiously and strung them together with string to make a beautiful multicolored necklace each year adding a new stone to the collection. It was hard to shape each stone into a smooth, round circle but with great difficulty she finally succeeded. As she began washing the rocks she immediately heard the wailing of Peter who had just woken from his sleep.

Anne walks into his bedroom, "Peter, Please." She wails in response before picking him up in her arms and rocking him.

"I haven't much time before mother returns, you know how important today is, don't you?"

Peter looks up at Anne, eyes wide and curious as though asking *what's so important about today?*

"It's mom birthday silly, you should at least remember that right?"

Peter sucks his thumb *Really, it's mommy birthday?*

"Peter, I need to get back to gift making and it's almost dark."

Just then Anne heard a knock on the door. "Oh my, I wonder who that could be."

Anne put Peter back into the cradle and before leaving places a teddy bear in her arms. She then makes her way to the door and looks out the window through the curtains. It was pretty light out still and she could make out the stout figure of Miss Williams standing outside the door. Anne quickly opens the door, "Miss Williams, how are you doing, would you like a cup of tea?"

"Actually dearie, I would." She says as she makes her way to her mother's armchairs and sits herself down.

Miss Williams lives within the town, she's old and plump and half blind. Her mother usually send her over when she intends on working late to look after Anne and Peter. Miss Williams however, had the tendency to fall asleep meaning it was just as good as Peter and Anne being on their own.

"Ahh, thank you dear." Miss Williams says as she slurps the hot tea down her throat.

"Why's mom coming late today?" Said Anne as she knelt down before her.

Miss Williams took another slurp of tea and licked her lips "She ain't coming to tomorrow dearie." She says in her deep Irish accent.

"What?" Anne could feel the tears well up her eyes, but because she was a indeed a big girl she couldn't let them drop.

"She 'ad work to do and walking down this path a long can be dangerous, she'll be stayin' at a friends place."

Anne looked down, she warned her mother to have the perfect birthday. She even prepare to bake a pie. She'd made the dough, stewed the meat and potatoes. All that was left was popping it into the oven. She made sure each room was spik 'n' span, and finally she put her mother's favorite song on the record player(it was a dreadful experience trying to put the disk on) and it was all in vain. The pie, the music the necklace. All in vein.

"Don't worry lass," ms lWilliams began "since your mom ain't here there's more pie for the all of us, after all, we can always wish her happy birthday tomorrow, what's one day more gonna do."

Anne nods and rubs away the tear that trickles down her left cheek.

"You're right, I'll prepare the pie for the all of us." She says standing up and walking towards the kitchen.

"Now that's a good lass." She hears miss Williams say.

Anne wouldn't let her mother change of plans ruin the next day. She'd smile and be brace, as she was always told to do in times of crisis. "After all," her mother would say "what good is a mopping face, it helps no one not even yourself."

The pie was eaten and all that was left of it, was a feel pieces of crust and scraps of potato and beef. Miss Williams was fast asleep on the couch, mouth gaping open while Peter was in his cradle, assumedly snoozing since the last time she was with him he was dozing off holding his teddy in his little gloved hands. This left Anne on her own, washing the dishes silently and once more placing them on the shelf.

After she dried her hands she walked toward the living room and stood in front of Miss Williams. "I'll get you a blanket." She whispered, "it is a cold night after all."

She quietly opened the door to peter's room and snuck into his closet. "Where are those blankets." She says to herself as she scrabbled trough peters toys and clothing. "Ah ha!" She says finally grabbing one for the

closet. As she wraps it round her shoulders she turns and lets out a fearful gasp. As her hands clasp around her mouth in seeing the crouched silhouette inside the cradle. It only took a moment however before she realized it was just Peter toying with something in his hand.

Anne laughs "Don't scare me like that you little cutie." So she walks up to his cradle. It's then that she sees what Peter's clasping.

"Mom's necklace!" She screeches and she sees him gnawing at one of the stones! How'd you get that?"

She reaches down to try and grab it from his hands but Peter has quite a grip and refuses to let go. "Kettle!" He says playfully as Anne tries to free the necklace from his fingers.

"Give it back Peter! It not yours! It's not-" then came the snap. The string broke and in doing so sent all the precious towns bouncing against the walls and floors, some even breaking in halves and quarters. Anne's heart sinks. Her eyes narrow and tears began to roll down.

"Why Peter! It wasn't yours it was for mother," Peter's eyes widen, awe stricken by Anne's sudden outburst. "WHY MUST YOU RUIN EVERYTHING!"

Peter whose looking up at her, pulls his teddy close, as though he was trying to protect himself. His eyes looked remorseless. He couldn't share her pain and that made things worse.

"I HATE YOU PETER, I HATE YOU SO MUCH." Anne spoke words she'd never spoke to anyone ever. Words that suddenly seemed to settle into Peter's heart as Anne saw tears fall. But it wasn't the usual loud, screeching cry Peter did when he wanted food, but rather a sad, silent, painful cry. However Anne was far from over, all of a sudden she flung the windows open and a gush of cold wind entered as the full moon illuminated the bedroom.

"I hope you get taken by a changeling, I hope they take you and I never see you again, I hope you never come back." She then walked towards

the door. She turns towards and can only see his silhouette in the dark room before she closed the door.

She did not entirely know what came over her, but she was not going back into that room. Peter had betrayed her and he couldn't even say sorry, or at least look at it. It was then the image of Peter's tear-stained face floated into her mind and for a slight second her heart softened. But she crossed her hands and sat herself outside the door.

"I will not go back in there Peter, not at all!"

No answer.

"I will not tuck you in, I will not read you a story, I will not sing to you, I will do none of that tonight Peter!" She yells a little louder.

But still no answer.

He could at least cry a little so she knew he was sorry.

"Fine then! I'll be on my way then Peter." She says standing up, straightening her gown and trotting downstairs, "I don't need-"

Suddenly a silhouette figure stood waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs.

She gasped.

But only to realize that it was just Mrs Williams "Oh sorry lassie, did I frighten you?"

Anne just nodded. And Mrs William laughed, "It's my little charm."

Was it really a charm to look so witchy in the dark? Anne thought to herself, but obviously never said so.

"Listen" began Mrs William "I've been meaning to give you something."

Anne nodded. The idea of a gift was rather captivating. She hardly ever received anything unless it was her birthday.

"You're 14 years old right, lassie?"

"14 and 6 months actually." Anne corrected. The months were awfully important.

Mrs William laughed once again. "Yes child, they are Indeed, and I was planning on giving you this on your 15th birthday, but how's a good enough time as ever."

She then beckoned Anne to follow her, and Anne did so, but before staring over her shoulder at the bedroom door. *You really hurt me Peter. She says to herself. You really did.*

Chapter III

"My gift is in the bookshelf?" Anne queried as the woman searched through the bookshelf, plump fingers scurrying here and there in an attempt to find this supposed gift.

"Are you certain it's actually here?" Anne asked, aware of how dotty Ms Williams was at times. "Maybe you don't have it with you at all?"

"No lassie, it's within these books somewhere, I'll find eventually. She says. Anne wasn't sure whether gifts such as these should be acquired from a person's home. But she wasn't one to question such queer things, after all, her mind was adrift. She felt guilty about how she treated Peter and was ready to make amends, and for a brief second an image of him flying right out the window with a pretty creature went through her mind. But she shrugged it off. Fairies and changelings were not real, and this was a fact.

"Finally!" Mrs. William says, startled by her sudden yelling and her attention was drawn back to the current matter. "I found the book, lassie." She says drawing it out of the shelf and into her hands.

It was the strangest thing she'd ever seen. It was definitely an aged book, with its dusty color and sallow pages, but it was rimmed with gold and bronze around the covers edge showing that it was of great value. She read the words on the cover, drawn out in gold;

"Beyond?" Anne asks looking up.

Mrs Williams snickers, "I'm glad to see you can read, yes that is indeed the name of the book. And it's a very special one at that."

"How so?" Anne asks.

"You'll have to read it to find out," she says rather ominously, "For such things cannot be explained with words."

She looks down at the book in her hand, then up at Mrs Williams, but as she does so, sees the woman already down the stairs, "Well, I think I shall retire now, she says aloud. "Don't stay up to late reading."

She looks down at the book, once again, it glistens in the light of the candles. Might she page through it for a while. She finally opens the book in her palms and looks upon the first page. "Dedicated to Margot." It read "A fairytale for all to enjoy."

All books started this way, so it wasn't so astonishing and she turns to the first page, "It's all in rhyme?" She thought as she marveled at the vivid colours of the drawing that seemed to quicken before her eyes. And she began to read;

'Once upon a land far away,
A girl was about to embark astray,
On an adventure noble and true,
And if you're reading this rhyme that girl is you.'

"Me." She says aloud. Possibly not her. It was an Impossible thing to think her life would transform so marvelously, but just as those few lines were read once again the quickening of the Images began and the words seemed to swirl about the page In glowing colors and transform themselves Into a reflective looking glass. Anne's eyes widened and she lets out a little yelp while throwing the book to one side as It continued Its glow.

"What just happened!" she whispered a little hoarsely, still trying not to disturb the Inhabitants of the house. books didn't do this sort of thing, they were usually still and quiet, not glowing. She reached out her hand to the book lying open the floor and stroked It before retracting quickly. Did Ms William know the book could do this. She then grasped It In her hands, determined to finish the tale. This time aloud. She cleared a throat and spoke once again, this time a little less confident;

"A world beyond this one exist If you didn't know,
So begin your travels, for It's there that you must go,
But be quick dear heroine, for danger lurks within,
For In your brothers, bedroom the story will begin."

What did that mean. She thought as all of a sudden the words, began to move once more and show an Image of Peter sleeping peacefully within His blankets, the window still open. "Why peters bedroom?" She asked herself aloud, then the words began to form upon the page once again. Swirling and writhing on the paper like snakes as they finally formed to lines.

"An evil darkness Is lingering,"

It spoke.

"And Is trading your brother for a -"

And Anne Immediately clasped her mouth and whispered no, as she read the last word. "A changeling."

She says bolting down the hall at full speed. The thought of the entire book being folly sparked within her mind, but was quickly extinguished by the urgency of the situation. She couldn't take risks now, whether or not the book was true or false, the potential danger of her brother was still there.

She opens the door finally, unsure of what to expect. But she yells out "Stop!" Never the less.

And her eyes widen, for crouched over the bed, was a real life fairy, holding the child in its arms, and its eyes shown in gold and it grinned maliciously as it stared at the girl.

This was a fairy.

Chapter IV

Whoever convinced her that fairies were pretty fluttery creatures was a liar. This thing was far from pleasant, even hidden in the shadows, the bumps upon the creatures back were apparent, its fingers were bony and it was a huge thing that seemed to be her height yet was shaped like a fully born human. And as it cradled the child in its arms it smiled, as though it had already won.

"Leave him alone?" Anne shouted as she ran toward the thing ready to attack but unsure of how to, but the creature's moth-like wings sprouted from its back and it flew above the desperate girl.

"Fool! You are no match for me.

The queen needs this tiny flee.

And off to her I shall fly,

To toddler's child goodbye, goodbye."

And as It spoke It flew out of the window leaving Anne to watch the creature go off with her brother, defeated.

"No," she says, as she collapses upon the floor, the book still In hand. "Peter." She whisper before crying. She sat down for a while sobbing bitterly, unsure of what to do now. She couldn't chase after the flying thing. It was Impossible, so what she do? Let It take Peter? Of course not, maybe she could tell Ms. Williams, but what could she do? Would she even believe Anne? Probably not. But this situation was drastic, she had to do something. But what?

"Well, then dearie. What now?" Anne head swiftly turns to the direction of the croaked taunt to find Ms. William hovering over her with a grimace. "Will you weep till the fairy comes back or might you chase after them instead? Either way it will make a good story?"

"What do you mean?" Anne whimpers.

Ms. William draws her plump fingers to the hairs of her chin and strokes them for a while, "A little girl loses her brother to the mystical forces and spends her entire life trying to explain the occurrence to her poor mother. In turn she is never forgiven for her selfish act and is consumed by grief."

"You knew." Anne whispers, heart sinking. "You knew all about the changeling all this time.

"Or," she continues ignoring Anne's realization, "she ventures deep into the woods to save her brother to a world she doesn't know yet."

"Why would you let it steal Peter?" Anne shrieks bolting up and suddenly towering over the tiny Ms. William, "Why didn't you warn me?"

"Why should I?" She spat back, "What could I possibly gain from warning you?" She then chuckles softly to herself, "Well it's a pity, dearie. We all lose something once in a while."

And she turns to exit the room hobbling toward the door when Anne flings herself at the hem of her dress, "Please help me! Help me save Peter! I'll do anything you ask, please!" She pleas.

"Child, my heart is made of stone, your tears will never move me." She croaks in response but soon after hesitates, "But if you promise retrieve something for me, I will be more than happy to show you to your brother."

"What?" Anne asks impatiently, "What ever it is I'll give you!"

Ms. William once again grinned as she pulls out a ruffled piece of paper and puts it into Anne's hand, "Your promise best be worth something, a lady is only as good as her word." She says.

"What's this?" Anne asks opening up the crumpled paper revealing a circular symbol.

"Your way to the land of Fae, just as you wanted, dearie." She says and a sickly feeling overcomes Anne. She'd always wanted to have an adventure, but not like this. Not with her brother's life being at stake. "All you have to do is draw this sign into the ground directly under the moonlight and say a spell that will send you into the land of Fae, simple."

"Well then. Where's the spell then?" Anne asks, patience wearing thin.

"In my pocket, dearie." Ms. William chuckles, "But your promise to get me what I desire isn't enough. Give me your hand."

Anne looks down to her slim fingers then up at Ms. William the desperately delivers her left hand to the witch. With Ms. William's pointer nail she lightly drew a mark upon the palm of Anne's hand and whispers an incantation under her breath to soft for Anne to hear. Suddenly the strange mark illuminated in green sending eerie shadows upon Ms. Williams face exaggerating her witch like features. "Now you are bound to your words darling, and if I don't have what I desire when to return, then a fate worse than death with come upon you."

"And what is it you desire?" Anne asks afraid of the answer.

Ms. William grins and her crooked yellowish teeth glisten in the green of the spell, "What I desire is feeble, I want the fairy queen's most prized possession."

"But_" Anne cries before she is cut off,

"The moon is setting fast, if you wish to see your brother again you must go now!" Ms. William says placing the a another paper in her hand and reaching down for the book on the floor, "And don't forget this, it will aid you well, dearie."

Anne nods, stomach clenched with fear, before leaving Ms. William in the darkness Peter's bedroom hearing her rattling voice croak, "But to get to the land if Fae, there is a price to be paid." Before fading away.

"Hold on Peter." Anne whispered as she stuffed a bag full of random items preparing herself for the quest ahead. "I will find you."

Chapter V

As Anne scurried through the blackened night, she felt the branches of trees snag at her dress and pull upon her hair like arms bent on slowing

her down. But her sheer determination forced her to endure the fearful sounds and shifting shadows that seemed to shift into nearby shrubs or behind tall trees. The forest was more appealing on the day time than the night. It was hard to see the moon through the thick covering of leaves that seemed to block out any light. This petrified Anne. Was she too late? Ms. William said this was her only opportunity, but the old bat could be lying through her rotten teeth, and it wouldn't be the first time too. Anne finally stops and begins to view her surroundings.

"A patch of moonlight!" Anne says to herself, hope flooding her body. She runs over to a clearing where the trees seem to have shied away from and places her hand to the ground. "Still moist." She says to herself and grabs a branch almost half her height. She pulls the paper from her pocket and examines it. A circular mark with a flower with seven petals. Exactly the same kind that Ms. William drew on Anne's hand. She then proceeds to draw the mark into the ground making sure it was big enough to for her to fit through. And as she looks down at her handiwork she sighs deeply.

What if it never worked? What if Peter was lost forever? What would she tell her Mother? Ms. William's words still lingered within Anne's mind. Her story could be either a story of loss or redemption, and only Anne held the pen to write it's ending. Her heart pounded in her chest and she drew the other paper from her pocket and stared down at the incantation. She could hear it thumping with her chest as though it would explode. She takes a deep breath, she spoke the words,

*"Oh Mistress moon, do as I say,
Grant me passage to the land of Fae.
To you, only this I pray,
And any price; am willing to pay."*

No sooner had the words escaped her lips when the paper slowly dissolved to nothingness as though melting into the air. Her one pass was gone. But what was the price she was willing to pay?

All of a sudden green light sprung from the ring almost blinding Anne as the forest seemed to fill with the white moth like creatures that seemed to dance with the iridescent glow. It's blinding glow burnt as Anne paced towards it having second thoughts about leaping into the other world. *You can't do this.* Her self doubt whispered pulling Anne away from the portal. *Why should you?* Her selfishness remarked as Anne gazed to the path back home. *Are you willing to pay any price to bring him back?* Her self preservation taunted. Fear clutched at her and Anne was read to give into the feelings of helplessness and return back to her home, but something spoke over the evil. *If you give up now you'll never know what you could have done.* It spoke, *You'll never know the power that you possess. You are stronger than you believe.* It was hope. Hope that she could restore was lost to her. Hope that she could write her wrong. Hope that she could truly be a hero.

She closed her eyes and drew closer to the portal step by step. And as she felt left foot hover over nothing she descended.

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Anne shrieks as she falls down an endless spiral of green which seemed to have no end in sight. She tries clinging to the wisps of green as a means to slow her descent but the walls of the portal are completely untouchable. All she could hear was sound of her own wailing voice as she tossed and forth through glowing tunnels that seemed to have no visible end until she collides with water and is pulled deeper into the

portal whilst slowly losing breath. *I'm going to die.* The thought echoed within her mind before realizing that she suddenly had control of her limbs again and the falling feeling finally faded away. Could she move. With eyes still shut she struggles to swim to the surface unable to escape her surrounding when she feels a pair of arms pull her from the water and dash her to the ground in one swift motion.

"Are you alright young Mistress?" The voice beckoned to Anne.

But she could hardly speak a word as she bolted upright and coughed out the water she just ingest. Before opening her eyes.

"My apologies I must express." But Anne couldn't speak as her mouth stretched open in awe. The grass was a rich, vibrant green that sparkled in the sun and the trees stretched to the sun weren't the menacing trees of the forest she'd just left but were white barked beauties with leaves of yellow. The blossoms that sprung from the ground blew plumes of sparkly dust that rose into the air and disappeared shortly after. And the stream sparkled as lily pads floated peacefully upon the water. This was a place right out of Anne's fantasies. One that she could have hardly imagined herself, in fact. In the distance, she could make out house like structures within the branches, she then turned to the boy beside her.

"Is is this the land of Fae?" She asks through her rattling teeth, cold from the unexpected swim.

The boy looked at her, eyes widened before pressing his finger to his lips, "Do not mutter another word, or you will be snatched by Hindrid's bird." He whispers.

"Hindrid's Bird?" Anne's eyebrow rose in confusion, "Whatever do you mean?" But just as the words escaped her lips, a shadow fell upon the pair and a screech tore through the peacefulness of the meadow and a yell from the distance.

"Run! Hindrid's bird is upon us!"

Chapter VI

"Run! Hindrid's bird is upon us!"

The peaceful utopia suddenly drew dimmer as the approaching creature dove towards the pair, its fiery wings catching the sunlight as it sunk to the grass sending plumes of golden pollen into the air. Its golden eyes darted towards Anne, then toward the boy beside her. "Well, well, well. I was quite famished today, it seems as though my prayers have been answered." It crowed while circling the two children. "How tempting."

"No meal will found here today, not if there's anything I can say." The boy spoke confidently as he puffed his chest at the giant bird. Was he daft enough to confront such a creature.

The bird screeches with laughter as it pushes the boy over with its black talon, "I remember you!" It remarked, "You were the boy foolish enough to raise their voice to the queen. If I were her, I'd have given you more than a simple rhyming curse."

The boy turns red as he tries to get to his feet, but the bird's claw plunges into the grass pinning him to the ground. "Let go of me foul creature, or my sword shall be your teacher!" He yells in a fit as the bird continues screeching.

"Humorous little creature." It remarks before glaring at Anne with an inquisitive eye, "You aren't an elf, are you?" Anne takes a step backward but the bird cranes its neck towards her pushing her to the ground. "You're a pesky human! Nothing more." It says examining her. Anne stares back at the creature, unable utter a word, paralysed with fear. "The queen won't be pleased to see an unsupervised human girl wandering around her land." Then it draws its head closer to Anne's until she can only see the yellow of its beak. "I guess I'll have to eat you quickly." It chirps with malice and the beak of the bird descends to devour the girl but suddenly retracts and lets out a yelp of pain. "My foot!" Fitted into the talon of the bird was a tiny dagger as the boy jump to his feet, "Run girl we haven't much time, over this hill we must climb. To my village we will go! Protected from that ratchet crow!"

Anne jumps to her feet and begins to bolt over the hill, as she hears the cries of the bird, but as she's about to make her way into the thicket she

turns back to see the ginger haired lad running towards her, bird soaring close to him, ready to snatch him into the sky. "I have to do something." She whispers to herself before glancing down at the golden pollen sprouting from the flower.

In a instance, as the boy reached her and the bird towered over the pair ready to swoop down on it's prey, Anne grabs a hand full of pollen and tosses it at the bird, "My eyes!" It wails, flying back into the air before tumbling to the ground.

"Serve's you right." Anne yells before looking to the boy, "Let's get out of here!" He gives a nod of approval before grabbing her hand and pulling her into the white wooded forest.

...

"Do you think the bird might have followed us?" Anne asks the elven boy as the journeyed deeper into the forest.

He shook his head, "Hindrid's bird, can not find us here, there is nothing more to fear."

Anne, nodded as she hugged herself, still drenched, "Do you always do that?"

His gazed curiously at the Anne before shrugging.

"You know. Do always have to speak in rhyme?" She clarifies.

"Yes indeed it is my curse," he says pitifully, "But I am grateful for it could be worse."

This was all too new for Anne, the idea of curses and elves and giant birds, she was quite equipped with the skills to handle such occurrences. But she had to admit something; even with the dangers that littered this world, the sun filtering through the leaves creating a sort of rosy haze and birds and critters that seemed to flash by made up for it.

Then suddenly, from the bushes below a tiny winged creature ascended and began to circle Anne while giggling softly. "It's beautiful." Anne sighed dreamily.

"Do not touch that pixie, girl." He warned, "Or a year's worth of memory it will hurl."

Anne didn't understand exactly what that meant but wasn't willing to find out and quickly retracted her hand. "By the way, what's your name?" She asked.

"Thorn is what most call me." He said finally stopping at a tall, thick oak that seemed to tower above the whole forest. He then began to walk around the tree as though examining it before knocking on the bark.

"You didn't rhyme that time." Anne says innocently.

He narrowed his eyes with disapproval, "I'm quite busy, can't you see?" And as he gives the tree one good knock a rope ladder tumbles to the ground, the Thorn looks at Anne and gestures for her to come closer, "Within these trees is my home, about the forest floor we need not roam."

In a swift motion the boy grabs onto the wooden rung and begins to pull himself upwards into the leaves and Anne follows. "By the way, my name is Anne." She says as she struggles past branches and twigs that

obstructed her path. But with no response the boy continued upwards as they drew closer towards the light shining through the trees.

Then gradually the Anne began to here the chatter of voices as she ascended. Not just chatter but singing. The light erupted into Anne's eyes as she pulled the leaves away from her view and pulls herself above the leaves. The light fades and with it, she is greeted by a town like setting with quaint, little houses lines up next to each other, foliage roofs sparkling in the dull sunlight. Anne had known of tree houses, but not tree towns! Branches sprung from all over the floor of the town and amidst the highest brunch was a sort of rounded house hanging in the air. And as for it's inhabitants. Jolly elven folk dressed in greens and browns, danced around the town, arms flung into the air and smiles painted onto their faces as they sung;

"What a truly gracious day,
For non of us were gruesomely slain,
Even in darkness a single ray,
Can heal a thousand years of pain."

The "gruesomely being slain" thing must happen a lot if such a song exists.

Anne thought to herself, but before she had anytime to speak she saw the rounded house's door open slowly as an elderly elf descended for the branches until he reached the floor. All the elven folk eyes darted towards him as the graciously sank to the ground in curtsies and bows.

Thorn nudges Anne who quickly bows to the floor too.

The elderly elf clears his throat, his yellow eyes dart through audience until they meet with Anne's, "I see we have a visitor." His croaks. Then gestures with his hand for the girl to follow him, "Come Anne, we have much to talk about."

Chapter VII

An Anxious Anne stares at the crowd of Elves that seem to whisper to themselves as she makes her way to the Elf King. She looks back at thorn he shrugs in response before raising his hand to give her a thumbs up before she turns to the Elf King.

"The rest of you, continue you festivities, I shall join you when the moons of Ithaca rise tonight." He says releasing his citizens who once more begin to dance and sing as Anne is lead to the rounded house.

...

The Elf King closes the door as Anne glances about the tiny home. A simple bed with leave like linen and opposite stood a desk. A boring little home for someone who is supposedly royalty. But an interesting relic hung over paper cluttered desk. A mirror embroiled in gold and bronze roses that created its glistening frame. It reminded Anne of the book that lay within her little bag.

"So Anne," the Elf King spoke as her attention turned to her host who stood at the desk staring into the mirror. "I take it that your journey to this world was less than ideal."

"How do you know my name?" Anne queries, the whole thing made her uneasy.

"Come closer." He whispers.

Anne shook her head, "I don't think that will be necessary." She says taking a cautious step back.

The Elf King burst out in raspy laughter, "It pays to be less trusting here." He says, "This is filled with dangers that you cannot even comprehend. But I am not one of them." He then wraps his bony hand around the mirror and pulls it off the walls as he faces it towards Anne. "Show the girl what she desires." He says and as the words escaped his lips the mirror fizzles and sparkles green flints that circle the room taking the form of green glowing butterflies that left trails of glitter as they past by.

How pretty. Anne thought but soon after the butterflies flew back into the mirror that erupted into light forcing Anne to shield her eyes. "Anne." She heard the Elf King call, "Open your eyes."

Chapter VIII

As Anne's eyelids parted she gasped at the sudden change of environment. She no longer stood within the dank and musky room she had entered several minutes ago but was now standing under a moss covered tree that twisted into the clouds above. Its white reeds danced to the tune of the wind as its branches stretched up so high that the sun was dimmed down to singular rays.

"Where am I?" Anne asked as she trod through the long grass that swayed to the same tune as reeds. However, before she could go on further a white moth like creature flew into view sending her aback. "You were the things that came out of the mirror!" It chimed to Anne, as though agreeing with her statement and as it did, two more flew out of the grass. "What do you want from me?" She beckoned, "And where did the old king go?" But no answer came. They just seemed to chime to themselves while fluttering glitter as they flapped their wings. "It seems that you 'thing' are of no help to me." Anne says before she trudged down the hill, knuckles clenched. "I'll figure it out on my own."

As Anne descended down the hill, more of the sparkly insects seemed to fly into view as Anne swatted them away for dear life, but it was to no avail as they continued to torment her. "Leave me be!" She yelled, but as she was about to take another step, her foot met with the air and she tumbled down the hill and collided with the ground below. "Ow!" She spat as she tried to get to her feet. "Stupid bugs." But as her head rose and let out another gasp.

In front of her stood rows upon rows of pink and purple blossoms. Giant blossoms that stretched towards the sun. Their petals seem to be twisted closed as they throbbed like neon hearts. "What is this?" Anne whispers as she draws to one of the throbbing flowers and rests her hand on it.

"Oh my god."

Someone was in it. She could make out a silhouette of a person floating within the mythical plant and she could hear the faint laughter the floated from it. "These are children!" Anne cries as she hugged herself, terror gripping her. "Peter must be here." The thought that Peter was trapped on of these devilish flowers was more than Anne could bear as she run through the twist garden howling his name. But there were too many to examine, it would days to find her little brothers. She then heard a faint chiming as a singular moth thing sped past her. Then another. And another until a flurry of glittering moths buzzed around a singular flower in the distance.

"That's what those things were. They were my guide." She said as she run towards the singular flower throbbing blue. Peter's favourite colour.

As she pressed her hand to the flowers delicate petals she could faintly make out her little brother as he floated about the pod. But something was different. His ears were more pointed. Even through the petals she could tell. What did this mean. "Lets get you out of here." Anne says, relieved to finally see Peter, but as her fingers slid into the crevices of the pod she heard him mutter something.

"Your time is up."

"Peter?" Anne says. The pod begins to throb violently; flickering as it did, before erupting in a brilliant light that once again forced Anne's eyes closed.

"Peter!" She screams as the light finally dispersed and she was left sitting on the wooden floor of the Elf King's Chambers as the mirror shows nothing more than a desperate Anne.

"I've never seen such a powerful reaction!" Chortled the Elf king as his teeth rattled in his mouth.

Anne stood up staring at the unusual man, eyes narrowed, "I have had enough of this." Anne shrieked frustrated. "What did I just see?"

The Elf King's face became solemn as he rested the mirror on his desk. "That was a vision brought about by this mirror." He rests himself on the bed, "A powerful relic forged from the eyes of 100 wizards."

"Ew." Anne interrupts before the Elf king spoke once more.

"Indeed, it's creation I far from pleasant but it's power is great. It can reveal all in the present day."

"So" Anne began, "My brother really is trapped inside that spooky garden?" Anne says.

The Elf King nodded, "I'm afraid so. What you saw in your vision was Hortis dil Kin. The Field of Children."

"What is it?" Anne asked. "And how do I find this place?"

The king lips curved before he once again roared with laughter, "I haven't the faintest clue." There was something wrong with this man. Something sinisterly unsettling.

Suddenly he flung the door wide open, "Now leave me, little girl. I must rest before tonight's festivities."

"Festivities?"

"Oh goodness gracious me! How could I have forgotten." He says with a grin on his face, "Tonight is a special day. Luna's Festival. The day we honor the moon by presenting her with gifts."

Anne nodded and she was about to leave a bony hand clasped her shoulder tight, "For safety's sake; do not utter a word of this to anyone. Not even Thorn. Understand?" He then proceeded to shut the door behind him, leaving Anne both confused and uneasy.

She shook her head, "I guess I'm on my own." She muttered to herself before she descended down the oak. She gazed up at the sky as the moon began to rise into the air slowly covering the village in a eerie blanket of red.

Chapter IX

Anne travelled the town streets, in a huff. The stupid Elf King gave her so little information, not enough to save Peter at least. All she knew was that he was in trouble and she had to find a way of saving him.

"Would you like a Blueraven Apple?" She heard an shirt elven man croak at her pushing the sapphire apple into view, "One bite guarantees restful nights for the coming week, only tree coppers."

"No thank you." Anne said as she tried to walk past the persistent gentleman.

"How about a wildfire Lily. For the coming festival. A pretty girl like you would catch the eye of a lad with this in your hair. Literally. Boys will flock towards you like sheep."

"I haven't any money." Anne insisted.

"Money?" The peddler exclaimed, "Not a problem, a finger or your biggest toe will cover the payment."

Anne sneered, "No thank you." She said, before pushing past him. She was in no way interest in what the man was selling, or willing to pay in

body parts. But as she was about to progress a hand wrapped around her wrist, "I thought I made it clear that I didn't want to by your stuff." She spat as she turned to face the peddler. But she was met by the sight of a tiny bearded man but was instead glancing at her ginger haired companion. "Oh, it's you."

"Hello again, Anne was your name?" He said cheerfully, and Anne nodded. "Well here you'll draw a lot of fame." Anne's eyebrow rose, "Fame? How so?" She said in response.

Thorn pulled her through the crowds, "You're the first human here in years, your presence brings cheer from our feet to our ears." He said pointing to his own pointed ears.

As these words were spoken a procession of instrumentalists wove by with drums and stringed instruments. With them, tiny elf children and full grown adults followed all laughing to themselves voices raised to the night sky. Thorn grabbed Anne by the hand, "let's follow them we're in for a treat, we'll all dance within the streets."

"Dance." Anne questioned, "I can hardly do such a thing now." Anne said retracting her hand. She couldn't dance around whilst her brother was still in danger. It didn't feel right. She'd save festivities for another time.

But thorn was persistent, he tugged at her crying, "Luna want's us to celebrate. I'm sure all your troubles can wait."

More elves rushed by, pushing the pair towards the town square. "What do you know of my troubles." Anne snapped. "I'm just not in the mood."

Thorn stared at her for a moment, as though he were planning something. Then in one swift motion, he snatched a ribbon from her hair and bolted through the crowd. "Hey!" Anne yelled as her frizzy hair came undone. "Give that back!" And with that she chased after. Thorn colliding with other elves that jeered or swore as she crashed past. "It isn't funny!" She yelled. As she ran further on she noticed that the crowds seemed to simmer down and the area was more open and free.

"Come on Anne, you have to be faster than that. Make your way to where I'm at." She heard him cry as he stood only a few feet away from her. She raced towards him until she finally managed to smack into him and she was pressed against his chest. She pulled back swiftly, "Give me back my ribbon." She yelled, but took a glance around the place she ran into. They were both in a ring of elves, all clapping and cheering.

"It looks like we have our first participants!" Yelled a female elf with a drum under her arm. "Our famous hero Thorn and his lovely partner." The crowd applauded louder as Thorn bowed to them graciously then winked at Anne.

"Curtsey Anne, before the dance. We must be polite if we want fighting chance." Thorn whispered to her as he stood high.

Anne in turn curtseyed as she gazed up at Thorn, eyes firing daggers, "A chance at what?" She whispered back hoarsely, but quickly hid her anger and embarrassment with a big, fake smile.

"A chance at victory that we need, now dearest girl; let me lead." He chimed with a smug smile before pulling Anne towards him and placing an arm on her back. Anne was nervous. She'd never danced with anyone in her life, let alone a boy. She never once thought that she might be

standing in the center of an audience twirling from left to right. She wasn't that sort of girl. But she couldn't back out now, not with 100 eyes peering at her. The only solution would be to dance now and kill Thorn later.

"1, 2, 3!" Yelled the drummer, the her hand met the face of the drum. The square erupted with the light cheerful tune of fiddles and a voices that rose above it all.

They skipped round the stage; still linked to one another as they spun round and round. It wasn't long before the real dance began. Thorn whirl an unsuspecting Anne at arm's length as crashed back to him as he took both her hands. Anne felt he face stretch into a smile, a genuine one. One that hadn't experience this sort of excitement and years. Even though she was pulled away from her familiar and simple life, she couldn't help finding joy in the fast paced joy of another world. A world that seemed scary at first, but also seemed to be magical.

As they danced, other pairs joined, skipping to the music rhythmically.

"Faster, faster!" Screamed a child joyously as the drums pounded rapidly and fiddles shrieked in faster tones. They all danced gleefully under the icy moon, unaware of the danger that lurked behind and silver exterior.

...

After the festivities, all the children gathered round an open flame as the adults spoke to each other about things only they could understand. Thorn, who was seated beside her, seemed to be quite popular amongst the town children. As he spoke, they all seemed to draw closer and closer laughing at the jokes and stories he told. With the exception of one elf with a red cap who sat opposite the pair.

"What a joke." She retorted, arms crossed.

Thorn turned his attention to her, "What ever do you mean Poppy, you don't think I could have bested she?"

"Yah!" A toddler elf cried, "Thorn bested the Mean old Fairy queen. His told us all before." And as her spoke an older elf shook his head.

"Don't say things like. The Fairy Queen's spies might hear you."

But the toddler shook his head, "But she is mean. She takes us elves from our families and forced them to be her slaves.; he yelled. Then the child

looked up at Thorn. "Tell us the story again." She said grinning from ear to ear, "Yell us about how you bested the Fairy Queen and rescued the Moon's daughter."

Thorn stood up, "Well, I'll have to do so if you insist, if my dear friend Anne my assist."

Anne's, smiled shyly, "Oh, I'm not the best story teller." She lied.

Thorn shook his head, "Well sorry kids, you heard the lady. She refused to help so don't blame me."

"Hey!" Anne yelled, "Now you're blaming this on me!"

Thorn's lips curved into a mischievous grin. "Come on, you can't refuse a plea from children, let's entertain this crowd again."

Anne was about to turn the offer down but stared down at the dozen giant eyes that seemed to plead with her. "Oh please, human girl." The toddler whined with her hands clasped together. "Help Thorny tell the story."

"Fine." She sighed. Once again he'd backed her into a corner(And she still didn't get revenge for the dance). But it might be fun.

The elf named Poppy rose to her feet, "Well if we're gonna hear this story again, you can call me when something exciting happens." She hissed before she walked away.

Anne stared at her leave, feeling a little off about the whole thing, but Thorn rest a hand on her shoulder. "Don't mind her, she'll be alright." He said, placing a bag in Anne's hand. "Now, for a story to end this festive night."

Chapter X

As Anne sprinkled the dust into the fire she watched as the orange flames roared with purple hues, then blues, then reds. She stared in astonishment as they flicker in different vivid colors. "You have to continue throwing the dust, with this sacred task to you I entrust." He said standing over the colorful flames. All she had to do was throw dust into a fire? Some sacred task.

"Now I shall begin," he spoke as the children sat comfortably under his shadow, "Of the evil Fairy Queen and how I did win." The fire hummed to itself as Thorn reached his hand into the flame and Anne gasped as he pulled a flaming dagger from the fire. Truly this was magic:

"My party and I were called to the Fairy Forest,
To relieve the place of some goblin pest.
So we travelled down a winding path,
To face the evil goblin's wrath."

He said pointing the flaming dagger towards the darkest part of the elven forest.

"We heard the creature, cry with rage,
'No one can defeat me, fairy, elf or sage.'
And as we all fought valiantly,
It's seemed that we'd have to agree.
No fairy or elf could defeat the foe,
And with each blow his power would grow.
But I heard a rustle in a bush,
And past the branches I did push.
To see standing in front of me.
A beautiful maiden is what I see."

And as he spoke, the fire flew from where it sat and crafted itself into the form of a young girl. The children applauded as she twisted into the air and flew above the crowd. Anne marveled too, as she stared at the fiery girl that somersaulted out of nowhere.

"She whispered, softly into my ear,
'There is nothing that you should fear.
Use this potion to destroy the beast,
You shall leave the troll deceased.'
I spilt the potion on the troll
And watched it turn to lumps of coal.

We celebrated out victory,
Hand in hand, elf and fairy.
But as we did a shadow came,
And the fairies fluttered off with shame.
For revealing herself from a place unseen."

The flamed hissed and grew over the children as the cheerful blue turned to a crimson red.

"Was the wicked fairy queen."

And as these words were spoken wings erupted from the flaming figure as the Fairy queens paced around the children chackling maliciously. The toddler clung to her brother as the flaming Queen approached her before towering over Thorn.

"She asked me, 'How could you defeat,
Such an evil pile of meat?'
I told her of the maiden and,
She pulled me by my dainty hand,
She said, I must show her to the girl,
And for my troubles she'd make me rich as an earl.
I hesitated not, but then thought this,
"What might become of the fair Miss."

The Fairy queen cackled eye's gleaming red,
"Once you find her, I want her dead."

And as Thorn spoke these words in an eerie tone, the children gasped.

"So I sought off by my lonesome self,

The charming and heroic elf."

Anne rolled her eyes as she tossed some more dust into the fire.

Charming and heroic. Anne repeated to herself with a slight smile. *His so full of himself, isn't he.*

"With terrible choice to make I sigh,
Set her free, or let her die.
I searched from day to night,
Till the forest was covered in moonlight
But finally found her within the grass,
As a shooting star did pass.
She stared at me with mournful eyes,
"Take me if you want." She cries.
I take my sword from by my side,
And-"

All of a sudden, the flames dispersed as a loud cry from the distance alarmed the children. "Thorn, you little goblin, you!" The voiced cursed as it approached the startled elves.

"The fairy queen!" The toddler cried as she hid behind her older brother, "She's come for us!"

"Oh no!" Thorn cried, "I have to hide!" And he proceeded to crouch behind Anne.

"Some hero you are!" Anne yelled as they huddled close to each other in the darkness. "You fought her, you should be the one protecting us!"

Thorn shook his head, "No. It's a force worse than any other. The wrath of an angry mother!"

And put of the branches over the clearing emerged a tiny woman followed by Poppy who seemed to strut toward the children victoriously. "Thorn you better have a good explanation to why you left without out as much as a goodbye!" She screeched as she reached hand towards him through the cluster of children and tugged at his ear.

"Poppy how could you rant me out?" Thorn yelled as he was tugged back sown the hill by his ear.

"How could I not?" She giggled back. "It's not my fault that you so mischievous."

Anne, who was holding back bouts of laughter tried to compose herself as the comical scene played out. "Thank you for helping Thorn with is story." She heard all of a sudden and turned her head to the toddler who stood beside her. "You were really good with the fire trick."

Anne smiled back, "I don't think I did much. I just-" but before she could complete her sentence the toddler wrapped her arms round Anne's neck embracing her in a hug.

"Thorn doesn't have a girlfriend yet." She whispered and Anne's cheeks burnt up with embarrassment as the child retracted and followed her brother who was already making his way down the hill. *What was that suppose to mean?* She thought to herself but before she could do anything else she heard Thorn's mother yell.

"Are you coming or what!"

Anne stood up as she looked down the hill at the pair, "If you haven't a place to stay you can stay with us for the night." The woman continued

with a smile as her fingers still clutched Thorn's ear. "After all, he brought you here so I feel quite responsible."

Anne run down to past the remains of the fire. "Thank you." She says as she cat catches up to the pair.

"It's the least I can do." She says letting go of thorns ear, "You must be cold, I'll make you a nice hot cup of tea to warm you up."

And as the three descended to the rows of houses in the distance, after a long night of festivities, no one notices a single star twinkle red with the dark blue sky. An omen of the danger to come. One brought a bout by a broken promise.

Chapter XI

"How could you just run off like that!" A stout, little woman yelled a Thorn (who was almost double her size). "You could have given me a heart attack!"

"But mother, I had to go." Thorn said in response, "To where the Night Wisp Flowers grow."

The woman shook her head, "Don't see that these escapades are what got you cursed in the first place! You can't keep running off like this." She yells as she hobbles toward steel kettle and pulls it out of a blazing hearth with thick cotton gloves before placing it in front of Anne. "Tea, darling?" Anne nods. She managed to hunt down Thorn after leaving the Elf King's home and found herself a witness to a scolding.

"If you don't mind."

"Not at all." The woman says sweetly before giving Thorn a glare, "Well? What are you waiting for? Go get the poor thing a cup. She must be freezing!"

Thorn nods in response before trotting towards the cupboard. "Now child, what may I call you?"

"Anne will do just fine." She replies as she gazes around the wooden home. There wasn't much difference between the Elf King's home and the elf woman's. Except for a vase filled with flowers and a few drawings framed on the walls. It was homely. The walls blazed with reds and oranges, as the warmth of the hearth surrounded the small room slowly drying Anne.

"Well, you can call me Ms. Whiffletoe." *An awfully unusual name.* Anne thought but refrained from laughter.

Thorn entered the room with two three mugs and places them on the table before sitting down. "Now, Anne," Ms. Whiffletoe began, "how exactly did you find yourself in such a place. Usually, the only human children you hear of are..." she hesitates before speaking once more, "are stolen by fairies."

Anne's mind flashes back to the image of her brother trapped within the blossom and the feeling of his beating heart pulsed on the surface of her hand. "That's why I'm here. My brother was stolen from me. I came here through a sort of portal."

"A portal?" Miss Whiffletoe questioned as she poured the tea into each mug. "Those are awfully hard to come by. And Awfully hard to stumble upon." She gives Thorn another stern look. "How exactly did you find it?"

"I just followed the flashes of green, to a site I'd never seen. And the swirling within the water, stood the girl there after!" Thorn Rhymed while twiddling his fingers nervously. "I was only playing, sorry mother for leaving without saying."

She shook her head once, "What ever shall I do with you." She says, as she hands Anne a mug. Anne presses her lips to take a sip.

"What kind of tea is this?" Anne cries as her mouth is assaulted with a stinging bitterness.

"It's a brew of Night Wisp petals and Hobgoblin Spit. Good for the heart." Chirps Ms. Whiffletoe cheerfully. "A family recipe."

Anne immediately places the mug on the table, "I drank spit!" She yells in a flurry.

Miss Whiffletoe chuckled to herself, "you're really from a different world, aren't you?" She then rose from her seat and shuffled towards the window. "I still don't get how you could open up such a powerful portal without Night Magic." She said as she drew the curtains revealing the iridescent moon. "And you couldn't have any on you, right?"

"I hardly know about magic in this world, let alone Night Magic. All I want is to find my brother and leave this place." Anne replies as she stared up at the silvery moon. This was all too unbearable for Anne. Giant birds, Elves, Magic mirrors. On nights like this, she would be huddled in her blankets and gazing at the sky. On nights like this, she'd wish upon the shiniest star for an adventure beyond her tiny garden fence. On nights like this...the moon didn't turn red. Anne's eyes widened as the pearly white of the moon was slowly dissolved by a scarlet red and the stars followed suit. It shown with sinister glee as shafts of red light shifted through the room.

Ms. Whiffletoe was the first to shriek with fear, and was followed by far off screams in the distance. "An omen of death!"

Thorn rushed towards the window pulling it open as hostile wind tore through the room. "It whispers something fiercely, someone made the moon angry."

"Made the mood angry!" Cried Ms. Whiffletoe in a panic, "What fool would do such a thing! And on such a festive day!"

The wind seemed to whirl uncontrollably, dashing the pictures to the ground and tossing the mugs off the table.

"Close the window!" Anne yelled at Thorn who still gazed into the sky, "It's too powerful!"

With every second that passed, it seemed to destroy grow strong, even pushing the furniture to the end of the room.

"Thorn! Didn't you hear what Anne said? Close the blasted window before it destroys this place!" Miss Whiffletoe commanded and she tried to salvage what she could of broken pictures. But still no response.

Anne, grabbed Thorn by the shoulder, "Why aren't you saying anything!" She cries.

"A girl made a promise to the moon." The words were whispered as the wind gradually settled.

Anne retracted her hand and the flustered Ms. Whiffletoe stared up at her son both confused. "A girl a promise to the moon."

He said again.

Anne took a step back, heart racing, "What are you talking about."

There was only silence.

"You made a promise to the moon." And as he turned to face them, Ms. Whiffletoe gasped as his eyes were the same color as the moon, glowing fiery red.

"You made a promise to the moon, Anne. You made a promise to the moon."

Chapter X

Thorn drew closer to Anne, eyes still blazing red as she stepped backwards, "Who are you? What do you want from me?"

Thorn stretched his finger till it was pointed directly at the moon. "I am she that rules the night. The moon herself."

Ms. Wiffletoe, who was crouched in a corner began to approach her possessed son. "Please Mistress, leave him be. Don't punish him for another's misdeeds!" She plead bitterly, hands clasped together. "Let him be."

The red eyes gazed past the tearful woman as she spoke once more, "All can be for giving child. The mistress of the moon is forgiving as she is powerful. But only if you can give what she asks for."

Anne's heart beat chest. What could she possibly desire from Anne. She had only a few items in her backpack, all of which were of no importance. There was absolutely nothing she could give the mistress of the moon. "What do you want from me?" Anne asked, hands clenched together as nervousness took over.

Thorn's face twisted into a grin, "You shall have to see for yourself." She mused, "You must meet me where my power is greatest, so I may take my offering. Only then will you know the truth you seek." And as these words were spoken, Thorn's eyes slowly reverted back to their golden color as his shut his eyes and fell upon the to the floor.

"Thorn!" His mother yelled as she dashes to his side and cupped his head in her arms. "Wake up darling! Wake up!" But his eyelids didn't part.

Anne felt a pang of guilt. If something happened to Thorn, it would be her fault. He only tried to help her and by doing so endangered his own life. Twice! She reached her hand towards him, unsure of what help she could offer but Ms. Whiffletoe glared up at her, eyes burning with anger. "Don't lay another finger on my son!" She barked, eyes narrowed. "You've done enough."

Anne retracted her hand. Eyes watering as she felt a tear roll down her face. "I sorry." She managed to croak as her chest tightened. "I won't cause anymore harm." And with that, she rushed towards the door banging it behind her as she climbed down the thick branches to the bustling town.

The elves seemed to be in a state of fear and confusion as raised voices waffled through the air.

"What could any of this mean?" She heard a woman cry out.

"Has anyone seen my daughter. She had a clover tucked into a red cap." A father yelled from a distance.

"Death! Death is upon this village!" A bearded elf cried as her trotted through the crowds.

It was all to much to bear. She pushed past the clutter of elves and dashed towards the tree she first used to ascend into the elven village. *Maybe if I leave, the danger will leave too.* She thought to herself as she finally caught sight of the giant oak, surrounded by wispy fireflies. *If I leave the danger goes with me.*

She repeated in her mind as she looked down the tree at the forest floor in the distance. She could barely see anything as her eyes tried to adjust to the darkness. *I'll find Peter on my own.*

"Wait child!" She heard a voice call from behind. "Don't tell me you're leaving already." She turned and was met with the tall, thin figure of the Elf King as he arched over her. "What would possess such a young girl to run off into the night like this?"

Anne, turned back to face the oak. "I need to leave here. That's all." She said as she gazed down once again. "I'm going to find Peter."

"Your brother. Am I right?" He croaked, and Anne nodded.

"Thank you for your hospitality but I must take off now." She said. "I can't stay here any longer."

The Elf King clucked his tongue and placed a hand on Anne's shoulder. "Well, if you insist in leaving, there's nothing I can say to stop you. So instead, I'll help you."

"Help me?" Anne said, as she turned to face the Elf King as she wiped her eyes with the back of her hands. "What help could you lend me?"

He chuckled to himself, "I have learnt from my years of living one thing. People make the worst decisions when their tired." He said as he slipped his hand into his pocket.

"What does that have to do with me?" Anne said, caution growing. "I'm not tired."

"But your heart must be." He said pulling a pouch out of his pocket. "And that's why my gift to you" he said emptying the contents of his pouch into his palm revealing a pink I, glittery dust. "Is peace."

The Anne's eyes widened as he blew the dust into her face. She fell back into the grass as her suddenly felt paralyzed with sleep. "What-what did you do to me." She shrieked as her vision blurred.

"Sweet dreams." Was the only thing Anne heard as her eyes dropped and he sank onto the grass. Her breathing drew quieter and her mind was surround with only darkness.

Chapter XII

Anne felt herself jerk up and down as she slept peacefully. It was as though she was travelling upon a rocky terrain of some sort. She bolted upright, eyes bulging open as she looked around. She appeared to be on the back of a wagon filled with golden hay. She stared at the forest slowly travelling behind her as golden leaves descended to the patches of grass mixed within the soil. She then stared up at the sky. It's icy blue color meant that it must be the next day. What the heck was going on?

She turned to the person seated on the back of the horse. Or if the creature dragging the wagon could be considered a horse. It's dark blue pelt hung off its body and dragged upon the ground like that of a dog. However, what bothered her most was the figure riding the horse. They hid them self in a cloak as the looked down at the road ahead. *What a peculiar situation I'm in.* Anne thought to herself. Considering the fact that the cloaked rider hadn't turned his head to view her she concluded that he still thought she was a sleep. *Meaning this is my chance to escape.* She said to herself. As she made her way to the end of the wagon, crawling stealthily as the straw crackled under her palm she let out a gasp. *My bag.* She thought. *It's gone. It must have been stolen.*

She recalled the events of the previous night and her eyes narrowed. *Of course. He wanted the book. That Elf King took my bag while I was asleep.* She then glanced back to the hooded figure. *Then he sent me off with this creep. Probably trying to get rid of me.* Anne nodded to herself. *That's exactly what happened.*

But with this information there was hardly anything she could do. She barely knew anything about this new land so she couldn't find her way back even if she wanted to. *Unless...* Anne thought, eyes still fixed on the hooded figure. Could she really overpower them. The person seemed to have the stature of a kid just like herself. *I need that book.* She said to

herself as she began to crawl towards the figure. *It must be worth something if the Elf King stole it then sent me away.* As she drew closer to her target she positioned herself in a crouch, ready to pounce on her prey. *What if they have a weapon?* The thought occurred, but it was too late. Anne had already sprang into the air and wrapped her arms around the person before the horse jerked backwards throwing both Anne and the person into the wagon then onto the ground.

The two wrestled in the grass as Anne yelled, "Tell me where my bag is you, crook."

"Get your hands off me, I'm an ally can't you see!"

Rhymes! He was speaking in Rhyme! "Thorn!" She cried pulling away the hood revealing her first travelling companion. "Is it really you?"

"What do you think?" He yelled in a huff, "Now release me at once, you foolish fink."

Anne pulled herself up and crossed her arms, "Well what kind of reaction did you expect after kidnapping somebody." She yelled, "Idiot."

"You make a fair point," Thorn said, also raising himself and dusting his clothes, "Now can we quit this joint."

Anne couldn't help but smile a little. Thorn was the first person she met when she appeared in this unknown land. He represented a sort of familiarity. The only thing she knew about the Land of Fae. But quickly enough, she remembered that her bag was still missing, and he could very well be working for the Elf King.

"Not until you tell me where my belongings are." She said, trying to sound authoritative. "I'm not going anywhere until I have my bag and you tell me exactly what's going on."

Thorn shook his head, "Hanging from the left side of my blue steed, are the possessions that you need."

Anne immediately raved towards the horse, and saw her bag hanging from the neck of the horse. She immediately pulled open the strap of the bag but shrieked in terror before dashing back to Thorn's side.

"What kind of joke is this!" She yelled. But Thorn only responded with laughter.

"Guess it is true after all, frogs make little girls cry and call!" He said still chuckling to himself.

Anne was not having any of it. In one swift movement her foot swung and crashed itself upon Thorn's shin sending him bouncing about the forest floor on his right foot. "Why is there a disgusting toad inside my bag?" She shouted. "And get rid of it before I kick you again."

"Give me a chance to explain," He cried, "Don't just randomly inflict pain!"

Anne wasn't a fan of frogs. Not even a bit. When she saw the slimy green creature she was immediately taken back to the moment in her life when the boys at school thought it might be funny to slip one down the collar of her dress. From then on she despised frogs. "Well you better start explaining fast!" She yelled waving a fist in the air, "There's more where that came from."

Thorn nodded as he walked towards the horse, grabbed the bag and emptied its contents onto the ground. The frog leapt out first before a the book plodded down to Anne's feet. A few bottles of liquids also scattered about the grass and finally a small hand mirror rolled into the grass before laying flat towards. "It still doesn't explain the ugly toad." Anne said as she pointed down at the frog with a sneer on her face.

"Firstly, I'm not a toad, I'm a toad." It croaked back in response. "And secondly, I'm not ugly. I think I'm a very attractive toad."

Once again, Anne let out a shriek and jump back in fear. "It spoke to me!" She gasped. "It's a talking frog!"

"Correct, it is. How you guess? Now from that fact, can we progress?" Thorn chimed.

"This might be normal in this crazy world of yours, back from where I'm from frogs aren't suppose to speak."

"You sent a giant bird flying like a whimpering dog, yet you're afraid of a little frog?" Thorn chortled.

Anne cheeks went hot. "I just don't like frogs. Okay?" She stuttered. "Now where exactly are you taking me anyway?" " she said composing herself as she stared up at the unfamiliar trees that covered the sky in yellow leaves. "And why is it a different season here." She recalled the green elven village filled with blooms of many colors and had assumed it was spring. But here, the entire forest was painted in autumn colors. Beautiful, but mysterious.

"All that shall be explained, promptly." The frog said as he leapt onto Anne shoe, "Pick me up child."

Anne shook her head, "Sorry but I don't think I want to." Anne winced.

"But how do you expect him to reveal to you, the place that we are going to." Thorn said as he began to pack all the object into the bag, but as he did so, Anne saw something sparkle. Her eyes widened.

"The mirror." She sighed under her breath, "The Elf King's mirror." That it glistened in Thorn's hand, smaller, but still the same as when Anne last saw it. "How did you get that."

"Because I gave it to him." The frog croaked, "It's my mirror after all, so I have every right to give it to whom ever I choose."

Suddenly Anne realized who she was talking to. She scooped the frog into her hands and raised it to her face as she looked into it's familiar yellow eyes. "Elf King." She said and the creature nodded back.

"Yes child, it is I. The Elf King." He croaked in response.

"What happened to you?" She asked eyebrow raised before turning to thorn who was loading the bag onto the cart. "What happened after I tried to leave?" She asked in a serious tone.

Suddenly, the forest went still. Not a single voice was raised as a wind whistled through the branches. Thorn's eyes lowered as though he couldn't bear the sight the weight of looking onto her eyes.

"Well?" She urged.

"The fairy queen." The frog began, "She attacked."

Chapter XIII

"It was the a few hours after the moon turned red," the frog said as he rested in the palm of Anne's hand as the cart wheeled it's way behind the horse. "She came to our home with flocks of birds and what we suspect to be a witch."

Thorn nodded in agreement within his cloak, "I've never seen power so great, no magic against her could equate."

"And the Fairy queen did this to you?" Anne asked staring down at the old frog.

He shook his head, "No." He spoke, "The Fairy cannot harm an elf with a spell or weapon. Because of a deal with the Mistress of the Moon years ago. That's why she hired a witch."

"What did they want?" Anne queried as she thought back to the blood red moon that blazed in the night sky. Did it have something to do with her? Did she know about Anne's intentions of freeing her brother?

"She wanted my mirror and your book." The frog croaked.

But as he was about to elaborate the cart halted abruptly. Anne placed the frog within the straw and stretched herself till she could see above the horse in front of them. It seemed as though they'd stopped at some sort of hill. Once that sloped downwards with rigid angles. This place was different from the other places Anne had seen. Below her were sharp

rocks that pointed to the sky. Dust whirled around the air hissing as the particles danced chaotically. It was dim and lifeless. A crater of death within a land of beauty. "What is that place?" Anne asked as she stared down at the desolate wasteland.

"Skytheria." The elf king answered as he hopped onto the edge of the cart then Anne's shoulder making her sick to the stomach. "The Mistress of the Moon can appear to you here."

Anne swallowed hard, recalled her appearance through the Thorn and the dreadful message she relayed to Anne. "I'm here to repay the moon, aren't I?"

"Until you do death lurks near. You must repay the lady of the silver sphere." Thorn said jumping off the horse. "He can not go further ridden by horse. We must walk to take this course."

"Walk down there?" Anne cried gesturing to the crater, "Is that even possible."

"Anything is!" The Frog smiled, "All it takes is a little faith."

Anne sighed before making her way off the cart and walking up to Thorn who was offloading some materials. "We might be there for a while." The frog said as he pointed to Anne's bag with his slimy finger. "Take your bag with you, we can't risk the mirror or book being stolen."

"Why are they so important?" Anne asked pulling the bag over her shoulder, "I still don't understand?"

The frog chortled in the same hearty tone as the cheery elf king, "You ask a lot of questions. But all will be revealed once we reach the Cave of Stars." He said. "And you shall see the answers for yourself."

...

The descent to the Skytheria was anything but easy. As Thorn and Anne climbed down to the sand ground, avoiding the spikes below the Frog began to sing to himself as he rested upon Anne's shoulder. It was easy for him to sing, he wasn't doing all the work. As they finally met the barren land with their feet the pair trio stared at the barren wasteland ahead that seemed to have no end.

"This is it." The Elf King said as the wind swallowed his voice, "This is where the real adventure begins."

Chapter XIV

As the wind whistled a strange tune, Anne, Thorn and the Elf King travelled across the desolate wasteland where the sun never seemed to shine and the ground was forever barren. As they saw the valley grow dimmer they knew that the sun was setting and they would soon be shrouded in darkness.

"Lets stop here." The frog king croaked, "I'm so tired after a long days walk."

Anne raised an eyebrow, "Walk?" Anne questioned, "I carried you the entire way." She said frown. "You have no reason to be tired."

"Well," the frog spoke, "having a sell cast on you can have it's toll, child."

Anne shrugged, she couldn't disagree. After all, to know what a spell felt like you'd have to have on cast on yourself(And that was not advised.)

"Fine, We'll camp right here. Within these walls we'll have nothing to fear." Thorn said, looking up at the spiked roof above and the dull red light at the end of the tunnel the just walked into. "Be weary still I've heard fearful stories. So conduct yourself with caution please."

Anne raised a finger to ask about what Thorn meant but realized that the answer would probably be more confusing than doubt and quickly changed the topic. "How far away are we from the cave?"

"We should arrive at noon tomorrow." The toad said as he leapt out of Anne's hand and onto the ground. "Not far now, I promise." He said the exact same thing a few hours ago. And some hours before that. And some hours before that. They'd spent half the day walking but never seemed to grow any closer. It was irritating.

"Great." Anne sighed as she crashed down onto the ground with exhaustion as plumes of sand rose into the air. "Not far now."

What followed was the uneventful setting up of the camp as Thorn placed crystal around the pair. As the light of day disappeared the crystals began to grow around them in yellow hues. "There, the crystals are set up right, this should give us lots of light." He said resting beside Anne.

"Good work, lad!" The frog congratulated as he hopped onto Thorn's knee, "This should keep is safe from the Sand bats."

"Excuse me, What?" And remarked.

Thorn looked down at the frog with widened eyes, "So the rumor are true!" He exclaimed.

"Oh hooey. They're not that bad. Been in a couple of scraps with them." The elf King said, "Even ridden one!"

"Well that's because know one's as crazy as you!" Thorn said once again.

"What are you guys talking about?" Anne pitched in as she chewed at the sweet fruit within her hand, her only meal for tonight. "Please tell me it's not something life threatening."

The frog king winced and Anne immediately knew it wasn't good. "It's nothing too dangerous. Just a few bats burrowed in the ground."

"Just a few!" Thorn yelled agitated, "Such lies will never do."

The frog King chuckled nervously, "A few hundred. Just a few hundred." Great, more flying creatures. Anne swallowed her fear and spoke in a steady voice. "Do you know exactly where they are?"

The Elf King shook his slimy head, "Afraid not. As a matter of fact we could be under a nest right now. But there is a way to know!"

"What is it?" Anne asked as she bent down towards the frog making sure she was still a few inches away.

"The book Anne." The frog said, "You might not know it, but the book holds great power and with it we can-"

"Guys, we need to get out now." Anne heard Thorn whisper hoarsely, and as her eyes shifted around the terrain she could see the ground vibrate and felt the cave quake around her.

"Oh no." Croaked the elf King as he shifted to Thorns Arm the his shoulder. "We better get going, children."

No sooner were the words spoken that black leathery creatures quadrupled they're size erupted from ground with glaring green eyes that burnt in the dark. As Anne leapt to her feet with a scream she was followed by a just as terrified Thorn racing behind her. "Those aren't bats!" She screamed heart thudding in her chest. She heard the two monsters screech behind the trio galloping behind them with sinister intent. "What do they want!" Anne yelled her voice drowned out by the Sand bats.

"It's hard too tell!" The Elf king yelled, "They could be part of the reasonably friendly variety. Or they could want to eat us."

"We have to escape somehow!" Thorn yelled! As the creatures footsteps drew closer and the howling grew louder.

As they dashed across the sandy terrain eyes scanning for any sign of safety a small cave came into view a few miles away. "We can make it if we run fast enough." Anne screamed as she raced towards it with every ounce of energy she had. But as the cave materialized within the darkness Anne noticed something that made her heart pound louder.

No more footsteps. Which meant that they were no longer on the ground. Anne turned for a second fear burning within her as she was met with the blood curdling screech of the bat above her and scooped into the sky by it's powerful claws, bag and all. As she felt herself being pulled into the air she could only hear the distant voices of Thorn and the Elf King with her descent into the sky. "Help!" She screamed in a panic as she felt the Sand Bat's grip around her waist tighten screeched once more before soaring further into the air.

"This is it. I'm done for."

Chapter XV

As the moon fell into the hills of Riliga and the sky burnt red as fire. As the reeds swayed to a cool and calm wind and the grass rippled to it's tune two slender creatures flew over the ground, wings sparkling as they both flew through the curtains of the willow tree and into a clearing where giant rocks with ancient runes stood encircling the figure in the center. The two creatures glided to the woman and fell to her sides each kneeling before her.

"My queen, we have some grave news to relay?" Spoke the first creature with pale yellow hair.

The queen nodded, "Yes?" She says with a voice both soft and cold.

The second creature, the one with dark hair cleared her voice before speaking. "The elf King has escaped with both the mirror and the book." Her voice trembled as the word escaped her mouth.

There was silence in the glen, as the five rocks surrounding the queen began to glow in a fiery red color. Both fairies seemed to shiver as though winter had clutched at them. "I see." The queen mutter under her breath, "How pitiful." Her scarlet hair tossed within the wind as she turned to the light haired fairy. "So how were you useful again?" And in one swift motion her hand crashed into her chest exploding into light as it quickly retracted. The fairy fell to the grass as the queen rose from the ground hand still clenched in a fist. "What use is a fairy who cannot obey?" She contemplated as she opened her hand and gazed at the shimmering butterfly within it. The glowing insect wriggling in her palm as it tried to fly

into the heavens but clashed with the queen's fingers that arched around it like a cage. "Useless." She mutters as her other hand waves through the air drawing a tiny cage into existence. "So I shall keep your spirit." She said placing the butterfly into the cage, "And you shall have you body and soul." And as she spoke the queen raised the cage into the air and watched as it floated into the sky past the clouds and far out into the ether until it was no longer visible. "You." The Queen said turning to the dark haired fairy. "Find the Elf King immediately and do not fail me. Use any means necessary." The Queen spoke as she walked past the traumatized fairy who knelt before her. "Or your spirit will be mine as well."

...

Meanwhile, within the clouds a winged creature flew through the air clutching a little girl as it glided above the rocky terrain below them. It's green eyes navigating the valleys below it as Anne head drooped and her eyes surveyed Skytheria. It hadn't stopped since it began it's journey and Anne could see no end in sight. And she feared for one. The moment the creature landed she was it's dinner. It would rip her to shreds and leave nothing but bones; or would it eat those too? Her eyes began to well with tears as she felt the inevitability of her demise grow closer and closer. She couldn't even find peter! And now she was going to be killed without being able to ever see him or her mother again. The thought brought about more tears as she thought of her mother's sadness when she returned to find both her children gone. Her thought subsided as she felt the creature finally descend piercing through the air and falling to the land below. *I won't die like this!* A voice roared within her amidst the fear and sadness. *I have to live. I must!* The battle wasn't over until she was within the creatures belly, meaning she still had some time to fight the beast off. As the Sand bat finally landed upon the highest

peaks Skytheria, falling on one foot the placing the other foot with Anne on it onto the ground she immediately scrambled out of it's grip as she tried to escape it's clutches. This was her time to escape.

As she got to her feet she bolt in the direction furthest away from the Sand bat throwing all caution to the wind. She heard it screech as thudded towards her, but Anne ignored the beast taking a step and meeting the air instead if the solid earth. "Ahhh!" she screamed as tumbled off the peak and plowed towards the ground below but halted unexpectedly within the air before meeting the spikes below.

"What?" Anne questioned as she felt herself being pulled into the air and placed back onto the rock gently. She found herself glaring into the green eyes of the Sand Bat as it stared at her through silent eyes then proceeded to close it's wings and collapse to the ground still staring at Anne. It saved her. Or at least it saved her for a later meal. Anne thought as she edged away from the beast. Suddenly its eyes darted to the bag, then back at Anne and it quickly clawed at the bag pulling all of Anne's belongings towards it. Anne raises an eyebrow as it pulled open the bag and rummages through it's content with it's snout too scared to stop the creature. What did it want? She thought, watching it's nose wriggle through her bag pulling from it all her belongings in search of some treasure until it's head finally rose into the air. To Anne's surprise it hadn't picked the book nor the magic mirror or anything of significant importance for within the mouth of the Sandbat was one of the juicy red fruits. It raised it's head edging the fruit into it's jaw and crunched at it before pushing bag back at Anne as though it said, *I'm done and no longer need it.* Anne watched it as it swallowed the fruit licked the fur of it's hairy lip before it stared back at her. Guess it was friendly. Anne summoned the courage within her as she spoke, hoping she would not provoke the beast, "Hello."

It's eyes seemed to glisten when it heard the simple word as it crept closer to Anne eyes widening.

“Um. My name is Anne.” What was she doing? It was a bat it couldn't speak of course. But she couldn't really be sure of that, could she? It was a land where fairies existed and Kings were turned to frogs. “What should I call you?”

The Sand Bat moaned gleefully, like that of a sheep as it drew even closer to Anne trotting around her like an energetic puppy. It's tongue hung out of it mouth as it nuzzled Anne with it furry head, “Okay, okay!” she exclaimed. “Clearly this isn't going to get me anywhere.” She giggled nervously to herself, as she realized her companion could only speak in grunts and shrieks. “And especially not to the cave of Stars.” But no sooner had the words been spoken did the creatures eyes suddenly burst into a green shimmer startling Anne as she remembered the glowing eyes of the previous night that pursued Her and her friends relentlessly. As it's eyes illuminated Anne felt her left hand suddenly burn furiously. The pain Drew her eyes towards it and Anne found herself staring down at the mark Ms. William left on her. “How strange.” She murmured under her breath. What could it mean for her?

“Do you know how to get to the Cave of Stars?” it remained silent as it stared down at Anne. *Cave of Stars*. The words were echoed into her mind, but not by her own voice. *Take you to the Cave of Stars*. Could it really understand her? Was it sent to aid her quest? Then the creature bowed before her as though urging her to get on it's back. Anne Consider the possibility that the Beast might still be trying to kill her. She took another glance into it's eyes and sensed not even the slightest hint of hostility. *Take you to the Cave of Stare*. It whispered into her mind once

again. "Fine I'll do as you please." Anne said reluctantly as she reached her hand to it's neck and hoisted herself onto its back, rucksack hanging from her shoulders. Then without warning, she felt the Sandbat gallop across the the small surface towards the edge of the cliff, each step growing in speed and they're in the air. The ground seemed to disappeared until all that could be seen were muddles of brown terrain that blended into each other until they was nothing more than streaks speeding past them. They flew through the dark clouds of Skytheria, over the dusty atmosphere and into the blue of the sky where the world was bright and filled with optimism. Anne felt some sort of peace as they journeyed above the world, a peace that pulled her face into a smile as she felt the leathery wings of the Sandbat flap up and down. She was drawing closer to her beloved brother, and soon he would be in her arms once more.

Chapter XVI

Clouds drifted past the pair, sweeping across the blew atmosphere lazily as the Sandbat glided past them only kept afloat by the air gathered in it's wings. They had flown for a good hour or so as Anne clutched to the giant horn on the Sandbat's back to prevent herself from tumbling off. It didn't seem to tire much and navigated its way through the clouds with ease. The tranquility of the soaring through the air seemed to make Anne's eyes heavy as drowsiness too over all her sensed forcing them closed once or twice. But she couldn't afford to rest, especially when she was so high up above the ground that a fall to the ground meant instant death, so she had to wait till the next stop before she might even consider a nap. *But even so, I still have to find Thorn and The Elf King.* She thought to herself, *then Peter.* Would there ever a be a time of peace.

Apparently not. Before the pair gathered storm cloud clattered with thunder and lighting splattered through the air. "Don't tell me we're flying through that." Anne said holding on tighter to the horn. And in response to her statement the Sandbat exhilarated and crashed through the storm clouds into the murky center of the storm. But this was no normal storm. And glanced left and right as cages upon cages of glowing butterflies floated through the air. The tiny prisons collided with one another and a faint humming noised filled Anne's ears.

"How pretty." Anne said reaching for one of the cages as it sped past her snatching it into her hand while still gripping the horn. The butterfly

fluttered about the bars of the cage trying to escape as Anne brought it close to her face. "What exactly are these things?" She asked herself before carefully slipping it into her bag. "Might as well keep it."