The Forgotten Secret

Author not credited

STORYPDF

Complete English text · A4 reading edition

Contents

Chapter PLOT SUMMARY 6

Chapter 1: The Sleeping Girl 7

Chapter 2: An Answered Prayer 10

Chapter 3: Her Tenth 13

Chapter 4: Saying Goodbye 16

Chapter 5: Our Willow Tree 20

Chapter 6: Hidden Talents 24

Chapter 7: Special Friend 28

Chapter 8: Meeting Your Family 32

Chapter 9: Half the Truth 36

Chapter 10: Being in Your World 40

Chapter 11: Telling Secrets 44

Chapter 12: The Magic of Trust 48

Chapter 13: A Day Off 53

Chapter 14: Extra Ordinary Day 57

Chapter 15: The Valley 61

Chapter 16: Helping One Another 65

Chapter 17: The Green Haven 69

Chapter 18: The Kiss 73

Chapter 19: Letting Go 77

Chapter 20: The Homecoming 81

Chapter 21: Family 85

Chapter 22: A Tale of Two Rangers 89

Chapter 23: The King, Queen, and the Princess 93

Chapter 24: Another Kind of Goodbye 96

Chapter 25: Queen Alina 100

Chapter 26: Blue Haven 104

Chapter 27: Earth and Water 108

Chapter 28: Orange Haven 112

Chapter 29: Not Just a Princess 116

Chapter 30: The Return 120

Chapter 31: Prince and Princess 124

Chapter 32: Queen Aine 128

Chapter 33: Fire Lord 132

Chapter 34: Duties First 138

Chapter 35: A Tale of Love and Loss 143

Chapter 36: Fire versus Fire 147

Chapter 37: Family Affairs 151

Chapter 38: Second Chances 156

Chapter 39: Dark Mountains 160

Chapter 40: Rangers and Princesses 163

Chapter 41: Water Magic 167

Chapter 42: Azure Gathering 171

Chapter 43: Coming Home 175

Chapter 44: Realm above the Clouds 180

Chapter 45: The Four Realms 184

Chapter 46: Awakening 189

Chapter 47: A Ranger's Life 194

Chapter 48: Tale of the Water Prince 198

Chapter 49: Love amidst Uncertainty 204

Chapter 50: Reunited 210

Chapter 51: Camping Trip 216

Chapter 52: Unthinkable Schemes 223

Chapter 53: Sins of a Dark Fairy 226

Chapter 54: Facing Destiny 231

Chapter 55: Battle with Orcs 235

Chapter 56: Choices We Make 240

Chapter 57: A New Beginning 246

Chapter 58: Fathers, Brothers and a Wedding 249

Chapter 59: Coronation 253

Chapter 60: The Best of both Worlds 257

About this edition

This StoryPDF reading edition contains the complete English text, with its original paragraph and section order preserved.

Newly typeset with selectable text, a linked contents section and chapter bookmarks. Copyright rules can differ by country. Corrections and rights enquiries: liuxinglianxue@gmail.com.

Read online: StoryPDF / The Forgotten Secret.

Reading edition: 2026-10-28. Typography: Crimson Text (SIL Open Font License).

Chapter PLOT SUMMARY

Arianna is a fairy princess left hidden with a human couple named Reed and Rose Rivers when she was just a baby in the small town of Bellmont. The Fairy realm is under attack by a Dark Fairy named Alirion, who is intent on ruling over the whole realm. Alirion is temporarily captured but casts a spell on the two fairies know about Princess Arianna's secret.

Arianna grows up living an ordinary life, not knowing about her true identity. Her secret identity is shortly forgotten. After her sixteenth birthday, she accidentally meets Caspian, a fairy from her realm, and they become special friends. Eventually, with the help of Caspian, Arianna discovers her true identity.

In the meantime, the Alirion escapes and threatens the safety of the realms again. Arianna joins Caspian in the Fairy realm, along with her true family, to fight against the Dark Fairy.

Arianna's realization of her fairy lineage aids in her unlocking her hidden magic, which is the key to overcome the said Dark Fairy. She unleashes her magic and defeats the Dark Fairy for good.

Arianna is reunited with her Fairy family but is given the chance to live with her human parents anytime she wishes. So, that is what she did.

Chapter 1: The Sleeping Girl

Bellmont is a small and peaceful community near a forest. The residents of this quaint town live their lives harmoniously which gives it a very welcoming aura. Nothing out of the usual community life ever occurs here. But on this particular evening, something essential to this tale is about to transpire.

The night is very chilly and dark. In such a night, the mood brings a foreboding feeling that something eerie is taking place. The trees seem to whistle with the wind. This gives a scarier scenario at this point. However, this is not a horror affair. The atmosphere just gives it that impression.

It was a very late hour and the lights were out on every house that a hooded shadow passes. If someone wakes up and looks out the window, he will not see anything outside. But for a keen eye, the scene is like a ghostly entity is out there.

However, this tale has a closer semblance to a strange turn of events on a particular being. To state it clearly, it is rather a long journey with an uncertain outcome. At the moment, an important undertaking is at hand. This particular night, a significant mission will come to its temporary destination.

For the time being, the focus this evening is the arrival of an unusual character. It is rather odd that despite of the complete silence, the footfalls of the peculiar pilgrim cannot be heard. Not a single sound at all. The traveller also seems to be floating instead of walking since there is no trace of footprints along the path where the strange character came from.

The mysterious figure suddenly stops, and then looks up at the moon, almost hidden by the dark clouds. The hood slides off and reveals a pale but very lovely face. Her face appears to glow even with the lack of illumination. Her exterior is captivating to gaze upon. The mystery emanating from her persona will keep one seems hypnotize.

She looks young but seems aged by the expression on her face. She looks around her surroundings, as if making sure where she is. She nods to herself as confirmation for her precise location.

She instantly puts on her hood to cover her cold pointy ears. She wears full dark green clothes, made of canvas, and green leather boots. Her outfit is rather out of place in this town.

The stranger glances at a willow tree nearby then beyond it. She is captivated by the moving leaves of the willow tree, as it makes whistling sounds in the middle of the night. Her facial expression is indecipherable.

"Hmm, he's late," she whispers to herself, frowning a little bit disappointed.

Her thoughts start to wonder towards home. What is taking him so long? Has anything gone wrong? This waiting can be worrisome. She sighs deeply. Her attention is drawn towards the huge willow tree. Its leaves move gracefully with the wind.

After a while, a faint sound can be heard from the direction where she came from. She pulls her sharp dagger from her belt instinctively, with one swift movement. Her stance reveals a stature of a warrior.

"Sorry I'm late Mel!" the newcomer apologizes hurriedly. This new arrival is wearing a hooded cloth similar to hers. He was carrying a green basket, unusually bigger than the ordinary kind, with a swaddle of blanket over it.

"Shh, be quiet Aldar. You might wake her up!" replies Mel as she puts away her dagger, upon realizing that there's no danger. She takes a deep breath and frowns at her companion.

The man, whose name is Aldar, looks much older than Mel but has a more laid back aura than her. He wears a playful smile on his face as he stares back at Mel.

"How was your journey? You took a while to get here. Did you lose your way? Are you sure you were not followed by anyone?" Mel questions, while glancing towards the direction of the trees.

Aldar nods, "Take it easy Mel, we're fine," he responds and hands the green basket carefully to Mel. He readjusts his hood and fixes his bow and quiver pouch on his backside.

"You should loosen up a bit sometimes." Aldar teases.

"I had a little difficulty leaving the rest of our rangers behind. I wanted to be sure that they will be able to handle the rest of the fanatics out there." Aldar suddenly turns serious with a bit worried look on his face.

"Of course I am serious. There is so much to be worried about." She glances around them once more.

"However, there is nothing we can do now but fulfill our part of this plan. The Queen made us promise to do this. She knows this is the best way to protect her baby. She must be kept hidden until things settle. This is our last resort should the other rangers fail to stop the forces of our enemies. The King is out there with our rangers. This is our mission," Mel says with a determined tone.

"I apologize for leaving her with you. I know things are so tense in the realm but I had to make sure our Queen is safely hidden," Mel explains in a weary tone.

"Poor baby, she will never grow up knowing her true family. She will be alone, without any idea of the life that she should really have, not even her true lineage," Mel tearfully exclaims, as she winds a necklace with an emerald locket on the tiny wrist of the baby in the basket.

"I think it is for the best that she will not know anything, for now. It will be very painful for her if she finds out the truth. Growing up without this knowledge will ensure her safety and will let her grow up as a normal child. The time will come when she will be able to handle all this. Then, we shall both help her understand and guide her." Aldar replies with certainty.

"She will grow strong like her Mother. In time, she will understand." Mel utters in finality as she gives the baby a soft kiss on the forehead. The tiny new-born baby remains fast asleep, without a single care on her angelic face.

Both Mel and Aldar slowly walk to a house at the end of the street near the edge of the forest.

It was past midnight already. The moon still hides behind thick clouds.

Mel checks the baby in the basket for the last time, making sure the blanket is perfectly tucked. With a sad expression, she places the green basket with the sleeping baby in front of the house with the blue door.

"Good bye, our little Princess Aria. Sweet dreams and always be safe. Be brave and strong. Until we meet again..."

Suddenly, from beyond the forest, a thick smoke rises. Then the moon is engulfed by very dark and unnatural clouds. The wind brings a suffocating smell.

Aldar and Mel looks at each other at the same time with panicked expressions.

"What is happening? I thought Marion and the others got everything under control before I left?" Aldar exclaims in shock.

"Oh no, the King!" Mel gasps in horror. "Let's hurry!"

Aldar and Mel sprint across the street towards the willow tree and disappear in the forest without a single sound.

In the distant horizon, the color of the night sky turns from black to blazing orange.

Chapter 2: An Answered Prayer

Everything seems ordinary this early morning. Bellmont is such a small community where people are more laid back. This is a normal morning for most of them to still be in slumber for such a chilly weather.

The cold weather from last night carries on throughout this early dawn. The trees continue to rustle with the light breeze that makes one feel lazy to even leave his bed.

But then, this is not the case for Reed Rivers. A weather like this is even a better time for him to get up and get going. He is such an early riser.

Reed is in his middle twenties and has a muscular physique. He emerges from his house wearing a jogging gear. He is on his way to his usual early morning jog when he sees a basket at their doorstep. The basket is not something you will ignore since this particular one is enormous and very green.

He automatically scans their street to have a clue on whoever left it there. Maybe someone is playing a prank on him?

Everyone in the neighbourhood knows he is the only one who takes a run this early, no matter the weather. He comes out to jog as early as four in the morning so this is definitely a very strange occurrence. Who will lurk around in such a very early time except for him?

He inspects the nearby houses at a glance and there is definitely not a single one of their neighbours is even awake at this very moment.

Reed stares at the very green and extra big basket in front of him. He bends to take a closer look.

"Oh my!" he exclaims in surprise upon seeing a sleeping baby girl inside the basket. This is getting stranger by the second.

"Rose honey, come quickly! Look at what we have here." Reed hollers in a hurried voice.

A woman peeks behind Reed, and inquires, "What's wrong?"

Upon realizing the reason for his husband's surprised tone, she inspects the basket herself.

“Oh, goodness! What do we have here? Where did this baby come from?”

Rose is also in her mid-twenties but has a frail built. Her motherly instincts kick in. So she slowly picks up the little baby from the mysterious and very green basket with a puzzled expression. She seems automatically enamoured towards the new born baby quickly.

Like her husband, Rose is astonished on how this pretty little angel came to be on their doorstep.

"Poor baby, such an angel. How can anyone do such a terrible thing? Who knows how long has the baby been left here out in the cold," she muses.

As if replying, the little baby yawns and awoke from slumber. However, the baby doesn't seem to be affected by the cold weather. In addition to that, the baby has never made any attempts to cry.

"The angel is waking up, let's go inside," Reed suggests.

"Never mind my run for today…" he decides as he grabs the basket from the ground and closes the door behind them.

Rose hurriedly carries the baby along with the green blanket wrapped around it. She keeps making cooing sounds as if to communicate with the little one. The little girl just stares at her intently as if she understands any of these.

"What shall we do now? Are we to call the authorities? Surely they will put this little one in social services. And then what, a foster home?" Rose asks as she sits down to cuddle the baby better.

"But what will happen to this poor baby? There must be a good reason why someone chose our house for this little innocent child. I don't like to sound selfish or anything but i think, us, finding this tiny blessing is what is meant to be," she continues to rant.

Rose cannot contain her overwhelmed feeling, as if this child was destined to stay with them. There's a certain feeling of warmth that this baby radiates. Rose and Reed felt it as soon as they go inside.

Reed sits down, still holding the basket, thinking hard. This is something big but something wonderful at the same time.

"You know what Rose? You maybe right about this. There must be a very good reason for this."

Reed puts the basket on their living room table then walks carefully towards his wife and gave her a peck on the cheek. He absentmindedly caresses the baby's forehead.

"Remember what we have wished and prayed for? We have been trying for years now. Even the doctors tell us there's nothing wrong with us. This is it! Our little ray of sunshine! Our answered prayer," Reed rationalizes with finality, his voice full of excitement.

Reed recalls the countless times when Rose thought that she was already pregnant but turned out to be false alarm. Her wife's frustrated face keeps popping in his memory because she wonders every time that maybe the doctors are wrong. Their ages are the prime period for having a baby though they inexplicably always fail.

He stares at the lovely pale face at the same time touching the tiny hands of the quiet baby. They are such soft and gentle hands.

How can such a pale faced baby radiate such warmth that makes them feel that things are going to be alright? That is when he notices a necklace on the right wrist. The emerald locket seems to glow. They can easily tell that the locket's make is not anything like the ordinary ones you see in a jewelry shop.

"Maybe there could be a clue here," Reed says, thoughtfully unwinding the necklace and examines it. The pendant is not like any ordinary jewel. It glows even without any light around to make it sparkle.

"It's an emerald locket!" Reed exclaims in amazement. He excitedly, but carefully opens it.

Both Reed and Rose suddenly smell a peculiar fragrance like a combination of morning dew and sunshine. Inside the locket, Reed sees something engraved in intricate gold letters.

"Arianna, our sunshine," Reed says out loud.

The baby seems to smile upon hearing her name.

"So that is the name of this precious little girl! Arianna! What a lovely name. We shall call you Anna, our sunshine." Rose replies teary-eyed, cuddling little Anna once more.

"But what if someone comes back for her? What shall we do?" Rose worries.

"When that time comes, we will face it together. We will tell Anna the truth about her arrival in our lives. We will let Anna decide for herself. What we can do now is care for her and love her as our own with the time given to us." Reed says with a resolute face.

"I wish things are that simple, Reed. I hope you're right." Rose sighs.

"Don't worry little child. We will love you as our own and keep you safe always. This is our promise to you." Rose has bonded very soon with this special baby.

The tiny angel seems to understand as she continues to smile at the faces of these two generous people who will play a big part in her complicated life ahead.

Our princess has found a home to shelter her with love. This will help her later on to have the strength and courage to face the storms ahead of her.

Both Reed and Rose have decided that this innocent child is the most precious being for them from this day on. They didn't have the slightest idea how little Anna is much more important in the lives of others somewhere far away, in another realm, where she truly belongs.

For them, she is Anna their answered prayer.

Chapter 3: Her Tenth

Anna looks at her reflection in the mirror with a frown on her face. It is a special day for her but she looks unhappy instead of delighted for this special occasion.

She stares disappointedly at her own face and her eyes travels to her hair. Noticing the girlish green bow on top of her head makes her grimace all the more.

The green dress is nice. It's her favourite colour. But then she prefers jeans and her regular cotton shirts. However, her Marmee Rose surprises her with this dress. She sighs a bit.

"Why does Marmee insist on making me wear this stupid dress? It's my birthday so am I not allowed to choose what I like to wear?" she exclaims to her reflection, as if it will answer back.

"I think I should change. Popsie will understand. He has always been understanding with what I like." she continues to complain.

She looks back on her morning jogs with her dad. They love the time spent together breathing the fresh morning dew and earthy aromas. They take the trail past the willow tree. Both doesn't mind the early morning chill. It's very relaxing for them.

Anna and her Popsie Reed spend their time talking almost about anything. Even her fantasy stories about werewolves, vampires, fairies and other creatures are lengthy topics for their discussions. His dad shares her adventurous personality.

Anna's reflection gave her a wide grin, as if to tease her.

"Marmee is right you know? We should be ladylike, like a true Princess. Besides, that green dress brings out the glow in our green eyes." interrupts her reflection, praising Anna so as to convince her otherwise.

"Well, you and Marmee don't really understand! I wish Jo is here already. She will agree with me better than you!" Anna argues back as if it's a normal thing to discuss with your reflection like that.

With a last frown towards the mirror, Anna rushes out the door as her reflection disappears from the mirror.

Downstairs, Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose are already waiting for Anna. Standing between them is a skinny girl in blue sweater, black jeans and white sneakers. The girl is as tall as Anna but has a little darker shade of skin tone than hers.

Upon seeing Anna going down from her bedroom, the girl smiles widely.

"Happy birthday, Anna! You look really pretty my friend!"

Anna stares at her best friend's clothes and wishes she was wearing the same as her. However, seeing her friend is enough reason for her to forget how she feels ridiculously awkward with her attire today. She smiles back widely.

"You're here already! What took you so long? I can't start my birthday party without my best friend!" Anna jokingly complains as she gives Jo a tight hug.

They both giggle excitedly as if they haven't seen each other for a while when in truth, they were busy early morning helping Marmee Rose make sandwiches.

"Sorry I had to finish some packing of my unused toys and things. My mom says she has to get rid of some stuff too. So, I took some time sorting my things. A bit wrong timing but you know how Mom is when she starts on something, she would not stop until they are done."

"But I'm here now so let's start the party." Jo replies apologetically, handing Anna a small wooden box. "I hope you'll like this." She gives her best friend a proud smile. "Popsie and I worked really hard on this very special project for your birthday," she adds.

"Thanks, Jo. Let's eat! I'm hungry already." Anna grabs Jo's hands as she leads her towards the dining table filled with all of her favourite food.

"Marmee you're the best! Thanks for all of these. I love you, heaps!"

"You're most welcome dear. Anything for our little sunshine!" Marmee Rose responds happily.

"By the way Joanna, where is your mom? I prepared so much food which is more than enough for all of us." Marmee Rose asks.

"Sorry about that Marmee. Mom told me to apologize that she cannot join us today. She went to Aunt Lila's house. She finds it an urgent matter to bring her extra stuff there today." Jo replies with humor.

Anna stares at all her favourites; tomato pasta, baked potatoes, cheese bread, garden salad and a lime cake! The cucumber sandwiches that Jo, Marmee and Anna prepared this morning are also enticing Anna to start eating.

"Darling, aren't you going to wait for your other guests to arrive before you start?" Marmee Rose asks.

Anna and Jo look at each other, smiling at the same time. Then Anna replies, "I didn't invite anyone else because I am positive no one else will come anyway. I am totally fine with just me and Jo here!"

Anna shrugs her shoulders to show that it's not a big deal for her. Holding her best friend's hand, Anna moves closer to the table. Jo lights the green candles on the lime cake. Anna stares at the ten sparkling candles, lost in deep thought.

Jo, the girl who has been her protector from other kids who kept making fun of her too white skin and excessive love for nature, compared to other kids with their gadget games and internet stuff. Jo has been her ally since the day they met in preschool. Her only friend but the best there is.

"Well, whatever the birthday girl likes!" Popsie Reed blurts out gently taking Marmee Rose's hand leading her towards the table.

"Wait, I like to say a little thanks for what Mother Nature has given me for my birthday."

Anna holds one of Jo's hands and reaches out to hold her Marmee Rose's hand while Popsie Reed holds the other and Jo's free hand. They are standing around the table holding hands in a praying position.

"Mother Nature, we thank you for all of these food, which are my favourites by the way. Thank you for my Marmee Rose who worked so hard to prepare them for my birthday. Also, thank you for my Popsie Reed for always taking care of me and Marmee. Lastly, thank you for my very bestest friend Jo, for being here always for me. Thank you for my tenth! Thank you, thank you, thank you and thank you!" Anna excitedly ends. She blows the candle lights and makes a wish. The three applauds and laughs.

Anna hugs Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose at the same time then starts to grab the cucumber sandwiches with Jo after her. Both girls love the same kind of food so they are satisfied to be just the two people to share these delicious spread of food. They savour all the goodies on the table with a contented heart.

Just by observing the girls, it really is such a party already. That is what Anna prefers than spending the day with other kids pretending she enjoys their company. Her tenth birthday is perfect that way.

All the people important to her is already here. That's all she ever wanted. Well of course, she plans to change into more comfortable clothes later when she hangs out with Jo at their tree.

Reed and Rose stand back a little to observe the two girls happily devouring whatever their hands can reach. Apparently, both of them have the same thought.

Has it really been ten years since this girl unexpectedly came to their lives? They prayed so hard for this blessing and now they will do anything to make sure she is happy and safe.

Reed kisses Rose's hands as if they were having a silent conversation. Both are wondering if it is time to have that talk with Anna. Is it the time to tell the truth to the baby in the green basket?

Chapter 4: Saying Goodbye

"I just can't believe this is happening? Why do you have to go?" Anna laments while hugging her best friend so tight like she will not let go. Jo holds on to Anna as well.

"I'm sorry Anna. I don't want to leave you too. You know how much our friendship means to me but this is for my mom and dad, for our family," Jo starts to explain.

She takes a deep breath and stares around. She blinks several times to keep her tears from falling. Jo doesn't like Anna to see how terribly sad she is feeling right now. She knows it will make things harder for her best friend to say goodbye too if she sees her tears.

Jo looks up to the darkening sky. The weather seems to take a gloomy mood too. It is almost sundown but the sun is as if in a hurry to set.

“It’s getting dark. I think it is about to rain.”

Jo tries to say something casually about the weather as she squints her eyes to the remaining ray of light from the sun.

"Finally we will all be together. Dad has been away for a long time and I know that makes Mom miserable because we were left here. They have decided that I should grow up here. I should stay in a place where everything is peaceful." She continues.

“Yup this place is going to be a lot quieter without you.” Anna interjects while smirking, in an attempt to tease Jo.

"They spend so much time apart for my sake. Dad's Archaeological job has taken him away from us way too long and now that there's a chance that we can join him in Alaska, we really have to go. I think I ought to give them a chance to be together." Jo takes another deep breath.

She hopes that her speech is as convincing to her friend. She feels she finds it hard to lie to Anna. Growing up together really makes them more like sisters.

"Alaska, huh, imagine me going there? Everything is frozen, not much greens to see. I know I will miss this place a lot and most especially you!" Jo adds in a lighter tone to pacify her friend's sadness, and hers too.

"I know, I know, and I do understand, it's for your family. I am happy that finally you will all be together. I just thought we will graduate together and go to College!" Anna says but now a bit calmer.

"I wonder how you will manage Mathematics?!" she teases Jo once more. Anna grins a bit.

"Great, Anna! Thanks for reminding me! Maybe I will end up flunking my Math subject and they will end up kicking me back here quickly." Jo replies sarcastically. At least it made her friend smile.

"I will miss you terribly! You always solve my homework. I just get confuse with all those numbers. Dad will surely have me tutored, I guess." Jo replies with a frown. She recalls the endless times Anna patiently explains to her, hoping she will finally get it but fails.

"I will chat with you every day. I know you are not into internet and stuff, but that's the fastest way we can talk to each other! I will miss you every day my bestie," Jo reminds Anna reassuringly.

Anna just nods and gives her friend another tight embrace. Her locket starts to glow. Both break away from their embrace.

"Even my locket misses you already." Anna takes the locket out to show her friend the pulsing green light from her neck.

"Okay, okay I get the message. Hey, Anna… Stay weird alright?" Jo makes a last attempt to humor her friend.

"Well, you know me? You won't find anyone in Alaska like me." Anna retorts back at her with a little giggle.

"Do you still have the key I gave you for your tenth birthday? Keep it with you and keep writing to me every day like I am here. Just put every letter in the wooden box. I will read them when I get back, promise." Jo instructs her, serious once more.

Anna pulls the necklace once again from underneath her green cotton shirt to show Jo the key dangling with her emerald locket. The locket is glowing once more.

She turns around and touches a part of the trunk of the willow tree. Anna pushes a little groove in one part. After her hands found what it's looking for, she places the key to open a secret hole. Then she takes out the wooden box, opens it and takes out a blue paper.

"Here, read this when you miss me there," Anna says as she places the blue paper on her best friend's hand.

"As for me, I miss you already. Our fifteen years of friendship will see more years to come. Take care of yourself Joanna!" she finishes as she hugs her friend again.

"You take care of yourself too, Arianna! You know what; I might end up reading this even before I reach Alaska. I will come back okay?" Jo promises again.

She folds the blue paper and places it in her jeans' right pocket. From the left one, Jo takes out a green paper.

"Here, I have one for you as well. Read it later." Jo hands Anna the green folded paper.

"How much time do you have?" Anna inquires, glancing at the road, as far as her eyes can see. Looking at it reminds her how far of a distance her friend's destination will be. Her expression turns into a frown again.

"Actually, a little bit more. Mom and Dad are on their way here now after they leave the keys of our house to Aunt Lila." Jo answers, automatically checking her watch.

Jo stares at the blue door of Anna's house across the street. She seems to be making sure to remember it vividly.

The blue door has never changed its colour ever since she can recall. Popsie Reed seems to be attached to that colour.

Jo smiles to herself. I miss them already. She cannot count anymore how many times she has slept over their house whenever her Dad and Mom go out on a date when her Dad comes back from Alaska, for a short time for a break from work. Those were precious bonding moments.

Both girls sit under the willow tree, their willow tree. The tree that has been their fortress since they both learned how to climb it. The willow tree has been the silent witness of how their friendship grew. It is their trustworthy keeper of their secrets. Jo stares at the leaves overhead, that she will miss too. She can feel her eyes starting to get wet. She wipes them quickly with her fingers before her friend notices.

Anna and Jo sit in a comfortable silence with each other. Probably both are wondering how different their lives will be far apart from each other. They hold hands the whole time.

After a while, a grey van arrives in front of them. The van feels like a bell tolling to remind the girls of their ticking moments left.

They suddenly snap out from their deep thoughts. Both girls stand slowly, taking their time a bit. Both are still holding on to each other's hand.

Mr and Mrs Daniels walk up to the girls. Reed and Rose emerge from the blue door. They cross the street from their house to see the Daniels' departure.

Olivia Daniels gives Rose a tight embrace after saying, "keep in touch, Rose."

We are not sure when we will be back because of Mark's job, but we will definitely be missing you all. Thank you for treating Jo like your own daughter."

"Oh, hush, Liv. Anna and Jo are like sisters already."

Rose sniffs, suppressing her tears from falling.

"You are family to us already." She adds.

Rose hands a pack of sandwiches to Olivia as she says, "For your trip, Jo might get hungry."

Mark Daniels and Reed exchange a steady arm hug, "take it easy out there, man."

Then, that is it for Anna and Jo. They hug, cry and sigh in defeat.

"Goodbye for now," Jo whispers.

"Goodbye for now," Anna whispers back.

Their clasped hands don't seem to want to separate. But they know it's really time to part for now.

So, right beside the willow tree, Mr and Mrs Rivers, with Anna, watch as the grey van of Mr and Mrs Daniels, with Jo, slowly disappears at the corner of the street.

Suddenly, Anna feels like the weather became colder, lonelier, sadder...

"Goodbye..." someone else seems to whisper.

Anna glances at the willow tree.

Chapter 5: Our Willow Tree

Anna sits underneath the willow tree with her legs crossed. She is feeling restless though she should be happy for it's her special day.

"What a birthday..." she sighs disappointedly.

She never thought she will feel so miserable and alone on her sixteenth birthday. Earlier during the day, her Marmee tried convincing her to invite a few of her classmates. She blatantly declined. She would rather be by herself. The single good thing for her today is that Marmee Rose lets her wear her casual clothes.

She misses her best friend so much. It has only been over a year when Jo and her family went to Alaska but it feels like it's been way longer than that.

Jo talks to her every day in the internet but it's really not the same. Her best friend updates her daily and she does too. Although when their conversations finally end, she misses Jo even more. It's a consolation that her friend is doing well there with her parents. At least one of them is happy.

It is not that she is unhappy with her parents but all her life, Jo has been there for her. Maybe Jo adjusts easier than her. She sighs deeply with that thought. She has to suck it up after all.

She starts rubbing the key dangling, with her locket on her necklace that she never takes off. The key is an additional memento given by Jo, her best friend. It came with a wooden box which she uses to keep her letters for Jo.

As for the emerald locket, she can't remember when she got the necklace but her Marmee told her that she was wearing it since she was an infant. Her Marmee said it's her natal gift for her.

Anna recalls her tenth birthday when Jo and Anna had such a great time. It didn't matter if Jo was her only guest. That's all she needs, her best friend.

But today, it hurts so much for her to spend this day alone, under their tree, Jo's and hers...like they always say "our willow tree".

Though Jo talked to her from Alaska a few minutes ago, she still feels gloomy. The distance is really hard for her. She wishes that things are simpler like they used too. Well, growing up gets complicated year after year. Maybe that is what she needs to accept.

"Anna, it's getting late. Are you ready to go inside now? You haven't even touched your lime cake." Marmee Rose shouts when she peered from the window.

"You might get cold there!" Marmee adds to remind her.

"Just a few more minutes Marmee!" she hollers back.

"Alright, honey, your Popsie and I are just here okay?" Marmee says with a worried tone.

"My Marmee, she has always been worried about me...not having other friends, not being like the other kids..." Anna talks to herself.

Anna sometimes thinks that even before she feels in a certain way, her Marmee can sense already. All the time she is down, her Marmee knows what to say. Like right now. But somehow she gets a bit upset that she is like an open book to her Marmee Rose. It is not that she likes to hide her feelings but oftentimes, it worries her Marmee Rose a lot.

This is one of the things she usually does as if it's such an ordinary thing to do. Other kids find it weird when she talks that way. But why will she care about what they think? If only Jo is here...She senses the stress rising from her chest. She feels suffocated.

Anna resumes her sitting position. She sighs, closing her green eyes and placing both her arms on her crossed legs, palms open upward. She takes a few slow and even breaths. She repeats this breathing exercise several times to calm herself. She focuses on her breathing as well as the beating of her heart.

Deep in her inner calm, she does not notice her locket glowing underneath her shirt. She stays that way for a while.

Finally, when she feels a bit better, Anna stands up and unlocks a hidden hole with her key and retrieves the wooden box. She reaches in her jeans' pocket and takes out a folded blue paper. This is another addition to her letters for Jo.

Popsie Reed was the one who helped Jo to make a hole in the willow tree so Jo will be able to complete her birthday gift for her then.

"Popsie has always known me better. I never had to say anything," Anna blurts out with a smile. Marmee's heart is in the right place but she seems to be always worrying. Why does she feel like Marmee is afraid that something might happen to her?

Unlike her Marmee, her Popsie is the calmer one. Popsie Reed lets Anna join him on his morning jogs along the trail beyond the willow tree. She enjoys hearing the different sounds of nature.

Anna looks at the trail...

For a second, she feels like running away. She is being drawn towards the forest. Anna shakes her head as if to remove the thought. Why would she runaway? Marmee and Popsie will be sad. Maybe she is just yearning for her best friend's company. Jo is her constant special guest, year after year, her only guest on her birthday. Nobody else matters.

Anna's attention returns to the wooden box. She stares at the dominance of blue letters from the green ones. This reminds her how long since she got a handwritten letter from her friend. She sighs then returns the box.

Anna climbs to a thicker branch of the willow and starts to sit facing the trail. Though to her surprise, someone else was sitting on the other side of the willow tree. The mysterious intruder is busy drawing on the ground with a stick.

She holds back trying to decide what to do next. Should she just go back to the house? She gets a little curious.

From Anna's view, it is a boy, maybe the same age as hers and is wearing a weird kind of brown clothing. Her curiosity gets the best of her.

"Who are you?" Anna enquires from above where she sits. However, she decides to say it calmly so as not to startle him.

The strange boy jumps to his feet startled by Anna's voice. He looks up with a puzzled expression then asks a question instead.

"You can see me?" still in disbelief.

“There goes my subtlety.” Anna exclaims as she stares at the boy with a confused look.

"Of course I can see you. Do I look blind to you?" she adds.

Anna climbs down the tree and walks towards the boy who's still holding his strange stick, or a staff? Or is it a wand?

Anna gapes at the boy again. He is wearing a long sleeved shirt all the way to his hips with pants tucked inside his boots all in the shade of brown.

His outfit makes him look like one of the hobbits from the adventure movie Jo and Anna watched, except that he is not barefooted, and of course not as short. But he is definitely good looking. Anna smirks a little.

"I have been coming here a lot since I was young but nobody sees me ever. What are you?" the boy in brown asks suspiciously. He still has not given away anything about himself.

"What do you mean what am I? Do I look like I came from outer space or something? You're the one who looks strange!" Anna retorts, starting to get upset.

Anna starts to consider her first thought, which is to leave this strange boy alone. But her interest wins over.

“I live just across the street! There at the house with a very blue door!” she is shouting now and a little flushed already.

“Great, I just pointed to a total stranger where I live! Way to go Anna, just wait for him to strangle you in your sleep…” she babbles on.

“Oh now I even dropped my name for good measure!” Anna shakes her head ignoring the strange boy for once. She is really deciding to turn her back on him now.

Suddenly, the boy holds out his hand to Anna, "I'm sorry, I did not mean to upset you. I'm Caspian by the way."

The strange guy changes his tone, friendlier now.

Anna stares at Caspian's hand still outstretched in front of her. She is debating with herself if she will accept this boy's acquaintance.

Yes, he has a weird appearance because of what he is wearing. But weird is not something new to Anna. Also, he already knows her name and where she lives due to her outburst earlier.

So, what the heck? Anna starts to consider.

"Oh come on, I apologized already. Can we be friends now?" Caspian says with a smile. He has a cute smile too.

"Okay, your apology is accepted, only because it's my birthday today. I'm being generous. Call me Anna!" Anna explains.

"Oh yeah, I already said my name to myself a while ago…" she says in afterthought.

Caspian smiles even more. Really weird girl, but pretty, especially her eyes, he thought.

"Anna, it's time to go inside! It's beginning to get dark." They hear from across the street.

That will be Marmee, Anna thought.

"I have to go now! It was nice meeting you, I guess. Goodbye, Caspian! See you around,"

Anna hurries to cross the street without looking back while Caspian can't take his eyes off her. He is still wondering about their unexpected acquaintance. He waits for her to go in through that blue door.

"Happy birthday, Anna! See you again..." Caspian replies in a whisper, as he disappears behind the willow tree.

Clouds start to darken the sky and the sun has already set in the horizon. This signifies the end of another day. Nevertheless, somehow, this will be the beginning of a new friendship between Anna and the strange boy named Caspian.

Chapter 6: Hidden Talents

Late nights are fun when you are busy chatting away with your best friend far across the world from you. That is how both Anna and Jo feel right now.

"What time will you sleep? Do you still have some papers to finish?"

“Are you sure you're doing okay there? What about that guy you mentioned last time? I remember he is the one who's the son of your Dad's colleague?"

Anna asks without a pause.

"You mean, Joshua Brown? He's in College, a freshman majoring in Math. He has been helping me out in my math studies. You know how I am with figures, right?”

“Luckily, Josh is very patiently explaining those confusing numbers to me. He argues that math is part of our daily living so I should get used to dealing with them. If you personally want my opinion, calculators, well, even phones can do that.”

Jo points out with conviction in her tone. She tries to talk casually when mentioning Josh but Anna knows her best friend really well. Jo likes Josh. Jo is just being herself. She always attempts to show disinterest in everything except about their friendship.

“But my papers are easy peasy! Our professor here says my essays are well written. I guess I have lots of practice when we've been writing to each other every day. I can't wait to give my letters to you when I get back.”

“Dad says his work will wrap up in time for my graduation here. So that will be a little less than a year from now.” She continues talking excitedly.

“Sorry Dad took so long. I miss you a lot you know, "Jo shouts loudly from the screen. The reception is crappy that she feels the need to shout to her friend.

Anna allows her friend to babble on with her stories. She loves listening to her stories about her life in Alaska.

"Congratulations! I'm so proud of you. I can't wait for you to get back!”

“Popsie says we can go camping when you get back. There's a lot of the forest we have not yet explored. I know you miss the forest too." Anna blurts out when she gets her chance to chime in the conversation.

"Yup, I can't wait for the greenery! Alaska is but tons and tons of ice. I tried going outdoors once with Josh but climbing our tree is much more fun than slipping down slopes!" Jo complains to her best friend.

There goes her best friend again. She is pretty sure that Jo somehow enjoyed her skiing with Josh. She smiles at Jo on the screen.

"You and Josh seem to be having fun together. I hope I get to meet him someday. Someone who teaches you Math stuff as patiently as I can is a guy I give two thumbs up." Anna teases.

"Well he is a lot mature than the guys there in our neighbourhood. He likes the outdoors than playing games in the net."

"He likes to meet you too. Of course I told him a lot about my best friend. Maybe one time when we chat again I will make sure Josh is around so you could at least meet virtually."

Jo ignores her teasing. She definitely likes him. Anna concludes to herself.

"What's the name of that boy again you saw at our willow tree? Casper?" Jo asks, finally changing the topic.

"Stop that!" Anna exclaims as she turns to look at her mirror, her face blushing.

"What? Did I say something wrong?" Jo sounds surprised.

"Not you Jo, sorry," Anna explains, seeing her reflection in her mirror giving her a silly grin.

"Are you talking to your reflection again? So how's that reflection of yours? That's one of the things I miss when we're together. I can never stop being amazed with you and your hidden talents!" Jo laughs at her friend.

"It's just that she keeps smiling at me ever since I met Caspian!" Anna clarifies to Jo.

"So, this Caspian guy, is he cute? Do you meet him at our tree often? What is he like? Have you told Popsie and Marmee about him?" Jo teases her a bit.

"Please, not you too, Jo!" Anna complains playfully.

"He is kind of cute but in a weird way. He wears this brown outfit every time we see each other. I don't know if it's some kind of uniform or costume." She says with a grin, envisioning again how Caspian looks with his clothing.

"I don't ask because I don't like to offend him." Anna narrates.

"I'm just glad that you found a friend when I left. At least now you have someone to talk to. I don't mind sharing our tree with your new friend. Just make sure to introduce him to me when I am finally back. I feel guilty leaving you." Jo explains thoughtfully.

"So, where does he live? Does he go to the same school? What about his parents?" Jo adds.

"Caspian never mentions his parents. He told me he lives beyond the other side of the forest. Remember the valley that Popsie said that caught fire when we were still babies? That's why Marmee doesn't like us to go beyond the usual trail that Popsie takes when he jogs every morning." Anna recalls.

"Hmm, so there are people living there again? I thought it was a deserted place because a lot of people are scared of what happened there?" Jo ponders.

"My Dad says that place used to be so beautiful. There are so many extra ordinary plants and trees growing. In the past, there were fresh produce market there and people go there to buy their veggies, herbs and other stuff."

"It sounds like a cool place to visit then. Mom even said that there used to be a farming settlement there so the place was well kept right before the fire."

"Too bad we were just babies at the time to see for ourselves the beauty of that place." Jo points out.

"But what is Caspian doing so far away from their place?" Jo sounds puzzled.

"He says he has been going to our tree for a while now but told me no one sees him."

"According to him also, he even knew how you look like. He said he has seen us when we were still kids just like him. We climb the tree and he was there just with his stick."

"Caspian loves drawing on the ground. That's how I saw him on my sixteenth birthday. A bit weird huh?" Anna narrates.

"Yup, pretty weird because I would have noticed if there was a strange guy with a stick lurking around our willow tree. Well, you always have a knack for strange things."

"Remember when you slipped from the willow tree when we were seven? I thought you'll hurt your head but you hit the ground without a scratch. Your locket suddenly glowed nonstop." Jo reminisces.

"A lot of weird things but I never told anyone anything. Not even Popsie or Marmee. I'm scared they might think something is wrong with me. They always look so worried about me, like something might happen to me, especially Marmee." Anna says as an afterthought.

"I'm glad I have you," Anna blurts out.

"You have never made me feel different. Anything you see odd about me or what happens around me, you just get amazed but never look at me like I'm scary or creepy. That's why I miss you terribly." Anna reminds her friend.

"Same sentiments for me right here my friend! I'm glad to have you to tolerate all my quirks. We have such a weird friendship." Jo jokes around.

"Okay, Anna, let's sleep now, before I start crying here! You take care of yourself, Anna. Say hi to Caspian for me. Sweet dreams!" Jo ends the video chat.

Anna smiles as she shuts off her computer. She turns to look at her reflection again.

"Stop teasing okay? We are just talking about Caspian because Jo asked. Is that clear? So now we are both smiling..." she says then turns her light off.

After a while, Anna's breathing steadies. She has fallen asleep with a smile on her face.

In the darkness of Anna's room, her locket starts to glow steadily. From outside, it looks as if she has caught a firefly in a jar, but the glow emitting, instead of a yellow light, is green...

Chapter 7: Special Friend

It is a cozy sunny afternoon at Bellmont. The breeze is just right for outdoor activities. The leaves of the trees sway lazily with the wind.

Anna just got home from school. She is a bit disappointed because she thought she will be able to go home earlier. Luckily, she has no written assignments to do for today.

Professor Lane, her Botany teacher, made them stay to clean up the laboratory equipment they used for the day. The class took a while to finish because instead of just cleaning, everyone was fooling around in the lab. They ended up cleaning much more than they were originally supposed to.

So here she is right now preparing in a rush for a little picnic setup for her friend. She tries to focus to calm herself. Everything is almost set anyway.

Anna thinks twice if the cucumber sandwiches are enough. Good thing she made the lemonade early this morning before she went to class so it's now ready enough to pack. What else?

Anna rushes upstairs for a quick change. She wears her favourite pastel green blouse and her dark green pants.

"I think we look good alright." she nods to her reflection in the mirror. Her reflection gives a brilliant smile and a thumb's up sign as affirmation to her.

"Okay, I'm going now, bye!" she says and blows a kiss towards her reflection. The reflection just winks back seemingly excited just like her.

Carrying a basket with the sandwiches and the big flask of lemonade, Anna crosses the street in a hurry towards the willow tree.

She half smiles envisioning how funny it would be if she trips midway crossing the street. Would that make her appear too eager?

Anna breathes deeply and calms down.

Popsie and Marmee went out on a date late this afternoon. Marmee likes to check out the new bakery at the other town. They might even get some groceries as well. So they may take a while to get back.

Anna reaches the backside of the willow tree and as she expects, Caspian is already there doodling with his stick on the ground. She observes him a little bit without making any sound.

Caspian is scribbling her name...

"Sorry I'm late..." Anna says shyly after a while.

"Oh, it's okay…" Caspian replies as he hurriedly erases what he wrote done.

He glances appreciatively at Anna with a wide smile. He walks towards her and takes the basket from Anna. They find a nice spot near the tree.

Both of them sit down at the same time under the shade of the willow tree. The breeze blows softly at their flushed faces.

Anna takes out a small picnic mat then Caspian helps her spread it on the ground. They move in silence, as if what they are doing needs a lot of concentration. However, in truth, both are just trying to think of what to say to the other.

Anna starts unloading the sandwiches and the flask from the basket. Still, she avoids looking directly at Caspian.

"You look nice, umm, the color green suits you." Caspian compliments Anna but is staring elsewhere. He tries to sneak a glance when Anna is busy with the sandwiches.

Anna stops rearranging the sandwiches and takes a quick glance at Caspian. As usual, he is wearing the same brown outfit. She grins at him.

"Thanks for the compliment. I really like this color too." Anna pauses.

"I hope you will not mind if I ask you a question..." she hesitates.

Caspian looks her way without saying anything, still awkwardly.

Anna takes a deep breath then says, "Why do you always wear that?" pointing to Caspian from top to bottom.

Caspian looks at himself too, as if just seeing what he is wearing for the first time.

"Well, I don't know what else to wear? It's not nice?" he says with a puzzled look on his face.

"It's fine but it's just that... every time I see you, you are wearing the same clothes again and again. Is that some kind of uniform or something?" Anna asks.

"Maybe, I guess you can call it like that, if you mean that everyone wears it. My people wear the same as what I wear." Caspian admits.

"Okay, when you say your people, do you mean your family?" Anna questions again.

"Yes my family. I grew up getting used to these clothes and our way of life." Caspian confides.

"What does your family do? I mean, what is your way of living?" Anna continues out of curiosity.

"My family takes care of the land. We make plants grow. We make sure things are fine in the Valley. Then people come to sell them in markets." Caspian replies.

"So your family are farmers and landowners? That's cool. I have always been fascinated with plants and nature. I'm taking Botany and I love learning how things grow." Anna shares excitedly.

"We are not really landowners. The land is for everyone. We take care of the lands. We make sure that all the elements are balanced." Caspian explains.

"Your family lives in that land that had caught fire when I was still a baby, right? Do you know what really happened then?" Anna inquires.

"It's not really clear to me since, like you've said, you are still a baby. Back then, I was still very young. Only the elders know what exactly transpired at that time. Every time I ask, they will just say that whoever caused the damages was already caught and punished."

"My people's priority now is to restore the place to its original glory. We are working hard towards that, for the sake of my people and for everyone else." Caspian clarifies.

"Yes, I have learned from Jo's parents that the place was really beautiful back then. It is very productive. I wish we could have seen that." Anna says thoughtfully.

She hands a cucumber sandwich to Caspian, urging him to take a bite.

"I prepared those. Jo and I love those. I hope you like it too." She informs him.

"Thanks Anna," Caspian says.

"Maybe someday you will see the Valley the way other people witnessed its bounty, too." He turns serious for a moment.

"Speaking of your friend, when is she coming back?" Caspian asks changing the subject.

"Jo says after her graduation. I thought she will be gone for a long time but luckily, her dad will be finishing up soon. I miss her terribly..."

Anna stares blankly at an invisible spot on the ground.

Caspian looks intently at Anna and saw her sad face. He reaches out for Anna's hand without thinking and says, "You miss her a lot. I can tell."

Anna looks at Caspian beside her and gives him a half smile. She lets Caspian hold her hand.

"She's my best friend, my only friend." Anna narrates.

"I know, but she will be back soon and right now, I'm glad you are here. I am your friend too. Can I be your special friend?" Caspian asks in a whisper.

Anna smiles in response and takes a bite of her sandwich.

"Jo says she would love to meet you when she gets back. That would be your official welcome to our Willow Tree club." Anna blurts out adding a bit of humor to it.

"I would love to meet her too." Caspian answers but still staring somewhere else.

Both of them gaze in silence at the trail leading to the forest. They seem grateful that the sun has set and the shade provided by the willow tree hides the blush on their faces.

They stay like that, holding each other's hands, until it is really dark and Anna needs to go back to her house. Time flies so fast when they are together.

Caspian helps Anna pack the picnic basket once more. He carries it while he accompanies her across the street. He seems unwilling to let go of her hand.

Anna notices that there is still no light inside. She is aware her parents are not back yet. She finds it unfortunate because she is hoping her Popsie and Marmee would be back by then. She likes to introduce her special friend to them. She stops short and thought of something to stall Caspian from going home yet.

"Would you like to go inside first?" Anna invites Caspian as she opens the blue door.

Caspian hesitates, staring at the open door. He then looks at Anna.

Anna waits for a reply.

"I guess, maybe some other time. Thanks for the lovely picnic."

"Good night Anna," he says giving Anna's hand a gentle squeeze.

He crosses the street back to the willow tree.

Caspian waves goodbye, then finally disappears behind the willow tree.

Anna stares after him absentmindedly. She feels like running after him. She shakes her head and smiles to herself. She cannot wait to tell Popsie and Marmee about her special friend.

Chapter 8: Meeting Your Family

Caspian stares at the sky thoughtfully. Slowly, the pale grey starts to show a little light. The sun will soon start to come out from the East.

He lazily walks to his spot under the willow tree. He is holding a single green rose with one hand and his staff on the other.

He idly draws circles on the ground with the end of his staff. He is thinking of what to say...

Coming from the forest, he hears laughing sounds. He abruptly stops doodling and starts to get nervous. He has not figure out what he would say after all.

Caspian looks towards the direction of the trail and soon enough, he sees Anna with Popsie Reed slowly coming into view, walking while laughing at the same time.

"Good morning Anna! Good morning sir!" he exclaims as he stands, feeling a bit awkward.

Anna walks towards Caspian while Popsie Reed stares in surprise.

"Sorry for interrupting your morning."

“I am Caspian, by the way. I am Anna's friend from the valley." Caspian explains politely to Popsie Reed, offering his hand for a friendly greeting.

"So, you are Caspian, the friend Anna was mentioning to us about. Her Marmee and I thought you were just an imaginary friend for we have never met you. Well, until now..." Popsie Reed gives him a warm smile.

"Popsie, that is so much details... I never thought you didn't believe me." Anna cuts her Popsie's teasing.

“He lives in the valley beyond the forest so… I guess he might have been busy at times when you and Marmee are here. But we often meet here under the willow tree." Anna rationalizes to her Popsie Reed to explain further.

Anna starts to get self-conscious too.

"Again, I apologize sir, for the intrusion this morning. I know you and Anna have your early morning jog together." Caspian repeats.

"Call me Popsie. I'm glad Anna has other friends. Well, Jo is her only friend then." Popsie Reed adds.

"Why are you here very early in the morning?" Anna asks turning to Caspian and finally notices the green rose in Caspian's hand.

"I just like to give this to you. It is the first green rose to bloom from our place. It reminds me of you, your eyes." Caspian answers.

He finally gains some courage to hand the rose to Anna at the same time as he gives his timid explanations. He seems unsure what to say next.

"Oh, thank you, Caspian" Anna replies while she blushes uncontrollably.

"Wow! That's a beauty that green rose." Popsie Reed says with admiration.

"Just like our Anna here..." he adds with another teasing tone, as he places his arms over Anna's shoulders in a loving way.

"Popsie, stop that! We better get inside, Marmee might be waiting already." Anna tries to ignore the teasing.

"Young lad, would you like to join us for breakfast?" Popsie Reed asks.

"Marmee makes such good toasts with cheese omelettes." He says proudly.

Caspian hesitates, and is about to decline the invitation.

Popsie Reed even suggested.

"Maybe we can have breakfast outside. The rising sun is such a nice view to miss."

"I will go ahead inside and tell your Marmee we have a guest. We can set up the bench and make us a lovely outdoor venue. Wait here young man."

Popsie Reed winks at Anna and hurries to the house to start preparing.

Anna and Caspian stares at Popsie Reed going inside. Anna averts her eyes from so much shyness. Instead, she stares at the green rose in her hands.

"Thanks for this rose again. I'm sorry if Popsie seems imposing." She states shyly.

"If you have other things to do, it's okay. I can tell them you had to leave already." Anna inquires doubtfully.

"Oh, it's fine. I'm happy that your Popsie is very friendly. He seems to adore you so much."

"I really like to meet your family." Caspian assures her.

At that instant, Popsie Reed comes out carrying the movable bench.

Anna and Caspian cross the street and start to help Popsie Reed set up.

Marmee Rose comes out from the house carrying a tray of toasts, omelettes and orange juice.

"Good morning ma'am," Caspian greets her.

He offers to carry the tray from Marmee Rose and places it on the table of the bench.

"Good morning dear. We are glad to finally meet you and I hope you enjoy our simple breakfast. Call me Marmee." Marmee Rose says with a smile.

"I will get the plates and glasses." Anna excuses herself.

Popsie Reed, Marmee Rose and Caspian are seated on the bench as Anna comes out again.

Anna serves everyone while they admire the beauty of the early morning sun. The four of them takes their time as they eat while enjoying the warmth of the sun. It surely seems to starts the day really bright.

"So, how is the valley nowadays?" Popsie Reed turns to Caspian, after finishing his orange juice.

"We are starting to see the growth of some of the rare blooms that the valley once had before the fire. That green rose is a proof that the valley has a chance to recover after all." Caspian narrates.

"Yes, yes, Marmee and I used to take our time there admiring the rare flowers that seem to bloom only on that valley." Popsie Reed says in nostalgia.

"Remember that rare blue rose you bought from one of the markets there? I loved that one. It stays blooming longer than the average rose here. I wish I could see one again." Marmee Rose recalls wishful thinking.

“Yes my darling Rose. It looks so lovely but not as pretty as you.” Popsie Reed replies lovingly to Marmee Rose.

Anna and Caspian stare at Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose at the time. They look so much in love despite the years. Then, as if by pull of magnetism, Anna and Caspian automatically meet each other’s eyes. They avert their eyes just as quickly as they met.

"We are slowly growing some of those roses too. I will try to bring one to you, too, Marmee" Caspian promises in response, hoping Anna’s parents did not notice what transpired between him and their daughter.

Anna stares at Caspian, her Popsie and her Marmee. She thoughtfully listens to their conversation on the beauty of the valley in the past and on what the valley looks like now.

She smiles and feels very content that her parents finally meet her special friend Caspian. By the looks of it, Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose like her friend. She gazes at them again as if fascinated in the scene.

Now, she only needs to wait for Jo to return. She is pretty sure her best friend will also warm up to like Caspian, too. She frowns upon remembering her best friend again.

Without a warning, Anna felt the glowing warmth of her locket. She touches the part of her shirt where the emerald locket is underneath. She is so much used to it by now. However, she hopes that it will not give away her emotions so much.

Anna glances at her parents and Caspian once more. Marmee is looking at her with a worried expression on her face. It is as if her Marmee heard her thoughts.

Her Marmee gives her a forced smile then looks away. Both boys do not notice the exchange. They are still busy talking about the valley.

After a while, Marmee Rose stands and starts gathering the breakfast leftovers. Anna helps too. Popsie Reed and Caspian folds the benches.

When tidying up is done, Caspian expresses his thanks and takes his leave as he wave goodbye to Anna and her parents.

When Caspian has gone towards the trail, Marmee Rose holds Anna's hand and gives it a little squeeze. She takes a deep breath.

"Anna, i think it is time that we have a talk. Your Popsie and I have something to tell you." Marmee Rose informs her softly.

Anna appears troubled by Marmee's announcement. What could this be about?

Popsie Reed puts his arms on both his ladies' shoulders. Popsie Reed seems relaxed.

"My darlings, let's go inside to talk," Popsie utters calmly leading both Marmee Rose and Anna through their blue door.

Chapter 9: Half the Truth

Popsie Reed leads both his ladies towards the sofa. He never expects this morning will be very momentous for them.

The breakfast turns out to be very interesting. They finally meet the special friend of Anna. She has been mentioning him for days now. It is so obvious how much Anna has been less miserable when she met Caspian. She gets animated when she mentions her special friend to her Popsie and Marmee.

When Jo and her family left for Alaska, Popsie is aware that her daughter was devastated. He empathizes with the loneliness Anna feels having been left behind by her best friend, her only friend. Caspian's presence as Anna's friend has been a lot of help for her to cope with Jo's parting. He made her daughter smile again.

Popsie Reed recalls when Anna came home crying when she was little because the other kids in preschool were mean to her. She was around 6 then. He saw the sadness and loneliness in her eyes but having Jo changed that. She has found not just a friend but a sister as well. However, she again felt alone for Joanna is very far away. Surely it cannot be helped for it is her friend's family decision. But still it is a sad moment for Anna.

Anna often spends time under the willow tree reading, as well as writing the countless letters both girls have written for each other. Anna is always by herself. But having Caspian now makes her daughter feel better, less alone.

Popsie Reed seems to play it cool but he has always been thinking of Anna's well-being. He might be very good at looking not so worried for her sake but he is. He has to be strong for both his ladies after all.

Having Anna with him and Rose completes their family but not knowing what lies ahead for Anna has always preoccupied his thoughts.

Yes, Anna completes his family but Anna remains lonely because of her incomplete life, her unknown past. She might not be aware of it right now but she somehow has that feeling inside her that she is different.

He wishes he could do more for Anna. But he really isn't sure what it is that could make her fully happy.

Anna has always seemed to be oddly separate from the other kids in their neighbourhood. It is as if Anna is aware that she unlike them. She senses that she is not totally part of their world. Anna is not theirs.

Ever since they saw her in that green basket with her strangely glowing necklace, Reed and Rose know Anna is not ordinary…

"So, Anna, we have been meaning to tell you something for a while now. But your Popsie and I thought again and again that we can postpone it."

"However, your glowing locket reminds me that it is time. I think you also notice something odd every once in a while. I guess this is a perfect moment to do so,"

Marmee Rose starts out, interrupting Popsie Reed from his reverie.

Marmee Rose holds Anna's hand, slowly caressing it while she continues.

"Anna, my dear, remember that your Popsie and I love you more than anything else in this world. Whatever you decide to do, we will respect it."

Marmee Rose starts to tear up.

"Marmee, what's going on? Please don't cry. You're scaring me."

Anna replies, giving her Marmee Rose a tight embrace. She is starting to get really concerned.

"Popsie what's wrong with Marmee? What is she trying to say?"

Anna glances at her Popsie Reed with a confused expression. Her Popsie Reed's facial expression seems apologetic.

Popsie Reed clears his throat then slowly replies,

"Anna, when you were just a small baby, your Marmee and I found you at our doorstep in a green basket. We never knew who left you there or the reason why. All you had with you then was your emerald necklace with your name written on it."

Popsie Reed pauses.

"Your Popsie and I have decided to keep you with us because we someone felt that when we found you on our doorstep, you were meant to stay with us."

"We were chosen to protect you, to care for you, and to love you as our own."

Marmee Rose finally finds her voice again but still crying.

Anna stares at Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose with a shocked look. She is not quite sure how to process this revelation. Why now?

As if Marmee Rose hears her question, she adds.

"We always knew that you were different. I saw your necklace glowing this morning. So we pretty much observe that you are also aware of the odd things that occur around you."

"We know there are certain things you do but never discuss to anyone."

She pauses for a while. She is trying to find the right words to explain this delicate situation.

“We felt that even when you were still a baby, your locket glows whenever you feel something strongly, as if it is an extension of your emotions.”

“We know you can talk to your reflection. We were surprised when you did that when you started to learn to talk. We tried to give a logical explanation to it like you were seeing an imaginary person. That is but common to most kids, to have an imaginary friend.”

“But now that you're more mature, we realized that all the strange things we have observed you can do is really a part of you.”

Marmee Rose narrates nonstop. She has to let it all out now.

“That is why we think we should tell you now the truth of how you came to be us."

She concludes with a final deep sigh of relief.

Marmee Rose stops crying at the same time she finishes her narration. She stares at Anna's face, trying to decipher her reaction to all these information.

Popsie Reed walks to Anna and wraps his arms around her from behind her.

"Anna, we are sorry we never told you the truth sooner but I hope you will forgive us." Popsie Reed whispers to Anna.

Anna still remains silent. She loves both her Marmee and Popsie so much and thankful that they told her about her past but she feels confused.

They told her the truth, but only half the truth. A lot of questions are still in her head. Who were her parents? Where did she come from? And the most painful one is that why did they leave her behind?

Anna starts crying. She sniffs to try to control herself but the tears won't stop from falling.

Anna sits on the couch a bit shakily. Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose move closer to her, each one sits on either side of the armrest of the couch. Both of them enclose her into a comfortable embrace.

Anna allows them to comfort her. After all, nothing has changed. Her Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose has always been her protector, her mother and father in all aspects except by birth.

Anna takes out her locket from underneath her blouse and starts caressing it. By now, the locket has been glowing incessantly giving off a warm feeling in the room. This somehow soothes her troubled heart.

"You will always be our Arianna, our sunshine." Reed and Rose exclaims softly at the same time.

The three of them stays in that silent position for a long time. The warmth emanating from the locket provides them comfort. It might just be half-truths that Anna learns about today but truly, nothing changed.

Anna wonders what she should do next. Should she look for her real parents? Didn't anyone ever come back for her if they changed their minds for leaving her? Was she meant to be left behind because she is strange or because there is something wrong with her?

She needs to talk to Jo. Well, what about Caspian? Should she tell him about this also?

Anna feels so exhausted with all these questions in her head. Somehow her knowing the truth about herself will give explanations to the strange things that she can do.

Chapter 10: Being in Your World

It's almost late afternoon and Anna keeps glancing at the willow tree from her bedroom window. She is waiting for Caspian. She plans to tell him about her past even if she herself does not fully know everything. She just needs to share to him this important thing about herself.

It feels strange that Caspian hasn't visited her for a week since the morning when he joined her family for breakfast. That was the day when she found out from her parents their secret about her.

After that long day of going about their routine in silence, Anna told Jo what she learned. Of course her best friend is the first person she would confide to.

"So, what do you plan to do now?"

Anna recalls Jo's comment. Her friend seems calm too about the whole thing. It is as if she knew Anna was really not ordinary. Her best friend has always been very accepting of Anna. Jo never has any reservations even when she sees or experiences anything unusual or strange about her.

Anna didn't give her best friend any reply because she herself didn't know what to do either.

Learning about her mysterious past made things even harder now that it was sixteen years ago. She didn't know what to do next.

"When I get back we will try to solve this together," Jo promised. This made Anna calm down a little.

But how can she solve anything? Even her Popsie and Marmee have no idea who left her in the first place. Where should she start? Are her parents still alive?

Anna plans to tell Caspian about it but unfortunately, he has not gone to their tree yet. Come to think of it, she doesn't know exactly where he lives. He only mentioned about living in the valley beyond the forest.

She does not think that it is a good idea to go to him because her parents might have the impression that she ran away. That will surely break their hearts.

Why would she do such a thing when it's her Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose who cared for her and who took her in when she was unwanted by her own parents!

Anna gives a long sigh and glances at her reflection with a frown on its face too. She feels a bit thankful for having this weirdness with her. In a way, she does not feel alone in this situation. She can talk to her anytime she feels like it.

"Put it this way. We don't know the whole story yet, right? Who knows? We might be royalty or something like that. Don't over think stuff. It's exhausting!" Anna's reflection advises her.

A movement near the willow tree catches Anna's attention. She takes a peek from her window and there is Caspian! Unmistakably it's him on his brown getup again. This made her grin.

“We have to cut our discussion short. Let’s talk later. I will see Caspian first.”

Anna waves to her reflection and exits her room.

She takes the steps down two at a time, in a rush to go outside.

Marmee Rose and Popsie Reed stare in surprise while she hurries to the door.

"Where are you going, Anna?" Popsie Reed asks quickly.

"Just outside, Popsie. Caspian is there!" Anna answers.

"Be back by dinner time, okay?" Marmee Rose reminds her.

Anna nods while blowing a kiss towards the direction of her very understanding parents, as she closes the door behind her.

Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose smile at each other. They are both giving Anna some space to sort out her thoughts after what she has learned about her past. They are both unhappy for Anna because they know nothing more besides how Anna came to them. As her parents, that is enough, but they understand that for Anna, it's not. She will never feel complete not knowing who she really is.

Seeing Anna excited just now is enough to make them smile a bit. They are both worried that she might run away after their talk. Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose know that Anna does not belong to them. They are resigned to the fact that someday she will eventually leave. For now, they are content that she chooses to still stay with them.

"Let's have dinner outdoors, Reed. I know you will love to watch the sunset. Anna will... She can join us, if she prefers to." Marmee Rose suggests.

"That's a great idea, honey! Maybe Caspian can join us as well. I am definitely positive Anna will be delighted."

Popsie Reed agrees.

Popsie Reed starts carrying the collapsible bench again towards the door.

Marmee Rose goes back to her cooking. Her chicken stew is almost ready.

Popsie Reed glances at the willow tree. He sees Caspian and Anna sitting under the fading shade of the tree. The light of the sun is slowly disappearing.

"Hey kids! How do you like to have dinner with a view of the sunset? It's the best in town!" Popsie Reed hollers jokingly from across the street.

Caspian and Anna shout at the same time, "Great idea!" They stand and approach Popsie to give him a hand in fixing the outdoor bench.

Anna goes inside to check on Marmee Rose's cooking.

She thought that she is really blessed with such generous parents.

Anna comes out carrying plates and cutlery with Marmee Rose behind her. Marmee Rose slowly places down the steaming chicken stew.

Both Popsie Reed and Caspian sniff with a grin. That chicken stew really smells delicious.

So there they are the four of them seated to share a chicken stew dinner with a view of a beautiful sunset. Truly, Popsie Reed is right. It is the best kind of dinner in town.

While eating, Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose can't keep themselves from stealing glances at Caspian and Anna.

The two appears to be enjoying each other's company so much that they are oblivious that both Marmee and Popsie are in front of them.

Anna is recounting her school experiences to Caspian. She talks excitedly about the discoveries she learns in her Botany course and Caspian listens very intently, catching every detail Anna is narrating.

Popsie Reed winks secretively to Marmee Rose. The two starts to get up and tidy the bench.

"You two should enjoy the view. Marmee and I can handle this." Popsie Reed tells Anna and Caspian when both attempt to stand and help them clean up.

"Thank you, Popsie for the amazing food and view," Caspian replies with gratitude.

Anna gives an appreciative smile to her parents.

When Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose finally finish cleaning up, both excuse themselves and stay indoors.

Anna gives a long sigh. Caspian takes her hand and stays silent in that fashion.

"What is going on with you, Caspian? Why didn't you visit me for a week? Is something wrong?"

Anna floods Caspian with questions.

Caspian looks at Anna and replies,

"I have been busy in the valley. I'm sorry I made you worry. Things are a bit serious there at the moment."

"I wish I can stay here with you like this," Caspian continues, while staring at Anna.

"You are so lucky to have your Popsie and Marmee and this place. It is so peaceful here."

Caspian utters looking very gloomy.

Anna looks at Caspian in deep thought. She suddenly feels her concerns may not be as big as Caspian's with the kind of expression he has on his face right this moment.

"I wish I can be in your world all the time." Caspian whispers as if in lament. He gazes at the direction of the forest.

"What do you mean my world?" Anna clarifies meaningfully.

Caspian's words somehow convey some underlying meaning with it.

Chapter 11: Telling Secrets

Caspian stares intently at Anna for a long while. He seems to be deliberating on something.

Anna glares back with a questioning look, waiting for Caspian's response.

It feels like eons of time passed with both of them gazing at each other.

Caspian focuses on the dark skies now. The sun has finally set and the early evening seems to magically transform their surroundings into a fairy tale like scene.

Caspian resumes staring towards Anna again but finally saying, "I'm not really sure where to start Anna."

"We totally live in two different worlds you know," he adds.

Way to go Caspian, he thought to himself. You are not really making sense right now.

"What do you mean by that? Is it because you live faraway beyond the forest? Don't you think that is being too melodramatic?"

Anna disrupts his thoughts as if hearing them too.

Caspian moves closer to Anna then touches her pale cheeks.

Wow, she is really pretty! He gets distracted with his thoughts and what he has to say. Those green eyes are really distracting.

It seems she doesn't mind him touching her face.

Anna glares at him even more, still waiting for his explanation. She is starting to lose her patience.

"Anna, it's not just our living conditions that I'm referring to. I am not like your normal guy, not like the usual people around you." he continues to explain. However, he thinks his reasons are still unclear.

"Well, i know that. You're a lot mature than my schoolmates and the other kids in our neighbourhood. That is why I like you. That is why you're my special friend right?" Anna interrupts again.

"That's not what I mean again! But thank you for thinking of me that way." Caspian says with a bit of frustration. He is not frustrated with Anna, but with himself because he is having difficulty explaining things.

Caspian ponders for a moment then holds Anna's hands instead. He takes a deep breath and starts again,

"Anna, please listen well and let me do the talking first. When I am done, tell me what your reaction is, okay?"

Anna nods in agreement and notices the seriousness in Caspian's face. He is so handsome when he is all serious like that. She observes, as she blushes a bit.

"You have asked me a while ago what I mean by your world. We are really from different worlds. I am not from here. Yes I live in the valley but my world there is a lot different from what you imagine or what other people think they know about the valley."

Caspian glances at the willow tree, then to the trail and looks beyond the forest. He wishes he can show Anna everything. It might be easier that way.

"I am not an ordinary human being. Remember the first time you saw me under the willow tree? I was surprised that you were able to see me."

"From when we were young, I go to that same willow tree and watched you and your best friend Jo play. Both of you never saw me ever."

"We can conceal ourselves from human beings. But I don't really have any idea even now how you suddenly saw me on your sixteenth birthday. I was surprised too."

Caspian pauses then holds Anna's face again with both his hands.

Suddenly, like a veil is removed from Caspian's face, his brown eyes changed to a colour of green like Anna's and his skin as pale. But the greatest change is his pointy ears.

Anna stares at Caspian but her expression didn't change at all.

A few moments pass as Caspian waits for Anna's reaction.

It is Caspian who got surprised for Anna's unperturbed response.

"You know what Caspian? I have always seen how you really look like."

Anna confesses.

Caspian stares intently at Anna with bewilderment and he blurts out, "Wait, what? But how?"

So Anna has her own secrets too.

"I have always seen strange things since I was young. I have my fair share of weirdness to tell you."

"Maybe when you saw me and Jo when we were young, I was not totally able to see beyond your concealment. I was not aware of anything much but my friendship with Jo."

"But when I saw you on my birthday, I guess it might be because I was terribly lonely for missing Jo. I was looking for company. Therefore, I might have been searching that is why I saw you." Anna makes it sound logical that way.

"Of course you were looking somewhat strange and all, though that's fine with me because you were nice to me. But then, I never told anyone how you exactly look like. I figured you like to stay in disguise and also people might freak out too if I did describe you as how I really see you."

Caspian is totally speechless with this revelation from Anna's part. He always thought that if Anna sees how he truly looks like, she will stay away from him. She will freak out and hide.

"I know you're some kind of a fairy," Anna adds.

"Earth Fairy," Caspian validates calmly.

"So, are you all Earth Fairies in the valley? Is that why you dress up that way? When can you take me there so I can see your land?"

Anna asks excitedly.

"It's a little more complicated than that. There are also the Fire Fairies, Water Fairies and Air Fairies. We are protectors of nature."

"I cannot bring you to my land because you cannot enter there. But I can show you the valley, which most of your people know about. Not beyond that."

Caspian feels grateful he can talk openly to Anna about his world now.

"Wait, I actually have a lot of questions for you but I have to tell you something too. I know my secret is not as strange as yours but I just like to share to you."

Anna says looking serious.

She let's go of Caspian's hands and stands facing towards the forest. Now she is the one trying to think of the exact words to say.

"What's wrong Anna?" Caspian stands too, as he places his arm on Anna's shoulders.

"Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose are not my real parents. I was left at their doorstep when I was still a baby. They have no idea who my real parents are and where I came from."

Anna blurts out hurriedly in a whisper.

Restating these facts pains her heart once more. She feels like crying again.

"Anna, I'm so sorry to hear that. What do you plan to do now? Will you look for them? I mean will you look for your family?"

Caspian asks, full of concern.

"Honestly, I'm really not sure what to do. It's been sixteen years now. If my family wanted me back, they would have looked for me by now right? But no one ever came for me."

“I feel incomplete but I'm very lucky to have Popsie and Marmee. I have decided that I would just let it go for now. I don't have much of a choice anyway. Besides, I haven't the slightest idea where to start looking. They might even be dead or moved far, far from here."

Anna concludes.

She looks up and sees the bright stars. That gives her something to smile about.

"Well, can we now go inside? I have had enough of this telling secrets part.”

“Let’s ask Marmee and Popsie if we can take a little stroll at the trail. There are so many stars out tonight. Pretty good time to see the night sky."

Anna says changing the topic.

She cheerfully pulls Caspian by the hand towards the house.

"Come inside!"

Anna repeats.

"Anna, there's a slight problem..."

Caspian pauses a bit panicked.

"I can't go inside your house!" he reveals, staying glued to where he is standing.

Anna stares at Caspian with a confused expression.

“What is this about now?” she exclaims with annoyance.

Chapter 12: The Magic of Trust

"How did you know you can't go inside?"

Anna asks Caspian with disbelief. She is about to open the blue door but turns to face Caspian instead.

"I just know. Please trust me, I tried!"

Caspian insists.

Anna gives him an incredulous look.

“Explain! Now!” She demanded.

"Remember the day we had a picnic under the willow tree? I got here early then I came over your house to check if you're home when I didn't see you at our tree. I figured you might have gotten tide up at school so I got curious." Caspian confesses.

"Nobody was around so I thought I'd take a look inside," he continues softly voice with a sorry expression.

"What? Of course you can't go inside... it's locked!" Anna says exasperatedly.

"No, locks don't matter to us." Caspian replies with surety.

"Oh, okay so that's what you get for trying to sneak into our house! That's what happens to normal people you know? They can’t get in.”

“That is considered trespassing for human beings like us. It's a good thing Popsie Reed was never crazy on security alarms. You could have caused a commotion in the whole neighbourhood."

Anna sounds amused.

"I don't have any explanation also why I can't go in but when you invited me to go inside your house after our picnic, I thought I will be able to go in but it's like there's an invisible aura preventing me to step into your house."

Caspian wonders.

"I had the same feeling also when I had breakfast with you, Popsie and Marmee."

"Even now, I can still sense that barrier. It’s stopping me from moving close to your door…"

Caspian remains puzzled.

"You're really serious huh?"

Anna says to Caspian with a little frown.

What could that mean? Anna thinks.

"That's really strange then...well alright, so you just have to wait for me here. We can figure that out later on."

"What about through the windows?" Anna asks jokingly.

Caspian gives her a grimace.

"Okay…okay…I'm going in now…"

"I will just tell Popsie and Marmee that we're taking a walk for a while."

Anna decides as she quickly walks through the blue door waving at Caspian mockingly.

Anna seems to be enjoying this. Caspian thought to himself.

Caspian looks up to admire the bright stars. He is still pondering on possible reasons why he can't enter.

It's not like he was a vampire who needs to be invited to certain dwellings before he can enter that particular place. Wait… is that true or just some misleading facts about the night creatures?

Caspian sighs for thinking such ridiculous thoughts.

Anna comes out and breaks Caspian's musing.

"That was quick..." Caspian says.

"Are you ready to go now? Have you come up with a possible theory to explain why you can't come in?"

"I think the best reason for me is so you will not sneak up on me when I'm asleep!"

Anna teases Caspian.

Caspian frowns, not understanding the humor on Anna's statement.

"Oh, right, you don't know Twilight... Edward and Bella?" Anna tries explaining.

Caspian continues to frown.

"Oh, sorry… It's just a story about a human girl and a vampire who fell in love."

"It's about a night creature?" Caspian inquires. That one, he understands.

"So, you know about vampires?" Anna asks as she holds on to Caspian's arm.

"Of course I do! Among all other creatures there is."

Caspian replies as they both cross the street, pass the willow then to the trail.

It is a clear night with all the stars shining brilliantly in the night skies. It really gives the impression of an enchanted evening...or is it just because of how these two beings are projecting their emotions?

"Which creatures exist among the fairy tales Jo and I have read? Are Vampires, Werewolves, Dwarfs, Hobbits living amongst us? Wait, is Gandalf for real?"

Anna asks incessantly.

"Who is Gandalf?"

Caspian interrupts Anna.

"Okay, you haven't heard about him, so he is fictional. He is a wizard."

Anna answers.

They are now a little bit into the forest now.

"A wizard?" Caspian repeats.

"Yes…someone with great magical powers." Anna explains.

Caspian stops walking.

"A being with magical powers?" he asks with interest.

"Yes, but he is a good wizard. Saruman is the evil one."

Anna narrates excitedly, but noticing Caspian suddenly halts.

"What? So, wizards are real too?" Have you met one?"

Anna faces Caspian.

They are now face-to-face. The stars illuminate their pale silhouette. The trees around them dim the light.

"In our realm, there are powerful fairies too. There are those whom you refer to as this Gandalf. They are the good ones who use their magical powers to protect nature and all that dwells in this world."

"But there are also the dark fairies. The most powerful and dark fairy I am referring to is named Alirion. He was the one who caused the terrible fire in the valley. He has killed some of our people."

"The elders were able to trap Alirion in a secret place. Our people avoid killing anyone because it is in our nature to give life and not end it."

"He miraculously got away just a week ago after so many years of banishment. We have yet to find out how he managed to escape his prison."

Caspian explains to Anna with strong emotions.

Anna is listening to every word that Caspian utters, sensing the turmoil in his emotions.

Both of them realize that they are standing very close to each other already. Their proximity allows them comfort for the troubled feelings brought about by what Caspian has revealed about his world.

Caspian embraces Anna gently. He is drawn to her and the warmth that seems to radiate from her amidst the darkness around them and the heavy feeling in his heart. It is like a ray of sunshine though it was night.

Anna allows herself to stay in Caspian's embrace. She has this strange feeling that whatever Caspian said is something very important to her too. She empathizes with him.

After a while, Caspian pinches Anna's cheeks and says,

"Thank you for listening to me. I thought that when you hear the truth about who I am, you will not like to see me anymore."

"Why would I do that? I think when I finally started seeing you, there is no way I can 'unsee' you ever again."

Anna tries to lighten up the mood.

"Here you go again with your jokes, I'm serious. I never like to lose you as my special friend, ever. You mean so much to me."

Caspian says as he traces circles on Anna's palm.

"But I mean what I said. I can never let you go away or I turn away from you. What we have is something special. And you know what? The moment I saw you, I believe that means I trust you instantly considering how different your appearance is. I think that is the magic of trust."

Anna concludes.

"If you say so…."

Caspian agrees.

Hearing those words from Anna, he feels much more relieved now.

"I think we better head back to your house. Your Popsie and Marmee might get worried. It's getting late."

Caspian reminds Anna.

Anna and Caspian heads back to where they came from still holding on to each other's hands.

Both are silently contemplating on all the things they have talked about. Both of them are feeling much closer to each other.

Chapter 13: A Day Off

Anna stares at the trail deep in thought. She woke up very early this morning, much earlier than Popsie Reed. No one wakes earlier than him. But this morning is different.

Anna feels so restless, even her locket keeps glowing endlessly. She awoke from a dream or should she say a nightmare.

In her dream, there was a terrible blanket or cloth that was suffocating her. She heard voices whispering but she couldn't recall by now what she heard in her dream. All she can remember was the feeling of not wanting to be left behind.

Does the dream have some kind of truth in it? Or is it just her emotions that created such a bizarre nightmare? Anna keeps pondering on this. She just wishes she can remember the whole dream altogether. It might give her a clue on how to understand it.

Marmee Rose and Popsie Reed rushed to her room upon hearing her moaning in her sleep with her locket sending green streaks of light from her bedroom. The scene appears to be some kind of distress call from Anna for her parents to help her immediately. It was pretty much too symbolic for their impression. Both got so worried that they ended up staying awake. They were also bothered by the disturbing dream.

So now, the good part about this whole incident is that Popsie Reed was able to convince Marmee Rose to take a little jog and stroll at the trail with him. However Marmee Rose only agrees after Anna assured them several times that she was fine and was just having a bad dream.

Now she is sitting on one of the branches of the willow tree, thinking very hard on what her dream meant. She feels a bit lazy too to join her parents or maybe too tired from lack of sleep.

The sun has already risen and still Anna didn't move even an inch from her position.

Suddenly, Anna hears someone approaching. She glances at the trail anticipating to see her Popsie and Marmee back but she is mistaken.

Caspian is already looking at her up the willow tree with a big smile on his face.

"Good morning Anna! I saw Popsie and Marmee in the forest trail. They told me where you will be." Caspian tells Anna as he climbs effortlessly up the branches of the willow tree then sits beside her without making any sound at all.

Ever since Caspian has revealed his true identity to Anna, rather, Anna admitting that she knew him to be a Fairy; he has never made any efforts to conceal his abilities from her. It makes him at ease to be his self when he is with her.

Anna feels contented that Caspian is behaving naturally around her. She appreciates his honesty regarding his true self. That makes her feel she belongs, she is trustworthy.

Caspian automatically holds Anna's hand, which makes her blush a bit. She can never get used to that gesture. It makes her heart skip a beat every time Caspian does that.

"I thought you will be with your Popsie and Marmee when I saw them in the forest?" Caspian inquires, staring at Anna.

He expects Anna not to miss spending quality time with her parents. Also, he knows that Anna loves jogging with her Popsie Reed in the mornings. Having Marmee to join them is a bonus.

"I feel off today. I woke up so early," Anna reasons.

"Well, I was awoken by my nightmare and couldn't get back to sleep. That's why Marmee and Popsie were also up early." she corrects herself.

"What nightmare?" Caspian asks with a concerned tone.

Anna starts narrating her nightmare to Caspian. He tells him the same things as what she told her parents. Everything she can recall, which is not much. Caspian listens intently trying to analyze what she is saying.

"I am not really sure if it has to do with learning about my past, which is so mysterious for me. This bizarre nightmare must be just because of my over thinking about it." Anna rationalizes.

"It's okay. Don't dwell too much on it." Caspian suggest calmly and puts his arm on Anna's shoulders.

Caspian stays silent, giving Anna her time to ponder peacefully as well. He absentmindedly caresses her shoulders with a gentle rubbing motion as a gesture to make her feel that everything will be okay. She is safe with him no matter what.

He does not care about Anna's past. Anna will always be Anna for him. Her past is of little concern to him. His feelings for Anna are absolutely stronger than before. He cares for her more and more in each passing day. He wishes her to be okay always.

They stay that way for a while on top of the willow tree.

"So why are you here early?" Anna suddenly asks, turning her face towards Caspian. She realizes their faces where too close...both of them blush.

Caspian takes a while to respond. He is fascinated by Anna's green eyes. "umm, well, I was patrolling in the forest when, umm, I, umm, saw your Popsie and Marmee and they told me you were up, I mean awake and up here...and I suddenly get this strange feeling to check on you," he admits, stuttering a bit.

Anna smiles at him then asks, "Patrolling? I thought you're into growing stuff and all. Are you some kind of soldier now?"

"Earth fairies are responsible for nurturing the land but we also need to protect our kind. We have rangers. They are our fighters and protectors. They have knowledge in combat and weaponry." Caspian explains excitedly.

"Ever since I was young, I have always wanted to join the rangers. I have heard about the legendary rangers like Aldar, the wise, and Marion, the courageous..." Caspian suddenly stops and seem to be thinking about something.

"Even about the feisty ranger named Melandra is known by all fairies. They are the bravest of them all. They were not scared to fight the dark fairy Alirion. They helped in capturing this dark fairy."

"However, Alirion used an evil spell that left Aldar and Melandra unconscious, like in a deep sleeping spell. Only Alirion can undo the spell. But he has to willingly do it. Both rangers were kept in a safe place where Alirion cannot reach them."

"The elders say that both rangers are keeping a very important secret that is why Alirion didn't kill them. He will stop at nothing to get to them. But Marion, he did not spare. He killed him on the spot for protecting the King." He seems so saddened by this part of his story.

"That's why rangers have been patrolling everywhere since the dark fairy escaped. I joined the rangers to help protect our realm, and yours too. With this dark fairy on the loose, there's no telling what he will do to your people too. If he has no qualms killing his own kind, your people are an easier target for him." Caspian stops, looking towards the trail.

Anna stares in the same direction and after a while, her Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose appears hand-in-hand laughing.

Anna can't help but admire her parents' love for each other. It shows in their every gesture and radiates to others, to her. No wonder she grew up feeling loved despite of her being abandoned by her own.

"Hey kids! Let's go out for a bite! It will be my treat!" Popsie hollers to them looking up the willow tree at the same time.

"Where are we headed?" Anna hollers back.

"Let's go to town. Let's try the breakfast buffet at Sally's." It is Marmee Rose who answers excitedly.

Caspian stands and helps Anna too. After a while both reach Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose on the ground.

Popsie Reed goes in the house and comes out jingling the keys to his blue pick-up truck.

"You're coming with us right?" Anna asks Caspian as she jumps at the open back of the pick-up truck.

"Why wouldn't I join you guys? Let's take a day off from these worries for now." Caspian replies, sitting soundlessly at the back beside Anna.

The blue pick-up truck speeds away along the street on a very bright day towards town. It seems just a fine ordinary day to have a regular brunch at Sally's.

Chapter 14: Extra Ordinary Day

Sally's is a bit crowded this morning. It seems like most of the people in town decided to have brunch today than exactly coming for breakfast time.

Sally's is a little Diner that is originally a minimart. Mr and Mrs Goodman runs the minimart way back but when both passed away, their children decided to turn it into a Diner.

Sally's, named after Mrs Goodman, is practically located beside the only gas station in town. Apparently the Goodman twins (Harry and Larry) are more interested with cooking than retailing.

The place is packed with people who know each other since Bellmont is just a small town. Since everybody is familiar with each other, Sally's look as if a small town gathering event is taking place right now than just some random people who coincidentally decided to eat there at the same time.

Though the place is extra-filled with people, no one apparently mind the crowd. They all enjoy the loud atmosphere of the Diner.

The place is bustling with excited chattering when Anna, Caspian, Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose walk in for their spur of the moment plan to grab a bite.

"Hey there Reed!" Harry Goodman greets them as he leads them to an empty table for four at the corner of Sally's.

"It's good to see you this morning. It's nice knowing that Larry's cooking is much appreciated around here." Harry laughs at his own joke.

"Hi Harry!" Popsie Reed shakes Harry's free hand, while the other one takes the menu.

"What's your special this morning?" Marmee Rose inquires, smiling at Harry too.

"Good morning Rose. Try Larry's Rosemary Chicken. He has been bugging me to put that in our regular menu. So by popular demand it's on our specials menu now. I guess he was right after all. It's a big hit! My brother really knows about good cooking. Maybe I'm the only one too skeptical about it." Larry replies proudly.

"I am sure Larry knows what he is doing. You're doing a pretty good job too. Mama Sally would be proud of you two." Popsie Reed says cheerfully.

Harry gives them a warm smile upon Reed's mention of his mother. He mostly does the managing of the Diner while Larry sticks to the kitchen. It makes the twins well-coordinated that way. So far, the Diner is a success. The twins have made the right decision after all.

Harry stayed single while his twin Larry was married to Beverly for fifteen years now. Their son Roger is the same age as Anna and goes to the same school.

Roger is helping out today. Apparently, Sally's is really full this morning.

"I think I will try the Rosemary Chicken." Caspian decides.

"I will have that one too please!" Anna blurts out.

"Okay, Popsie and I will have the breakfast buffet" Marmee Rose says as she stands. Popsie Reed leads the way to the packed buffet table.

"Are you sure you're okay being here?" Anna whispers a bit conscious, to Caspian when they are alone at their table.

"Why shouldn't it be? I told you I will try to set aside worries today. I would like to spend some extraordinary day with you. Relax Anna." Caspian responds with a smile.

A blonde boy with blue eyes approaches their table carrying a tray with four mugs of hot water.

"Hi, there Anna! It's nice to see you here at Sally's. I haven't seen you around lately." The boy says with a warm smile while looking at Anna.

Caspian suddenly frowns when he sees the blonde boy. He ignores him and stares at Anna instead, observing her reaction to the blonde boy.

"Hi Roger! I'm with my Mom and Dad. By the way, this is Caspian." Anna replies to the blonde boy but glances at Caspian as she introduces him to Roger.

"It is nice to meet you, Caspian! I'll be back for your orders." Roger says with a smile, not noticing the dagger looks Caspian is sending his way. He gives the impression of seeing a target at the back of Roger's head.

Anna nudges Caspian's elbow and says, "Hey, what are you doing? He's a school mate of mine," she explains.

Caspian's face relaxes a bit, "I felt weird when he was smiling at you like that." He seems confused.

"Are you jealous?" Anna starts teasing him.

"Oh, okay, if that is the word for it, yes I am!" Caspian admits shamelessly.

"Don't be like that, you silly!" Anna holds Caspian's hand to calm him down.

Soon Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose return carrying their plate full of assortment of dishes from the buffet.

"You should try the buffet Caspian! It's half the price! No wonder Sally's is packed today!" Popsie Reed says excitedly.

Both Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose start eating. Caspian stares at their plates. The food looks truly delicious.

Roger comes back with two plates of Rosemary Chicken saying, "enjoy your meal. See you around Anna!" then turns around with a wave.

"That boy of Larry has grown to be responsible. It's good that he is helping out his old man here." Marmee Rose narrates.

Caspian looks glum for a second. Anna pinches his elbow and he smiles immediately. Both start eating too. They all focus on their food for now as the chattering of people continues in their background.

Caspian finishes first and stares at Anna and her parents. He smiles again and says, "Thank you for always letting me join you every time I'm with Anna. I really appreciate spending time with you because you make me feel at home."

"You're welcome kid! Anyone special to Anna is special to us too," Popsie Reed replies.

"Now, who wants coffee?" Popsie Reed asks.

"Let's try that." Caspian immediately replies excitedly.

"Anna, can we be the one to get them?" He asks with anticipation.

"Okay kids, you do that. I will have a black coffee." Popsie Reed turns to Marmee.

"What about you Rose?" Popsie asks as he caresses Marmee Rose's free hand on the table.

"I will just have coffee with a little milk and sugar." Marmee Rose replies.

Anna and Caspian stand to get coffee for the four of them at the coffee machine. They line up for a while because there's a queue at the coffee machine. It seems a lot are in need of caffeine today.

Caspian keeps staring around him with a smile and a look of wonder in his eyes. He is fascinated with everything going on at Sally's.

"I love this extraordinary day!" blurts out Caspian on their way back to their table. For him, everything happening there is extraordinary but ironically, just trivial things for others.

Anna can't help but smile at Caspian. She is happy that he gets to do ordinary things with her though she knows they have different worlds.

After their conversation early this morning and finding out how seriously troubled Caspian is regarding what's going on in his realm, she is thankful that he gets a little break from all of it. Now, Anna can't help but wonder about Caspian's world too after he spends time with her in her world.

Caspian notices the frown on Anna's face and asks her in a whisper, "What's wrong?" to avoid Marmee Rose and Popsie Reed from hearing.

Marmee Rose and Popsie Reed are busy chatting with some other people at the table near them. They don't notice anything.

"Now I'm wondering about your world." Anna whispers back to Caspian.

Caspian is about to reply but they suddenly hear a loud explosion. It sounds like it came from the valley. Caspian quickly stands.

"Sorry, but I have to go. Thank you for a wonderful morning!" Caspian excuses himself politely.

"Do you need a ride, son?" Popsie Reed offers with concern on his face.

"It's alright Popsie. Marmee, I have to go. Anna, I will talk to you later." Caspian glances at Anna apologetically. Then he exits the Diner as fast as he can manage.

Everyone in the Diner heard the explosion. Now the townspeople start chatting loudly to each other that they did not notice Caspian's sudden departure.

"What's going on in the valley? I hope Caspian will be okay." Anna exclaims without asking anyone in particular.

Chapter 15: The Valley

Caspian cannot recall how he got to the valley that quick. He is just so relieved that Popsie Reed did not insist on driving him there all the way from town. If he did, Caspian might have taken longer to reach their place. At the same time, it will be harder to arrive there with someone not knowing the state of things upon their arrival.

Popsie Reed is a very perceptive person so he has to have a sound explanation. His mind is already imagining worse-case scenarios when he heard the explosion. He needs to be exactly sure first what really happened.

Well, it could have been a perfect day for Caspian, having spent it early with Anna. He is sorry to leave her and her parents so suddenly but his duty as a ranger is very important, most especially now that the dark fairy has escaped. He is just thankful that he gets to have some time with Anna once in a while. That is not much to ask for.

"Could this be his doing?" Caspian whispers to himself. He shakes his head to discontinue his thoughts getting darker by the second. He might not have met this Dark fairy personally but the stories of the other fairies give the impression that he is ruthless.

The valley is a long distance away from town if you walk. For Caspian, it is just a magic away. As he reaches his destination, he gives a sigh of relief. He is expecting the fairies in panic or worse, hurt.

In the contrary, the place seems fine, though his people are all over the place. A good number of his fellow rangers are busy checking out the small houses that are spread in the valley.

These houses serve as a facade for human settlements for their farm trading. These are the only fixtures visible to the human eyes. Their realm is camouflaged safe from the scrutiny of the humans.

"What happened here Bran?" Caspian blurts out upon his arrival.

Bran is the first ranger he sees.

"I heard an explosion!" he adds.

"We are not sure yet," Bran replies.

"The others are inspecting every possible cause that triggered the explosion. Where were you?" Bran asks curiously.

"Sorry, I was in town. I was with my friend and her family."

“They invited me to have breakfast there... I got curious." Caspian explains.

"What kind of friend? I human friend you mean?"

Bran teasingly asks with a bit of intrigue.

"Yes, I have been seeing her for a while now...she knows who I really am." Caspian says further.

"Careful, Caspian, you are aware that we are not supposed to reveal our kind easily?" Bran reminds him.

Bran joined the rangers at the same time as Caspian. They train together and so he is very casual with him. He might not be one of the most skilled rangers but he is very trustworthy. Caspian doesn't mind Bran's reminders.

Both Caspian and Bran join the other rangers assembling in the open field. The other rangers finally finished their search in the houses. By the looks of disappointment on their faces, they did not find any clue there.

"The explosion seems to be just a ruse. There's no trace of anything damaged or ruined here. Maybe who made that explosion aims to distract us from our search for the dark fairy."

"Or better yet... let's check on Aldar and Melandra." Aramir concludes.

Aramir stands as their head ranger ever since the demise of Marion. Aldar and Melandra are second in command but with their present condition, it is impossible to ask for their guidance on the matter.

Aramir is the senior ranger among them but as a leader, he is very impulsive in his decisions. This is one of such perfect examples.

"Wait, Aramir! If your theories are right, isn't it safer not to go to where Aldar and Melandra are kept?"

"Someone might be watching us right now. It could even be the Dark fairy toying with us. We don't want to accidentally reveal their location. The dark fairy will definitely do all he can to get to them. This might be one of his tricks." Caspian explains with conviction.

All the other rangers nod silently in unison. They stare at Aramir waiting for his decision.

"Let us head back to our realm instead and report to our Queen and King. Well, there is not much to report anyway. I think we need to head back. But some of you must stay behind here to keep watch if anything else seems out of the ordinary." Aramir decides.

"Caspian, take the lead here with five of our fellow rangers. Be alert. Inform me directly if you see anything. Bran, Alcon, Jeera, Cleo and Orin, stay here with Caspian. Be vigilant!"

The rangers mentioned at the moment bow politely to Aramir as he turns towards the direction of their realm. The rest of the other rangers follow.

"Good thinking Caspian! Aramir sometimes gets overly reactionary," comments the petite fairy with golden brown hair.

"I thought Aramir will scold you for disappearing somewhere again." Cleo adds jokingly.

"Thanks Cleo. It just cross my mind since you did not find anything out of place. As for my absence early this morning, I just had to be somewhere for a while." Caspian explains.

"You are probably right that the Dark fairy is just trying to trick us into revealing where Aldar and Melandra are located. It is not the first time that he used the valley as a distraction for his bigger plan." Jeera, the silver-haired one says.

"It might not just be the Dark fairy. Remember, we still have not solved the mystery on how he escaped his prison. I think that should be taken seriously." Alcon reminds them. He is the tallest among the rangers.

"So, someone must have helped him. Could there be a traitor among us?" blurts out the dark brown-haired one named Orin.

"So many speculations…The Dark fairy might still have a few followers around. Let's just keep our eyes open." Bran reminds them.

"Yes, let's keep patrolling the valley for now. But let's stay in pairs for precaution. Jeera and Orin you can patrol together. Alcon stay with Bran. Cleo let's look around again near the forest." Caspian instructs them.

The rangers start to spread out, on their guard. However, they all seem to agree that nothing else will happen now.

"Be ready with your glamour. The people from the town might come and inspect too. They heard the explosion even from there. I think some of them might be curious to find out and see with their own eyes what really happened." Caspian adds.

All the fairy farmers come out from the settlement houses to resume their work in the field. These fairies are dressed in brown trousers like human farmers. They are the front liners who trade with the human visitors whenever they hold the vegetable market in the valley. This way, the human population stays unaware of the fairies' existence.

Supernatural beings live with the human population in secrecy. So far, the werewolves are more capable of co-existing with humans for they take human forms. But here in the town of Bellmont, where the population is small, they can draw attention to themselves as easily. Werewolves move with their packs. So, too many werewolves might be too obviously recognized. That is why they stay away from this area.

Oftentimes, it is better that way. Knowing that fairy, witches, vampires, werewolves and other such beings exist is harder to process than just considering them as legends or myths.

Most especially right now, a dark fairy running amok is a very difficult matter to control. It will cause such panic and pandemonium if word gets out to the human kind.

So, the valley exists as a bridge between the human world and the fairy realm. However, this kind of bridge is not a passable one for the humans...for now.

The fairies can be considered as the guardians of this bridge through the supernatural realm.

Chapter 16: Helping One Another

Shortly after Aramir left with the rest of the rangers for their realm to consult with their Queen and King, the rangers have inspected every area of the valley thoroughly.

Caspian and his companions are just staying around for the possibility of the townspeople's arrival any time soon.

True enough, some of the people from the town arrive with food, some blankets, jugs of water, first aid kits and all sorts of things needed for disasters and calamities.

The rangers are able to foresee this so they are prepared with their glamour. They expect people to come and look around but what they do not expect is for these people to bring so many supplies like food, water and all sorts of other things for them.

Popsie Reed, along with some the people from Sally's Diner, rush to help the settlers in the valley with the assumption that something bad really happened after such a loud explosion.

The new arrivals are dumbfounded upon seeing the farmers working on the fields just as naturally as any day in the valley. There is no sign of any disturbance or disaster.

Caspian, and the other five rangers left by Aramir, approach Popsie Reed and his companions immediately but a bit warily.

"Popsie Reed, thank you for coming. Apparently, the explosion we heard was caused by one of the heaters in the storage greenhouses. Luckily, it was attended to immediately by the other farmers and did not cause any damage except for the storage house. We have a spare heater standing by so everything is back to normal even before I got back here." Caspian explains convincingly.

Caspian is quick enough to formulate a plausible story so the townspeople will not be suspicious of anything else. He hates inventing stories and lying most especially to Popsie Reed but he has no other choice. Not having a convincing explanation will make the humans wonder. After all, such a loud explosion can be really worrisome if it really caused damages in the valley.

"We came as soon as we were able to put together some supplies that we thought you might need. Thank goodness it was handled quickly. It would have been disastrous if a fire broke." exclaims Harry, the Diner owner. He is unloading two crates of sandwiches at the backseat of his pick-up, as well as two jugs of water.

"My twin Larry cannot leave the Diner but he prepared these sandwiches. We hope we can make more but we thought we need to get here quickly to do what we can to help." Harry adds.

"Wow, nice sandwiches, sir! I'm Cleo by the way." the petite ranger says as she help Harry carry the crates of sandwiches.

Harry cannot help but be amaze how a tiny young lady can carry those crates quite so easily. Cleo careful puts down the crates on the nearby work bench. Afterwards, she lifts the other jug of water carried by Harry effortlessly.

"Please help yourselves with the sandwiches. They are freshly prepared by my dad." utters the blonde boy coming out of the same pick up with boxes of blankets.

"My name is Roger." he continues, as he also stares in wonder at Jeera too.

"I remember you." Caspian interrupts, trying so hard to keep a friendly smile on his face. "You're Anna's friend at the Diner." he confirms meaningfully.

"Thank you for all these things you have brought for our people." says the tall ranger named Alcon.

"But we feel this is too much of us to ask from you." Alcon finishes.

"No, no, don't worry about it. We are neighbours still, however the distance. Honestly, we all feel that helping one another is the best action." Popsie responds reassuringly.

"We feel sort of guilty we were not able to respond to that the tragic fire a long time ago here in the valley is something we are also regretful about. It happened so fast in the night. We were all asleep and we were not able to help at all."

"We presume your people were also caught off guard too then. So this is our way of making amends for that." Popsie Reed admits sadly.

"Please do not feel obligated about the fire here in the valley. It happened a long time ago and it was our own negligence that led to that tragedy. I am Jeera." inserts the ranger with the silver hair but glamour herself into a brunette. Her silver hair will be too conspicuous for a farmer.

"Well, at least today it turned out differently. We are more than happy to see the valley returning to its abundant state." Popsie Reed comments cheerfully.

"We have always looked forward to the market fair every year. The Valley grows a variety of rare plants and produce that we cannot ignore what happened in the past." Popsie Reed admits.

"The lessons of the past make our people more wary to repeat the same mistakes." Jeera says more meaningfully than what she has said.

The rest of the townspeople pile all the assortment of supplies they have all brought with them. Then afterwards, they start to bid their farewells.

"Caspian, please do not hesitate to come to me for anything else we might be able to help everyone here with, okay?"

Popsie Reed reminds him, as he gives Caspian a pat on the back.

“Thank you so much for all your help.” Caspian answers with sincerity.

He walks with Popsie Reed to his pick up truck and stands back with the other rangers and the farmers to watch the vehicles leave.

Caspian continues to stare with a dark expression on his face, at the direction from where their visitors have disappeared from.

"Hey, Caspian, why do you have the dark look? Is anything wrong?" Bran inquires to his friend with a concerned tone.

"Are you thinking about something in connection to the explosion this morning? Is it the Dark fairy?" he further interrogates, since Caspian has not offered any explanation yet.

"It's much worse than that. It's that blonde boy a while ago. He's a friend of Anna from school. I feel he likes Anna." Caspian finally replies with a sour face.

"The blonde boy is good-looking!" Cleo interjects playfully.

"His sandwiches are delicious too!"

The other rangers start to laugh out loud, making Caspian frown even more.

"Come on man, he's no match for you!"

Bran tells him reassuringly.

"Popsie likes you a lot!" he teases.

Caspian laughs with the other rangers.

"It is nice to know that the people in town are willing to help us out, for now. But what if they discover that someone among us can bring harm to their kind?"

Jeera states a valid point calmly but all of them feel the weight of this heavy burden on the fairy folks.

"That is why we must be more relentless in finding the Dark Fairy more than ever. We have to find him before he starts revealing our kind to the humans for all his wicked actions, like the explosion this morning." Orin says.

"I think our patrolling here is done for now. Let us return to our realm and find out what our Queen and King decide as a plan of action." Caspian concludes.

The six rangers add a few more enchantments in the valley for the security of the farming fairies.

Each one of them hopes that this time, the Dark fairy and his schemes will be ended soon.

They head for the enchanted mist towards the bridge.

Chapter 17: The Green Haven

Crossing the enchanted part of the realm is where the gate to Green Haven lies. If one looks back towards the valley, the fields are still visible but will appear like a thin layer of fog is separating it from the Haven. This is the enchanted mist. It conceals the realm of the Earth fairies beyond the valley.

There is a bridge that they crossed to get to the Green Haven.

The Green Haven is where the Earth fairies dwell. A variety of trees can be seen all around; willows, oaks, elms and elders.

The haven may seem to appear plainly like an ordinary forest but these trees are fairy houses.

Caspian and the rest of the rangers from the valley walk wearily towards the Elder tree, which is the abode of their Queen and King. It stands at the centre of all the different trees in the haven.

They head straight there to let their Queen know of their arrival, as well as to report all the events of the day. Aramir surely has already made known the earlier events of the day. Now, it is their duty to give them the rest of the details, especially the arrival of the humans bringing all sorts of help.

The dwellings of the Earth fairies stay close to the basic qualities of earthen habitats. Leaves and flowers fill the surroundings as they enter the halls of the Queen and King. The simplicity of the place may lack the usual majestic appeal for Kings and Queens but the Earth Haven still exudes grandeur in the fairy sense.

The Earth fairies feel closer to nature in dwellings made of leaves, flowers and other plants.

The rangers bow with reverence to their Queen and King, seated on wooden thrones decorated with an assortment of colourful flowers.

"Greetings, Queen Alina, King Merlion. We came straight here from our patrolling in the valley. However, we made sure first that our fellow Earth fairies farming there are protected by additional enchantments before we left."

"As expected, some of the humans arrived. They did not come just out of curiosity on what the loud explosion is about but also to bring food, medicine and other supplies for our people there. They are genuinely concerned with our people there." Jeera narrates carefully.

"Good tidings Jeera, Cleo, Orin, Bran, Alcon and Caspian." Queen Alina replies, acknowledging all the rangers who arrived. The King merely nods and stares at them with his piercing green eyes.

Tranquility generates in the Queen's aura. Queen Alina's expression is a solemn one. Her face is as pale as the rest of her people but has an air of elegance and beauty incomparable to anyone in her realm. King Merlion, beside her, is a handsome counterpart for his Queen and exudes a sense of strength and power. Both appear young, like all the rest of the fairy folk but everyone in the Green Haven respects them for their wisdom and compassion.

Aramir stands beside King Merlion's throne with his head bowed in fealty. The rest of the other rangers stand side by side at the right side of the hall, all in their warrior's stance dressed in brown. They are the protectors of the Green Haven and the surrounding towns in the human world.

On the left side, the rest of the Earth fairies stand wearing green of different shades. These are the fairies who nurture the flowers and every plant in the realm and beyond.

Everyone in the hall remains silent, awaiting their Queen and King to address them. Each one is aware of the gravity of their present situation.

The unexplained escape of the Dark Fairy and the explosion early in the morning only proves that the Dark Fairy can toy with them anytime he likes.

The fairy folk's fear of Alirion, the one they refer to as the Dark Fairy, is not irrational. He is not just a fairy but the greatest Fire Fairy that ever lived.

The memory of the havoc of the fire he unleashed, which burned the valley so many years ago has left such a great pain in the hearts of most fairies, especially the Earth Fairies because of their innate caring for nature.

The death of Marion, their formidable ranger, in the hands of Alirion, added to their unforgettable sorrow. The fairies have seen how skilled Marion is, but he was no match for the Dark Fairy.

When Queen Alina stands from her throne she immediately gets their attention. The fairies snap out from their dark reverie of the past. All of them stare at their Queen.

"My people, I am saddened by the news that I have just learned from our neighbouring Water Fairies." the Queen pauses to make sure that everybody heard her.

"The swiftest messenger of the Water Fairies came here before Jeera and our other rangers came back from the valley."

"The Water fairy has confirmed that the Dark Fairy Alirion has crossed the Blue Haven and returned to the Orange Haven to claim leadership of the Fire Fairies." the queen stops unable to control her sadness.

Instantly, King Merlion approaches his Queen and guides her back to her throne. He remains standing and says, "The Fire Fairies remained our allies after the tragic events in the valley years ago."

"They have denounced Alirion then and handed to us the fanatics who were helping Alirion at that time. If the Dark Fairy is truly in the Orange Haven, he might have forced the Fire Fairies into submission. He must have other allies now."

"My King, like what I have suggested earlier, we must send envoys to the Orange Haven to see for ourselves what is presently happening there." Aramir interrupts politely.

"Aramir, i know we have to do something but we must coordinate with the other Fairy Realms too. This issue is not just about the Fire Fairies. Whatever action we take will affect the other Fairy Realms."

"Your Queen and I have already sent the messenger of the Water Fairies to the White Havens to inform the Air Fairies that our envoys will join together to device a plan before heading to the Orange Haven."

"The realms of the Air Fairies and the Water Fairies must coordinate with our realm too so we can have a strong chance of defeating the Dark Fairy once and for all." King Merlion announces with conviction.

"Now, we are only waiting for the envoys of the Air and Water Fairies to arrive." Queen Alina speaks again.

"For now, please take a bit of rest, rangers. You need your strength for the battle ahead of us." she says with determination.

Queen Alina and King Merlion stands. All the other fairies bow, acknowledging the departure of their Queen and King from the hall.

Whispers arise from all the fairies left in the hall. Some of them are still in shock that a war is upon them again. Most of them hope that there will be a more lasting peace between the realms. Unfortunately, the Dark fairy is bound to break that peace once more.

The rangers gather around Aramir to await their leader's instructions. Aramir makes certain that each of his rangers is listening.

"Like what our Queen said, we shall rest for a while. We shall join the envoys of the Air and Water Fairies upon their arrival." Aramir announces.

Aramir also exits the hall. The rest of the rangers follow.

The hall starts to empty. Caspian and Bran are among the few left there.

"What are you thinking about?" Bran asks Caspian.

"I have to see Anna before I go. Cover for me okay? In case Aramir asks. I will not be gone for long." Caspian replies.

"But you were just with her today!" Bran shouts after him hurriedly.

Caspian sprints to leave even before Bran agrees to his plan. His mind is already elsewhere

Chapter 18: The Kiss

It is almost twilight when Caspian reaches the willow tree. He is so lost in his thoughts on the events in their realm that he does not notice that he has reached the end of the trail from the forest. He is even surprised that Anna is waiting at the willow tree, staring straight at him with a frown on her face.

“Caspian, are you alright? Popsie said everything is back to normal in the Valley. But you still look worried?” Anna starts to inquire.

“Anna, sorry I was not able to come sooner, after I hurriedly left from the Diner this morning. Yes, the valley is fine.” Caspian walks up to Anna, still with a serious face. He closes the distance between them and embraces Anna unexpectedly.

“Anna, I just have to see you now. Yes, things are still calm in the valley, but there is a war brewing in our realm. Not just the Green Haven, but all the other Fairy realms. It’s the Dark Fairy…” Caspian’s words just trail off. He does not let go of Anna not even an inch. His words sound fully laden with weariness.

Anna is caught off guard by Caspian’s actions, stays still. She waits for the next move of Caspian. She can feel the warm blush on her own face though she cannot see her own face.

They stay that way for a few moments, perfectly still. Anna can sense Caspian's need for reassurance. She is just unsure what else she can do for him.

When Anna realizes that Caspian will not say anything anymore, she pulls away slowly from their embrace and gazes at Caspian’s weary eyes.

“Hold on a second Caspian. You are scaring me. There is something more that you do not like to speak about…”

Anna starts to look worried too. She is beginning to feel anxious for his silence. There goes that same sensation again. Whenever Caspian talks about his people and what is happening there, she sort of gets that inexplicable connection with it somehow. Whatever it is about, she empathizes with them. It is as if it matters to her too.

Caspian takes her by the hand and leads her to the willow tree to sit. It is dark around them by now. The atmosphere seems to sense the darkness in Caspian’s thoughts. He still does not let go of Anna’s hand.

“Anna, like I have mentioned, a war is coming and it involves every Fairy; Earth, Water, Air and Fire Fairies altogether in one messy battle. This is all because of Alirion. He has gained control of the Fire Fairies’ realm. Whether by force or the fairies willingly obeys him, which is what our people will try to find out. Whichever the case, a battle is going to happen…” Caspian pauses.

Anna understands clearly. Caspian need not explain further. It is her turn to worry. Caspian is a ranger among other Earth fairies. He is going to battle with the rest of the fairies. This is a battle that they may or may not win against the Dark Fairy.

Upon comprehension of the reality of danger for Caspian, Anna holds his face with both her hands, gently caressing it. She traces every curve, as if memorizing them.

Suddenly, Caspian cannot control his emotions anymore. His face comes closer to Anna's.

He moves slowly, slowly, until he can feel her breath on his face. He can feel Anna's heart pounding at the same pace as his own.

As if there is a magnet between them, Caspian gently places his lips against hers. She does not resist the gesture, as if she is anticipating it herself.

Their first kiss...a short but special one for both of them. Suddenly, time seems to stop. The worries seem to fly away or cast aside for now.

Caspian and Anna sigh at the same time. Both finally smile, still looking at each other's eyes…green to green. Caspian's face suddenly lights up in realization of something. What if?

As an unspoken answer to his thoughts, Anna suddenly touches her heart. She holds on to where the locket glows underneath her shirt. The strong emotions she is experiencing right at the moment sends the emerald locket to glow incessantly. She reaches out for it and in the darkness of the evening, it shines brightly like a star in the sky.

Caspian cannot take his eyes off the glowing locket. For the first time, he sees Anna in a different way.

He just cannot believe that he did not see it all along... everything clicks into place. He has found her! She is just like him, an Earth fairy.

"Anna it's you!" Caspian exclaims with amazement and joy. He takes Anna's hands and guides her to stand. Then, he bows reverently in front of her. "Princess Arianna, I am at your service..." he says in exultation.

Anna stares at Caspian with a confused expression. She pulls him forcefully to stand.

She just cannot comprehend what made him behave that way so suddenly.

"Caspian, are you okay? Are you out of your mind? What are you talking about? How did you know my name Arianna? I have never told you that?" Anna sounds frantic.

"Anna...i mean Princess Arianna, you are our long lost Princess. You are our Princess Aria, the daughter of Queen Alina and King Merlion. You have been lost for sixteen years."

"Why didn't I see that before, when you told me that your Popsie and Marmee are not your real parents?"

“I think the locket is protecting you, concealing you. It did not trust any fairy until now that it felt my true feelings and intentions for you. That's why you can see who I really am even if I glamour myself then.”

“Yes, you are the princess child that Aldar and Melandra kept hidden from Alirion that fateful night when he attacked the valley."

"I was still young then like you but your story has been told to every fairy in our realm because your parents, the Queen and King, tried to look for you, in the Fairy Realms. They never thought that Aldar and Melandra will not be able to tell them where they hid you. They were both left unconscious when they faced Alirion.”

Caspian pauses after something crossed his mind. He stares at Princess Aria with a devastated expression.

“It was meant to be kept as a secret so Alirion cannot reach you if our realm perishes, along with our Queen and King.”

“You are a secret, the forgotten secret kept by Aldar and Melandra, all these years. This changes everything!"

Caspian finishes his explanations with a little less emotion.

"How are you sure that it's me, that I am that Princess you are looking for? I don't even look like you!" Anna tries to argue, still not convince with all these revelations about her past.

The locket Anna is holding in her hand continues to glow. She stares at it, and for the first time, she is looking at herself reflected by the glow. Her green eyes, her pale face, and to her shock, her pointy ears!

"What?!" she utters in amazement realizing what the locket revealed to her. All of sudden she believes it, all of the truth in it, with all of her heart.

"I have to tell Popsie and Marmee. They have to know, i owe it to them. They have protected me since I was a baby..."

Anna starts to cry, choking on any other words she intends to say.

However, Caspian remains immobile in front of Anna. He is unsure of how to react now, to the girl he feels so strongly about, to their Princess.

Anna takes Caspian by the hand and urges him across the street to her house.

"Anna, um Princess Aria, what are you doing? You know I can't go inside!"

Caspian reminds her. At first he hesitates knowing that he cannot enter her house anyway, but as magic can break like any spell, he feels something has changed too. He is not hindered by any shield, he can pass now!

"Princess, i think your locket is allowing me to go with you now!" Caspian utters in bewilderment.

"It trusts me!"

Anna quickly enters her house, tugging Caspian with her. She ignores what Caspian has discovered because she is determined to tell her loving parents what she found out.

They find Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose sitting side by side at the sofa drinking tea. Both look up to them questioning, seeing their excited faces.

"Hi, Anna! Hi, Caspian! Is everything alright?" Popsie Reed asks, intrigued.

"Popsie, Marmee, we have to talk. I have something very important to tell you." Anna blurts out.

Popsie and Marmee stare at each other with puzzled faces. In a few minutes, everything will be clear to them.

Chapter 19: Letting Go

After Anna finishes narrating all the information she has learned from Caspian, as well as all the revelations aided by her mysterious locket, Popsie and Marmee remain speechless for a few moments.

Anna does not take her eyes off her parents. She owes her life to these parents whom she will always love, no matter what she has learned about herself. They have sheltered and given her love all her life despite not knowing anything about her.

Both are now teary-eyed in front of her.

"Popsie? Marmee? Please say something..."

Anna pleads, now looking a bit worried, not having an idea what they are thinking.

It was Marmee Rose who stands first from the sofa and gives Anna a tight embrace.

"We have always known that this time will come. After all, you have been really someone extra special in our hearts. For us, you are forever our Princess. Although we are also surprised by all that you have told us, nothing changes for me and your Popsie."

Marmee Rose caresses Anna's hair with so much affection while they continue to hug.

"When you were growing up, we have often wondered about the extraordinary things you can do. So, I guess you are really different from others, from us. But keep in mind my darling; you will forever be our daughter, our Anna."

Marmee Rose whispers to Anna, as she cries on her shoulder.

Popsie Reed stands too, and joins her girls for a tight hug.

"Anna, we are very happy that you have finally uncovered who you truly are. We have always felt that knowing the whole truth about your identity will make you feel whole again."

"We have nothing greater to give you than our whole-hearted support in whatever you decide to do now. Your Marmee and I are fully aware that your time with us is borrowed. When you came to us in your green basket, you have captured our hearts and we cannot turn our backs on you. Right there and then you have our love and devotion."

Hearing Popsie Reed's words melts Anna's heart even more.

Anna's locket starts to glow once more, as bright as it can be.

Caspian stares at the captivating object yet again in amazement as it glows brilliantly, fully illuminating the whole house.

"Your Marmee and I have always suspected that your locket is connected to you, your feelings, and most especially your sense of protection."

Popsie Reed walks closer to Anna and Marmee Rose to engulf them with his warm embrace.

"You can see the magical locket too?" Caspian exclaims.

"Since Anna arrived in our doorstep with it, we have always known she is different, that she is someone who will bring warmth to everyone she encounters like what we have experienced when she arrived to us. She will truly be Arianna, our Sunshine."

Marmee Rose answers proudly.

"Let me show you something." Anna excitedly says, remembering what happened to her just outside a few minutes ago.

She touches her glowing locket. Sure enough, her true appearance is revealed. The locket has kept her true appearance since she came to the human world for her protection.

Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose smile at their Anna. Though her fairy qualities come into sight, the adoration of her foster parents did not falter, not even a bit. Truly for them, she is a Princess. But not their own...

Anna's face turns sad abruptly. Learning about her true lineage means she has a responsibility to her true people, the fairies. Deep in her heart, not just the fairies' lives are at stake.

The looming battle with the Dark Fairy is her concern too, which means, she has to join Caspian. She will be leaving her Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose...

As if Anna's foster parents read her mind, both clutch their daughter's hands tightly.

"You have to go, right?"

Popsie Reed asks but he knows Anna's answer to this anyway.

"Popsie, i wish i wouldn't have to, but..."

Anna replies in such melancholy.

"But you have to." Popsie Reeds finishes for her.

"Oh, Popsie, you have always understood me so well."

Anna declares as she embraces her foster father.

"Please, be careful. Caspian… promise to guard her, with your life!"

Marmee Rose turns to Caspian with her demand and not a request. Her voice betrays the unbearable pain in her heart. It is never easy to part from someone you have always instinctively yearned to protect. For her, she would never ever be ready to part with her daughter although she and Popsie Reed have long accepted this fate.

"I am her protector even before I knew who she really is. You need not ask that of me anymore, Marmee."

Caspian says with certainty.

Anna starts to cry in silence. How can she deserve such very understanding and loving parents? It breaks her heart to see them trying to be completely composed instead of breaking down with sadness.

This is what their worried looks in the past truly means. They have always known that she will leave them. And to think she wondered so much why her foster parents look so anxious. If she had known the truth earlier, maybe she could have spent even more time with them. Maybe she could have given more of herself to repay their unconditional love for her.

Marmee Rose leaves them for a while, rushing to go upstairs.

Popsie Reed is still holding on to Anna's hand.

Caspian stares out the window. He begins to worry about what is happening in their realm.

After a few minutes, Marmee Rose comes back holding a green cloth. It is the soft blanket of Anna when she was a baby.

"Here, my Princess, this belongs to you."

Marmee Rose says as she wraps it over Anna's shoulders like a shawl.

"Be safe."

She whispers softly while touching Anna's face gently with both her hands. In her eyes, her daughter seems to have transformed into an elegantly strong young woman. A Fairy Princess…

Anna hugs her Marmee Rose tightly and whispers back,

"I will return to both of you. I love you so much Marmee! You too Popsie."

Popsie takes his turn in engulfing Anna in a very loving embrace.

"We will be here, awaiting your return. We love you Princess." he says like a promise.

Anna takes a final glance at her parents, her devoted family.

Caspian slightly bows his head to Popsie and Marmee then opens the door.

Anna follows Caspian and shuts the door behind her without looking back. If she looks back, she will surely breakdown in tears. But she is determined to show that she can be strong. She has to be strong after all; she is a Princess, a Fairy Princess.

"Princess Aria, will you be alright? We have so much to explain when we get to the Green Haven. For one, I left without permission. So maybe I might be in trouble."

Caspian tries to make light conversation with her.

The sudden change in Aria's status makes him uneasy. He is a ranger, she is a princess.

"What? You left without telling anyone? That's irresponsible of you!" Aria says, exasperated.

"Wow, you truly are acting like a princess now, talking about responsibility and stuff..."

Caspian replies, trying to deflect her retort.

"I told Bran where I'm going. He is one of the rangers with me but not Aramir." he explains further.

"Who is Aramir?" Anna inquires, as they walk towards the trail.

"My princess, you really have a lot to learn from now on...well, let's see if we can get there quickly."

Caspian suddenly stops walking. He stares at the Princess.

Anna stops too but clueless on what Caspian means.

"Now, Princess, try to concentrate on visualizing the valley." Caspian explains to her.

Anna stares at him with a puzzled expression but when he remains expectant, she closes her eyes and tries to do what he asks.

At first, it seems nothing is happening. For a moment she thought Caspian might just be playing a joke on her.

But after moment, she can feel her locket glowing and the warmth spreading all over her.

She continues to imagine the valley. Recalling the morning jogs she takes with her Popsie...

"Welcome to the valley, Princess."

Anna hears Caspian's comment beside her.

Anna opens her eyes and there they are, at the Valley.

She looks around her trying to make sure if it's just her eyes imagining all these. It is dark so she tries to focus her eyes a bit to check carefully.

Yes, they are definitely at the Valley. Just like magic…

Chapter 20: The Homecoming

Aria stares around her in amazement. She cannot imagine that she was able to achieve what Caspian told her to do. It's not that she does not believe she can do it. She is used to doing odd things all her life, but being able to transport herself to where she needs to be, on the first try, is something she cannot wrap her mind around with.

The valley seems deserted or the fairy farmers might have already retired to the house settlements for the night. Aria has never been to the valley at night. She marvels at how beautiful the night sky is, with the moon shining so brightly, along with the multitude of stars in the vast horizon.

"Nice job Princess!" Caspian says with an amused tone. He walks towards the veil of mist in the direction of the bridge towards the Green Haven. He glances back just to check if Aria is following him.

Aria snaps out of her reverie and starts to walk behind Caspian. She senses that something has changed between her and Caspian. From their closeness a few hours ago, and that unexpected kiss… Did she just imagine that? How come he becomes rather casual to her again and seems to be making fun of her?

Aria tries to keep pace with Caspian's strides. When she finally catches up, she reaches out for his hand to make him stop from walking to face her.

"Caspian, are you okay?" Aria asks with so much concern on her confused expression.

"I am fine." Caspian responds politely but quickly. He attempts to resume walking to end their discourse.

"But what about us? Are we okay?" Aria asks some more, still holding Caspian's right hand.

"We are fine." is Caspian's quip response with a bit of annoyance in his voice.

"Now let's get going Princess. Your realm awaits you." He masks his true emotion with sarcasm.

Caspian gently pulls away his hand from Aria's grasp. He continues walking towards the bridge. They are already passing through the enchanted mist, which conceals the fairy realm.

Aria follows Caspian silently. The confusion on her face turns to hurt. Why is Caspian suddenly like this? Did she say something or acted in any way to upset him? She continues to ponder about his attitude change towards her...

Aria gazes at the mysterious mist around them as they cross the bridge. She gives a short sigh. She allows herself to get distracted by the sight unfolding all around her. It seems like she will not get any other response from Caspian anyway.

At the moment, her attention focuses on the fascinating scenery she is viewing for the first time. She has seen the forest but not beyond any other place.

The bridge they are crossing is covered with a myriad of flowers that sparkle as the moonlight shines on them. Flowers in a variety of colours and shades grow in clusters. There are various plants creeping like vines along with the glittering flowers. These plants comprise of leaves in differing shapes and sizes. Truly, the bridge is like a passage into a magical world beyond human imagination.

Aria slows down in her attempt to stare at the arches that hold the bridge from underneath but since it is dark, she has to strain her eyes to see anything.

After a while, she is astonished that she can see very well the bottom of the bridge so suddenly without any difficulty. How can she do that? That is another shock for her.

“Are you coming Princess?” Caspian shouts at her. He is already way ahead of her, almost at the end of the bridge now.

Caspian’s hollering cuts Aria’s fascination in this wonderland she is encountering.

She sprints towards him in a hurry, but not apologetic about it. By now, she is attempting to behave indifferent to Caspian's attitude.

However, her pretence gets the better of her. She frowns instead as she crosses her arms in front of her.

Caspian in turn just gives a heavy sigh, and turns his back on her again to continue walking. It seems he is better in being indifferent.

Finally, at the end of the bridge, Aria is stunned by the beauty of the different trees, in various colours and sizes.

“Welcome home, Princess Aria.” Caspian utters reverently, bowing slightly.

Aria stares at Caspian again, recalling her earlier confusion. Now, he is very polite but he seems unhappy too at the same time. What is going on? She thought to herself, still unable to fathom what is really going on between them. But there is no chance to ask him because a group of fairies dressed in brown, like Caspian, starts to approach them.

Caspian walks quickly towards the other fairies, leaving Princess Aria a bit hidden beside one of the elm trees. He greets the other rangers with a slight bow and says, “I apologize for my absence and for not asking for permission for leaving.”

“What were you thinking Caspian? I told all of you to get some rest, not go out there!”

Aramir replies with a hard tone, even gesturing his hand pointing towards the bridge. He is obviously upset.

For an impulsive fairy like him, this is a difficult thing for him to do, to stay calm. So far, he is failing horribly.

“But I told Bran that I am leaving.” Caspian insists on his explanation.

“That is enough now, Caspian! Bran is in no position to grant you permission to leave! Times are dangerous right now and you know that as much! How can you behave so recklessly like that?”

Aramir cuts off Caspian with a stern tone. He scolds him like a child caught running away.

The rest of the other rangers watch silently. But then they don't seem perturbed by the exchange of the two rangers.

However, some of them, including Bran, is now smiling like things are really amusing.

“Quit that father and son kind of bickering Aramir. Caspian has a visitor.” Jeera intervenes with her glance already in the direction of the elm tree.

Aramir and the rest of the rangers turn their gaze at the same time towards where Jeera is focused on.

“She is one of us!” Cleo shouts from atop of the elm tree, as she jumps down exactly right beside Princess Aria.

Princess Aria is caught by surprise by the sudden appearance of Cleo beside her and the amount attention given by all the fairies at that moment.

“My name is Aria. I have just recently found out that I am like you.” Princess Aria says nervously as an introduction.

Caspian runs to Princess Aria’s side. However, he seems to be hesitating on touching Princess Aria, so he just whispers to her. “Princess, show them your locket.”

Princess Aria nods slowly in comprehension. She pulls the necklace from underneath her cotton shirt. As Caspian expects, the locket glows a bright green.

There is no mistaking the glowing emerald locket. It is the emerald locket of their Queen Alina. All the rangers stare in awe and starts bowing synchronously to Princess Aria. The same thoughts are in their heads.

Cleo is the first to speak.

“Like the story we have memorized from growing up. The hidden princess that was lost and forgotten. Welcome home, Princess Arianna.”

Princess Aria starts to walk towards the rest of the rangers who remained bowing to her. She is debating with herself if she should start pulling each fairy to stand straight instead of letting them bow to her.

“Please don’t bow to me. It’s okay. Everyone stand. Oh please stand.” Princess Arianna says with a mix of embarrassment and anxiety to be the centre of attention.

She also finds it ridiculous for them to automatically accept her just like that. She had a hard time believing it when she found out.

“Our long lost Princess. Everyone let us tell the good news to our Queen and King. Our Princess Aria, please come and join us.” Aramir says in his very polite manner.

Princess Aria stares at all the fairies around her, as if she is caught in a dream. Is she really here? She searches for Caspian’s face for some comfort. He smiles at her and gives her an encouraging nod. His reaction somehow gives her courage.

Princess Aria is led by Jeera and Aramir towards the Elm abode. All the rest of the fairies follow after in silence. Caspian falls behind a bit.

The procession is somewhat taking a long time. Anna starts to get agitated. Her head feels fuzzy.

Wait, is this really happening? Am I ready to see my real parents after all this time? These questions swirl in her already bewildered mind.

Princess Aria slowly panics to herself. This is going too fast for her.

What shall she do? Should she continue on or just turn around from where she came from?

She absentmindedly touches the green shawl that her Marmee places over her shoulders. Her yearning for her Popsie and Marmee comes to her like a security blanket shielding her from doubts.

She crosses her arms in an attempt to hug herself.

I can't do this! She seems to shout in her head.

Chapter 21: Family

Princess Aria halts and exclaims, “Wait!” She finally finds her voice to speak out her hesitation.

The rest of the fairies behind her abruptly stop walking too. Aramir and Jeera, who are both situated in front of the Princess, turn around and stare at her confused, but did not say anything. Every fairy is silently anticipating for their Princess to say something further.

“Princess Aria, the Queen and King need to know as soon as possible that you are here.” Aramir utters on an impulse but still as politely as possible.

“But I have not ever seen them before! What do I say to them? Will they believe that I am their daughter? What if they get disappointed?” Princess Aria rants frantically all her doubts.

Jeera looks at Princess Aria. She seems to weigh if she will say something to give the Princess some encouragement.

Suddenly, Caspian stands by her side and reaches out to hold her hand gently.

“Princess Aria, all the Earth fairies looked for you everywhere in the realm. The Queen and King will see you as you truly are, just like I did.”

He says reassuringly but let go of the Princess’ hands immediately when he realizes that all of the other fairies are looking at him shocked. Not to mention Aramir's stern look. Caspian re-joins the crowd of fairies.

“Queen Alina and King Merlion, your parents, are devastated all these years for not finding you. Not a single day passed that they did not look for you.” Jeera adds with kindness in her tone. She hopes her words helps the Princess a little bit to be braver to face her true family.

Princess Aria stares at Caspian from afar for a while, and then glances around her. She looks at all the fairy faces and she sees on each and every face the acceptance and anticipation for her, for their Princess.

“Princess Aria, we know that this is too hard for you. You have been away since you were a baby. But this I will promise you, as a protector of this realm. The Fairies in Green Haven is one family. The Earth fairies honour you as our Princess. You are part of this family. We shall give you the same reverence as the Queen and King.” Jeera ascertains.

Her words are the summation of the sentiments of the rest of the Earth fairies.

Jeera comes up to the Princess and encourages her to move along. Caspian on the other hand, falls back even more and joins the other fairies far behind. Princess Aria walks side by side Jeera and Aramir now.

The procession resumes silently towards the Elder tree. When they reach the entrance of the Elder tree, Aramir signals for them to stop and says,

“The envoys from the Blue and White Haven have been inside for a long time discussing plans. I will go ahead and inform them about the wonderful news.” He enters quietly.

Princess Aria turns to Jeera. Her mind recalls the impending battle.

“Will the fairy realms be at war? Isn’t there a way to prevent this from happening?” Princess Aria asks Jeera with a worried expression.

“My Princess, Fairies are peaceful but if an evil force like Alirion threatens that peace, we will not hesitate to fight back and protect our realm.” Jeera replies resolutely.

After a while, Aramir comes out and ushers Princess Aria to come forward. Princess Aria looks back and scans the faces of the other fairies looking for someone.

"Caspian?" she utters expectantly.

Caspian comes forward as if he was pushed out from the crowd of fairies. Bran snickers in amusement at the side lines.

Caspian bows reverently and says formally, "Princess, what do you require?" He is a bit flushed, aware that the other fairies are staring at them both.

"Can you accompany me inside?" Princess Aria replies with the same formality.

Caspian stands and glances towards Aramir for permission. Aramir nods in agreement. He turns to the entrance. Princess Aria follows after him and then Caspian next. The rest of the fairies stay outside in silence.

"Some of you, return to the bridge and guard it from intruders. Cleo, lead them and stay hidden among the trees. You are an expert in that anyway." Jeera instructs the rangers.

Cleo nods and leaves along with a few of the rangers.

The fairies left behind spread out to just wait for the council meeting with the envoys in the hall to end. Bran sits with his legs crossed, on the ground. Jeera joins him shortly.

“What a terrific revelation, right? Imagine, our lost Princess found? Who could tell?”

“Even with Aldar and Melandra still unconscious, our Princess is found and she was just under our noses. Why didn't Caspian notice? He has been seeing her in the human world for a while now..."

Bran speaks out all his thoughts enthusiastically. He cannot contain his amazement on how things have turned out.

"I think Aldar and Melandra made sure that the Princess' whereabouts cannot be easily known by any of us, by any fairy. Even the Dark fairy is desperate to get to Aldar and Melandra because I think, no fairy magic, even dark ones can get to the Princess." Jeera rationalizes.

Bran nods in silent agreement to Jeera's theories. Who knows what kind of protective spells Aldar and Melandra devised to keep the location of the Princess a secret for such a long time? They are two of the greatest fairies in the realm anyway. Even the Queen and the King were not able to find her.

Bran smiles to himself. Jeera notices and slaps him on his shoulder.

"What's so funny?" Jeera asks curiously. Knowing Bran, he can find humor in almost any situation.

"I just thought that Caspian is in a state of shock right now. Finding out that the one you feel so special about is your Princess. That is really something to think carefully about. Our Princess…"

Bran trails off, suddenly seeing the bigger picture of all these. Now, he feels guilty in taking it lightly.

"I think Caspian will make the right decisions eventually." Jeera replies confidently.

Both Bran and Jeera stay silent, deep in their own thoughts.

Suddenly, Caspian walks out of the Elder tree in a rush. His face looks terribly conflicted.

"Hey there Caspian? How was the family reunion?" Bran hollers to Caspian jokingly.

Caspian is about to leave but Bran walks up to him when he realizes that Caspian looks troubled.

"Caspian, where are you going? Do you like to talk about it?" Bran inquires.

Caspian stays silent. He merely looks away to the distant trees, lost in his thoughts and emotions. He was never the sharing type. He grew up being independent since he was a child. Bran is a friend but he is really conflicted right now. He needs to get away and sort things out on his own first.

"Bran, this is really such a bad time for me. I need to be alone for now." Caspian politely request from his friend.

Bran lets him go. He knows Caspian well enough to not push him to open up when he is not ready yet.

"Jeera, Bran, I will just be by the bridge. Call me when Aramir needs us to assemble." Caspian informs them as he walks hurriedly away.

Caspian is determined to calm himself down. He is a ranger. He is a protector but he cannot do his duties if he will not be focused. Not now.

He must set aside his emotions for his responsibilities for his people, his realm, and his family.

Chapter 22: A Tale of Two Rangers

It is a bright afternoon. Everything around seems peaceful. Aldar and Melandra sit outside on wooden benches beside a Willow tree.

This particular tree is massive and a bit older than the rest of the other Willow trees surrounding it.

Both rangers wait for their leader and friend to emerge from his abode.

Though their friend might not outspokenly express his need for emotional support, Aldar and Melandra have been with their leader long enough to know that he needs it at this moment.

After a few minutes, a handsome fairy with long, straight brown hair rushes out of the massive tree, looking paler than usual.

He starts pacing in circles around Aldar and Melandra. He continues this activity without respite. The other two fairies just stare on, with matching amused expressions. They allow him to keep on a bit.

Finally, Aldar cannot take it anymore. He is probably already getting dizzy observing his friend. He stands and blocks the fairy to end his repetitive pacing.

"Marion, can you please stop already? You are going to drive me and Mel crazy!" Aldar says full of amusement in his tone.

Marion looks at Aldar, totally confused. He smiles sheepishly, upon recognition of Aldar for the first time, since he came out of his Willow shelter.

He has never been disoriented like this as if a dark spell was cast upon him.

"Greetings Marion! Do you recognize us? Please take a few breaths and calm down." It is now Melandra's turn to tease him.

Marion glances at Melandra. Obviously, he did not notice her too. His face looks so confused. The other rangers could not even imagine what's going on in his head right this instant.

Melandra shakes her head disapprovingly. How can their esteemed leader get to this kind of behavior? The great Marion… The leader of the rangers... He is considered the bravest and strongest ranger amongst the Earth fairies, who never gets scared or worried. Their leader who always know what to do and takes very precise actions.

"I apologize, Aldar, Melandra." Marion sighs deeply.

"Cara has been at it since dawn. How can giving birth be so agonizing?"

Marion attempts to explain his peculiar behavior. His fellow rangers have always perceived him as the fearless warrior that he is.

Truly, anticipating a birthing process can make one fairy behave like a crazed one.

In this particular situation, he has shown so much doubt in himself. He has always been a ranger. But to be a father, that is a totally different matter. It is an unknown skill for him.

"Come, sit first Marion." Melandra taps the empty seat beside her.

Aldar leads Marion to the offered bench when it appears that he did not comprehend what Melandra just said.

"Calm down my friend. Soon you will meet your baby. Everything will be alright." Aldar gently assures Marion, with a friendly pat on the back.

Marion sits awkwardly and continues to look worried. He focuses his stare on the ground.

When he found out that Cara is carrying his child, he has been counting the months until its arrival. However, Cara is a bit fragile in her pregnancy so he worries day after day if Cara will be well and ready for the birthing process.

This is the most dreadful feeling for a ranger like him. He can protect his people from danger. He will even sacrifice his life for them without thinking twice. But now, he has no control over this.

How long will this anticipation be?

Just like an answer to his question, the cry of a baby reverberates from the Willow tree. This startles Marion from his thoughts. He stands but not particularly sure of what to do at all.

Zella, the fairy nurse, emerges from the Willow tree carrying a crying baby boy in her arms.

However, instead of a smile, her face is full of sadness. She pauses, attempting to use the gentlest words she can think of at the moment.

"I am sorry Marion. Cara fought so hard but she was very weak. She has struggled so much. She tried her best to keep strong, just until her beloved boy comes out safely."

Zella tries hard to explain to Marion.

But Marion is already deaf to any explanation. He is not listening anymore. His thoughts are already tumultuous.

He touches his son's forehead gently then rushes inside the Willow tree. His expression resembles the face of a defeated warrior.

"Cara...no! It can't be!" That was all he can afford to utter. His head is not thinking straight.

Melandra walks towards Zella and takes the crying baby in her own arms. She tries to make the little boy stop from his fits of cries. Poor baby…How can such an innocent child be parted with his mother too soon?

Aldar follows Marion inside...

****

"Straighten your arms and grasp your sword firmly." Marion patiently instructs with so much seriousness in his voice. He demonstrates slowly how to take a battle stance using a sword as a weapon. As a ranger, these are basic skills to acquire.

The little fairy boy, about a year and a half old, listens with full attention. He keenly observes Marion. After which, he tries to imitate with precision his father's movements.

"Well done my son. You will be such a brave ranger someday." Marion praises his son as he messes his thick brown hair with a hint of fondness. He smiles at his son but half-heartedly.

"I will be just like you father. I promise!"

The boy exclaims proudly with a frown on his face, in his efforts to project fierceness on his innocent face.

His father pinches him on both cheeks as he tells him light-heartedly, “Oh, I’m so scared…”

Both father and son laugh at each other playfully.

"Yes you will definitely be, my son. You shall protect our Queen and King, and our little princess, as well as our people from those who will try to hurt our realm." Marion confidently replies.

Suddenly, Aldar barges in with anxiety written all over his face. He weighs his words carefully.

"Marion, come quick. Something is happening. A number of fire fairies were spotted near our border. I am not yet sure what they are doing there. They had to cross the Blue Haven to get there. The other rangers are trying to establish an official discourse with these fire fairies at the moment." Aldar explains hurriedly to Marion.

When Aldar realizes the little boy with the wooden sword is there, he smiles at him and says,

"Well good evening to our little ranger! How's your training so far? You should try my bow and arrow someday."

"You promise to teach me Aldar?" the boy asks expectantly.

"I most definitely will." Aldar replies.

Aldar looks at Marion who is already set to leave.

"King Merlion will join us as soon as we find out if this is bigger than just a few fanatics. Mel is with the Queen now and our princess." Aldar tries to fill in Marion, as quickly as possible.

"See you later brave boy!" Aldar exits.

"Father, is everything alright? Are there really fire fairies nearby? I have not met one. Can I come with you?" his son pleads insistently.

"I am sorry my son. Maybe some other time I will bring you with me. I have to do my duties first. You understand how it is to be a ranger, right?"

Marion stares at his son's deep green eyes. His son stares back at him with adoring eyes.

"Yes, father. I will wait for your return here. Promise to tell me all about it when you get back okay?" he requests.

"I will. Nurse Zella will stay here with you. She is on her way here now. Stay brave, my son." Marion instructs him.

"I love you, father." The boy embraces his father tightly.

"I love you too, Caspian." Marion whispers.

Chapter 23: The King, Queen, and the Princess

The great hall of the Green Haven is presently filled with fairies from three realms. The presence of these fairies is essential to each of their realms. The cooperation amongst all the fairies is the key to defeat the Dark fairy.

The fairies in gray are the rangers representing the Air fairies of the White Haven, with their silvery eyes. The rangers in black are the Water fairies from the Blue Haven. They stand side by side at the far right of the hall, staring alertly with their purple irises. The rest of the fairies present are in green, except for the rangers in brown, like Aramir.

When Aramir announced the presence of Princess Arianna, the hall is filled with anticipation. The story of the lost Princess has travelled from realm to realm. The search for her went on for years and years. This gives an atmosphere of a long tale in which a very significant part is about to unfold. Every fairy currently in attendance waits silently as if witnessing a climax in a story full of suspense.

All eyes are glued to the major characters in this scene. The Princess at the center of the hall and the Queen with her King on their thrones, are like actors and actresses under a spotlight but has somewhat forgotten their lines. The deafening silence and long wait is beginning to be unbearable.

Of course, King Merlion and Queen Alina sit at the elevated portion of the hall, in their green splendour. Both cannot take their green eyes off the girl with her equally green eyes, wearing her oddly out of placed shirt and jeans.

Princess Aria stares back speechless. Her emerald locket glowing non-stop, undeniably proves her lineage without any further explanations or introductions. She has no idea what to say anyway, so she just waits for her real parents to speak up. Caspian's sudden departure by her side makes her feel so unsure again if she really belongs here. Why did he leave so suddenly again?

"Princess Aria…Arianna. Welcome home." Finally, Queen Alina finds the courage to say something. Her words are merely whispers but can be clearly heard by every fairy. The Queen stands and approaches Princess Aria who seems to be glued at the center of the hall, immobile. King Merlion follows after her spontaneously.

Princess Aria's musing over Caspian's changing behavior is cut short when she sees her long lost parents walking towards her. Her eyes are fixed at the Queen and King approaching. However, she stays suspended inanimately out of anxiety, her glowing locket giving away her emotions.

Princess Aria cannot seem to make up her mind if she should walk towards them to meet them halfway. In a few moments, she realizes they are finally in front of her just at arm's length.

The King and Queen embrace her without hesitation. Something inside her stirs up and engulfs her with so much longing. The tears she is trying to hold at bay rushes in waves from her green eyes. It is as if the feel of her parents' touch stimulates a long forgotten awareness that she has yearned for such a long time. Her body responds before she even realizes what she is doing. She holds on to both of them as tightly as she could, like lost treasures she found that she could not afford to ever lose again.

"Welcome home, Princess Arianna!" shouts one of the elder-looking fairies in green robes.

"Welcome back to the Green Haven our Princess." All the fairies chant after an extended silence. Everybody cheer for the happy reunion.

It appears as if a long journey has come to an end. This one is a happy ending. This is something similar to the stories in fairy tale books.

A few minutes of cheering and applauding continues.

Princess Aria is led by her King Father and Queen Mother back to the throne. Princess Aria tries to wipe her tears but they continue to flow from so much happiness. She has never been more complete.

Her doubts on this particular moment being real have gone away completely. She has never imagined that the fairy tale stories she loved so much to read about could possibly be all true. Her, being a part of that tale as a fairy, a Princess fairy, seems just like a dream.

When the King, Queen, and the Princess settle down, Aramir bows and says, "We are greatly overjoyed by the completion of our fairy kin."

"Now, we have graver matters to deliberate. Upon conferring with the envoys of the Water and Air fairies, we have come to a decision to send rangers to the Orange Haven."

The hall turns silent once more for the reminder of the original purpose of this gathering.

Aramir faces towards the majority of the fairies in the hall, and then continues.

"In behalf of the envoys, each of the realms will send their rangers together to the Orange Haven, to observe, but not engage in any battle, with the fire fairies."

"We need to find out first of the true involvement of the Dark Fairy. We have come to the conclusion that the Dark Fairy is gathering allies to strengthen his power before he challenges the other realms in an open war."

"I have chosen five of our strongest rangers to join me and the rangers of the Air and Water fairies to undertake this mission. We will leave as soon as possible by taking the route in the Blue Haven."

Aramir bows slightly to the King's direction signalling the end of his discourse.

"Aramir, I advise you to take the necessary precautions so your mission will remain secret. We cannot be sure that any of the fairies does not sympathize with the twisted Dark Fairy. We must not underestimate him yet again, after what he did in the past. It caused us our greatest ranger while the other two remains insentient." King Merlion reminds them.

"Is Caspian one of your rangers in the mission?" Princess Aria blurts out abruptly, standing as if ready to join him. All the audience seem surprise by the question of the Princess. However, Princess Aria is not concerned with what all these fairies were thinking..

"My Princess, Caspian is one of our highly skilled rangers and the keenest of observers. He will be a prodigious asset to our mission." Aramir explains to the Princess.

Princess Aria glances towards her King Father and Queen Mother, in a manner of asking for permission

"Father, Mother, may I speak with Caspian for a short while before he leaves?" Princess Aria asks politely.

King Merlion gives his daughter a warm smile while Queen Alina reaches out for Princess Aria's hands then replies, "My daughter, we owe Caspian for your safe return to us. Of course you can talk to him anytime you wish to."

"Aramir, please inform Caspian to go directly to the inner garden. Our Princess will be waiting for him there." King Merlion requests.

"Yes, my King. I will look for him now and gather the other rangers, as well." Aramir takes his leave.

The envoys of the Water and Air Fairies start to leave too. The rest of the Earth Fairies soon follow. Only, the elder fairy who welcomed the Princess a short while ago, remains.

"Nurse Zella, kindly accompany me and our Princess so she can change into our people's garments." Queen Alina instructs the elder fairy. She ushers Princess Aria towards a side entrance.

"Father, I will see you later." Princess Aria gives the King a tight hug before joining the Queen and the Nurse fairy.

King Merlion is left alone sitting at the throne. He seems to be remembering something as he smiles to himself. Her daughter's actions remind him of someone he has not seen for a long time now.

After a while, he stands to make his way out of the hall. He intends to check on Aramir and the rest of the rangers before they leave for the Orange Haven.

Chapter 24: Another Kind of Goodbye

Aramir found Caspian sitting with his legs crossed under the elm tree. He is staring blankly at the bridge leading back to the Valley.

"He's been like that since he came out from the hall. What's wrong with him? I didn't ask him. I knew that he likes to be alone."

Cleo shouts at Aramir as a precaution.

Cleo, just like Caspian, is tremendously skilled in camouflage and also similarly a keen observer. She has been watching him from atop the elm tree since his arrival there. She allows Caspian the solitude he seeks.

Aramir, as stubborn and impulsive as he can ever be, ignores Cleo's warning. He sits beside Caspian under the elm and waits for a few moments for Caspian to acknowledge him. When Caspian does not react, Aramir taps his shoulder in a brotherly fashion.

"Caspian, I am aware that you prefer to be left alone but the Princess has requested to have a word with you before we go to the Orange Haven for our mission."

Aramir says as casually as possible.

"Princess Aria is waiting for you at the inner gardens. I suggest you go there now. We shall leave as soon as the envoys from the Blue Haven have confirmed safe passage through their realm." Aramir fills in Caspian with the plan.

Caspian remains quiet as if Aramir has not spoken a single word to him.

"You know what Caspian, I am aware of what is bothering you. But right now I advise that you set aside your emotions first because as a ranger, your utmost duty is as a protector of our realm. That is what your father will say to you too." Aramir reminds him.

Having heard Aramir's mention of his father, Caspian snaps out from his silence.

"Maybe you are right Aramir. But the problem is he is not here anymore! We will never really know what he thinks now right?"

Caspian retorts filled with bitterness in his voice.

"That is where you are wrong! He has always wanted you to be a good ranger like him. If only Aldar and Melandra could tell you that right now."

Aramir pauses, knowing what Caspian would reply to that. Aldar and Melandra are still in the grotto, both unconscious.

"I know how you feel. Marion has treated me like a younger brother. He taught me well on how to be a ranger. No other ranger had ever put his duty as the first priority more than him." Aramir explains.

"Yes and that's what got him killed!" Caspian shouts in anger.

Aramir senses that Caspian is about to say more but cuts him off. This is tremendously testing his impulse to get angry as well but he is trying his best to understand this ranger's outburst.

"Marion is the best and bravest among us. He gave up his life to protect our King! He fulfilled his duty up to the very end."

"He never meant to leave you. You are most precious to him but if he did not do his duty, he knew that his being a ranger would be meaningless!"

Aramir is already emotional now but breathes hard so he would not continue on with his tirade.

"Marion protected King Merlion from the Dark Fairy. He also endured a lot of sorrow for losing his beloved Cara, your mother. But he set it aside because of his duty."

"Aldar and Melandra did their part too in protecting Queen Alina and the Princess. They hid her so well. None of us ever found her, with you as an exemption."

Aramir points this out to remind Caspian of his pivotal role in finding their Princess.

"Maybe there is a reason why it was you who discovered the Princess' true identity. Your blood as a ranger, the son of the bravest one in our realm, might mean that you are destined to be Princess Aria's protector. Just like what your Father was to the King and Queen."

"This is your moment to prove that you are worthy of being a ranger. You are Marion's legacy." Aramir concludes.

Caspian remains silent once more. He slowly stands, but Aramir caught his arm before he was able to stand.

"Caspian, I believe in you too, my brother. You have to say goodbye to all the regrets and anger you feel. We are all your family. Do not forget that."

Aramir whispers with gentleness in his tone now. He lets go of Caspian's arm and turns to watch the bridge.

Caspian leaves, without saying a word, towards the direction of the inner gardens where his Princess waits.

"Nice speech Aramir. I wonder what Caspian decides to say to the Princess?" Cleo shouts at Aramir from above, half in humor.

****

Princess Aria sits on a hammock of vines with tiny purple flowers growing all over it. She fidgets a lot in her emerald dress, which falls up to her feet. She hates dresses. But here she is now attired on one. If only Marmee Rose can see her now. She suddenly misses her and Popsie Reed too.

Princess Aria stares around her surroundings. The place seems really peaceful. Her Queen Mother must have spent most of her time here while she thought of her lost daughter. She recalls her own sadness for the feeling of longing for someone who is an essential part of you.

"Princess Aria, Aramir informed me that you requested to have a word with me?" Caspian says politely, from behind where the Princess sits.

The arrival of Caspian startles the Princess and interrupts her thoughts. She stands from the hammock and faces him.

Caspian gives a reverent bow and stares at the Princess, waiting for her response.

"Caspian, why do you talk so formally to me? What is going on with you? You have been behaving that way since we left my house. Please help me understand if I said or have done something for you to be this way." Princess Aria demands.

Caspian lowers his head to avoid Princess Aria's eyes. He remains impassive.

"Please say something Caspian. Have you forgotten what transpired between us under the willow tree? Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

Princess Aria questions him again, almost pleading.

"I'm sorry my Princess. I don't know what to say. Finding out who you truly are has me confused. You are not Anna anymore. You are now my Princess, our Princess Arianna. And I am a ranger..." Caspian is lost for words.

Caspian could not explain any further. Just a few days back, he was pondering the dissimilarity of their world, the fairy and human world. But now that they belong in the same one, their statuses become another difference to hurdle.

Princess Aria might not be aware of her duties as a Princess for now. Soon she would. He thinks Princess Aria should set aside her feelings for him too.

Now, Caspian has made up his mind. He has to decide for both of them. He should know his place better. He should be by her side. He should fulfill his duty to her Princess as a ranger, as her protector.

Princess Aria glares at Caspian. She realizes that whatever she has said to him does not matter at all.

Caspian's silence gave the Princess all the answers she needed. It was all a mistake! Some infatuation...

Princess Aria walks away from Caspian without looking back. She could have glanced back, If only he had called her name.

Princess Aria walks hurriedly now. Caspian must not see her shed any tear for him. From now on, she has to act like a Princess. She has to be a responsible one.

Caspian stays unmoving like a statue. He lets Princess Aria walk away. He shakes his head as he turns around, and walks slowly from where he came, feeling defeated.

It is better this way. He convinces himself of this, while wiping the drops of tears from his eyes.

Finally, he is a ranger. He is a brave and strong ranger, just like his father.

"Goodbye Anna..." he whispers sadly to himself.

Chapter 25: Queen Alina

Princess Aria slows down as soon as she is certain that she is definitely as far away as possible from Caspian. As if the distance from him will lessen the pain she feels in her heart right now. Her eyes are getting blurry with all the tears that falls incessantly, while her locket glows brightly too. It obviously reveals how much intense her pain is right now.

The Princess stops from running away. She looks around her, not knowing where she is at the moment.

The halls are dimmed. Only several torches hang by the walls in equal distances to illuminate the place.

Fairies have excellent vision so she need not exert so much effort to see. She has grown accustomed to using that fairy ability by now. Her emotional state at present is the reason for her disorientation.

Princess Aria carefully walks with no particular place in her mind. She tries to retrace her steps from when Nurse Zella was with her when she was on her way to the inner garden. She has not gone far when she hears voices in one of the rooms at her left side.

The Princess knocks at the wooden door, like customary gesture for humans. The voices stop abruptly and she hears footsteps nearing her way to open the door.

A young fairy, maybe a bit younger than her, takes a peek.

“Princess Aria, it’s you!”

The young fairy in green garments, similar to hers but cut shorter, looks so surprised but sounded extremely thrilled to see her.

She curtsies to Princess Aria and then pulls the door wider to admit her in.

The Princess scans the room as she enters, noticing that it is some sort of sleeping quarters. Everything is in green, though in different shades of it. There are two canopy beds placed parallel with each other, still in green.

There is a low window, which is left wide open. The light breeze from it gave her some fresh air to calm her constricted heart.

Another young fairy is also present, sitting on one of the canopy beds. She automatically stands to give the Princess a hurried curtsy.

“Who are you?” Princess Aria asks the two fairies politely but with so much curiosity. This is the first time she has ever seen fairies younger than her. Both look enchantingly pretty.

“I am Nadia, my Princess.” The fairy who opened the door for the Princess a while ago answers courteously.

“My name is Enya,” introduces the other one near the canopy bed. She seems shy because she keeps staring down, avoiding the Princess’ stare.

“My Princess, did you need something?”

“Enya and I are just waiting for Nurse Zella. She will teach us some healing spells but right now, she is with our Queen Alina.”

Nadia explains courteously to the Princess.

“So you are training to be a nurse fairy?” Princess Aria inquires intrigued by the information revealed by the young fairy.

“I am looking for my Queen Mother but unfortunately, I am not yet familiar with all the areas here. I came from the inner garden.” She narrates.

“Oh, we will be honoured to accompany you to the Queen’s chamber,” offers Nadia while Enya simply nods in agreement.

“Thank you. That is most kind of you.”

The Princess bows to both fairies and allows Nadia to take the lead. Enya closes the door behind her. Then the three young ladies proceed to their destination soundlessly.

In the short time that Princess Aria has discovered who she is, she is able to tap to her fairy abilities quite effortlessly. She walks with the two fairies noiselessly as if she has been doing it before.

Her fairy blood syncs with her mental capacity to behave as a fairy automatically. This fascinates her tremendously. It is like she has read a manual about fairy qualities and abilities and is able to behave like one naturally. For a moment she is distracted from her emotional turmoil.

Both fairies walk in front of her quietly and stop at a wide door after a short while. The entrance opens with one slow wave of Enya’s hand.

Again, the Princess takes note of this and plans to try for herself later.

“We cordially apologize for interrupting your rest my Queen.”

“Princess Aria was looking for you.”

Nadia declares in respect as she slightly bows.

Nurse Zella bows to the Princess. She does not wait for the Queen’s command. She left quietly with the two young fairies without a word.

Queen Alina is sitting on her bed. But stands immediately and walks towards her daughter to embrace her as a greeting.

Until now, the Queen has only said a few words since she had her Princess back. She is more physically showy maybe because she is unsure of what to say to her after so many years being apart.

Princess Aria starts to tear up again as soon as she felt her mother's touch. Her musing over the young fairies and the structure of their abode temporarily diverted her thoughts. She is thankful for the reprise, but now, she definitely seeks her mother's comfort.

"What is wrong my child? Please keep at heart that I am here for you now."

"Though I might not have all the answers or the exact solution to make your sorrows go away, I will try my best to do so."

Queen Alina promises while she caresses Princess Aria's hair.

"Mother, I am sorry if I seem to give you worries but I just can't help it. I feel so hurt. I don't even know how to begin to explain to you."

The Princess responds in between her sobs.

"Is this about Caspian? I am aware that she is special to you."

"You have grown close to each other and that brought you to us."

Her mother replies in a gentle voice.

"It is a fortunate occasion that Caspian met you. It is as if he was meant to find you for us."

"My Queen Mother, I appreciate that he helped me find my true family but he seems to change so quickly when he found out who I really am."

"I thought that our feelings for each other are mutual. Apparently, I was mistaken. He has given up on us easily." Princess Aria laments.

"Oh, my Princess, Caspian is an honorable ranger like his father. He is as pure hearted like his mother. But he has gone through a lot at a young age."

"Give him time to sort things out on his own. For now, please allow your heart some rest. You have had such an emotional day."

"Come lay down for a while."

Queen Alina takes her daughter by the hand and leads her to the enormous bed.

Princess Aria allows her mother to guide her. She is tremendously tired for all the events that unfold.

She lies down on the soft cushions and closes her eyes. When her body touches the bed, it gives in to the relaxing sensation of rest. She finally feel the whole weight of her tiring day.

Her mother sits on the bed beside her, allowing her gentle fingers stroke her hair.

The Queen remains silent the whole time by her side. Having her long lost mother near her is more than enough comfort for the Princess. She needs this tranquillity to let herself calm down too.

Her Queen mother is finally with her after such a long, long time.

Sleep comes to the Princess.

However, she still misses her Marmee Rose…

Chapter 26: Blue Haven

The envoys from the three fairy realms have travelled safely and stealthily. This is a good indicator that their mission remains a secret.

Though the rangers are not easily wearied, they are obliged to pass the abode of the Water fairies. It is customary to pay homage to the King and Queen of the realm. Besides, they also need to gather some extra weaponry, for additional precaution in their uncertain mission.

The Blue Haven is situated in the underground grottos of the Azure River. The Azure is a vast body of water filled with a variety of creatures.

This river separates the Earth Haven from the Orange Haven. It serves as a magical barrier that segregates the four realms, with the White Haven above the clouds.

The realms have their individual domains but co-exist peacefully for many, many centuries. It has always been the way the fairies of each realm kept their kind hidden from the human world.

However, with the exemption of the crisis at hand with the Fire fairies, the harmony amongst the fairies hangs in a balance. This is how pivotal this mission is.

Ailsa, the leader of the rangers of the Water fairies, leads the group in another underground cave where the travellers can rest for a while. The Water Haven comprises of various grottos located deep under the river.

Since fairies are not susceptible to temperature changes, the group does not give any attention to the change in coldness for being deeply under the Azure.

“My friends, welcome to the Turquoise grotto. Please rest here a while. I will need to inform the King of our arrival first.” Ailsa says.

“He might be in the training grotto overseeing Princess Ava’s training.”

“I will summon for all of you at the main hall, when the King and Queen are ready to receive you. Please make yourselves comfortable.”

She finishes with a polite bow.

“We would like to ask your permission if we can go to the Aquamarine grotto while the rest of other rangers rest here.” Aramir inquires.

“I will bring two rangers along.”

He adds, nodding towards Caspian and Jeera's direction.

“If you wish…”

Ailsa agrees, giving another bow and then turning to leave.

“I will join you,” volunteers Dylan, another ranger among the Water fairies.

Dylan leads Aramir, Jeera and Caspian along a narrow cove. The temperature seems to turn a lot even colder as the path begins to darken in these areas, as they near the Aquamarine grotto.

The group walks in silence as if uttering a single word will disturb the peace and quiet of this particular place.

“Here we are…” Dylan announce, stepping aside, to allow the three Earth rangers go ahead. Aramir takes the lead. Then, Jeera and Caspian follow, and finally, Dylan at the rear.

As they enter the cavern, it is surely the darkest part here. It is dimly lit by a torch hanging at the wall crevice.

The fairy rangers are not bothered by the lack of light. Their eyes are focused on the two stone beds adjacent to each other.

They remain silent, utterly mesmerized by the two figures occupying the stone beds.

The bodies of two rangers remain untouched on the stone beds.

Aldar and Melandra lay motionless on them, like in a deep sleep.

Aramir and his company stand with transfixed stare, as if waiting for something to happen. But all of them know that there is nothing they can do for these two. A Dark fairy’s spell cannot be undone that easily.

Caspian stares intently at the two rangers. His face is impassive but a lot of memories running in his head.

“You promised to train me with your bow and arrow.” Caspian whispers unexpectedly.

Aramir taps him gently on the shoulder and turns to leave. Jeera and Dylan follow after. Caspian takes one last glance at Aldar and Melandra and leaves too.

The King of the Water fairies agreed to keep Aldar and Melandra after their sad disposition. This is their most secluded grotto which will keep them safe from the Dark Fairy.

This is a favor that the Water Fairy King cannot refuse from King Merlion.

The group returns to the Turquoise grotto shortly, without speaking. Nobody is in the mood to say anything anyway. Seeing the two legendary Earth rangers has given them a bit of reminder on how uncertain a life of a ranger can be.

The rest of the envoys who were left in the grotto sit on shell like seats and already having some food and drinks. Some are chatting lively about strategies for their mission at the Orange Haven.

“You’re back so soon.” Cleo exclaims.

“So how are Aldar and Melandra?”

She attempts to lighten the mood, seeing that her friends all look so gloomy.

Bran and Orin notice that Caspian and the other new arrivals did not say a word. They just sit with the others.

Soon enough, Ailsa returns, announcing,

“My fellow rangers, King Oberon and Queen Meridian are ready to meet with us now at the Prussian blue grotto.”

All the fairies scramble noiselessly to ready themselves. When everyone is assembled, Ailsa and the rest of the Water fairy rangers lead the way.

The Prussian blue grotto is the most spacious area in the Water Haven. It is positioned at the center of the realm. It is their throne room.

King Oberon and Queen Meridian are seated on their Pearl thrones. Their daughter, Princess Ava stands beside her Queen Mother in her Cobalt blue dress.

The Princess wears an expectant smile on her face. She scans carefully each and every face of their guests. Upon finding the familiar face she is searching for, she says,

“Welcome to the Water Haven.”

Her eyes fixed on the ranger leading the Earth fairies.

“We are truly grateful for all of you, gracing our humble realm with your presence. However, the circumstances of this gathering are truly unfortunate.”

King Oberon addresses the guests. Queen Meridian merely smiles in welcome.

“We are most thankful for your hospitality, my king.”

Aramir replies with reverence and gratitude. He smiles to Princess Ava.

"Queen Meridian..." Aramir bows in front of the Queen.

“Princess Ava, it is with great pleasure to see you well and radiant.”

Cleo smirks in amusement, as Bran catches on, seeing how overly gracious Aramir sounds.

“So tell me, how is my Earth King Brother?”

Princess Ava carries on the conversation with Aramir.

“King Merlion is well and contented. They have finally found our long lost Princess Arianna. Queen Alina is so much jubilant.”

Aramir is quick to reply, as he sneaks a glance over Caspian meaningfully.

“So, my brother has found more reasons not to visit.” Princess Ava adds.

“My darling Princess, your brother will join us when he is ready.”

It is Queen Meridian who cuts short the dialogue.

Everyone silenced. Not a single fairy dared to speak.

“My fellow fairies, we extend to you whatever help you might need before you’re set to leave. Take any rations, whether food, covering and weaponry, that our realm can provide. Safe travels and may your mission be truly fruitful for the sake of all of us.”

King Oberon’s statement adjourns the meeting.

The rangers bow and take their leave to prepare for their journey to the Orange Haven.

Aramir takes a last look at Princess Ava waving subtly in his direction.

The mission will now commence.

Chapter 27: Earth and Water

Princess Ava seems restless beside her Queen Mother. It seems time is of the essence for her.

Suddenly she turns to her King Father, as soon as the throne room is almost empty excluding a few Water fairies left behind to assist them for what they might require.

“King Father, I would like to seek your permission to allow me to join our rangers on their mission at the Orange Haven. I am your best ranger. Overseeing the mission would be for the best interest of our people.”

Princess Ava bows to his King Father.

“My daughter, our other rangers can handle this mission. It is agreed upon that it would only be to observe. There is no need for your presence there.”

Queen Meridian stands, and then pulls her daughter from her bowed position.

“Queen Mother, I have every right to be with the rest of the other rangers! King Father has prepared me so well and being a ranger, it is my duty to do so!”

Princess Ava faces her mother with defiance on her voice. She dislikes being treated like a fragile princess.

“Ava, I told you that you are the Princess of this realm. You should remain here with us!” Queen Meridian talks in a soft voice but with so much finality.

“Please mother…How would I fully gain the respect of our rangers if you would exempt me from the same duties they are fulfilling?”

Princess Ava is pleading now.

“Queen Meridian, my dearest Princess Ava, end this bickering now.”

King Oberon gently interrupts his wife and daughter. He is merely making a request.

“My Princess, I grant your appeal to join our esteemed rangers. You are definitely right. You are my best ranger. I have seen how hard you trained with the others.”

The King explains further.

“My Queen, our daughter is old enough to make her decisions, just like what our son has done too.” King Oberon reminds the Queen. Again, he tries to speak softly to his Queen.

Queen Meridian glances at her husband’s direction with so much contempt as she could muster. With a resigned look, she embraces her daughter as a sign of her acceptance of defeat.

Princess Ava smiles jubilantly. She knows that she won here.

“Mother, I promise I would be careful. Do not fret so much! I have the blood of a fairy warrior!"

Princess Ava gives his father a quick embrace. She bows slightly to both and turns to leave in a hurry.

King Oberon signals the remaining fairies in the throne room to leave him and his Queen alone. The fairies do so quickly, closing the entrance after them.

Left standing after her daughter’s departure, Queen Meridian decides to exit as well.

King Oberon grabs his Queen’s arm swiftly but gently and makes her face in his direction. He meets her eyes. Both King and Queen staring back at each other with their purple eyes.

The Queen glares hotly at her King, turning hers in deep shade of burgundy. King Oberon breaks their eye contact but refuses to let go of the Queen’s arms.

“Mer, please…Do you still blame me for your son’s choices? He chose to rule another realm. He is old enough to make this choice. Besides, he is happier now with Queen Alina.” King Oberon humbly pleads to his Queen.

“You are the reason he left! Do not forget for a single second that you are not to blame. Merlion would have chosen to be here. Yes, he fell in love with his Queen but he could have stayed here with her!”

Queen Meridian speaks softly but she might as well have shouted, with all the spite her words conveyed. Her eyes are full of fury in them.

“You have tried so hard to put our Princess in his shoes. You made her a ranger when you know very well that her place should be by our side, as a Princess!”

“Now, you are sending her away too? Have you lost all your care for my feelings?”

“You are the King and I am aware of my responsibilities as a Queen.”

“But you have seemed forgotten that first and foremost, I am a mother. My children try to flee from you but in doing so, I am left too…”

Queen Meridian’s voice is now full of anguish.

“Perhaps I have been just your Queen for you and not your wife…”

With that last statement from Queen Meridian, King Oberon finally releases his grasp on her. Queen Meridian takes that as her cue to leave. She does not look back at all.

“I am sorry…”

King Oberon sits on his throne with all the regret and sadness surrounding him.

****

Princess Ava is in a rush when she changes out from her dress to her black ranger clothing. She carries her sword in her scabbard and places her daggers on both her side sheath.

The Princess sees the rest of the Water rangers. Ailsa is already in front of the rangers of Water fairies. She stands side by side Aramir and Cleon, who are the commanders of their kindred rangers of Earth and Air fairies respectively.

Aramir sees the Princess immediately and waves to her.

“Our Princess Ava has decided to join us so it seems…”

He politely acknowledges the Princess’ presence.

All the rangers bow in unison and give way for Princess Ava to pass.

“Please, I am not your Princess for now. I am a ranger just like all of you. I believe we have wasted so much time on such pleasantries. Let us be on our way.”

The Princess commands as she walks ahead.

Aramir, Cleon and Ailsa follow after her and so does the rest of the rangers for this mission.

There are twenty fairies in this surveillance mission on the Orange Haven. They comprise of six rangers from each realm, with an addition of one swift water fairy messenger. The Princess completes their number.

The night sky is pitch-black when their group finally emerge from the Azure River.

The rangers noiselessly traverse the rocky part of the river bank. This leads to the border of the Orange Haven.

The Air Fairy rangers have already summoned the magical mist in the air surrounding them to camouflage their approach in the Fire Fairies’ territory. It is a cause for dispute when fairies from the other realms come unannounced or uninvited. However, the circumstance for this act is a different matter. The presence of the Dark Fairy in this realm is enough reason to make an exemption.

For now, this mission aims to find out the status of the Fire Fairy realm. Is the Orange Haven under siege by the Dark Fairy or are their people willing accomplices to rage a battle with the other Fairy realms?

Princess Ava is on the lead, with Aramir by her side. Cleon and Ailsa are positioned on opposite ends of the group. Caspian and Cleo, possessing the best ability in camouflage, venture a little further from their position to scout ahead for any fire fairies who might be on a look out.

All the rangers are very alert especially in such a dark night. The group does not use teleportation on this side of the realm. The less magic they perform, the lesser chance of detection. They patiently walk, trudging along the rocky terrain of this realm.

As the temperature rises, the group is aware that they are at the end of their border separating the Orange Haven.

Princess Ava raises her right arm to signal everyone to halt.

Chapter 28: Orange Haven

The Princess stares at the slope ahead. The rocky slope is just a bit inclined but not too sharply. Princess Ava pauses a while to test if anyone is bound to approach or attack their group.

The others wait for Princess Ava's next instruction. She motions for them to split into two groups towards the opposite sides of the slope. Half of the rangers under Cleon's command move carefully towards the right, to the direction where Caspian is positioned ahead. The other half led by Ailsa, marches to the left of the slope, where Cleo is.

Everyone crouch when they reached the top of the slope. Caspian, Cleo and Aramir take a peek down the rocky terrain below. The surrounding land seems to blaze with fire. Rocks appear red orange in color contrasting the dark silhouette of a mountain-like structure of the realm of Fire fairies.

The area appears deserted for the ordinary eye. But for the rangers, they are aware of magical spell casted here. There are three fire fairies sentries present at the moment. Each one stands apart from the other two. They seem relaxed in their stances considering they are designated guards if ever intruders are afoot.

The trespassers remain crouched above the slope. Their aim is to observe and that is what the mission is about. They can sense that the sentinels are obviously aware of their undeniable presence. However, the three fire fairies show no sign of alarm or distress.

Princess Ava stands but Aramir is quick to pull her back to crouching position again. The Princess looks at Aramir in disapproval but the earth ranger shakes his head to warn her not to disagree. So, they remain observing the fire fairy lookouts.

After a while, the fire fairy in the middle walks casually towards their direction. This particular one takes his time to approach, with his hands up to convey the message that he meant no harm.

When he is just a meter away, the group notices that something is strange in the fire fairy's demeanour. The eyes of this fairy are a bit odd. Instead of yellow irises, like the rest of his kind, his were coal black! This only means one thing. He is under a spell to follow any command of whoever put that particular spell.

There is no doubt that this is the work of the Dark Fairy. Surely, the other two fairies left down there are also under the same spell. Only the strongest of fairies can accomplish this kind of magic over other fairies. A fairy cannot easily be subjected to this manipulation without difficulty. Any fairy has the ability to negate this magic because each has the power to create or deflect an illusion. Only very dark magic can put one in this status.

Aramir allows the Princess to stand. The Dark fairy must have sent this one to relay a message.

Princess Ava comes forward and Aramir joins her. The rangers stay crouched.

“Greetings, my fellow fairies... I can see that you would like to have a look around.”

The voice definitely is not of this fire fairy.

“Alirion, whatever you have to say, speak now and release this poor fairy from your control!”

Princess Ava demands bravely.

“My Princess Ava, How gallant of you to demand that from me... You are one feisty Water fairy. You could have just been a fire fairy like me!”

The puppet fire fairy laughs loudly in mockery.

“You all came here in the first place. Maybe you are the one with a message for me?”

He continues to tease, showing a smirk on his face.

“We are here to find out what you plan to do. Why are you hiding there?”

Princess Ava angrily points towards the mountain realm. She is already losing her patience.

“My darling Princess…I have every right to be here. This is my home. I am a fire fairy. However superior I have become, I am still one of them. Even Lord Hakan is amazed over how strong I have come to be. He is literally speechless.”

The fairy gives a delirious laugh once more.

“What did you do with the King?”

The Princess lets out a shower of rain all over the fire fairy in front of her. She finally lost control. The poor fire fairy is all soaked with rain water.

“Princess Ava… That is enough!”

Cleon steps between the Princess and the drenched fairy. He makes a slight swish of his hand that automatically conjures a gust of wind to dry the unfortunate fire fairy.

Apparently, the fairy does not seem to give any care on whatever transpired. The Dark fairy resumes his discourse through him, sounding more entertained than ever before.

“Lord Hakan is indisposed right now. He refuses to help me with my plans so I locked him up underground, in the deepest darkest dungeon of his own fortress!”

The Dark fairy sounds so vengeful.

“Actually, Lord Hakan volunteered, as long as I spared his people!”

He adds with a bit of sneer.

“Where is the Prince?”

It is Aramir now who asks because Princess Ava is too furious to say anything.

She is trying to control herself as of the moment. She fears she might accidentally hurt the fairy.

“Prince Hagan you mean? That worthless, spineless son of his is not even worthy of his title! I took care of him already. By the way, to solve everyone’s puzzle, Hagan helped me escape from that wrenched tree you banished me into. I thought he was my friend but sadly, he helped me out of his weak heart! He was still in love with my sister after all this time.”

The fairy smiles menacingly.

It is Aramir’s turn to lose it. He suddenly punched the fire fairy on the face.

Cleon swiftly grabs the fairy to keep him away.

The fairy merely laughs, not even caring for the pain that the punch afflicted on him.

“What do you want, Alirion?”

Cleon asks calmly, while shielding the fairy from Aramir and the Princess.

“What do I want? It’s revenge of course! What else is there now?”

The fire fairy turns his back from them and casually walks back to the other two fire fairies outside the mountain fortress.

Aramir is about to follow but Cleon grabs his arm to stop him.

“Let him go Aramir. There is nothing else to be done. Clearly, the dark fairy has a magical hold on those fire fairies.”

He reminds him.

“We got what we needed. My apologies for losing my control back there.”

Princess Ava declares more calmly now. She walks back to the slope without another word.

Aramir and Cleon follow the Princess, as she signals the rest of the rangers to retreat. Her face is full of mixed anger and sadness over the information that the dark fairy mentioned.

Not even one among them is in the mood to say anything. The death of a fairy is a truly sad affair, especially a Prince. They might belong to different realms but they remain a kin to each fairy.

Princess Ava motions to all her company to gather around her. The other rangers follow without question.

After making sure that each one is in position, the Princess whispers a short chant. Afterwards she flicks her index finger.

“It is time to return to the Blue Haven.” She announces in a sharp voice.

The Air, Water and Earth fairies abruptly vanish in thin air, as if they were never there at all.

Chapter 29: Not Just a Princess

The Princess stares with humor all over her face as the Prince struggles to extricate himself from the vines that were entangled in all sorts of ways on his whole body.

The Princess does not even move an inch from where she is standing. She finds it very amusing for a strong fairy like him to be having difficulty. Or maybe…he is just pretending to humor her.

“Do you need my help now?”

She asks the Prince mockingly. She stays put where she is standing gauging how long the Prince will withstand not seeking her help.

After a few minutes, the Prince raises his hands as a sign of defeat. He turns to the Princess with a pleading look.

“Please a little help here my Princess.”

He tries to charm her with his bright smile.

Finally, with an easy flick of her finger, the Princess loosens the vines. She gives a little giggle knowing that she has proven a point.

“Thank you my Princess. I was just kidding when I said that a Princess like you should not be so involve in matters of battle or conflicts.”

The Prince is truly apologetic.

“I am your Prince, so you need not worry yourself on these things.”

He adds with a little more gentleness in his voice, in case the Princess decides to prove something again.

“My Prince, you know I love you with all of my heart and I will support you in your decisions when you become king. However, I would like you to keep in mind that I am not just a Princess.”

“When things get rough, I would be at your side in your battles! I would be your Queen after all. No one wants a weak queen.”

“Our people might be nurturing because it is in our nature but I could also be strong if our realm is threatened.”

The Princess ends her discourse full of pride in her tone.

She makes another movement with her index finger then a green flower appears on her palms. She tucks it behind her ear.

The Prince observes his Princess and he grins. She is becoming more and more like a queen in her views.

“You are really admirable.”

The Prince walks towards his Princess.

“Come my love, let us see your King Father and find out if he agrees with your ideas.”

The Prince replies teasingly as he takes his Princess’ hand and leads her to the Great Hall.

The Princess turns around with a swift movement and throws her dagger to the direction of a nearby tree.

The Prince and the Princess laugh at the same time.

Queen Alina smiles as she recalls her moments as a Princess, with her Prince Merlion.

He has always told her that she reminds him of his younger sister. Merlion has been so fond of his sister but chooses to spend time with her at the Green Haven more than his own realm. He was soon to be King of the Blue Haven but he has preferred to be with her here.

The Queen glances at her sleeping daughter. She smiles.

She still cannot believe that after what seems like eternity of anguish and longing, her daughter is just right beside her on her bed right now.

She gently strokes her daughter’s hair. She becomes emotional again of the thought that her princess grew up not being with her mother. She tries to imagine how her daughter was when she was growing up. Maybe she is as stubborn as her too.

Queen Alina sighs deeply and stands. She goes to the wide open window and sits by the window sill.

The sun is slowly rising. She marvels over such wondrous blessings that nature possesses. As the Earth Fairy Queen, she is responsible to keep the beauty of this world as it is.

“Mother?”

Princess Aria sits up so suddenly. Her face is filled with anxiety. She stands from the canopy bed and rushes to her mother’s side. She embraces her tightly without a word.

“Are you alright my child?”

The Queen questions her Princess, as she strokes her hair once more.

“I had the same recurring dream when I was still a child. I was a baby in a basket and I felt suffocated.”

Princess Aria responds quickly, a bit calmer now.

“I am sorry my Princess, we made the decision to hide you for your safety. Your father and I would not know what we would do if the Dark fairy got his hands on you.”

The Queen explains but sounding apologetic. Somehow, Queen Alina feels responsible for these alarming dreams of her daughter. Letting her go then seems a very terrible mistake.

“Mother, why is the Dark fairy like that? Why does he have so much hatred in him? What happened to him to fill his heart with so much anger?”

Princess Aria tries to make sense of it all.

The Queen is a little surprise by her daughter’s questions. However, Aria is of their world and knowing about the Dark fairy is part of being a fairy.

Queen Alina guesses that maybe her daughter is starting to think like the true Princess of their realm now. She would like to understand why all these events are taking place.

“My darling, so much has happened even before you were born and there are times, love can turn to hatred."

"This can make any of us lose our way. Fairies go through that, not just humans.” The words of the Queen still seems a puzzle to the Princess.

“We are hoping that we can still save Alirion from the darkness surrounding him but we fear he would not like our help.”

Queen Alina declares with grave sadness.

The Queen stands unexpectedly and pulls her daughter with her.

“Come Arianna…I have something to show you.”

The Queen steps on the window sill. She looks at Arianna and climbs through the open window. She motions for her daughter to follow.

Princess Arianna comes through the window but not as effortlessly as her Queen Mother. She needs more getting used to moving around wearing dresses like this.

Princess Aria gazes at where they are standing. It is another inner garden just like the one where she had her heart-breaking moment with Caspian. She frowns from the memory and tries to recover from it immediately.

Her Queen Mother walks a few paces to a small willow at the center of the garden. From a branch, she retrieves two daggers.

She returns to where Aria stands and then faces the willow. She takes aim and throws both daggers simultaneously. Both daggers hit the center of the trunk of the willow tree.

Princess Aria gawks in admiration. She never suspected that her Queen Mother has such a precise aim.

“It was Melandra who trained me. We were close since we were young. She has the skill of a true ranger even then and I was meant to be the Queen.” Queen Alina scowls at the memory of her friend and protector.

“She taught me to be more than just a Princess. We both believe that even our destinies cannot dictate everything that we want to be. I know I have my responsibilities as a Queen but I also know I can be more than just a royalty to be protected.”

She continues to explain.

“Mother, I wish to be like you. I would like to be brave too. Can you train me to be the right Princess for our realm?”

Princess Aria stares at her mother in anticipation.

“I will my daughter. I promised myself that I cannot be helpless. I owe it to my friend and to our people.”

Queen Alina says in agreement.

Princess Aria walks towards the tree to reclaim the two daggers her mother just threw a while ago. She smiles in excitement.

“I am ready now.”

Queen Alina gazes at her daughter with so much admiration.

Chapter 30: The Return

As soon as Princess Ava and the rest of the rangers from their mission return at the Blue Haven, the Princess goes straight to his father to report all the things they have learned from the Dark Fairy.

She looks so furious and distraught at the same time that she does not bother to excuse herself from the other envoys of the two realms.

“I bid you all safe travels to your realms. It is a sad affair to be the bearer of bad news regarding the Orange Haven.”

Ailsa bows to them and turns on her heels to follow Princess Ava.

Aramir proceeds to exit also, with the rest of the rangers. They are ready to depart for their own realm.

Cleon does the same for his group to bring the news to his kin at the White Haven. This will be such terrible news for their Queen.

The present situation of the Orange Haven as well as the King and his fire fairies are big matters for all the realms. The fire fairies are strong but the Dark fairy got to them using his dark magic spells.

Princess Ava finds his Father sitting on his throne with a bottle of strong wine. By the looks of it, the bottle is almost empty.

“Sad greetings to you my King Father. I am sorry but I bring such grave news…”

The Princess pauses upon observing the state her Father is in at the moment. She grabs the bottle of wine from him and places it on a side table.

“Father, what is going on with you? Have you had another dispute with Mother? How long have you been drinking?”

The Princess is aware that she asks a rhetorical question. Obviously, she knows the reason because nothing else will perturb him this way except a spat with her mother.

“Father, whatever happened in the past cannot be undone. You just have to understand that the pain remains in all of our hearts most especially with mother.”

King Oberon stares at his daughter with sad eyes. He shakes his head and places it between his hands.

“My daughter, I am aware of my sins to this family and my realm. You are correct that there is no way to take it back. My only wish is that you would still believe that my love for you, for your brother, and for your Mother remains the same.”

The King whispers imploringly.

“Yes Father, it is all done. I am trying to get past that now.”

“Please, there are bigger matters than the past. It is about the Orange Haven.”

The Princess waits for her Father’s reaction. She tries to sound as calm as possible.

“So tell me my daughter, what is going on in the realm of the fire fairies?”

The Princess receives her father’s full attention now.

“The Dark fairy controls the realm. King Hakan is imprisoned in the dungeons and Prince Hagan is dead.”

Princess Ava reports in a hurry. She thought that if she will say everything fast, it will be less painful.

Prince Hagan is a good friend. He might not be the best kind of Prince for his father could wish for but his heart is in the right place. She is sure of that since she grew up friends with Prince Hagan. However, he followed his heart in the end, which brought him to his demise.

Princess Ava wipes the tears that are starting to fall. She does not like to show any weakness in front of her King Father.

“My daughter, I am sorry to hear about Prince Hagan’s death. What we must do now is save King Hakan and his people from Alirion.”

King Oberon says gently to his daughter but very determined to do everything in his power for the rest of the fire fairies.

“Alirion has gone terribly insane for vengeance. I have to talk to my brother about this. Bigger things are at stake here. So many fairy lives are in danger.”

Princess Ava replies, now in a more emotionless tone.

“My Princess, we shall send for your brother to join us here. It is time that we set aside our family’s past. As a King, he will answer to our summons.”

The King states shortly.

“I will send Aerwyna to the Earth Haven immediately. She is our swiftest fairy after all.”
Princess Ava bows and turns, bringing along the bottle of wine with her as she exits.

****

Aramir searches for King Merlion in one of the inner gardens in the vast Elder Tree. King Merlion sits on one of the wooden pews facing yet another garden. The King is somewhat lost in his deep thoughts that he does not take notice of his approach.

Aramir takes a knee then greets his King.

“My King, our mission in the Orange Haven is complete. I am afraid there is no point in any secrecy about the mission since the Dark fairy is ready for us. He has taken over the realm and used his dark magic to use some of the fairies as sentinels.”

“It is safe to assume that the fire fairies have no choice but to obey him. King Hakan is his prisoner, and unharmed for now but Prince Hagan…”

Aramir cannot finish his words.

King Merlion stands and faces Aramir. He holds him on both shoulders then asks,

“How is Princess Ava?”

Aramir stares the King straight in his eyes and replies,

“Princess Ava is strong but I think she needs your counsel now, more than ever.”

King Merlion simply nods and turns away.

“You know Aramir, our lives are intertwined though realms separate us. All these turn of events are brought about by our interwoven past and present decisions. Now, the future is also dictated by what we will choose to do.”

King Merlion declares, full of resentment in his expression. His statements are full of deep meanings.

“Queen Alina believes we can still save him. We can still stop Alirion from his madness.”

The King adds but with so much doubt.

“My King, though you do not seek my opinion, I feel that you should let the past rest by enlightening the ones involved in this entanglement know of the truth. Unravelling this whole story from the past that has led us to our present predicament, might help resolve the situation better. It might even prevent mayhem in our kin.”

Aramir stops there. He believes he is able to state his point clearly to his King.

“You have come to be a wise counsellor at this instant. Who would have known that our young Aramir could learn to be wise like Marion?”

King Merlion answers with admiration.

“Marion has taught me a lot of things but I am afraid I would never come close to what he was as an honored leader.”

Aramir humbly responds.

Suddenly, Caspian enters hastily, followed by Aerwyna.

“My King, Aramir,” Caspian says in greeting.

“Aerwyna came to request for your presence in the Blue Haven.”

“My King, Princess Ava needs to talk to you immediately. She has sent me as soon as she can. She says she will not take no for an answer.”

Aerwyna states insistently.

King Merlion glances at Aramir, then to Caspian.

He finally makes up his mind that his sister is far more important than his personal issues. He nods to Aerwyna.

“Go ahead Aerwyna and inform Princess Ava of my return to the Blue Haven.”

Aerwyna bows and abruptly takes her leave.

“Aramir, you will come with me to the Water Fairy’s realm.”

“Caspian, find Bran. You will both watch over Queen Alina and Princess Aria. You will stay with them at all times in my absence.”

King Merlion leaves with Aramir after him.

Caspian is left at the garden by himself.

Finally, he will do his duty for his Princess and Queen.

Chapter 31: Prince and Princess

Princess Ava waits for his brother's arrival at the throne room. Their Father let her meet with Merlion here. She is aware that her father wants to see his son too but he knows that Merlion would rather not.

The Princess takes a deep breath. She is not sure how she really feels about their family situation. What happened in the past is something she just learned about when she is grown enough. Her Father's betrayal occurred before she was even born.

Their issues make her sad but she is unsure what she should really feel.

She wishes though that she is still just a young princess who has no worries or issues to deal with.

Princess Ava's thoughts come to Prince Hagan's death. Until now, she cannot believe or accept that Alirion can just get rid of someone just like that.

The Prince was the only fairy whom the Dark Fairy can consider as a friend.

Hagan followed him like a dazzled servant all the time when they were young. He has always been fascinated with Alirion's great ability to do magic spells. However, Alirion seems unafraid to delve in dark magic as well. He feels magic is useful, dark magic included.

Truth be told, Hagan was found of Alirion but his love for the Dark Fairy's sister was considered devotion. The Prince did not care if she was not a Princess. Hagan loved her unconditionally. However, her love was meant for someone else.

Princess Ava has always been positively sure that Prince Hagan cared for Alirion too. He would never have helped him escape if that is not the case.

Alirion used that pure love of Hagan to gain favors with King Hakan. Sadly, Prince Hagan did not see that Alirion was just befriending him so he would not be censored for pursuing dark magic.

Princess Ava noticed such things. She was the only one who understood how it felt to love someone from afar.

She was very young then but she admired Prince Hagan ever since she realized that she was already old enough to have special feelings for anyone. Now that she has grown up, all she felt was sadness that the Prince never got over Alirion's sister.

It would seem that the strongest magic that could control anyone is love.

Love could make the best of any of us follow blindly and lose our true self-worth.

Princess Ava sits absentmindedly on her Father's throne. She is reminiscent of the time when her brother Merlion was being groomed as the king.

Her brother always told her to enjoy the time that she does not have to worry about the future of their realm.

Merlion was right.

Presently, as a Princess who is all grown up, she is more involved in the affairs of not just her realm but the others too.

Merlion's arrival ends Ava's changing thoughts.

She runs like she is still a little girl to embrace her older brother. She has missed him terribly.

His refusal to go to the Blue Haven over the years seems too much for her but she could not blame him, just like her Queen Mother.

"Sorry if I made you wait for a while. I missed you so much."

King Merlion hugs his younger sister back.

"It is alright my brother. Your responsibilities as King must be keeping you away."

"I am glad you came."

"Princess Ava sits on the dais for her and allows her brother to sit on the armrest.

"I have heard of Prince Hagan's demise. I am so sorry Ava. I know you were fond of him."

Merlion places his arms on his sister's shoulders.

"You knew?"

Princess Ava sounds surprised.

"Of course, I knew!"

"You got overly excited when the Prince was present. You became ladylike instead of a careless teen warrior!"

Merlion smiles at the memory but becomes serious once more.

"I was young then. A prince like Hagan is pretty hard to ignore. I just don't get it why he never got his love reciprocated."

Ava is in deep thought again.

"Ava, let us not dwell in the past anymore. Prince Hagan knew what he was doing. The sad part is he was used by Alirion."

Merlion frowns.

“Since Alirion controls the fire fairies and keeps King Hakan as hostage, we have to find a way to save them without hurting anyone."

"Queen Alina thinks we can still try to talk to Alirion again.”

He says this with a hint of doubt in his tone.

“I think we are way past talks of peace with that one. The Dark Fairy is full on vengeance. He does not care about anyone now."

"We have to devise a plan wherein we could lift his dark spell over the fire fairies and at the same time rescue King Hakan.”

Princess Ava is trying to sound hopeful.

“That is way too big for a plan my sister. We have to hear what the Queen of the Air Fairies think. However, you are correct that Alirion does not have any plans of giving up quietly. If we have to face him in a battle, we must be ready.”

King Merlion sounds determined to deal with this issue once and for all. But he does not exclude the opinion of the Queen of Air Fairies.

“Big brother, you somewhat failed to include our dear Father’s opinion?”

Princess Ava sort of tries to remind him that their Father is still the King of the Water Fairies.

“You can handle him. I came here on your request, not to talk to him. I never intend to hear his opinion.”

King Merlion responds with a bit of arrogance.

“My dear brother, you are as stubborn as our Mother Queen. But then again, I could not blame you. But for me, I think it’s a lot easier since I was not yet around then. Still, our Father made a mistake!”

Princess Ava attempts to lighten the issue.

“Let us stop talking about that again…”

King Merlion cuts off Princess Ava politely.

“Right now, we must ready our armies. But just as I've told you a while ago, before sending them to a battle, we must hear what the Queen of the White Haven has to say.”

King Merlion concludes their conversation.

“Let us go to their realm now. Time is of the essence though I think the Dark Fairy is forestalling for our move before he does anything else. I am just curious what he is really waiting for.”

Princess Ava ponders over the Dark Fairy’s twisted mind.

The door to the throne room opens unexpectedly.

Ailsa enters and bows to Princess Ava and King Merlion.

“My Princess, Queen Aine has arrived. She is seeking a counsel with the King and Queen.”

Ailsa informs them hurriedly.

“Ailsa, accompany the Queen here. I will fetch my King Father and Queen Mother myself.”

The Princess sends Ailsa out.

"I guess the Queen of the Air fairies has been thinking the same way as we do. She has saved us the time to travel to the realm above the clouds."

King Merlion points out to his sister but seems unhappy about something.

“Well, brother, I suppose you will have to face our King Father now whether you like it or not. But look on the bright side, you will make our Queen Mother very happy to see you again.”

Princess Ava left with a mischievous grin.

“Make yourself comfortable, King Merlion. At least you get to stay longer in our Haven.”

"Welcome home big brother."

She adds playfully before finally exiting the hall.

King Merlion sits on his sister’s throne with a sour expression on his face. His sister can really be tremendously annoying sometimes.

The Prodigal Prince of the Water fairies stares around him. Truthfully, he has missed this place somehow. He just doesn't like to admit it though.

This will surely be an ordeal for him. However, the opportunity to also see their Queen Mother is a silver lining on his dark expression. He misses his mother too.

Chapter 32: Queen Aine

The Queen of the realm above the clouds seldom leaves her realm. She believes in the notion that the safety of her people lies on the security of the White Haven.

She is a proud Queen and she relies on her magic that she is surely be able to protect her own realm. Her visit to the Blue Haven is a statement that Queen Aine is also truly troubled by the threat of the Dark fairy.

Queen Aine of the White Haven comes in the throne room with her head held up high. She enters in a hurry but maintains her composure.

She is in a silvery gown that complements her ivory white hair. Her entourage follows her with their head slightly bowed.

Cleon, the head of her rangers, takes a knee in front of King Merlion.

King Merlion stands, a bit startled by the entrance of the Queen of Air Fairies.

“Greetings, Queen Aine. My sister and I were just planning to seek your guidance on the recent turn of events in the Orange Haven.”

King Merlion bows to acknowledge the Queen's seniority. She might appear young but she is much older than him, same as his parents.

“Greetings to you as well, King Merlion. I can see that you have finally come to your senses and returned here.”

Queen Aine’s remark is full of admonishment.

King Merlion masks his frown.

The Queen never knew the true reason why he left in the first place. He just put on a neutral expression as a sign of respect for Queen Aine.

Queen Aine never got married. She has been the Queen of the Air Fairies ever since King Merlion can remember.

Queen Aine has a more practical view on leadership. She does not believe in passing on the crown through the bloodline. She believes more on merits. Any fairy can be made King or Queen, if he or she deserves to be one.

King Merlion recalls the Queen eyeing her sister Ava to be the Queen of the Blue Haven and not him.

Queen Aine feels that King Merlion lets his emotions get in the way of his duties as a King. Ava has always been seen as the proactive warrior princess that she has grown up to be.

“So where is your father and mother?”

Queen Aine asks him maintaining her poise.

“Princess Ava has come to tell them of your arrival. They will be here soon. Have a seat.”

King Merlion offers the dais of Princess Ava, gesturing with his hands. He extends his arms to take the Queen's hand.

Queen Aine walks gracefully and places her hand on King Merlion’s. He kisses it and then he assists her to sit.

The other Air fairies stand in line at her side. Not one interrupts their discourse.

Having no other topic to say, King Merlion allows his mind to wander in the past once more.

This time his mind comes to recall Cara, the wife of Marion, was once being groomed to be her successor as Queen of the White Haven. She is not within the bloodline of Queen Aine but that does not matter to the Queen.

Cara was a brilliant Air fairy learning the craft of healing. That was what brought her to the Green Haven in the first place. She is training to learn healing magic from Nurse Zella.

This led Cara to meeting Marion, his formidable ranger. The rest is history.

King Merlion guesses that it might be the main reason for Queen Aine’s slight annoyance to him. He allowed his ranger to marry Queen Aine’s successor. Maybe she never truly accepted the choices of Cara. She was against their union.

King Merlion’s reverie ends with the arrival of Princess Ava with King Oberon and Queen Meridian behind her.

Queen Aine stands to acknowledge the presence of the King and Queen of the Water fairies.

She holds out her hand to King Oberon, which the King kisses as customary greeting. Queen Meridian embraces Queen Aine while Princess Ava curtseys.

“Welcome Queen Aine. We have waited a while for you to grace our realm with your radiant presence.”

King Oberon sits on his throne.

Queen Meridian walks up to King Merlion and gives his son a tight hug. It has really been a while since her son was with her last.

Afterwards, she sits at her throne while Princess Ava stands beside her brother.

“King Oberon, we need to save King Hakan at once. Regardless of the possible casualties, we must take action or else that Alirion will think of us as weaklings. Besides, the King is of utmost importance.”

Queen Aine seems to demand than suggest.

“Alirion is cunning enough to keep him alive for the moment, as a leverage, but who knows what that crazy fairy would decide to do next?”

Queen Aine continues in her discourse when no one seems to react.

"I would never have left the White Haven if not for this urgent matter between our realms."

The Queen of the Air Fairies points out.

“Queen Aine, are you suggesting to disregard the lives of the other fire fairies?”

King Merlion couldn’t keep himself from blurting out.

Queen Aine glares at King Merlion, surprised by the young King's question.

King Oberon looks towards his son for the first time. His expression is a mixture of emotions.

He is deliberating whether to reprimand Merlion for his outburst, in line with his paternal point of view, or admire him for expressing his disapproval towards Queen Aine, realizing his son is a King too.

King Merlion glares at King Oberon in defiance.

Princess Ava immediately touches her brother’s arm to caution him. Her brother should not let his anger towards their father be observed by the other Queen.

“Queen Aine, at some point I agree with you. King Hakan is our priority.”

Princess Ava expresses her approval to shift the growing tension in the throne room.

“If we plan to rescue him, we couldn’t send a lot of fairies to do that. It might trigger an all-out war between the fire fairies and the other fairies of the realms.”

The Princess reminds Queen Aine.

“I plan to lead the rescue mission myself."

Princess Ava states further.

"King Merlion, I will bring Ailsa, our head ranger. The rest of the rangers can be from yours and Queen Aine’s.”

It seems Princess Ava has everything perfectly planned out already.

“Princess Ava, I will join you on this mission.”

King Merlion insists.

“My brother, as King of the Earth fairies, you need to go to your realm. Your safety is important as well.”

The Princess gently reminds her brother of his duty as a King. She understands his concern for her but she is a ranger. This is what she must do.

“Then, let Aramir come with you.”

King Merlion decides.

“Cleon, you join them as well.”

Queen Aine turns to the silver-haired fairy beside her.

Cleon bows in assent.

"Princess Ava, you have impressed me yet again."

Queen Aine addresses the Princess as compliment.

"Queen Aine, it is my duty as a trained ranger to strategize in advance."

Princess Ava replies to the Queen.

“So things are settled. Princess Ava, take extra caution.”

King Oberon stands and embraces his daughter.

Princess Ava walks up to her Queen Mother and hugs her. She does the same to King Merlion.

The Princess and Cleon bow to all of them then turn to leave.

After their departure, King Merlion reaches out to his Queen Mother to take his leave as well.

“My son, can I have a word with you first?”

Queen Meridian does not let go of her son.

“Let us talk at the Turquoise grotto.”

King Merlion suggests, taking his Queen Mother’s hand.

Both bow to King Oberon and Queen Aine.

Queen Aine turns with a serious expression towards King Oberon.

Her face seems to question why King Oberon is impassive with his son’s behavior.

She does not say a word but her gaze speaks volumes.

Chapter 33: Fire Lord

Alirion slowly descends the spiral staircase leading to the dungeons. It is extremely dark but he does not show any difficulty at all. In fact, he is not even using any torch or any form of light to illuminate the path.

It is also partly because he is extremely familiar with every part of this Haven. This is where he grew up. This is where he learned all the magic he could get his hands on during his younger years. His mother died giving birth to him while his father did not even care about his existence. But the past is of no importance to him anymore. He is more focus on what he plans for his future. Nothing could hold him back anymore, not his father, mother and sister. They are all gone now.

Alirion's mind is occupied by his delight for being in this place once more. After his encounter with the rangers through his puppet fire fairies, he feels confident that he has sent a clear message that he controls everything in the Orange Haven.

It is truly a lot different when he was here so many years ago. He was full of ideas on how to get his hands on being the Lord of this realm. He always felt that he possesses greater power than anyone else and just being a follower is not his destiny. He should not be bowing to any King or Queen. Instead, he should be feared and obeyed.

He believes that his dark magic is strong enough to keep any fairies outside at bay. Therefore, Alirion takes his time to ponder if he should get rid of this King now or just torture him a bit for the lack of faith in his capabilities in the past.

As he goes down to the bottom most part of their realm, he could not help recall how he bitterly felt that he should have had this realm in his control a long time ago, if not for its very stubborn Fire Lord.

Alirion gives a sneer upon reaching his destination. He is facing the Fire Lord, the mighty King Hakan. This is the proud Lord of the fire fairies who never trusted him despite Prince Hagan's closeness to him and his beloved sister.

"So, what does a Dark Fairy like you need now? I have nothing to bargain with you. I requested for you not to hurt my people, our people. Instead you turned them into your puppets! Does your darkness know nothing about honor?" King Hakan shouts in rage inside his dark dungeon.

"Easy with your tongue my Lord. I might bind it again if you could not shut up and stop being so all mighty with me. You are still that arrogant King who always believes in no one else. I could always change my mind about it and destroy everything here." Alirion teases the Fire Lord.

“I have given you a chance. Despite being a bastard son, I have provided you sanctuary! I let my son befriend you! How come you were never like your sister?” King Hakan spats his words for the Dark Fairy.

Alirion's expression turns sour upon hearing the King compare him to his sister. She has always been the pride of their father. Why would his father be proud of him when he was just his illegitimate son from a poor fire fairy? His sister should have been a queen if only she heed the love of Prince Hagan. He stops himself in his thoughts about the past.

“Well, you should have made my sister your son’s bride! She could have been your Princess! Your son was so in love with her after all!” Alirion loses his cool too.

“My son makes his own choices but he can never force her. We are not like you! You have always been obsessed with power! Hagan should not have trusted you! Where is my son?” The Fire Lord shouts even more, not particularly showing any fear.

This time, Alirion laughs insanely.

“Oh, your son, my Prince, and friend saved me but changed his mind when I wanted my revenge. According to him, he does not intend to taint my sister’s memory with revenge. So, I decided to get rid of him.” He laughs out loud again.

“What? What did you do to him?” The Fire Lord's anger changes to worry.

“Well, before I visited your precious haven, we argued a lot so I let the ogres deal with him beyond the dark mountains after I have gotten enough of his essence to transform into him.”

"I would say it was a pretty brilliant plan of mine as a back up plan if your weak son changes his mind. And predictably, he did."

Alirion proudly explains.

“He is of no use to me anymore, just like my sister whom he loved so blindly. Both goodie goodie.” He continues narrating.

"You ungrateful bastard! After he rescued you and even tricking his own father to smuggle you pass the Water Haven, you got rid of my son just like that? You are such an evil traitor!"

“You are the one he shouldn’t have followed blindly!” King Hakan shouts again. The Fire Lord shakes the bars of his cell violently as if to strangle Alirion. His eyes turn bright gold from his fury. Sparks start to emit from his palms.

Alirion takes a few steps back. He seems to deliberate if he would continue taunting King Hakan further. He starts to reconsider if he bound the Fire Lord’s magic perfectly well.

“Well, we can’t go back now right? No more sister… No more friend…So at this instant, I should get rid of you too. In that way, I would finally have this realm for my own.” Alirion declares so full of himself.

The Fire Lord becomes silent. He tries to reign over his anger. He would not be doing this as a sign of defeat. He is bidding his time to unleash whatever magic he could although the Dark fairy used his dark spells to hinder him.

Alirion interprets the King's silence as acceptance of loss. He laughs out loud truly thrilled of seeing the Fire Lord's helpless state. He is about to add some more mockery but got distracted by the visions he saw through his sentinels outside.

"So, they've come for another visit?" he says with amusement.

****

Outside, Princess Ava and her company approaches calmly towards the fire fairies at the entrance.

Princess Ava stops in front of the three sentinels. She is flanked by Ailsa, Cleon and Aramir.

"We have come here to seek for a proof that you have not harmed the King. We also intend to claim Prince Hagan's body." Princess Ava speaks with an unwavering tone.

"Your Prince is not here. I have given him to the ogres. Maybe his parts were already distributed to all the ogres as trophies. A Fairy Prince would be a great honor for their kind." Alirion speaks through one of his fairy puppets with so much malice.

Princess Ava could not hide the disgust on her face. However, she would not let Alirion have the satisfaction to see the pain she feels concerning Prince Hagan's gruesome death.

"Well then, I demand you to show us King Hakan!" Princess Ava recovers and speaks bravely like a true royal Princess and warrior.

The Dark Fairy gave another mocking laughter.

"Why would I do that my Princess?" He replies full of himself.

"Whatever vengeance you have in mind, it has nothing to do with the Fire Lord. You already have this haven. What else then?" Princess Ava speaks calmly trying to control herself from hurting the fire fairies in front of her.

"What else do I want? I need all the other realms to bow to me as the ruler of all fairy realms." Another villainous laughter follows.

"You have really gone insane! The other Kings and Queens would not bow to you. You are just one crazy fairy with an oversized ego!" The Princess continues.

"If you think fearing you would make everyone follow you, then you have no idea at all about leadership. They would follow you not based on fear but for believing in you. What you stand for and for your people!"

Princess Ava shouts fearlessly.

Cleon, Aramir and Ailsa start to spread out. A couple of other fire fairies come out from the main entrance. All of them definitely are under a dark spell to do Alirion's bidding.

Cleon raises his arms and releases a tornado to blind the approaching fire fairies. Ailsa brings rock-sized ice down to incapacitate the fire fairies who are filing out from the entrance in great numbers.

Since the Dark Fairy is distracted with the sudden attack of different elements, Princess Ava and Aramir rush through the opening. All the puppet fire fairies are focused on retaliation that the two are not hindered by anyone. Their plan might work after all.

****

The Fire Lord notices that Alirion's attention is preoccupied by the events outside. He holds on to the cell bars and tries melting them with his fiery hands. It is taking so much of his energy since the dark spell of Alirion is in effect. However, he patiently continues with this effort.

Alirion's face is contorted so much for trying to control as many fire fairies to battle the intruders. The tornado and hailstorm makes it even more difficult for him to see everything that is going on out there.

****

Princess Ava and Aramir do not waste any time. Aramir uses his earth magic to open any door he could because he is not certain where the other fire fairies were being held prisoner. True to his instinct, the dark fairy's control is limited. Alirion could not possibly use his dark magic to all these fairies. The other fire fairies start to emerge from every nook and cranny.

Finally, he spots Haco, the leader of the rangers. Haco starts to organize everyone.

"Aramir, thank you for rescuing us. I am sending everyone out. We must get King Hakan from the underground dungeon. I am positive we would find the dark fairy there too." Haco signals to the fire fairies to move out.

"Lead the way Haco. Princess Ava is with me." Aramir jerk his head to point to Princess Ava's direction.

"Princess Ava, let us head to the dungeons." Aramir shouts to the Princess amidst the commotion of fire fairies moving out.

Haco leads the way to the underground dungeon with Princess Ava and Aramir after him. Two other rangers follow.

****

Meanwhile, Cleon and Ailsa continue with their respective magic spells. They are careful not to unleash more than what is necessary so as not to permanently harm their fellow fairies. They just need to incapacitate them so as not to get to them.

The hold of the Dark Fairy is still strong. But suddenly, the other puppet fairies begin to falter. Have Princess Ava and Aramir succeeded?

****

King Hakan takes Alirion by surprise. He blasts his dungeon door, startling the Dark Fairy from his concentration.

Due to the unexpected turn of events, Alirion loses his control over the fire fairies outside battling with the intruders.

“What! No! It can’t be!” Alirion shouts as he sends a ball of fire in King Hakan’s direction. His face is full of surprise and disappointment. He has not predicted that the Fire Lord could escape his cell.

“You, bastard! How dare you kill my son? He trusted you! He treated you as a real friend! You shall pay for his death with your own miserable life!” King Hakan throws balls of fire one after the other towards Alirion. His golden eyes are ablaze with so much fury.

Alirion gauges the rising anger of the Fire Lord. He has underestimated this King. He thought that he has extinguished any hope of this King after telling him that his son is already dead. Instead, his anger fuels the King to retaliate.

He realizes that he could not win. Alirion deflects the fire balls coming his way and casts a heavy cloaking spell to escape.

The last ball of fire from the Fire Lord hits the dungeon wall when Alirion vanished.

****

Alirion reappears at the top of the spiral staircase where he is met by Princess Ava, Aramir, Haco and his rangers. He does not waste time on them. He sends a blast of fiery electricity on Princess Ava’s direction.

The Princess tries to evade the blast. Aramir pulls Princess Ava behind him to shield her. A look of shock passes onto the Princess’ face. Aramir falls down stunned for a moment. Haco and his fellow rangers shoot their own balls of fire to fight back.

The Dark fairy disappears quickly leaving a mirthful laugh behind.

Princess Ava kneels down and embraces Aramir close to her. Her tears flow quickly drenching Aramir’s weakened body.

“Aramir, why did you do that?” The Princess whispers gently in Aramir’s ear. She caresses his long brown hair.

“My Princess, it is an honor to protect you. King Merlion would not forgive me if something happened to you.” Aramir replies in between breaths when he regains consciousness a few seconds after.

“Save your energy. Nurse Zella would know what to do.” The Princess cradles Aramir like a precious baby.

“Aramir, hang in there. Princess, we shall fetch King Hakan from the dungeon.” Haco bows and signals to his rangers again.

“No need to get me. I am here.” The Fire Lord ascends. His aura is full of fire and anger.

“That bastard of a fairy would pay for all of this.” King Hakan exclaims full of fury.

Chapter 34: Duties First

The events of the previous days has been very emotional to the Queen.

A few thoughts keeps her mind preoccupied somehow.

The first is on her occasional disbelief that her daughter is finally back after long years of endless searching.

The other worry is on King Merlion's return to the Blue Haven. He has not forgiven his own father and he is trying so hard to stay away.

These two realities is too much tiresome to contemplate for a very caring mother and wife like the Queen.

So a few moments of rest is the proper solution to a troubled mind.

Queen Alina retires to her chambers with Nurse Zella after her. Nadia and Enya, the two young fairy apprentices of Nurse Zella, join them too. This will be an opportunity for them to observe the Nurse fairy attend to the needs of the Queen.

Nurse Zella has been one of the elder fairies in the realm. Her magical knowledge needs younger fairies to pass on to. Both Nadia and Enya are diligent apprentices of the great healer.

Bran is guarding the Queen's chambers a while ago but is doubling back to Caspian and Princess Aria.

They left the two practicing magic right outside their abode near the small lake.

At first, Princess Aria wanted to tag along with the Queen to evade being with Caspian. She is not yet ready to be with him alone.

But her mother told the Princess that it is a good opportunity to practice magic. The Queen suggested that her daughter would have a good start if Caspian is to train her.

Bran is smiling to himself recalling his conversation with the Queen a few minutes ago.

****

“You know Bran, you don’t have to take the King’s command too literally.” The Queen suggested to him.

“I think nothing will happen to me in my chambers. First of all, having Nurse Zella and her two apprentices with me does seem to sound pretty safe enough number of companions already.”

The Queen continues to explain with an amused expression.

“I think we can handle ourselves on our own. Besides, I wouldn’t think anyone would dare attack me in my own realm.” She reminded him.

“What you need to be more concerned with right now is guarding my daughter. Make sure she does not harm Caspian too hard.”

“Our Princess seems to have inherited her aunt's temper after all.” Queen Alina says with a smile. She recalls how her sister-in-law could not control her temper herself.

“I advise her to practice with Caspian since she insists on practicing her magic. She learns quite quickly if you must know.”

“Better make sure Caspian is still standing until the King arrives.”

Queen Alina giggles with the other fairies and lets Bran out of her chambers.

****

Bran agrees with what the Queen said. It is amusing that his friend is left with the task of practicing with the one fairy he will never ever dare hurt.

With what is presently going on between Princess Aria and Caspian, they would definitely need a person to stay witness or be a referee.

Princess Aria will beat Caspian up badly with her magic. His friend would not even lift a finger to defend himself, or would he?

However funny it may seem to be, Bran hurries up to find them. He is betting that Caspian will surely stick to his duties first and let the Princess do what she wants with him.

****

Bran finds the ranger and his Princess by the lake. They have been on their own for a few minutes now.

True to the Queen’s warning, he sees Caspian soaking wet as he crawls by the lakeshore with a sour expression. He is taking his time to stand. Maybe he is deliberating if he should retaliate back.

Princess Aria, on the other hand, waits impatiently for Caspian to recover with her arms crossed in front. She is almost failing to keep a straight face for she is obviously enjoying herself as she tortures Caspian but intends to look serious or casual about it.

“I forget that you are also a Water fairy by blood my Princess. We should have moved to another area of this realm faraway from this lake.”

Caspian comments with sarcasm but also tries to stay polite to their Princess.

“Oh! My apologies to you Sir Ranger… I am still a bit new to my abilities so I have trouble controlling it presently.”

The Princess replies with the same sarcastic tone. She attempts to mask her growing impatience.

Bran stops and decides to watch from afar. He has not yet seen the magic of the Princess at work. He is totally curious himself on how far and how fast she has discovered her innate magic.

His other motive for holding back is to see how badly his friend would allow himself to be beaten up. He smiles mischievously to himself.

The Princess flicks her right index finger towards the direction of the lake.

After half a second, a portion of the water from the lake starts to swirl like a mini tidal wave. It smacks straight at Caspian so hard, sending him down with his back against the muddy shore.

Caspian looks annoyed but did not say a word. He just stands shaking his head and busies himself in removing the mud stuck all over him. After that he wills himself to dry.

Princess Anna crosses her arms once more. This time she looks annoyed herself.

“So what is it now? You are not going to fight back? Are you teaching me to fight with a coward?”

The Princess shouts at her ranger with irritation.

“How could I truly learn if you would hold back?”

“Suddenly you are afraid to hurt me? Do not worry okay? I could handle being hurt. I am a big girl now!”

Princess Aria adds with bitterness and pride. Her locket glows at the same time. This makes her emotions even more obvious.

Bran shakes his head. He is debating with himself if he should leave the scene this instant. It makes him feel awkward that he seems to be invading a personal matter between the two.

He sees Caspian stare at their Princess but remains silent. He looks conflicted.

It would seem that Caspian's attempt of using sarcasm on the Princess is backfiring on him.

Maybe it is time for Bran to get involve now.

“Excuse me, Princess Aria. I could join you in your training.”

Bran volunteers to break up the tension. He decides to intercede politely for the benefit of his friend.

Princess Aria nods to Bran in agreement.

In the meantime, Caspian walks far away from the lake, just in case the Princess intends to hit him again with water.

“Princess Aria, you seem to get the water spells handled very well.” He praises her.

“Let us try just isolating your earth magic first.”

Bran suggests to the Princess. He is not really a trainer but he intends to divert the Princess' anger towards something else.

She gives Bran another nod.

Bran is about to walk towards the bickering pair but stops short of his tracks.

“It is alright Bran. I could train with the Princess myself.” Caspian finally recovers from his silence.

He shakes his head while looking at Bran. He is warning him to leave them alone.

Bran shrugs his shoulders and sits on the ground to observe.

"I apologize for interrupting your training. Do continue and I will merely observe for now."

Bran announces to the two but both Princess and Ranger do not seem to hear at all.

They are more intently focused on their own bickering.

The Princess focuses her attention on Caspian once more with a mocking smile.

“So are you ready then Sir Ranger?” She asks confidently.

Caspian nods to his Princess.

With a wave of his left hand, he sends mud balls flying towards the Princess.

Princess Aria is caught off guard. She is not expecting that kind of move from Caspian. She deflects most of the mud balls but one or two got through and hit her smack straight on her face.

Princess Aria's expression of anger is priceless for Caspian.

“I'm sorry my Princess. Did you get hurt?”

Caspian is half concerned and half amused by what happened.

The Princess takes a moment to recover. She manually wipes the mud away from her face. A few drops on her dress. With her frustration, she overlooks to use magic to fix her present status.

“I am alright Sir Ranger.” She tries to keep her voice level down so as to hide her annoyance. She is determined to show that she is strong.

“Let’s try again.” Princess Aria commands.

“Are you sure Princess?” Caspian retorts.

“I just think I might have dirtied up your dress. What would your Queen Mother say if she sees you like that? Maybe you need to change first my Princess.”

“Excuse me? I am fine.” Princess Aria challenges.

“If you would allow me to suggest Princess Aria, you need to take a break first.” Bran blurts out as politely as he could.

This time, the Princess turns her attention to Bran. She looks as if she does not appreciate the interruption to their argument.

Bran feels a bit scared for his meddling.

Finally, Princess Aria turns away from them, stomping hurriedly towards indoors.

All of a sudden, ice hail drops on Caspian’s head.

Caspian looks surprised as well.

“That’s my Princess…” Caspian utters in amusement.

Bran laughs loudly at the scene.

“You’ll make such a scary couple.” He comments jokingly.

Caspian’s expression turns to sadness again.

Bran walks up to his friend and gives him a pat on the back.

“Caspian, you need a break too. Come on my friend. Let’s check what Jeera and the others are up to.” Bran starts to walk ahead.

Caspian allows Bran to lead the way. He really finds it difficult to prioritize his duties first. Being with the Princess makes him desire to be more than just a ranger. But what good would that do for him?

Chapter 35: A Tale of Love and Loss

Queen Meridian sits with her son at the grotto. She is holding King Merlion by the arm as if he would slip away if she lets him go. She still could not believe that she would ever get to see her son back here in his true home. She assumes that she is partly to blame for she never visited her son as well. She might call it a Mother's pride or a wounded heart.

The Queen opens her mouth, planning to say something but immediately shuts it. She is trying to figure out how she would say what is in her mind in a gentle manner. She is afraid that perhaps her words would make him avoid visiting their realm again and she would have to suffer the longing for her firstborn's presence once more. Just imagining that is enough torture for her.

"My son, I am aware of your duties at the Green Haven as their King. But you have really distanced yourself from everyone here. How did you manage all those years of staying so far, far away from us? Have you also forgotten about your Queen Mother?"

The Queen speaks softly but her words cut deeply in her son's heart.

King Merlion remains silent. He is unsure of what to reply to that. Should he make excuses for himself? He is aware of the guilt for leaving this realm which he was supposed to lead had he not decided to be with his Queen Alina at the Earth realm. His people has expected as much but never questioned his decision.

"I know the pain brought about by your King Father's betrayal. I have more to grieve than you. Despite of my love and devotion to him, he lost sight of my love for him and for our family."

Queen Meridian's words are full of sadness. The memories of the anguish upon discovering that your King and husband has shared his heart to another comes back fresh and wounding just the same as before.

"Mother, I understand your pain but that is the reason why I left in the first place. I could not stay loyal to a King who has done my own Queen Mother injustice."

"Let us not even go to the pain of a son who believed in his father since he was young. I have always admired the proud and mighty King Oberon."

Merlion's statements convey so much disgust.

King Merlion finally admits his true reason for serving another realm. It might seem cowardice to some but for him it is his way of defying his King Father.

His love for Queen Alina has also played a part in replacing the hatred for his father in his heart by the love for the Queen of the Earth fairies. Queen Alina showed him the same love and

maybe even more than he feels he deserves. She has always been her source of calm through the years of his resentment for his father.

In his eyes, King Oberon has failed his duties to his realm when he betrayed them for loving someone else besides his own family. Merlion wants to be a better King than his father. Perhaps he can be a better father as well.

“I am aware that even when you felt betrayed as his wife, you stayed devoted to him as his Queen.”

“How can you stay that way with him?” King Merlion questions his Queen Mother as if she betrayed him too.

Queen Meridian takes a deep breath to gather her own strength to explain her actions to her son.

“Merlion, as the Queen of this realm, I must exercise my compassion and what better way to serve as an example of that than forgiving the King. I forgave him but I have never forgotten a single day.”

“I saw how you look at your father when you were just our Prince then. I love you so much and that tore me up inside because I still love your father despite of his shortcomings.”

"You are a King to your own realm now and a Father to your daughter. You must see how your actions would ripple towards the lives of these people. You have to do your duties as a role model to others.

“When I became pregnant with your sister Ava, I thought everything would go back to the way it is, but I was mistaken.”

“You felt it yourself. You have never trusted your father ever again.”

Queen Meridian smiles a bit from a memory.

“Princess Ava gave us something to hope for. We wanted to be whole again, for her sake.”

King Merlion couldn’t help but smile too. His sister Ava is a bundle of joy for them.

Queen Meridian holds her son’s face in both her hands. She makes sure that he is looking straight at her eyes.

“My son, if you must know, before we had your sister. I have done something unkindly too.”

She pauses weighing what she is about to say.

“When your father promised me then that he would stop seeing her, I met with her without your father’s knowledge.”

King Merlion’s expression is a mixture of surprise and confusion.

“She is more beautiful than the usual humans. No wonder your father’s eyes adored her. He was captivated by her human frailty”

Queen Meridian becomes sad once more.

“Areeadne loves your father too. She loves him enough to decide to stay away from him for your father to be the true King that he is supposed to be.”

"I never asked her for that but she was determined to do so on her own."

“For that, I admired her. She was not selfish.”

She seems almost done with her tale of love and loss.

“Did father pursue her?” King Merlion asks with curiosity.

“Areeadne asked me to help her. For your father not to ever find her, I used magic.”

Queen Meridian confesses and looks relieved for finally being able to say out loud her secret.

“I used magic for my own selfish reasons. She requested me for it but deep inside my heart I did it because I wanted to do it too. She was out of our lives for good.” She says as if condemning herself.

King Merlion holds his Queen Mother’s face too.

“Mother, you kept that all these years? What about father? Does Ava know anything?” King Merlion questions.

The Queen shakes her head. Her eyes are brimming with tears already.

She removes her hands from Merlion’s face to claim his son’s hands on hers.

“My son, there is more…I kept in touch with Areeadne. Your father has a son with her. She was carrying his son when she left.” She admits weakly, as if this whole conversation tired her out.

“What? We have a half human brother? Where is he?” King Merlion inquires.

“That is the last that I know. Areeadne requested me not to contact her again and made me promise not to look for them. All I can assume is that he is a little younger than you but a lot older than Ava. Well, in human years.” She calculates roughly.

“I am sorry my son. I have to keep my promise to her.”

Queen Meridian appears defeated and guilty at the same time.

King Merlion embraces his Queen Mother in response.

Mother and son stay in that embrace for some time. Neither have any idea what to do with the secret they share now.

The Queen leans her head on her son's chest. With her revelations, she has freed herself from that long kept burden.

King Merlion's mind starts to formulate a plan of action based on the knowledge of a human brother.

Should he tell his sister? What about their father?

King Merlion strokes his mother's back to comfort her.

How can their family be this complicated?

He remembers that he has just got back his own daughter after a very long time in search for her. Right now, this makes him feel responsible that he has to do good with this half-brother whom he had no idea about up until this very moment.

As for his King Father, he recalls how much he admired him before his betrayal to their family. Being a father himself, he is aware of the King's right to this human son. Even though he still could not forgive him for breaking his mother's heart, his father should know of his other son.

"Mother, I think it is time to end all the secrets. We must talk to Father and Ava."

He is resolute with this decision.

After this is settled, he needs to have a word with Caspian too. No more hiding. No more secrets.

Chapter 36: Fire versus Fire

The atmosphere in the Orange Haven remains tense. The gravity of the terror of an entire realm of the Fire fairies under the spell of Alirion is disturbingly alarming to its people.

The Fire fairies are a proud and brave race. Never have they imagined to be invaded by a single fairy and lose their control over their realm. What is worse is that the intruder is one of their own. It is scary but mostly insulting for their kind.

King Hakan sits on his Granite throne with both hands blazing with fire. Not a single fire fairy dares to utter a word. The whole throne room is filled with all the fire fairies in the Orange Haven. After being freed by the Princess of the Earth Haven and their other kin, they are all waiting for their King's command.

At the moment, the King spins the fireballs on each of his palms like tops. All eyes are focused on the blazing fireballs.

“My people, I would have to apologize to all of you for the cruelty of the Dark fairy. It is my fault because despite of being aware of my son's affinity to Alirion, I did not take any steps to be more vigilant in guiding our Prince better.”

The Fire Lord's voice seems to break. He carries on playing with the fireballs on his palms. This gives him something to focus on instead of his brewing emotions.

“If not for Prince Hagan's blind friendship with Alirion, the Dark fairy would not have the opportunity to even enter our realm. Our Prince made a terrible choice. And for that I take the blame. He is my son and I should know better.”

He admits with bitterness.

As proud as he is of being the strong leader of this realm, he feels guilty that he was not able to pass on the same strength to his son Prince Hagan. He has been soft with him and now it is too late. His son is dead.

The twin fireballs shoot straight to the ceiling of the throne room. The King's bottled up anger finally unleashed upon his recollection of the manner in which his son died.

The fire fairies instinctively raise their arms above their heads like a shield anticipating the effect of the fireballs.

The King does not even notice the reactions of his people. It appears that his anger is directed to himself.

“Prince Hagan is dead and Alirion has escaped after he made us all look like fools!”

The King stands shouting these words to all of his people. His eyes are of bright orange like burning flames ready to bore a hole into his enemy.

“We shall not take this peacefully! That coward fairy shall pay for his insolence!”

“I shall pursue him in the Dark Mountains and wherever else he will try to run to for cover! Even if he runs to the ends of the world, I will not stop until I have avenged my son.”

King Hakan ends his monologue.

“My Lord, I will follow you anywhere to bring justice for our Prince and our realm.”

Haco, the leader of the rangers, steps forward as he professed his support. He bows with fealty while he valiantly volunteers to join his King.

The rest of the rangers step forward as well and bow reverently to their King.

“I am thankful for your unwavering loyalty and respect for my leadership despite the weakness I have displayed in the past.”

“My King, let me lead a few of our rangers on a scouting mission to pinpoint the exact whereabouts of the Dark fairy. We shall also try to scavenge at the Ogre's lair for Prince Hagan's remains. The Dark fairy might just be exaggerating what he has done with our Prince.”

Haco proudly voices out his well laid plans.

“We shall allow you the solace to grieve for your loss.”

He adds with sadness in his tone.

“My brave Haco, I give you my permission to execute your ingenious plan.”

“I am grateful for your consideration.”

“Prepare for whatever provisions you might need.”

The Fire Lord returns to his throne.

Haco and a dozen of rangers bow then exit soon after.

“My people search our fortress. Check each and every area of our Haven. Find out if the Dark fairy has left any clues as well as magical traps. Be careful. We shall fortify the security of our realm.”

All the fire fairies depart in silence from the throne room.

The Fire Lord sits on his granite throne once more.

Now that he is all alone, he slackens off his posture as he covers his face with both hands.

The silence in the throne room is deafening. The King seems to have fallen asleep. Then suddenly, a certain sound can be heard coming from the King.

At first it is just short sniffles, then the sniffles progress to sobs.

The exhausted Fire Lord finally breaks down. His façade of strength crumbles down.

He cannot still reconcile in his mind that his son is dead. He regrets not being able to share his time with him. Maybe that is the reason for his son's blind devotion to Alirion.

The Dark fairy used the Prince's yearning for attention from his King Father. The Fire Lord is the kind of father who is rigid on his feelings and is afraid to show any weaknesses.

"Romina, my love, I am sorry I have failed you."

The King laments to himself.

"Why do you have to leave us so soon? I have no idea how to be a good father. I only know how to be a strong King."

The Fire Lord resumes talking out loud as if in a conversation with his Queen.

Queen Romina died when Prince Hagan was still very young. She fell ill of an unexplained cause.

"Our son needed a father not a King. I have not realized that when you died, Hagan was left on his own with his grief for his Mother's death. I was caught in my own grief. We should have mourned for you together as father and son."

The King continues to talk to himself in between his sobs.

King Hakan turns silent abruptly.

"I will avenge you my son even if it means the death of me."

He whispers to himself, sending several fireballs flying across the throne room.

Haco enters the throne room without any warning.

He glances around the room catching a glimpse of the slowly fading flames of the fireballs.

Haco returns his attention to his King on his throne.

"King Hakan, we are now ready to depart. I would just like to send you word that Princess Ava has left with Aramir, the injured Earth ranger. She is escorted by Ailsa and Cleon."

"They will bring Aramir back to the Earth Haven. Nurse Zella will be able to care for Aramir better than any of our healers."

Haco waits for the King to respond.

"Haco, I entrust to you our rangers. Return as soon as you have the coward's whereabouts."

The King nods to his ranger.

“I give you my word, King Hakan.”

Haco bows then turns to leave.

The Fire Lord remains silent once more. He has said out loud everything that he has in his mind.

He is now trying to make peace with himself. He breathes deeply with a resolute feeling. He knows that he can surely protect his people if he puts an end to the Dark fairy with his own hands.

The Orange Haven is a strong castle that Alirion has been coveting for a long, long time. The fires of this mountain fortress shall remain ablaze by fighting a fire fairy like Alirion with fire as well.

King Hakan intends to show this Dark fairy the greatest fire that will end his evil plans once and for all.

The Fire Lord is done mourning as a father. He is now ready for battle as a King.

Chapter 37: Family Affairs

The throne room seems cold and empty. A certain melancholy can be felt though the place is brightly lit by the rays of the sun seeping through the huge windows left wide open so the breeze of the afternoon winds fans the interior.

The King of the Green Haven sits on his throne with his right hand under his chin in deep thought.

He went straight to his throne upon his arrival in his realm.

But wait… Is this place really his home? He starts to doubt himself after the long, exhausting and emotional dialogue he just had with his own family back in the Blue Haven. Apparently, he is still very much involved in the affairs there. He sighs deeply in his frustration.

Though he tried staying away all those years, his belief that his hurt and disappointment for his parents' past would heal was a mistake.

Until now, all the secrets and the feelings that go with them linger in his being.

How can this be so complicated?

King Merlion recalls how shock his King Father was when he found out that he has a half human son. His father was almost in tears with all the guilty feelings in his heart. But King Merlion was not sure if it is from his realization that he had another son whom he failed to be a good father to or it is from his remorse that his philandering has a more concrete proof.

King Oberon, his father, has always been such a complex fairy. It is difficult to say what his actions really imply. Nevertheless, he surely looks affected by all the revelations.

As for his Mother, Queen Meridian, it is ironic that she is the one feeling guilty for hiding her knowledge of the illegitimate child of his husband from a human. All she did was cry the whole duration of the family reveal.

It was only Princess Ava, his sister, who took things with a level head. She has decided that they should find out what happened to this half-brother but not until she was sure that Aramir was in good hands before starting such a quest.

Princess Ava even joined him in bringing Aramir back here to be healed by Nurse Zella. She refuses to leave Aramir's side with her view that Aramir saved her life from the Dark fairy when they rescued the Fire Lord and freed the rest of the fire fairies.

King Merlion shakes his head and smiles a bit. His little sister never fails to impress him. She is more than worthy to lead the Water fairies, much, much more than their father and he put together. She has always been the most reasonable one in their family after all.

Presently, King Merlion is so grateful that all their family secrets are out in the open. Well just among the four of them. The whole realm need not know of his Father's indecency. He might hate his father for that but not that much to let him lose face among their kin.

He is a father himself now and for your family, you would do everything to avoid them from getting hurt.

His mind moves to another family that needs the same honesty that he tried to establish in his own, which is why he is in the throne room right now. He is waiting for his Queen to join him in this most difficult of task.

Right in time with his thoughts, Queen Alina enters the throne room. She rushes to her King who stands from his throne to meet her half way. She gives him a loving embrace.

King Merlion sighs once more. His Queen has always been his source of inner peace. She is aware of his internal battles.

"Are you ready for this, my love?"

The Queen looks straight into the King's eyes to make sure he is truly up to the task at hand.

The King nods in assent but definitely full of sadness in his eyes.

The door of the throne room suddenly opens and Princess Aria enters in a hurry.

"My Princess, what are you doing here?"

The King stares in his daughter's direction, truly surprised with her entrance.

Queen Alina takes his King's hand and leads him to sit with her at their thrones.

"My King father, I apologize for my intrusion but Queen Mother told me that you would be speaking with Caspian."

The Princess is in a rush to explain herself.

"I am sorry if I have been having a fight with Caspian when he was training me in your absence. I know he didn't mean to hurt me on purpose. I demand from him not to hold back so I would truly be able to learn to fight."

Princess Aria continues with her narration a bit flushed from sprinting to the throne room. She intends to get there first ahead of Caspian in the notion of explaining the incident at the lake.

"My Princess, whatever transpired during the training is definitely not the reason why I am set to talk to Caspian. Besides, whatever goes on in training you is based on Caspian's best judgment. He is a sensible ranger after all, just like his father."

King Merlion stops short in his discourse upon remembrance of his task.

"This is of a different matter."

The King's words are almost inaudible.

“So what is this about then?” Princess Aria asks with much interest now.

The King gazes towards the Queen by his side for a little help.

“My Princess, this matter is more about Caspian’s past than anything you are worried about.”

“Please my child, have a seat. You might as well stay so you would understand Caspian’s situation better.”

The Queen motions to the other throne by her side.

Princess Aria goes to her throne with a puzzled expression but stays silent this time.

After a while Caspian enters and bows to them. He is a bit wary seeing Princess Aria there too.

“My King and Queen, Bran told me that you would like to speak to me?”

“If this is about my behavior during training…”

Caspian is about to explain further but the King raises one of his hands. The ranger stops in midsentence.

It is Queen Alina who speaks first.

“Caspian, you need not explain anything about it. In fact we are grateful for your help in training the Princess.”

Caspian looks to the Princess’ direction with a smile. Princess Aria scowls a bit but changes her expression quickly.

“Caspian, it is however us who owes you an apology.”

King Merlion says in all humility.

Caspian’s facial expression turns to confusion. Why do they need to apologize? He thought to himself.

“Caspian this is about your father Marion and your mother Cara.” Queen Alina interjects to aid the King in his explanation.

Caspian’s expression changes to sadness.

“My King and Queen, you need not be apologetic for what happened. My father did his duty as a ranger and my mother’s death is on me.”

Princess Aria remains silent on her seat but is tempted to go to Caspian to console him.

The King starts to speak again.

“Caspian, it is true that the death of your father is in the hands of the Dark fairy but you have to know the whole truth of the matter. It is our responsibility to reveal to you something of grave importance which is part of your past and also of the present.”

Both Caspian and Princess Aria are clueless of what the King is talking about.

“Caspian, your mother Cara is not an Earth fairy. She is an Air fairy. But your father and mother fell in love so I gave them my blessing to be wed. Queen Alina and I have the same circumstances too. So each fairy has the right to choose their beloved.”

“Though your mother truly wanted to be a great healer for her realm and the possibility of being their future queen, her love for your father made her decide to stay with us. They built a life here in the Green Haven.”

King Merlion narrates slowly.

“So I am both an Earth and Air fairy?” Caspian asks curiously.

“Yes Caspian but that is not all that was hidden from you. We decided not to tell you about your mother’s true lineage to prevent you from discovering something more complicated about her affinities.”

King Merlion takes a slight pause as if doubting if he should still continue.

“We have always considered Cara as part of the Earth realm. She is a healer herself and that is surely one of the qualities our people embody. However, she has a sibling.”

“Wait, are you saying I have a living blood relative?”

Caspian interrupts the King once more from his excitement in finding out about a kin.

“This is where the tragedy begins… Cara has a half-brother among the fire fairies. Her Air fairy father had a son but never recognized even in his death.”

“However, your mother loved her half-brother just the same. But her brother grew up being bitter about his father’s rejection and strived to be the greatest fire fairy he could be. It was only his sister who tries to give him guidance again and again though his bitterness grows inside him.”

“With Cara's death, her brother lost any good in his spirit.”

“He isolated himself and delved in dark magic. He blames his loneliness to all the fairies whom he thought stole his chance to be great or stood on his way.”

“In his twisted mind, he blames your father for stealing his sister and having you lead to her death.”

King Merlion stops his narration abruptly. He looks so tired by now.

Caspian is speechless as he process all the information revealed to him after so many years of living with this unknown tragic past.

His eyes widens upon realization of his mother's half-brother whom his King spoke of.

"No… he killed father!"

Caspian shouts in anguish.

Princess Aria cannot contain herself anymore. She stands and approaches Caspian to embrace him.

Caspian welcomes the Princess' comforting arms. He clings to her tightly just like when they were in the human world.

Suddenly, she is not the Princess anymore. She is the girl named Anna who saw him at the Willow tree.

Caspian can sense his legs would give up and he would stumble if not for the Princess in his arms too.

However, Caspian refuses to show his pain. He controls himself so he would not shed any tear in front of his King and Queen.

"I'm sorry about all this Caspian."

The Princess cannot find any other words to say. She wants to make things better for him but she feels helpless too.

King Merlion and Queen Alina stares at them in silent pity. They are aware of the pain in knowing a past that haunts you even in the present.

But they are truly convinced that they did the right thing. They have concealed it from Caspian for he was still young then. They would not wish for him to be full of anger growing up.

Telling him now that he is all grown up would give him a clearer perspective of what he should do.

Queen Alina hopes for Caspian to turn to forgiveness towards his uncle, Alirion. But King Merlion is aware of the pain of betrayal. He has doubts in the outcome that his Queen hopes for.

This time, a heavy burden falls on Caspian's shoulders. How does he see the Dark fairy now?

Chapter 38: Second Chances

Caspian absentmindedly walks towards the door of the throne room with Princess Aria on tow holding his hand. He does not even notice that he did not excuse himself nor take a bow at the King and Queen. His head is spinning with all the knowledge of his complicated past.

King Merlion and Queen Alina let the Princess leave with Caspian without any objections.

Caspian is like a son to them already most especially for the King. When Marion, Caspian's father, died saving the King, Caspian was left orphaned at a young age.

King Merlion considered it his responsibility to care for this boy. He let Marion marry Cara. He was protected by Marion from the Dark fairy. In his opinion, he should be blamed for everything that brought this boy sadness and pain.

Queen Alina cared for Caspian like a son too. Her attention transferred to this boy when that faithful evening she lost her precious Arianna for the unforeseen circumstances at that time. Truly, It was tragic that they lost their daughter while Caspian lost his parent on that faithful night.

It seems that fate has conspired to bring Caspian and Arianna together. They have lost their parents even when they were still young. Fate has brought them together to ease the loss, the loneliness.

Queen Alina is thankful that Aldar and Melandra have brought their daughter to a wonderful home. As she observes Arianna, she has grown quite humble and compassionate. This shows that their Princess grew up surrounded by love and pureness of heart. She has yet to express gratitude to the human parents of Arianna.

King Merlion and Queen Alina watch the two young fairies exit the throne room.

When Caspian and Arianna are finally out of hearing range, the Queen gives a heavy sigh. She holds the King's hand and caresses it.

“My love, may our Princess bring comfort to our ranger.”

King Merlion squeezes his Queen’s hand in reply.

“May all these revelations give him the wisdom to decide what his future should be.”

The King's words convey so many different meanings. It would only come to light when Caspian finally accepts who he really is and where he should be and decide to become.

After all, he is an Earth ranger but an Air fairy too. They would not take it against him if he decides to leave otherwise. The Green Haven carries so many memories for him, mostly painful ones

The Dark fairy is another matter for Caspian to deal with.

What would be his plan of action now?

****

Princess Aria leads Caspian to the same inner garden where they said their goodbyes not so long ago. It is rather ironic that back then, they were both intent on being as far away as possible from each other. Both thought the distance would end their pain. But right now, they seem to be drawn together by pain.

Both sat together at the same hammock that Princess Aria sat on while waiting for Caspian before. This is the first time they got this physically close once more since the Princess arrived in the haven.

Princess Aria does not let go of Caspian's hand. She stays silent, giving the ranger some time to calm his troubled mind. She would like to make him feel that she is still Anna, the girl she met at the willow tree.

It feels like they are back at their Willow tree, sitting under its shade. They felt comforted by their silence as they sit side by side. Back there, it was usually Princess Aria who needed consoling. The difference now is that Caspian is the one who seeks sanctuary from his misery.

After what seems like eons have passed, Princess Aria speaks.

"Caspian, whatever you like to do or say, I am just here for you. Nothing has changed. I am still Anna, okay?"

Caspian merely nods but gently brushes his hair with his free hand. He faces the Princess as if he just saw her for the first time.

"My Princess, I would like to apologize for all my actions since you got here. I have really been such a jerk."

He sighs.

Princess Aria is surprised by these words from Caspian. She did not expect him to talk about them. She thought that he would rather deal about his own issues. Maybe this is his way.

"You have done nothing wrong. I was just blindsided with the quick turn of events. Your being our lost Princess and me being just a ranger is a bit hard to process for me back then. Can you ever forgive me?"

Caspian explains himself.

Caspian holds Princess Aria's hands with his and looks straight into her green eyes.

Princess Aria feels the heat of her face blushing. She cannot take her eyes off Caspian's green eyes too.

She breathes deeply to calm her nerves.

“Caspian, of course I was taken by surprise by your sudden change of attitude. You hurt my feelings. But I think you have bigger things to sort out than what we are to each other.”

“I know you don’t like to talk about it but if you do, I am here to listen.”

“In my opinion, now that you know everything, you should be relieved that you know where you stand and that would help you plan your future.”

“I have felt so lost when I found out that I was abandoned in the past. But I think it is best that we know the real truth about our lives even if it is hurting us rather than stay obliviously peaceful in a false notion of happiness.”

Princess Aria retrieves her hands from Caspian’s grasp and places them on Caspian’s cheeks.

Both are still gazing at each other’s eyes, green to green.

Without a warning, the Princess pinches both sides of the ranger’s cheeks so hard then laughs out loud with amusement.

“That is for your mud balls! You ruined my dress Sir Ranger!”

Princess Aria shouts at the ranger in false anger.

Caspian massages his cheeks feeling the sudden pain of the pinch with his eyes wide with surprise. He gives a slight smile.

“You are such a Princess, my Princess! I thought you would like me to train with you without holding back?”

He teases the Princess, still recalling her utter shock on that day by the lake when his mud balls splat at her face and drops some mud on her dress.

Princess Aria grins back at him. Finally, she was able to distract Caspian and made him smile.

“You know what Princess? You are absolutely right. It is better to know the truth than be clueless of the reality.”

“When did you get so mature in your ideas?”

Caspian casually asks.

“I am a Princess now remember? So I guess I have to be smart and mature.”

The Princess retorts back.

“Well this might be what we can call second chances.”

She adds.

Caspian stares at his Princess a bit confused with her comment.

"What I mean is that, we both grew up living a life without a single idea that it is unreal. But now, we have learned the truth and we are given a second chance to live our real lives. What we do now would define who we are from now on."

Princess Aria clarifies.

Caspian gives a nod of agreement.

"So, what do we do now, my Princess?"

Caspian waits for the Princess to reply.

Princess Aria gazes around the garden. Her eyes focus on a blue rose in one of the bushes. She stands then walks towards it. She touches the blue rose but her mind is somewhere else.

"Caspian, do you remember your promise to Marmee?"

Princess Aria turns to ask Caspian.

Caspian's face lights up with remembrance.

"You plan to go back?"

Caspian asks a bit wary.

"I know the Dark fairy is still out there but that should not stop us from living our lives, right?"

The Princess pauses then picks the blue rose.

"I would tell Queen Mother that we would visit Marmee and Popsie. We could bring Bran and some of the rangers with us."

The Princess' face beams. She feels proud of her grand plan.

"We could even ask Queen Mother and King Father to join us if they like so they could meet my parents from my human world. After all, they owe them for taking care of me all those years."

Princess Aria states all these with finality.

Caspian stares at her with doubt.

Princess Aria smiles widely and pulls Caspian to stand from the hammock.

"Come on ranger. It's time to live our lives. Let's go back to the throne room."

Caspian allows his Princess to drag him along.

Maybe Princess Aria is right. They need this break. He misses their willow tree already.

Chapter 39: Dark Mountains

There is portion in all the fairy realms that the fairy folks avoid to travel on. Not that this place is forbidden but more on the common knowledge that it is the region in the realms that does not abide by the usual rules or laws exercised by all fairies. If you are only too desperate to flee from all the realms you would be insane to search for sanctuary there. That is the case for the Dark Fairy. There is nowhere else to go but to the Dark Mountains and the rest of the treacherous zones beyond it.

The Dark Mountains derived its name from its dreary physical features as well as all the other shady and malevolent creatures inhabiting it like ogres for instance. The four realms living in a structured and harmonious way of life makes the Dark Mountain inhabitants shunned for their notoriety and disregard for rules and order.

In truth, the other fairies never sent any of their kin beyond the four realms for their own safety. In the past, there were stories of adventurous number of fairies who dared but never heard of their return. But that was a long time ago. Who knows what has become of these wild cards of fairies.

Haco and a few of his fellow rangers march soundlessly on the uneven terrains towards the Dark Mountains. These rangers are used to such conditions that they are not in any way bothered by their present circumstances. Like their King, these fairies were trained to endure harsh environments no matter what. They are as courageous as their Fire Lord.

Currently, Haco and the other rangers trudge in silence, lost in each ones thought after hearing their Fire Lord's speech on retribution. Their minds are filled with rage as well for the insult they endured during their captivity by the Dark Fairy. Though it was just for a short and so limited period of time, these fire fairies felt the need to assert their strength to appease their hurt egos.

However proud these rangers are, they still abide by their loyalty to their King and it remains so for their prince. They cannot afford to be furious to their Prince so the main focus of their anger is the Dark Fairy.

Haco recalls the younger years of the late Prince. He is far braver than any fire fairies he has ever met but has a soft heart and has high regard for loyalty. It is sad that the combination of such principles was abused by an ambitious half breed fire fairy like Alirion.

They cannot blame the Prince for his strong affection for Cara, the Air fairy half-sister of Alirion. Cara has been very clear to their Prince that she does not reciprocate his admiration. But she has been polite to him and remained friends growing up.

Cara also is far more virtuous than her half-brother, which might be why the Prince was smitten by her charms. Not that she ever used that to her favor. In fact, she was not impressed by the royalty of Prince Hagan. She chose a ranger instead.

It is Alirion who monopolized this friendship and Prince Hagan blindly fell for that false notion.

Haco shakes his head in regret for not seeing through the Prince's intention to free Alirion from his banishment in the Green Haven sanctuary. He should have insisted to join Prince Hagan when he announced to their King that he will visit Alirion there. He could have prevented their Prince from committing yet another mistake.

Haco underestimated the strong loyalty Prince Hagan has for the magical siblings. Prince Hagan's love for Cara doomed him to act with pity for Alirion's captivity. But this same love enlightened him not to join the Dark Fairy for his vengeance and hunger for domination. So in the end, Haco could not take it against his Prince his acts of falsehood.

The sound of the boisterous laughter of ogres woke him from his train of thoughts. They have finally reached the Ogres' lair. The lair is just a cavern at the foot of one of the enormous mountains.

He signals the other rangers to spread out to cover the perimeter of the cavern.

The rangers have no intention to hide their arrival from the ogres. Their amber red clothing says so much of the confidence these fire fairies have. They can easily been detected but that maybe their intention after all. They would assault the ogres head on, for a direct physical combat.

Haco sees the head of their Prince on a spike in the center of the camp fire where the ogres noisily congregate. His shock combines with deep anger brings him to action when he recognizes the body parts of the Prince scattered around his spiked head.

He runs furiously forward throwing red electric balls of fire to the startled group of ogres. His company stopped laughing but is not able to take cover. Haco's fire balls hit most of the ogres burning instantly the parts where the fireballs fall.

The rest of the rangers shoot their own sets of electrified balls as they run towards the ogres too.

The scene can be described like a one-sided snow ball fight but far more deadly and damaging.

Since the ogres have thick skins, the fire ball attacks caused minimal pain. They regain their wits and start to swing their maces or axes, which ever they have in hand.

Haco and the rest of the rangers are ready with their swords enchanted with blazing fires. They battle with the ogres valiantly without any intention of leaving any single one standing.

The encounter seems like a war dance. The extreme contrast of the two warring sides is visibly obvious. The movements of the fire fairy attacks are graceful and precise while the ogres' are wild and random. The ogres' grunts and shouts are like crazed animals while the fire fairies are like mute ninja warriors. Moreover, the ogres move slowly but hits heavily in contrast to the swift and synchronized aims of the fire fairies.

After an hour or less has passed, the battle comes to an end. Not a single ogre remains standing. Some are unconscious while others are twitching with so much pain in different gruesome position when they fell by their campfire.

The rangers do not spare any glace at the fallen ogres. They move quietly to gather the remains of their Prince, which were scattered all around when the battle commenced earlier. They conjured huge satchels to carry every bits and pieces. They inspect thoroughly the area, making sure that not a single piece is missed.

Haco moves to the fire side where the head of the Prince is disgustingly skewered. He picks the spike up and carries it without glancing at the Prince's head. He cannot bear to look at it, as if it will disgrace his Prince further.

Haco walks straight out of the site without looking back but conjures an enormous fireball from his free hand. He throws it backwards in the direction of the ogres' campsite, without looking back.

The rest of the rangers follow their leader with the same manner of exit. The fireballs that were randomly thrown hit some of ogres then caught fire immediately.

The fire spreads quickly around the campsite. The sound of the screams from burned ogres can be heard clearly by the leaving fire fairies. However, they never look back.

Haco and his fellow rangers feel vindicated although they did not see Alirion among the ogres. The first step to the retribution they seek has been done. Although it is truly enraging to actually witness the revulsive manner in which the remains of their Prince was subjected to, they have avenged him somehow.

The fire fairies have not lost their focus on the fairy who has delivered their Prince to the ogres. They would surely be more merciless when they finally catch up with him.

The Fire Lord would surely be setting the whole region of the Dark Mountains just to make sure of that the Dark Fairy burns.

Chapter 40: Rangers and Princesses

Caspian feels lighter and calmer after his conversation with Princess Aria. Somehow the Princess has given him a more practical and positive view towards the disturbing revelations about his life.

At the same time his relationship with the Princess evolved in a more relaxed manner. Apparently both of them need each other more than they ever care to admit.

Their encounter at the willow tree means so much to both of the young fairies even if it was just casual and unexpected. Their lives are intertwined more than they can ever fathom.

Caspian whistles to himself as he heads for the healing tree. He intends to check on Aramir who is still recuperating from the encounter with the Dark Fairy.

He was not able to talk to Aramir on his first visit for the latter was still unconscious then.

Caspian grins as he recalls Princess Ava's refusal to leave Aramir's side since the Water Princess brought their head ranger for Nurse Zella's magical healing. Too bad Aramir lays unconscious in the duration of the Princess' stay by his bedside. His fellow ranger would have been ecstatic if he was aware of the special attention he is receiving from the Princess.

Every ranger in the Green Haven is conscious of their leader's strong admiration for the Princess of the Blue Haven. Their King might have a notion too but maybe does not mind his sister's admirer.

Aramir and Princess Ava have always been close since they were young. He seems to be more than eager to volunteer whenever the King needs a ranger to deliver a message at the Blue Haven or needs a representative as audience for any dialogue with the King and Queen.

It is not unexpected if the Water Princess cares so much for this ranger in the same manner. They share common interests in training as rangers.

Caspian's thoughts drifts back to his own Princess, his Earth Princess.

It was Princess Aria who finally convinced Princess Ava to leave Aramir temporarily and let Nurse Zella care for her precious ranger. Princess Aria requested her aunt ranger to train her to hone her Water Magic.

Princess Ava caved and was very thankful somehow to her niece that she can blow off some steam. She was quite furious when she arrived with the injured ranger a few days back. She even mentioned that if not for Aramir's state, she would have joined Haco and some of the rangers from the fire fairies when she heard them planning to go to the Dark Mountains to pursue Alirion.

Princess Ava is really strong willed, which she must have observed as well about her new found niece too. At the same time, Princess Ava is also curious regarding her niece's growing skills in using her recently discovered magical abilities.

As a ranger, Princess Ava cannot pass out the chance to train her niece. Complementary to that, Princess Aria is thrilled about learning from her aunt who is a well-trained ranger above and beyond her Princess title.

The two Princesses are now on their second training day outdoors near the lake where Caspian and Princess Aria fought like bickering couples way back.

Caspian smiles once more recalling how much different they behave to each other at this time. They seem to be back to just being Caspian and Anna all over again, which is the best thing for him right at the moment.

Aramir sits on his bed assisted by Enya. His chest is still wrapped with healing leaves. It might just have been luck that saved him from the Dark fairy who is more intent on his escape than killing other fairies. If that is not the case, Aramir would have been dead on the spot.

Caspian forces a smile when he enters the healing grounds. Upon seeing Aramir, he cannot help but recall his recent discovery of his affinity to the fairy who made his leader friend suffer.

“Hi Aramir! I hope you’re feeling a bit better now. Too bad I was not with you guys. I could have done a lot of damage to that crazy…”

Caspian’s words were left hanging. He could not bring himself to name the Dark fairy, his half uncle. Somehow he regrets opening up the topic altogether.

Aramir stares at him with an apologetic expression.

“I am sorry Caspian. I know we have been together for a long time. But it is not in my place to say anything. It was the King’s decision. He wanted to protect you.”

Aramir stops there. He knows that there is no explanation to justify his keeping a secret. As a ranger, each one should be able trust his fellow ranger. They are a family. However, it was King Merlion who forbade all of them.

“Aramir it’s fine. It has nothing to do with you. You don’t have to apologize for anything. I get it now. It does just feel a bit awful not know the truth about something that big about my life. But honestly, it’s not significant for me.”

“I am my father and mother’s son and that is it. Nothing else matters.”

Caspian takes a deep breath and tries remembering his conversation with his Princess to return to his previous calm state.

“Hey nice training by the way, I didn’t know you are involved in training anyone before.”

Aramir teases Caspian, intentionally to lighten their exchange.

“Well, it was an interesting prospect. Besides it was the Queen’s idea. I would assume Bran can’t wait to tell you that.”

Caspian retorts back with a little sarcasm.

“You know how Bran is. He always finds humor in everything.”

Aramir says with a smile.

“I am glad you’re sitting now. So, how does it feel saving your Princess?”

It was Caspian’s turn to tease him now.

Aramir’s face turns solemn.

“That moment when I saw that Princess Ava would be hit, I didn’t think twice when I shielded her. It’s like I could not live with myself if something happened to her. I could not imagine a world without her.”

Aramir confesses.

Caspian stares at his friend for a while. It dawned on him that he would have done the same thing for Princess Aria.

“Wow, I never knew you feel that deeply for the Princess. We are rangers and I feel the big gap between our statuses to the Princesses.”

Caspian admits too.

“Well, we are rangers and that does not stop us from caring deeply for someone. There is no law that forbids that. I just feel that however I choose to serve the one I love is the best decision I have done.”

“When you feel strongly for someone, you don’t have to expect that she would feel the same way for you. You love her and would do anything for her. That is the thing that prevents us from causing harm to her and all that she loves even if her love is not intended for you.”

Aramir has never been more serious and honest. Maybe with his near death experience, it made him more willing to share his feelings before it’s too late.

Caspian nods in agreement. Hearing Aramir say those words makes him more determined to do his duties as truthfully as possible for his Princess.

Both Aramir and Caspian remain silent after that. Each ranger caught in his own thoughts about his Princess.

Suddenly, Bran comes rushing in. He skids to a stop, almost bumping Caspian’s back. He smiles at both rangers.

“Nice seeing you are already up Aramir. It’s really something when you have a Princess as your guardian!”

Bran never fails to tease even his lead ranger.

“Hey Caspian, I was looking all over for you. Care to watch two Water Princess dueling? Jeera and the others are curious too.”

Bran gives a playful wink.

Chapter 41: Water Magic

Princess Aria has been practicing her water magic with her aunt Princess Ava for the past three days. Her inspiration to practice diligently comes from the promise of visiting her Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose when she did well.

When she told her King Father and Queen Mother about going back to her human family, they were a bit skeptical because of the impending danger that still haunts the entire fairy realm. The Dark fairy has never been spotted after he fled to the Dark Mountains.

Though the King and Queen were very welcoming of her idea, they concluded that they would only allow her to go there upon making sure that she is well adept with her magic.

Of course, she would also need to bring an entourage to keep her well protected. This would be spear-headed by her aunt herself and Caspian as well. Some of the rangers were assigned to join too.

So, the Princess works very hard to learn as much as she could for both her Earth and Water magic skills. She is sort of thrilled that she possesses two elements of magic. She feels confident that having a solid grip on her abilities is a good image for her as the Princess of their realm.

Although no one ever made her feel she needed to prove anything, her long years of absence as the Princess of this realm is like a disadvantage for her. So in consequence, she works doubly hard to be the kind of Princess that her realm would be proud of.

Princess Ava on the other hand found more reasons to stay in the Green Haven. Her main purpose is to train her niece with her water magic. The second motivation for the ranger princess is to oversee Aramir's complete recovery. Finally, her last goal is to spend more time with her brother.

However, Princess Ava's prolonged visit at the Earth realm is double edged. On one side, she is hoping that their King Father and Queen Mother would have some time on their own at the Water Haven. At the other, she aims to convince her brother to let go of his prolonged estrangement with their father.

Somehow, she wants her Queen Mother and King Father to be happy together again but her brother might feel like he is being forced to accept their father's mistake without consequences. But then, she believes that turning a page from their complicated history, would help their mother be at peace after all the burdens she has to carry from their past.

Princess Ava would also attempt to concoct a plan in their search for the half human brother they happened to have no idea of. They have no knowledge of his name or his whereabouts. Surely his human mother must have hidden to him also about his true identity.

So, the planned visit of Princess Aria would also be a means to try exploring the human realm in search for the lost water prince. Princess Aria suggested that her human parents might be able to help them too.

Presently, the lakeside turns out like an arena for competitions. Most of the Earth fairies are there to watch the two Water Princesses in their training. Even the King and Queen are there to witness how much their daughter has learned as well as assess if she is ready to go out back to the human realm.

The earth fairies are casually seated on the grassy grounds. A makeshift bench is positioned for the King and Queen. Caspian and the rest of the rangers sit on the ground as well. Only, Aramir is given a small mound to sit on. He was finally able to go outdoors.

At the moment, each Princess stands on opposite sides of the lake. Princess Ava wears her all black, ranger outfit while Princess Aria is dressed with jade green, ranger suit. The usual brown attire is only for the rangers. Their Princess is designated with a color of her own.

“Now, my niece, like we have previously practiced, we shall use minimal hand movements so your opponent would not recognize the kind of magic you would use. Therefore, your adversary could not properly deflect it.”

Princess Ava shouts her reminders to her niece before they begin once more. Her niece nods in assent.

The water from the lake starts to ripple and in a split second, spears of frozen water shoot out from the lake heading towards Princess Aria’s direction. The Earth Princess forms an enormous earth boulder, speedily shielding her from the deadly icy spears.

In retaliation, with unobserved movement, Princess Aria sends the boulder with all the icy spears stuck, flying towards Princess Ava. Her aunt cuts it in half with her sword which she was able to draw quickly.

Princess Ava sheathes her sword then throws her daggers straight towards Princess Aria.

Though the Princess does not possess any weapon of her own, she uses vines she conjures to deflect the sharp daggers, like a whip and both daggers are hurled back towards her aunt.

Princess Ava catches her daggers in each hand like a boomerang returning to its owner.

The Queen and King could not help but show a wide grin towards their daughter’s direction. The King even claps in amazement.

King Merlion is aware of how his younger sister would not be easy on her daughter. He knows that Princess Ava is really training Arianna very well.

The other earth fairies cheer with excitement on how their Princess defended herself. They are also aware of the reputation of the Water Princess. Princess Ava is not an easy opponent.

Caspian smiles to himself in admiration for his Earth Princess. He has been very proud of how quickly Princess Aria has been honing her magical skills day after day.

“My niece you have made me proud! You are learning everything I trained you to do so rapidly and with tremendous efficiency.”

Princess Ava praises her niece without any reservations. She knows how much Princess Aria devotes to learning these skills.

“Thank you my aunt. I have such a great teacher.”

Princess Aria beams at her aunt.

The two Water Princesses stand proud on opposite ends.

“Now, as customary for a ranger, which you truly are, with the skills you have exhibited, you are to choose your weapon. Your weapon will be your partner for life.”

Princess Ava unsheathes her sword and gives it a slight swing then pierced the ground with it. She left it stuck there. Afterwards, she takes her daggers from her side and throws them simultaneously with both her hands and each ends up on even distances from both sides of her sword stuck on the ground.

Princess Aria stares at the deadly weapons imagining that the ground is an impaled enemy. She claps in admiration along with all the audience by the lake.

Princess Ava gives a theatrical curtsy to everyone.

When the clapping subsides, Princess Aria gazes at her Queen Mother’s direction.

“I would choose two kinds of weapons as well like my aunt. I choose daggers like her and my mother. But for my second one I prefer the bow and arrow.”

Princess Aria states this as proudly as she can.

King Merlion conjures the bow and arrow while Queen Alina takes out her own daggers to offer to their daughter.

Princess Aria walks slowly to where her King Father and Queen Mother were seated.

The King and Queen stands to congratulate their Princess. Both give the weapons to their daughter. The Princess bows to them after accepting these and faces the crowd of Earth fairies.

The Earth fairies clap in appreciation of the achievements of their Princess.

After Princess Aria arranges her weapons on herself, she embraces her King and Queen at the same time.

“Can I go to my Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose now?”

The Princess whispers to both her Fairy parents.

“Yes, my child but first we have to pay our respects to the Fire Lord’s son.”

King Merlion says this with seriousness and sadness.

Queen Alina embraces both her husband and child once more.

Princess Aria can empathize with the loss that her Fairy family feels right now. She may not have personally met Prince Hagan but the loss of a son for the Fire Lord is something truly painful, not just for humans but for fairies as well.

Chapter 42: Azure Gathering

The early morning sun shines brilliantly and casts a shiny reflection on the surface of the Azure River. The mirrored sun appears distorted by the rippling waves giving an impression like the sun is dancing or running away.

Princess Aria gazes at the glistening water. She marvels at the hypnotizing effect it creates which makes one stare as if tempting you to plunge carelessly to catch the elusive sun.

Queen Alina gently holds Princess Aria's right arm, which breaks the magic spell that seems to hold her fascination towards the glistening of the river.

This is the very first time for Princess Aria to set foot in this place, for her to be in awe at every facet of her surroundings. Not to mention her surprise to be in the presence of so many fairies. She has never imagined that there are a lot of them. Well, in her fairy tale books she has seen a few but never thought that she would be encountering them and mingling with such marvelous beings for real.

The Princess suddenly misses her best friend Jo. Her human friend could have been so thrilled to witness this phenomenon too.

Now, Princess Aria is reminded that Jo would be coming back soon from Alaska, along with her parents. In addition to this, she cannot hold her excitement in the fact that she would finally go back to visit her Popsie and Marmee too as promised by her fairy parents after this day's ceremony is over.

Her Queen Mother gives her a slight tug on her arm to usher her to move closer to where all the Kings, Queens and all the high ranks from the Air, Water, Earth and Fire realms are seated.

Most of the fairies of the four realms are in attendance to honor the death of the Fire Lord's son, Prince Hagan.

King Merlion is seated beside Queen Meridian with King Oberon by her other side. Meanwhile, the Fire Lord is situated alongside King Oberon. The proud Queen of the Air fairies sits with Nurse Zella farther right, leaving two seats empty for Queen Alina and Princess Aria.

For the time being, her aunt, Princess Ava prefers to stand among the rangers of the four realms spread at the river bank in their color-coded garments.

Princess Aria scans the rangers assembled. Their group stands in an organized fashion vividly with shades of blue, green, white and orange. For this occasion, the rangers wear the colors of their realm and not their ranger clothing.

The Princess spots Caspian among the green-clothed rangers. Caspian is looking at her too. Both smile when their eyes meet.

Princess Aria is contented with their current relationship. She feels comfortable with it although their status has no label.

Princess Aria smiles once more with the thought that she does not even have an idea what labels do fairies give to relationships that are not basically between a husband and a wife.

Her reverie is cut short when the Fire Lord stands with a blue urn. He carries it close to him as if embracing it like a precious item. He wears a sullen look.

The rest of the fairies gathered around the Azure River watch in silence for the Fire Lord's next move.

“My fairy kin, first of all, I would like to express how much I am grateful for your presence, despite of…”

King Hakan pauses trying to choose the best words he can think of at the moment to express his sentiments for his combined admission and apology for Prince Hagan’s lack of better judgment regarding the escape of the Dark fairy.

“I am so much thankful for all your attendance to honor my son Prince Hagan despite his shortcomings. Being here with me and my people signifies your understanding and forgiveness. For that I am relieved. I hope that this signifies that your faith in the Fire fairies remains intact.”

The Fire Lord carefully opens the lid of the blue urn, as one of his fire fairies walks up to him to assist in holding the lid.

“I know that this is not our customary way of burial, but in this manner, in my opinion, my son’s death would be cleansed of his sins to our kind if a part of his ashes would be scattered in the Azure.”

The Fire Lord dips his free hand inside the urn to retrieve some of the ashes there.

“May Prince Hagan's ashes drift and blend with the water of the great mystical Azure. In this manner, may our ancestors be calmed by his ashes being as one with this river that signifies the unity of the four realms; Earth, Water, Air and Fire.”

After his speech, the Fire Lord walks closer to the river. When his feet touch the water, he retrieves his hand from inside the urn to scatter a fistful of ashes. He repeats the ritual three times.

The same fire fairy approaches the Fire Lord to assist his King to walk back, away from the river.

King Hakan waves his free hand to signal the fairy to move away.

The fairy stands back, giving the Fire Lord some personal space.

Unexpectedly, King Hakan embraces the blue urn as he kneels on the spot. He lowers his head. It would appear as though he is in deep prayer or sorrow.

Whichever the case, the entire fairies in attendance stares in astonishment. They have never witness the proud Fire Lord in such a humble disposition.

All the fairies, even the Kings and Queens, kneel on their places as a symbol of reverence and condolence to the Fire Lord.

King Hakan is a father in grief. This they all understand.

After a few moments, King Hakan stands, automatically assisted by the waiting fire fairy.

“My son may your spirit rest in peace.”

The Fire Lord walks back without looking back, after that last few words. He returns to his seat beside King Oberon. The King of the Water fairies taps his shoulder in a friendly gesture.

Queen Aine is the first to stand and approach King Hakan to offer her condolences.

“King Hakan, you have shown us humility in your time of grief. Keep in mind that each of our realm's survival depends on our unity as fairies.”

Queen Aine’s words surprise the other royalties. She has never admitted that she needs the other realms for strength. But her words confer the change in her point of view very clearly.

“Queen Aine, if there is any good brought by my son’s death, it is in our realization that our division as Fire, Water, Earth and Air fairies that led to our defeat and misery. Working in unity would ensure the stability of fairy kind.”

King Hakan's response is heard loud and clear by all the fairies.

This gathering at the Azure is one symbolic event that shows the start of true harmony amongst fairies.

“May this be a momentous day for all the fairy realms… We shall work towards helping each other for a better future.”

It is King Oberon's turn to speak out his mind.

Queen Meridian nods in support for her King’s statement.

Queen Alina embraces King Hakan to reassure the latter of the Earth realm being an ally.

“We should fortify our defences and magical protections for the entire fairy realm. The Dark fairy may have temporarily been out of reach but we shall pursue him in the coming days.”

King Merlion rationalizes to indicate that a strong alliance with the other realms should be push forth.

By now, the sun shines warmly at the Azure River. The gathering of the fairies has come to its fruition.

After the ceremonies, a humble feast commences that last until late in the afternoon.

This day is a reprieve from what is yet to come.

The fairies are aware that the Dark fairy is bidding his time at the moment. But they would try their best to prepare themselves to protect their realm from his evil threat.

Chapter 43: Coming Home

Princess Aria is very excited today. Finally, she would be able to see her Popsie and Marmee once more. It feels ages ago when she found out about her fairy descent. So many things happened already.

From being a simple girl of Bellmont to a teenager feeling lost for thinking that she is abandoned by her true parents, and now a Fairy Princess?

Truly, this seems like a fairy tale story that you just read about or live in your dreams.

Coming home is the best thing for Princess Aria to reconcile her past, present and future. This would ground her that she is both a part of the human and fairy world.

Her entourage is led by her aunt, Princess Ava, who is currently walking in front of her alongside Aramir. The two rangers seem to be a bit more demonstrative of their affection towards each other after Aramir recovered fully from his injuries a few days back.

Caspian is right by Princess Aria's side but a bit silent. He has been that way since they left the Green Haven early this morning.

She glances sideways at him. The Princess can see unease in his expression.

Caspian, sensing that the Princess is staring at him, stares back and smiles. He combs his hair nervously with his free hand because the other one is holding the blue roses he promised to Marmee Rose way back.

Princess Aria gives a sigh of relief. For a moment there, she thought Caspian would start ignoring her again like before. She grins as she imagines Caspian's nervousness is due to his anxiety in facing her human parents once more.

Maybe Caspian is also thinking about what transpired between them that led to his recognition of Princess Aria's fairy identity.

Suddenly, Princess Aria blushes uncontrollably upon remembering their unexpected kiss. Her locket starts glowing too. Good thing she placed it underneath her green round-necked dress. Otherwise it would be too embarrassing if it gives away her emotions every single time it glows.

"So, Princess… does your Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose know that we are visiting today?"

Bran inquires politely, breaking the silence of the travellers.

"Um, no but, if I am correct, they might have just been done with their early morning jog. Either they are having breakfast outdoors or maybe inside."

The Princess responds thoughtfully.

“Wait, should we glamour ourselves?”

Jeera asks, since her silver hair would totally be out of place.

“My Popsie and Marmee know the truth about my identity and they have experienced as much weirdness as they could when I was growing up under their care so you don’t have to worry about them.”

“Even my Popsie shares my magical stories so they would not be surprised if all of those are real after all. My Popsie is the coolest Dad!”

Princess Aria enthusiastically explains. She realizes how much she has missed being with her foster parents.

“Your human father seems very understanding. I cannot wait to meet him and your mother too. We should thank them properly for taking good care of my niece.”

Princess Ava joins in the conversation.

Princess Aria gives a nod as she sees the top view of the very familiar willow tree a few meters away now. They have almost reached their destination. She is finally coming home.

The familiar trail is almost coming to an end.

Princess Ava and Aramir stop abruptly.

The Water Princess turns around to gauge their company. She is trying to decide if her King Brother has exaggerated the security he ordered to join them here.

Most of the rangers who are with them are the same ones Aramir has trusted for security duties in the valley.

There is Caspian and Cleo, two rangers skilled in camouflage. Then, Jeera and Alcon, the more experienced ones are present too. Lastly is Bran. Well, he volunteered as soon as he heard of the expedition.

So, this group should be subtle enough. At least King Merlion and Queen Alina allowed them to leave as promised to her niece. The King and Queen of the Green Haven were supposed to join them too.

Both King and Queen were summoned unexpectedly by the Queen of Air fairies for a summit in her abode. The heads of the Four Realms need to plan their action on the mysterious silence of the Dark fairy.

They have reached the Willow tree and Princess Aria instructs them to stay hidden first behind the enormous tree.

“Would the protective spell still work?”

Caspian reminds Princess Aria of that issue.

Princess Aria gazes at Caspian with a teasing expression.

“You were able to go inside the last time remember?”

She starts to blush once more upon realizing what made it possible for Caspian to enter her house.

Caspian smiles sheepishly. He is remembering the exact reason too.

“Okay, so let’s try it first.”

Caspian suggests as he glances across the street at the familiar blue door.

“It seems Popsie and Marmee ate indoors.

Princess Aria replies as an observation.

She pulls Caspian with her to cross the street. She tags him along without letting go of his free hand.

It is Caspian’s turn to blush from embarrassment since their company are all staring at them especially Princess Ava and Aramir.

In contrast, Princess Aria is oblivious about the whole situation when she held on to Caspian’s hand without any care at all.

“You do the knocking.”

The Princess commands him as they reach the blue door.

Caspian takes a deep breath. He rearranges the blue roses first then carefully knocks at the door.

Princess Aria cannot contain her amusement from Caspian’s actions.

The rest of the fairies waiting behind the willow tree poke their heads to observe what is taking place.

After a few minutes, the blue door opens and the look of surprise on Popsie Reed's face is priceless.

“Honey, look what we have here!”

Popsie Reed hollers inside with a thrilled expression.

“Our Princess has come back!”

Popsie Reed adds as the door opens wide and Marmee Rose rushes out to embrace Princess Aria.

“Anna, we miss you so much!”

Marmee Rose exclaims as she continues to hug her Anna tightly.

Popsie Reed joins Marmee Rose and Anna in their embrace.

As usual, Anna's locket begins to glow incessantly again.

Caspian merely stands there immobile with the blue roses still in his hand. He wears a big smile. He truly is very happy for his Princess to be with her human family again.

This went on for a few minutes while the forgotten companions are still hidden behind the willow.

Finally, Anna gently frees herself from her parents' embrace.

"So Caspian… is the barrier there?"

Anna asks.

Caspian shakes his head in response.

"Good, I am just checking on you. You might have changed your mind."

Anna teases her ranger.

"Popsie, Marmee, we have company."

Anna waves her hand to signal the other fairies to come closer.

Both Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose look towards the direction of the willow tree across the street.

The fairy guests come out from their hiding behind the tree and walks carefully towards the house.

Princess Ava leads the group and looks curiously at Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose.

She is half expecting for the two human to get anxious upon seeing their strange visitors but their facial expressions does not show any hint of worry or fear.

As Princess Ava stares at her niece's human parents, she senses a feeling of family and familiarity. This might be what Princess Aria was meaning when she lived with these humans. No wonder she grew up with compassion and love because of the caring aura of her human family.

"Good morning, your highness."

Popsie Reed says with a smile.

"Oh no, no, just call me Ava."

Princess Ava feels comfortable already with Popsie Reed.

"Welcome to our humble home."

Marmee Rose greets them with the same warmth.

“Come inside.”

Marmee Rose adds gesturing towards the door.

“By the way Marmee, these are for you. Just as I promised… sorry it took a while.”

Caspian gives the blue roses to Marmee.

“Thank you my dear.”

Marmee Rose replies appreciatively.

Princess Ava looks meaningfully to the rest of the fairies.

The others understand what the Water Princess means by her unspoken question.

“We apologize if we would decline your offer.”

Princess Ava states while looking at her niece’s direction.

“Popsie, Marmee, I think the rest of the fairies cannot enter our house. The magical protection designed to keep fairies away still remains.”

Anna explains for her aunt.

“Well then, no worries. We shall set up a feast outdoors.”

Popsie Reed responds matter of factly.

“Now that’s more like it.”

Everyone turns their head towards the person who spoke.

“Popsie remember me from the valley? I am Bran by the way.”

Bran approaches Popsie Reed hurriedly to shake his hand.

Everyone laugh at Bran's ever so casual gesture.

Amidst all these encounters, Anna glances at everyone.

She truly feels grateful for coming home.

Chapter 44: Realm above the Clouds

The happy and satisfied group of Princess Aria heads straight to the realm of the Air fairies after their memorable excursion in the human world. The Princess is very proud of her Popsie and Marmee for the scrumptious feast her fairy kin partake as well as the hospitality they have shown.

It was too unbearable to leave them. Even Bran enjoyed the food so much that he cannot stop complaining of his awakened palette. According to him, he would really miss human cooking so much. He even hinted that he might occasionally drop by Popsie Reed's house just to experience Marmee Rose's delicious cuisine. This earned him a disapproving look from Aramir.

Marmee Rose prepared a pack of cucumber sandwiches for her Anna, which is now in Bran's possession.

Princess Ava has high praises for Popsie Reed too. They had a very engaging conversation on various mythical creatures.

Popsie Reed was very curious about the fairy world while Princess Ava willingly offers her knowledge on it. Likewise, the ranger side of the Princess led her to her inquiry on the human world. She might probably be trying to gain information on where to start searching for her half human sibling.

Princess Aria smiles from recalling how her aunt was truly appreciative of her human parents. Too bad her King Father and Queen Mother were not able to join them. Perhaps in her next visit, they might finally be able to meet her Popsie and Marmee.

Caspian seems more relaxed as well after his relief when he felt that Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose treated him the same as they casually did even before knowing his identity. He was a bit guilty for his made up story when Popsie Reed arrived in the valley with his human companions to bring help.

Presently, Caspian is very grateful for the opportunity to show them that he can still be trusted, especially when it comes to their daughter's protection. He has brought their Anna back, safe.

Their arrival at the realm above the clouds is not unforeseen. Cleon, the head of the rangers among the Air fairies is waiting at the castle entrance with a warm smile for them.

This is another first for Princess Aria and predictably, she marvels at the grandeur of the White Haven. Truly the glorious atmosphere of this realm befits the elegant aura of their Queen.

Almost everything is visually in the shade of white. The entirety of the external façade shows a very calm and spotless setting. It gives Princess Aria the feeling of bliss like she is entering heaven itself. The pureness of the realm above the clouds can be felt all around.

Princess Aria suddenly recalls Caspian's kinship. She glances at him to observe his reaction.

Caspian's expression is indecipherable. He appears tranquil though.

"Welcome my fairy kin."

Cleon greets them politely. This brought Princess Aria back to the present.

"Cleon it is nice to see you once more."

It is Princess Ava who responds in behalf of their group.

"Welcome to our realm Princess Ava and our young Princess Aria. We are honored with both your lovely presence."

Cleon praises the Princesses.

"Your realm is such a wonder."

Princess Aria replies cordially.

"Aramir, I can see that you are in the best of health."

Cleon turns to the head of the Earth rangers.

"I had the best nurse in all the realms."

Aramir replies half seriously and half-jokingly. He means Nurse Zella, who is known throughout the fairy realm for her tremendous healing skills. On the other hand, he feels indebted to Princess Ava for staying at their realm indefinitely to make sure he is fully recovered.

Cleon's glance falls on Caspian. He regards the earth ranger with a certain fondness.

"Welcome young ranger. I am delighted that you find your way back to our realm. It is your home as well."

Cleon says this with complete candor.

Just like his Air fairy Queen, Cleon might look young but he has served as ranger longer than any fairy can imagine. He knew Caspian's mother very well more than any other Air fairies could claim. After all, Cara was supposed to be the heir to Queen Aine.

Caspian stares at Cleon for a while contemplating on how to respond.

"Good to see you Cleon."

That is the most casual of words he was able to utter.

He might have grown in the Earth realm but setting foot in his Mother's true realm gives him a certain sense of connection to her, that he never had growing up. Since her death in birthing, Marion, his Father, avoids talking about her.

Caspian always felt he was to blame for his Mother's untimely passing. Though his Father never gave him any reason to feel that way, Caspian imagines that his Father's happiness revolves around his mother.

Recalling his mother being in this place gives Caspian a peaceful feeling more than he cares to reveal. It is as if his Air magical ability has awaken inside him.

"The Kings and Queens are assembled in the White Pavilion. Queen Aine is aware of your arrival in our realm. I took the liberty to personally welcome all of you."

"They have been discussing the Dark fairy's disappearance at the Dark Mountains. It seems his exact whereabouts is relatively hard to pin point even for my Queen."

"Alirion apparently has a keen skill for hiding, as well as deception. He is such a cowardly fairy."

Cleon relays all these with disgust. His animosity for this fairy goes far back when both Cara and Alirion were still young. He can never understand how Cara tried so hard to give her half-brother the benefit of the doubt when it was really obvious for everyone in their realm that his brother's ambition to prove himself as the best fairy would lead him to dark magic.

"You can rest and wait for their summit to adjourn. Queen Aine will send for you afterwards."

"Come and join me at the Gray Pavilion. We will have some refreshments send there."

Cleon turns around to lead the way so the group can follow him.

From behind the group, Cleo suddenly exclaims.

"I think Bran does not need any more refreshments. He has eaten all the sandwiches on our way here."

The group laughs as Bran discreetly attempts to hide in his pocket the bag that is already empty.

Bran merely grins at everyone for laughing at him. He glances at Princess Aria with an apologetic expression having been caught red handed for eating all of the sandwiches which were clearly not for him at all.

Princess Aria smiles back at Bran to assure him that it was just fine. Her attention returns to admiring this place which every fairy refers to as the Realm above the Clouds. She cannot wait to see the whole interior of this magnificent white castle.

The Princess walks with their group with her eyes looking around in bewilderment. The interior is even more fascinating than the impressive exterior. Each part of the castle gives a visual illusion of being around different cloud formations in varying shades of white and gray.

This realm lives up to its reference as the White Haven.

After a while, Cleon stops in an opening and ushers them inside.

“Welcome to the Gray Pavilion. Please make yourselves comfortable. I will just check on the food.”

Cleon bows to them and takes his leave.

Princess Aria stares at the cloud-like walls of the hall. As if bewitched by magic, the cloud walls appear transparent and she can see the outside, which is a view of a thousand or more fluffy cloud forms.

Caspian walks up to her and stares at the clouds as well.

“Princess, I would like to tell you that I am glad you are here with me.”

Caspian’s words strike Princess Aria with surprise but with so much happiness too. This world is more meaningful having a special someone to share it with.

She is not sure what to reply to that so she just holds on to Caspian’s hand. She guesses that should be a better answer.

So the young Earth fairies stay that way, in their own kind of peaceful bliss.

Chapter 45: The Four Realms

Queen Aine sits on her ivory throne while the other Kings and Queens are situated in a semicircular position in front of her.

“I would like to thank all of you for joining me here despite of the short notice. So far, our common concern on the Dark fairy has brought us a stronger drive to work as one united fairy realm.”

Queen Aine states this with a tone of formality but this is as much as you can get as a reaction from her indicating her agreement to join the other realms in order to fully protect the fairy kind.

Queen Aine’s pride as the eldest among the Kings and Queens in attendance gave her the authority to speak her thoughts without reservations.

The others show her the due respect she deserves for her strong guidance in the affairs of fairy kind that goes back from the great battle in the long history of the fairy kingdom.

She is the sole living fairy who was part of the elder fairies who raged a war against the other supernatural entities who refused to live under a common rule of peaceful coexistence under the guidance of the Four Realms.

Queen Aine and the other elder fairies took part in the shaping of the four realms after the malevolent ones were driven far away beyond the Dark Mountains. Well, those who were left alive after the great battle.

The Four Realms that live in harmony has long been complacent of this peace since not a single one of these malevolent creatures ever dared to return and challenge the ruling four kingdoms.

“I believe the time has come for us to be proactive in maintaining the peace in our realms for the future generations of our kind.”

Queen Aine continues.

“Alirion has gone too far in his attempt to dominate. We must not let him gain his footing and come back for another try.”

The Queen’s voice rises a bit on this last statement.

“My rangers made their first attempt to pursue Alirion after retrieving my son’s remains but failed to gain any information unless they venture further beyond the Dark Mountains. Surely that bastard fairy would be there hiding in cowardice!”

The Fire Lord responds angrily to the point of standing from his seat with both palms glowing with orange flames.

“I think we should send a mission with a greater number of fairies from each realm.”

King Merlion quickly suggests this plan. He agrees with the Fire Lord's notion but he would like to secure the safety of the other fairies in venturing beyond the Dark Mountains.

“I agree with my son.”

Queen Meridian interjects.

“The fairies we will send on this mission needs to be absolutely in good numbers. We are not sure of the dangers they will encounter there as well as what kind of other creatures they will face besides the Dark fairy.”

She adds.

“Haco and my other rangers dealt with a few number of ogres quite easily.”

The Fire Lord exclaims full of pride.

“Yes King Hakan, we are aware of that but the ogres are a few among a variety of species who are easily handled compared to…who knows what is out there.”

Queen Alina gently reminds the Fire Lord.

“Queen Alina is correct. We should not forget to take into account the other creatures beyond those wrenched mountains.”

It is King Oberon who seconds the point raised by the Earth Queen.

“King Oberon is right. We must also be wary that Alirion might have rallied these creatures to his cause too. Who knows what kind of promises this Dark fairy gave to these unruly creatures similar to him.”

King Merlion adds.

King Oberon stares at his son. His acknowledgement is more than enough for him. His son has been a bit sparing in his anger towards him since their last conversation in the Blue Haven. Although he was never given the opportunity to talk to his son, he continues to be proud of the kind of King he had turned out to be.

“Well then, we should prepare our rangers for an undertaking as big as this. Training is essential. We cannot send our fairies with mediocre skills!”

Queen Aine says as a caution.

The rest of the Kings and Queens nod silently in agreement. No other fairy has a greater experience when it comes to war than Queen Aine.

“As we prepare for this mission, let us fortify our protections surrounding the four realms.”

The Queen finishes.

“Well, let us join the young generation of fairies in the Gray Pavilion. I am pretty sure you are all exhausted with this topic on this one particular fairy. I know I am.”

Queen Aine stands after she says this.

The others stand too, taking Queen Aine’s action as the end of their long and tiring discourse.

****

The Queen of the White Haven interacts casually with the other fairies in the Gray Pavilion. With her present actions, she looks even younger than her true fairy age.

She particularly finds Bran very amusing. In consequence, Bran seems to appreciate his royal audience.

King Oberon and Queen Meridian are engaged in a light conversation with Princess Aria. It seems that they are getting to know their granddaughter better and finding her to be a fine Princess.

Queen Alina sits quietly with King Merlion in one corner of the pavilion, enjoying each other’s company as they observe the other fairies around them.

“So, do you think there is no chance for redemption for Alirion anymore?”

Queen Alina whispers to her King.

King Merlion looks at his Queen with sadness.

“There are several opportunities that he could have taken that choice especially in his captivity in our realm. He plunged deeper into the darkness when he killed the only one left who is willing to give him another chance.”

King Merlion seems pained in the reminder of Prince Hagan’s death.

“I thought it was revenge that made him behave that way and even got Marion killed. But if you analyze the details of his every action, it is his own greed for power that has driven him to kill again and again without any remorse.”

“I am sorry my love. Alirion is beyond redemption.”

King Merlion caresses his Queen’s face gently.

Queen Alina nods as she looks at Caspian across the room with Aramir and Princess Ava.

“But what do you foresee about Caspian? Do you think he would decide revenge rather than forgiveness?”

Queen Alina asks this with worry in her tone.

“Caspian has grown into a very honorable fairy like his father. He also possesses the same compassion we have taught him. I think whatever he decides to do in the end, we need not worry.”

King Merlion ends their conversation in that manner.

****

Caspian excuses himself and left the pavilion. He wanders around a bit and found the Pearl Pavilion. This is the healing quarters of the White Haven.

He enters silently and immediately felt calm inside this particular place.

His attention is caught by the white frames hanging on one side of the room.

He walks towards them and he is captivated by the image of a young fairy resembling his own features with the exemption of her silvery eyes.

Caspian is definitely sure that this is her mother’s image from when she was still younger. He touches the image in the frame carefully as if to memorize it to commit to his memory.

A tear drops from his eye without a warning. He wipes it immediately.

“It is alright to shed a few tears once in a while.”

It is Princess Aria who utters this.

She followed Caspian when she noticed his absence in the Gray Pavilion.

“Oh, I thought you were busy back there. I didn’t intend to interrupt your happy conversation with your grandparents.”

Caspian seems to attempt to change the topic away from his momentary show of vulnerability.

“Caspian I told you before that I am here for you. You need not hide your feelings about anything. It will not change how I see you. It is not assign of weakness. In fact your display of emotions will make you stronger.”

Princess Aria reminds Caspian of her own sadness for not having spent time with her true parents when she was young. She knows that for Caspian it is different because he cannot ever see his parents again but she empathizes with the feeling of longing.

Princess Aria gives Caspian a tight embrace.

They stayed this way for a while.

“Your mother is very pretty.”

Princess Aria breaks their silence.

“My grandparents invited us to visit the Blue Haven. We can go with them and my aunt from here.”

Princess Aria intends to see her other realm of ancestry.

Caspian nods and touches the image in the frame one last time before pulling Princess Aria towards the exit.

He is reminded of Aldar and Melandra upon the Princess’ mention of the Water realm. It has been a while since his last visit after all.

“Come on. I think it is time you meet your protectors when you were just a baby.”

Caspian informs Princess Aria with excitement.

The two walks out from the healing quarters totally revitalized emotionally.

Chapter 46: Awakening

Princess Aria feels like she is stepping into dreamland once more. Starting from their descent of the Azure River, she has been immediately awestruck by the various creatures of the deep that she never set eyes in the human world. She could not imagine these precious sea creatures would be found in this fascinating body of water.

She does not mind the amused expression of Caspian every time she marvels at each wondrous sight she observes as far as her eyes could see.

The companions who join them in their journey to the Blue Haven include her grandparents, King Oberon and Queen Meridian. Her aunt Princess Ava is present too with Aramir beside her. These two seems inseparable in the past weeks.

Her King Father and Queen Mother headed back to the Green Haven along with the rest of the rangers who accompanied them in the human world earlier.

In King Merlion's opinion, Princess Aria has proven that she can handle herself. In addition to this, nothing could harm her, considering they are within the Four Realms' secured boundaries.

When they arrived at the entrance of the Blue Haven, Ailsa is already waiting for them.

Ailsa bows reverently towards their group.

King Oberon and Queen Meridian retire to their chambers upon arrival.

Princess Aria and her aunt share a secret smile and a knowing look. They are overjoyed by the growing closeness of King Oberon and Queen Meridian which might signify that they are trying to move forward from the unhappy events in their family's past.

The sadness and regret that all of them witnessed in the Fire Lord during the Azure gathering serve as eye opener for everyone. The idea of spending so much energy on negative thoughts and emotions would lead to a lot of wasted moments to share love and happiness with the ones who are truly important to you.

"Princess Ava, we would like to request your permission to allow us to visit Aldar and Melandra at the Aquamarine grotto."

Caspian informs the Water Princess politely.

"I would like to see the two brave rangers who have brought me to my human family for my protection."

Princess Aria adds.

"I think that is a thoughtful notion. We shall join you there."

Princess Ava replies as she leads the way.

****

King Oberon dismisses the young water fairy who left a tray of refreshments in the chambers. The King closes the door himself then faces his Queen already sitting on the edge of their bed.

The King smiles broadly as he approaches Queen Meridian who is busily combing her long dark hair. She is aware of her husband's advances but pretends not to notice.

Both King and Queen seem to test each other's willingness to be intimate once more. It has been a while since they have a feeling of ease towards each other.

"My Queen, I would like to thank you for all your patience for an old selfish King like me."

King Oberon utters almost like a whisper. He knows that the Queen could hear each word. In his agenda, he is hopeful that they could start all over again.

"My King, I have never lost sight of who are dear to me. I may have tried to distance myself from you but it is just to protect my wearied heart. But my feelings never faltered. You have my heart, the whole of it."

Queen Meridian replies in a whisper.

The King sits beside his Queen and gently takes the combing shell from his Queen's hand. He allows it to drop carelessly on the floor. Then, he holds both of her hands and places them on his own chest, right where his heart is.

"Mer, you have my heart. It has always been yours. I am sorry for causing you pain. I love you, my Queen."

King Oberon embraces Queen Meridian after professing his feelings to her.

Queen Meridian returns his embrace. She would like him to feel that her embrace means her acceptance of her King once more.

Both King and Queen remains in that embrace wearing contented smiles on their faces.

****

Princess Aria allows Caspian to hold her hand as they walk silently along the dark rocks leading to the cavern. She has learned to adjust her sight like the rest of the fairies as well as her getting accustomed to the temperature changes which grows colder as they reach the entrance of the cavern.

Princess Ava and Aramir were the first to enter. The two appears to observe silence as if the place dictates such conduct. Then Caspian and Princess Aria follow in the same subdued manner.

Since it is Princess Aria's first time to see this tomb-like place, she felt a bit uncertain on what to expect regarding the condition of the two rangers.

The Princess is saddened automatically when her eyes finally focus on the two immobile rangers on their stone beds.

Although she never had the opportunity to know them, she feels that both rangers are special parts of her life. In a way, they have protected not only her but her whole family. Their lives were dedicated to serve hers and everyone else in their realm.

At first, Princess Aria is unsure of what to do. But Caspian makes the first move. He approaches the stone beds while still holding the Princess' hand. So the Princess moves closer to the beds too.

Caspian gives the impression that he is drawing strength from the Princess as well.

Princess Aria touches the stone bed of Melandra with her free hand. She then moves her hand towards the chest of this brave ranger. She can feel the beating of Melandra's heart and is surprised by it.

She could not help but recall her Queen Mother's melancholic expression when she mentioned her ranger friend.

Suddenly, Princess Aria's locket glows frantically. Even the princess herself is startled by it.

Princess Ava and Aramir quickly approach Princess Aria as if alarmed that the young princess might be distressed upon seeing both rangers in such predicament.

"My niece, are you alright?"

Princess Ava asks her niece with a slight panic on her tone.

Princess Aria's expression is of bewilderment as well.

It appears that the locket has its own mind.

Caspian shifts to hold the Princess in a protective stance. He places his hands over her shoulders.

Princess Aria closes her eyes to concentrate. She seems to be communicating with someone.

"Princess?"

Caspian whispers with a worried expression.

The Princess stays that way for a few moments while her companions wait expectantly.

Finally, Princess Aria opens her eyes and with a bright smile she announces…

"I know what to do."

Princess Aria places her other hand on her already positioned one on Melandra's chest. The locket continues to glow until its color turns to emerald.

As if electricity travelled through the Princess' arms from the locket source, the body of Melandra begins to jerk. At first slowly until her whole frame moves in constant convulsions.

Princess Aria retrieves her hands and takes a few steps away from the stone bed.

As if controlled by a puppeteer, Melandra's body sits up then her eyes suddenly opens wide.

"Mother of Earth!"

Aramir exclaims in surprise.

Melandra stares around her like she just woke up from a sleep.

"What happened?"

Melandra asks in a weak voice. She turns her look towards the ranger lying on the adjacent stone bed.

"Aldar!"

She calls out in a whisper.

"Melandra welcome back!"

Princess Ava says with shock.

Princess Aria walks towards the other stone bed. The others are frozen in their spots. They let the young Princess go about her business uninterrupted.

Melandra remains seated on her stone bed. She watches curiously the young princess unknown to her performing her magic. Melandra stares at the Princess' face. She seems familiar though she has not seen her before.

Princess Aria repeats her ritual once more. The effects are the same and the group witnesses Aldar revived just like Melandra.

Aldar has the same confused expression upon awakening.

"I think I have not thanked both you yet. I am Princess Aria by the way."

The young princess smiles at the two rangers.

Both Aldar and Melandra stand from their stone beds and embrace the princess at the same time.

"Thank you Princess!"

Both rangers chime together.

“I suggest we move this happy awakening some place more comfortable.”

Princess Ava suggests.

So the whole group makes their way back to the brighter part of the Blue Haven.

This day has proven to be a day of new beginnings and second chances for a more hopeful future.

Chapter 47: A Ranger's Life

The news on the magical awakening of two esteemed rangers spreads like wild fire all over the four fairy realms. The entire fairy world rejoices for such an inspiring story in such troubled times. The spirits of the fairies are way too low since the Dark fairy is like a ghost hovering in their realms. The lack of news or inaction from Alirion gives a terrible feeling of a certain evil lurking just around the corner if you slacken your defenses.

The awakened rangers create hope for all of their kind. Having the knowledge that a ranger's life maybe full of perils but if you fought with honor and true loyalty for your people, nothing is impossible. They need this inspiration now. This way, there is sort of a victory for them against the evil fairy amidst the deaths that came their way ever since this fairy decided that gaining power to dominate is more important than any fairy life.

Though most of the other rangers of the realms were younger by far and has never personally met the two legendary rangers, they have grown up learning about the gallantry of Aldar and Melandra so many years ago. Who would not admire these two fairies who stood up against Alirion to protect their King and Queen?

Aldar and Melandra return quickly to the Green Haven but did not fail to express their deepest gratitude to King Oberon and Queen Meridian for keeping their indefinite slumber truly safe and secure.

Aramir, Caspian and Princess Aria update the two rangers on the events from the past sixteen years that both were in their slumbered status.

The mixture of anger and sadness can be seen from both Aldar's and Melandra's faces upon recalling the death of their leader Marion, plus the escape of Alirion and the long search for their Earth Princess.

"My Princess, we apologize for keeping you in the dark. I think by now you have an idea of how ruthless this Dark fairy is. We could not afford to let anything befall you when you were just a defenseless infant then."

Melandra's voice is full of admonishment for herself.

"Please don't apologize. You have done your duty and my King Father and Queen Mother decided on my secrecy for my own safety. To be honest, I am grateful that you brought me to such wonderful human parents."

Princess Aria talks in a light tone to appease the regrets of Melandra.

"The locket decided for us. The protective spell worked as the locket sensed the house and whoever dwells within could offer the kind of security you require."

Melandra explains.

Princess Aria frowns in deep thought. She is trying to decipher the mystery of her emerald locket. It seems to have a mind of its own.

“Princess Aria, our awakening aided by you and the locket remains a mystery to us also.”

Aldar confesses.

“We could only theorize that since it was in Melandra’s possession before she left it with you when you were a baby, the locket became a key connected to you so you were able to revive us when no other fairy could break Alirion's spell.”

When Aldar mentions the Dark fairy, he could not help glance in Caspian’s direction.

As if Caspian senses the staring ranger, he stares back with a forced smile.

“No need for the pity look, Aldar. I have come to terms with that. My mother and father are the only ones that matter to me.”

“Aldar, I think our young ranger here has grown so much in your absence.”

Aramir praises.

Caspian somehow seems calm about it so Aldar does not pursue the topic at all.

“You still owe me a lesson with your bow and arrow.”

Caspian reminds Aldar as he grins at him.

Aldar smiles back remembering the little ranger that Caspian used to be.

“You should train him. He needs the practice badly.”

Princess Aria teases to lighten up the mood. She is reminded that Aldar’s weapon is a bow and arrows.

Upon their arrival at the Green Haven, even just by the edge of the forest from the Azure River, all the Earth fairies who catch a glimpse of Aldar and Melandra, approach them with so much astonishment. Their expressions come close to disbelief. After so many years, not a single fairy ever thought that Aldar and Melandra would ever awake from their slumber ever again.

The rangers and the Princess as if carry a certain talisman that the rest of their kin follows on their way to the Elder tree.

By the time they arrive at the entrance of the Elder tree, a good number of fairies are already on their trail.

“Our fairy folks, we are truly grateful for your warm welcome. We shall pay our respects to King Merlion and Queen Alina first but rest assured, we shall have the whole evening for merrymaking.”

Aldar says loudly for everyone to hear.

Melandra bows with both palms together as a sign of gratitude for their kin's welcome.

The fairies' response seems like a chime in unison.

"Welcome home Aldar and Melandra!"

With that, Princess Aria enters the abode followed by the four rangers.

King Merlion and Queen Alina were overjoyed to see their ranger protectors, as well as their friends. They gave them a strong feeling of hope for the unpredictable future when they have to face the Dark fairy once more.

"Welcome home my friend."

Queen Alina exclaims as she embraces her ranger friend tightly. She never thought she would be able to feel this happy to see her fearless protector since their childhood.

"My Queen, I have missed your beautiful face. I can see that you have grown even more elegant as a Queen while I was in deep slumber."

Melandra says with so much sincerity.

"King Merlion, I hope Aramir has kept you well-guarded in my hiatus."

Aldar bows to both King and Queen after his slightly jolly wink at Aramir.

"My brave Aldar, I can see you have not changed a bit. You are still as humorous as before."

"Too bad Bran has kept us entertained in your absence."

Aramir interjects.

"Even the Queen of the Air fairies found Bran amusing."

King Merlion adds.

"Hmm, it would seem we have missed a lot of things."

Aldar finally concludes.

Then the three fairies laugh out loud.

Caspian and Princess Aria observe the small reunion in progress. Both young fairies could see the contentment of the King and Queen in recovering their lost kin.

"Caspian, thank you for finding me."

Princess Aria says unexpectedly.

"But Princess, remember you saw me first."

Caspian replies with a tender smile for his Princess.

This is such a momentous opportunity for the fairies. Truly, the return of Aldar and Melandra would work as a catalyst to rally their fairies. This would serve as a perfect reminder that a ranger's life is viewed as an ongoing journey which does not end in slumber or death. Rather, a ranger's greatness is measured by how much inspiration radiates towards the lives touched along the way.

The return of the two formidable rangers would help a lot in preparing the other rangers for the impending search and battle with the Dark fairy and whatever else he has gathered to his evil plot for fairy domination.

Chapter 48: Tale of the Water Prince

The celebration among the Earth fairies lasted until the rising of the sun. The King and Queen had to excuse themselves when the first light of the morning sun is visible in their realm.

King Merlion and Queen Alina need a few hours to take some respite. They have promised their Princess that they will join her in the next visit to her human parents. They feel that meeting their daughter's human parents should not be put off any longer.

Truthfully, the fairy couple is curious to meet Princess Aria's Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose. Princess Ava has nothing but good things to say in her encounter with these humans. Even the other rangers who were present the first visit appears to have enjoyed themselves very much.

Even though Princess Aria is marveling over the celebration for Aldar and Melandra, she excuses herself earlier than any other fairy because she is feeling a bit tired. She is considering that this might be due to the amount of magic she performed to awaken the two rangers. Until now, she does not have a solid explanation on the miraculous outcome of the magic she administered back at the Blue Haven. She just feels a little bit spent so she needs to recharge herself.

The Princess would also like to have some time to calm herself down for her excitement in visiting her Popsie and Marmee once more. She is a bit wary on how her King Father and Queen Mother would feel when they meet her human parents.

This has kept Princess Aria's mind busy trying to assess her feelings as well. There is a certain guilt inside her for noticing her strong attachment to her human parents more than her fairy ones.

She feels like she is cheating on her real parents. Not that she does not love them fully but her connection to them is like on a magical level while her years of being in the human world and experiencing the unconditional love of her human parents makes her existence more real than her fairy descent.

Princess Aria sighs and wishes she could talk to her best friend Jo so she could ask her opinion on this.

She plans to share her thoughts to Caspian as well but she is aware that he has a lot in his mind right now. Princess Aria would like Caspian to have a little worry-free time so she preferred to retire by herself when Caspian offered to leave the party earlier to be with her.

She is aware of Caspian's closeness to Aldar and Melandra that she insisted for Caspian not to mind her and let him stay on with their other fairy kin at the celebration.

With that excuse, she was able to convince him that she does not have to come along for this time for her second visit to her Popsie and Marmee since her fairy parents would be with her anyway.

Caspian understood this and agreed that it would be a private moment for Princess Aria and both her parents from the human and fairy realm to get to know each other.

This time, King Merlion uses fairy magic to transport them quicker to their destination. Only a few rangers join them. The more experienced rangers like Jeera and Aramir are the only fairies to accompany them. But of course Bran insisted in coming along too. The latter rationalizes that he could be a look out in the vicinity in case of any suspicious activity. At the same time, he could return to their haven for fairy reinforcements while Jeera and Aramir guard the King, Queen and Princess. However, the other fairies are aware that Bran is just be fond of human cooking so the King dismisses the issue with a smile.

The King transports their group just at the shade beneath the willow tree without attracting any attention at all. He is cautious also to cast an illusion so that the house with the blue door across the street would have a magical barrier that the neighbors would not notice their arrival.

This morning, Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose sit outside having their coffee just admiring the sunrise. Popsie Reed has his free arm wrapped around Marmee Rose.

The new arrivals observe the couple from afar like they are watching a mushy movie about spouses so much in love with each other. The rising sun adds to the post card effect on this picture perfect scene.

Both have their backs facing their visitors so they have no idea that they have spectators already.

“Popsie! Marmee! I'm back! Did you miss me?”

Princess Aria shouts as loud as she could to get the attention of her foster parents like she used to do when she was a kid. She does that whenever her Popsie and Marmee are so absorbed in adoring each other as if they are the only one two people who existed.

Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose turn their head to glance at the direction where they heard their Anna's voice.

Marmee Rose stands first and closes the distance between her and Anna, who is running towards her across the street to embrace her.

Popsie Reed stands slowly and notices the other fairies by the willow tree.

King Merlion stares at Popsie Reed intently. He seems to gauge the kind of person this human is made of.

Queen Alina on the other hand, watches Marmee Rose and her Princess in a tight hug.

“Welcome back Anna! We kept having our breakfast outdoors half expecting to see you again.”

Popsie Reed announces focusing on Anna now.

“You seem to have a few friends with you today.”

Marmee Rose notices their smaller group in comparison to the last visit.

“Popsie, Marmee, I would like you to meet my fairy parents.”

The Princess walks towards her Queen Mother tagging along her Marmee Rose whose hand she holds tightly.

Queen Alina crosses the street to meet them halfway.

When they are finally face to face, both mothers seem a bit awkward on how to greet the other.

Princess Aria holds one hand of her Queen Mother with her free hand. Then, she walks back leisurely towards the house with both mothers on her side. She looks like a mother guiding her daughters towards home.

King Merlion walks after them and bows to Popsie Reed as greeting.

“Good day to you, I am Merlion.”

The King omits any title to refer to himself. With this gesture, he intends to express his view that Popsie Reed is his equal.

“It is nice to finally meet you, your highness.”

Popsie Reed replies in a friendly tone and extends his arm for a hand shake.

Initially, King Merlion is puzzled so he does not take any action.

Princess Aria signals the handshake to her King Father and so he does the gesture a bit awkwardly, repeating his introduction to call him just by his name.

“Good morning boys. It is nice to see you back.”

Popsie Reed focuses his attention on Jeera, Aramir and Bran.

“Popsie, I am so glad you remembered me.”

Bran finally gets the opportunity to speak up as Popsie Reed notices them.

“It is an honor to be back here sir.”

Aramir says politely.

“Thank you for your hospitality the last time.”

Jeera utters as she walks up to the group with Aramir and Bran behind her.

“Have a seat my friends.”

Popsie Reed offers the benches.

“Where is the lovely Princess Ava, by the way?”

Popsie Reed glances towards the willow to check if he just overlooks the presence of the Princess. The rest of the fairies sit on the benches he offered.

“I had a wonderful chat with her the last time. She is a very smart and sensible fairy.”

Popsie continues referring to Princess Ava as a fairy casually like it is an ordinary thing.

“I recall our conversation about the fairy folks and other magnificent creatures. She mentions about a lost person she intends to find. However, we never got into details since it was time for them to leave.”

King Merlion and Queen Alina exchange a knowing look but keep silent at the time being.

Marmee Rose goes to the house followed by Princess Aria. They come back carrying some baked biscuits, glasses and pitcher of lemonade.

The group eats and drinks in silence and with a grateful heart for what is offered to them. Bran seems to particularly enjoy the snacks.

Soon after, Jeera, Aramir and Bran stand and bow to the King and the others. They spread out to stay as guardians in the vicinity and at the same time give Princess Aria and her parents some privacy.

“We would like to give our sincerest gratitude for keeping our Arianna safe with you despite of the circumstances of how she came to you.”

Queen Alina utters with so much emotion.

Marmee Rose stares at the Queen as she senses that feeling of remorse from the fairy for parting with her daughter.

“We have no regrets in our decisions to love her as our own. I understand how you feel. I would have done anything in my power to protect my daughter. For me, Arianna is my daughter as well.”

Marmee Rose reaches out to Princess Aria to take her hand and gives it a gentle squeeze.

Queen Alina and Marmee Rose look straight into each other's eyes. They are one mother to another mother having a silent conversation on their swelling love for their daughter.

Princess Aria gives each one a kiss on the forehead. She picks up the glasses and pitcher to return inside the house. She uses that as an excuse to leave so as not to be seen about to cry.

Finally, she feels that her loves for both are equally whole. They are different feelings of love but both intensities. She takes her time inside to let herself cry her tears of happiness.

Meanwhile King Merlion and Popsie Reed are into another kind of conversation.

“My sister became fond of you so quickly. She cannot stop expressing how much you love her niece. For that I am truly grateful. You are the kind of father Arianna needs while growing up. I could never have wanted any other for her.”

King Merlion admits.

“Thank you for your kind words.”

Popsie Reed humbly replies.

“My sister Ava has mentioned of someone we are looking for. We have no idea of his existence and we suspect he may not be aware of it as well.”

King Merlion divulges this matter to Popsie Reed as he senses a trustworthy nature in him. He could sense it in his own heart how relaxed he feels talking to this human.

“We are in search for a Water fairy. He is our half-brother.”

The King adds in confidence.

“I was not able to get to my story of a fairytale that my mother used to tell me when I was little. It is about a fairy king who met a lovely lady by the river. The lady fell in love with this fairy despite their difference. They met at the river each time. But then the lady was with a child so she decided to run away without telling her beloved fairy the truth. Soon, the lady gave birth to a special boy. He was half-human and half-fairy. The lady called her son her little water prince. The story ends with the lady keeping his son's secret until the day she died with a broken heart.”

Popsie Reed finishes and stays silent as if remembering his own mother.

King Merlion stares at him as if calculating something.

“My mother and I lived in the city. She has been talking about Bellmont and how lovely and peaceful this town is. We both love nature. I figured she grew up here but left when she married my father. She said my father died when I was still little.”

“When I was growing up, I noticed that she was oftentimes sad. I knew she missed my father terribly. As for me, I don’t have any memory of him because I was very young when he died.”

“She kept mentioning about the wonderful nature of Bellmont. I promised that we would go here once I graduated in college. Unfortunately my mother died before I got to fulfill that promise.”

“So I moved here on my own after college and found myself a decent job as an accountant of the only bank in this town.”

“I kept thinking about her tale, her tale about a water prince. I find it sad more than it being a fairy tale.”

King Merlion is quiet the whole time while Popsie Reed is narrating his tale. When he is sure Popsie Reed is done, he stares at him intently then asks…

“If I may inquire, what is the name of your mother?”

“Her name is Areeadne Rivers.”

Popsie Reed stares back at Merlion with a puzzled expression.

The King looks as though he has learned the true ending of the “Tale of a Water Prince”.

Chapter 49: Love amidst Uncertainty

King Merlion has been silent on their way back to the Green Haven. Queen Alina senses her King's lack of ease but tries to ignore it for the sake of their Princess who is presently very ecstatic that her two sets of parents have finally met.

Princess Aria does not notice her King Father's predicament because Queen Alina continues to discuss with her daughter how Marmee Rose really charms everyone with her superb cooking skills. Bran can very much be the proof of this since he is implying to join the group when the Princess feels she misses her human parents again. Bran volunteers to be her constant bodyguard for the trip to the human world.

The rest of the group is truly entertained by Bran. So upon their return to the Green Haven, Princess Aria does not notice anything odd about the King's silence. She joins the other rangers heading straight to training while the King and Queen retire to their quarters.

The Princess and the rangers go to the training grounds near the lake. It has been the busiest part of the Green Haven since the Heads of the Four Realms launch their comprehensive training of all the rangers in their respective realms in preparation for the mission to the Dark Mountains.

Aldar and Melandra resume their duties as the leader of the rangers in their realm.

Caspian is training with the bow and arrow weapon, along with some of the other rangers. Aldar oversees this group.

Princess Aria joins Melandra's rangers for dagger weapon training. Bran stays there too, as if intent on keeping his word earlier to be the Princess' body guard.

Aramir and Jeera train with the use of swords as they spot Orin and Cleo sparring in one corner of the grounds.

Alcon observes a group of rangers practicing their magic on the earth element.

This day is truly immersed in battle preparations. Meanwhile in the King's and Queen's sleeping quarters, King Merlion is having his own battle. This is rather more of a conflict in his mind and not of a physical one.

Upon discovery of the surprising truth of his supposedly anonymous half-brother, the King is still in shock how magic plays its part so well in creating opportunities for making sure things fall into place.

"Everything that has happened so far, from Alirion's rebellion, to our daughter's state of being a forgotten secret, then Caspian's encounter with Arianna, until now…my personal discovery of my brother…"

The King trails off and seems incoherent but not for his Queen.

“Merlion, what are the chances that my locket has chosen that particular house to entrust our daughter’s safety?”

Queen Alina states the ongoing question that is running in her King's mind.

“Magic dwells all around us. We are all connected to this whole cosmic energy. All the elements; Earth, Water, Air and Fire are interwoven and bonded by love.”

“That places everything in its proper order.”

Queen Alina explains further with certainty.

“What should I do now? I feel like I would disturb this balance if I even let Reed know of his true identity. What about my father and mother? They have been growing close once more and if I speak of this knowledge, everything would start crumbling again.”

King Merlion voices out his concerns one after the other.

“As for Reed, would he believe me on this truth? He has always lived a life of peace in the human world after all. I just started to get to know him. What would his reaction to us, as fairies when he realizes that my own father is the cause of his mother’s misery?”

King Merlion continues.

Queen Alina gently holds King Merlion’s face with both her hands to calm him down.

“My King, I think Reed has the right to know the truth about his life. We owe him that much for loving and protecting our daughter unconditionally without truly knowing who she is.”

“I am positive that Reed would be able to handle this fairly well. Besides, he is family to us now not just for our Princess but by kinship as well.”

Queen Alina's words are full of positivity that certainly assures King Merlion to be honest to his half-brother.

“Our Princess would be more than happy to hear about this. I am pretty sure your sister feels the same way.”

The Queen adds.

“Let us then tell Aramir to send for my sister. We have to tell her first but not involve our King Father and Queen Mother yet.”

This is what King Merlion firmly decides on.

****

At the Blue Haven, the rangers have also been actively training under Princess Ava's close supervision. The Princess would like to be sure that her rangers are properly equipped with the skills for battle in such a treacherous place like the Dark Mountains.

Ailsa makes sure that their practice is regularly conducted. As their leader, it is her responsibility to ensure her people's safety. She would not fail her Princess ranger as well as her King and Queen.

Princess Ava gives strategies to the rangers on using the water elemental magic with minimal movements so their enemies would not predict what is coming to them.

"The key is total control of your connection to our water element which is most favorable to us, then combine it with our combatting skills."

Princess Ava instructs with utmost seriousness.

"You have been very busy my Princess."

Aramir comments as he enters unannounced.

"Aramir, your visit is unexpected. Aren't you busy as well in training?"

The Princess retorts back jokingly.

"I apologize to interrupt but my King requests your presence in our realm. It is about your half-brother."

Aramir states but does not elaborate anymore.

"In that case, it cannot wait. Let us go. Ailsa please assume training them now."

With the Princess' words, Ailsa bows in assent.

Aramir and the Princess rush back to the Green Haven at once.

****

The Realm above the clouds is buzzing with excitement. The air fairies are finally witnessing their Queen's prowess as a fighter. Even Cleon could not help but admire their Queen's unwavering air magic and her fluid movements.

"My Queen, you have demonstrated flawlessly what our rangers should also be doing."

Cleon informs his Queen. He senses Queen Aine intends to join the rangers in their mission. Cleon knows the Queen's pride too well.

He waits for the Queen to dismiss the rangers in training. When they are the only ones left, he cautiously chooses his words for his Queen.

“Queen Aine, I wish you would not take my advice the wrong way. You are our Queen and we need your guidance here. It is commendable that you are training them yourself but I hope you do not intend to go to the Dark Mountains with us too.”

Queen Aine does not reply to this but her frown directed to Cleon shows her disagreement with her head ranger.

“You know I am right. You are our Queen. Our people need you here.”

Cleon takes advantage of his Queen silence. He has known her way too long to know when to push his point. For this matter the Queen is aware of the soundness of his advice.

“You need not prove yourself because our people would not forget the history of our four realms.”

Cleon reminds her.

“Cleon enough of this talks. I shall be the judge of this. If I see that our rangers are ready, I would heed your advice.”

Cleon bows to his Queen with a slight grin. He knows that Queen Aine’s response is the closest to agreement that he could get from her.

****

The Fire Lord waits impatiently for Haco to report to him after their last expedition at the Ogres’ cavern for several days now.

If he would be the only one to decide, he would have rushed to those forsaken mountains by now and burned them all to the ground.

However, he is aware that he should keep the arrangement he made with the realms to take action in unity. So he just sends his rangers to scout just around the foot of the mountains.

Haco's entrance interrupts his musings.

“My king, the ogres, or whatever was left of them has fled to the Dark Mountains. We would have followed them there but I have to obey your command.”

“No need to explain yourself. I am just waiting for the other realms to be ready. I know you are all eager for this as much as I am.”

Haco nods in agreement.

****

Back at the Green Haven, Princess Ava goes to the King immediately. She is so much eager to find out what her brother has to say.

Aramir finds Aldar resting as he observes Melandra from a distance.

“You know Aldar, for a brave and very outspoken ranger like you, it would seem that there is only one fairy you could not challenge.”

Aramir startles Aldar with his keen observation on his strange relationship with Melandra.

“When did you get so smart about those things?”

Aldar retorts back to deflect Aramir’s comment.

“I have seen how you react to her. You are equal yet you seem to favor so much Melandra’s opinions. You prioritize her among other rangers.”

Aramir pushes some more.

“Aldar, you have to be honest to yourself and to her. You have been given this chance. I know this because I faced death too. Now, I live my life making sure that I show how I feel to the one I deeply care for.”

Aramir would not give it a rest.

Aldar stares at him incredulously then glances from afar at Melandra polishing her daggers.

“Go on Aldar.”

Aramir encourages him once more.

Aldar makes an attempt to fix his long hair in a knot. Then he conjures a ring of interweaving leaves.

Aldar walks up to Melandra.

Melandra wears a puzzled expression.

“What is going on Aldar?”

Melandra gets suspicious for Aldar’s serious expression.

“Mel, I am sorry to have waited for so long to tell you…being asleep for a very long time ironically awakens me.”

Aldar pauses.

Melandra stares at Aldar waiting for him to make sense.

“I love you Mel. Will you marry me?”

Aldar finds the courage to say this as he bends a knee in front of his long time ranger partner.

“Finally…I thought you would never ask.”

Melandra replies with pure joy in her eyes.

Aldar stands and takes Melandra’s hand to position the leaf ring round her finger.

“Woot! Woot!”

Bran whistles loudly while Aramir claps continuously.

The rangers who witness this exchange of love were overjoyed for both rangers.

Love amidst uncertainty is a symbol of the strength that binds any kind of beings together. The willingness to take a chance despite the lacking of a definite outcome shows courage to be selfless.

Chapter 50: Reunited

“What? Is that true? Aldar and Melandra are getting married?”

Caspian shouts at Bran in surprise.

“Yes, who would have thought that years of sleeping would make them arrive to that conclusion?”

Bran affirms to Caspian.

The news of the ranger's heartwarming scene at the practice ground reaches every ear of any earth fairy in the whole Green Haven.

“King Merlion and Queen Alina are in the great hall presently with the newly engaged couple.”

Bran excitedly narrates.

“That would be such a happy tale for the two.”

Princess Aria points out. She smiles while recalling all the wonderful things she experienced so far in her stay at the fairy realm. She still feels like she’s inside a fairytale book every now and then.

Her thoughts came to her best friend Jo. She is usually the first person she tells such amazing stories to when she was still here. Suddenly, something crosses her mind.

“Caspian what is the date today?”

The Princess asks.

Caspian shrugs indicating his uncertainty too.

“Why do you ask Princess?”

Bran inquires.

“Oh my, I totally forgot about it. If I am correct, Jo would be arriving soon.”

Princess Aria recalls excitedly.

“I will ask Queen Mother if I can stay for a while there. I have to be there when Jo arrives.”

Princess Aria runs off to the great hall with so much enthusiasm.

“I can’t wait to meet this friend of hers. Our Princess seems all excited about it.”

Bran comments with curiosity, visibly as enthusiastic as the Princess.

“Who says you’re coming?”

Caspian replies teasingly.

“If you must know, I have been granted by the King to be Princess Aria’s personal guard whenever she goes to the human world.”

Bran proudly snaps back.

“Oh, by human world you mean the Princess' house right? Come on admit it, you are just interested with the food!”

Caspian laughs knowing that he is right.

“Oh yeah? Who knows if I should need to guard our Princess when she encounters blondie boy again?”

Bran banters on.

Caspian’s face speaks volumes.

Bran gives a victorious laughter aware that he touched Caspian’s sensitivity on this topic.

****

“We are so happy for you my friend.”

King Merlion gives Aldar a congratulatory hug.

“Thank you my King. It was Aramir who gave a little push to my confidence. I think Marion’s prodigy gets smarter every day.”

Aldar says jokingly.

Queen Alina shares the same delight for her friend Melandra.

“I thought Aldar would never have the courage at all. Mel, I am so overjoyed for you.”

The Queen exclaims.

“When would you have the ceremony?”

King Merlion casually inquires.

“Aldar and I have decided that we should fulfill our duties first. We have to finish what we have started. We must deal with Alirion first.”

Melandra gazes meaningfully at Aldar.

“We would do this for Marion.”

Aldar does not elaborate on this anymore. He knows that both the King and Queen understand their decision as rangers.

"We are sure that Marion and Cara would be so ecstatic if they are here right now. Finally, after all these years, our two closest friends would be officially partners at last."

Queen Alina says a bit softly to suppress her own feelings. She does not like dampen the mood of everyone in her mention of a very important fairy in their circle of friends.

"To Marion…and Cara!"

Aldar suddenly says as he reaches out for Melandra's hands.

The room seems to fill with loving thoughts on their lost friends.

The King and Queen have always considered their circle of friends as family. Aldar and Melandra…Marion and Cara.

"King Father and Queen Mother, could I stay with Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose for a while? I know Jo, my best friend would be returning from Alaska with her parents soon. I would like to be there when she gets back."

Princess Aria barges in without any formal greetings due to her eagerness to be present upon her friend's arrival.

She stops at her tracks realizes her outburst and bows to the group.

"My Princess, of course you can stay there. I think your aunt Ava would be interested to join you in your vacation."

King Merlion replies casually but looks to his Queen meaningfully.

"I think she likes to get to know your Popsie and Marmee a bit more."

Queen Alina adds to justify King Merlion's earlier words.

"I think Bran wouldn't want to be left behind."

Princess Aria reminds them.

"Alright my Princess, let Caspian join too. He could return here anytime when needed."

King Merlion suggests.

"Thank you so much, father and mother. This means a lot to me."

Princess Aria embraces her fairy parents at the same time.

"Congratulations and best wishes to you Aldar and Melandra. I am so happy for you."

"Thank you Princess. If not for you, we would still be stuck in our dreams."

Melandra points out.

"We are sleeping together but that's it."

Aldar could not help joke about their past predicament.

“But seriously Princess, we are forever indebted to you for this second chance for us.”

Aldar adds, more seriously now.

“I believe that you have also given me something to be thankful for. You have chosen the best human parents I could ever live with for over sixteen years. It all worked out for all of us.”

Aldar steals a glance towards King Merlion.

“And now we are in this very joyous moment for two selfless rangers who are meant for each other after all.”

Princess Aria continues, not noticing Aldar’s gesture.

“So, I would like to apologize for my intrusion. I would like to prepare something special for my best friend’s arrival.”

With that, Princess Aria bows to everyone and takes her leave.

The anticipation for finally getting reunited with her best friend can be seen all over her face as she leaves the great hall.

After the Princess’ departure, Melandra stares at her the Queen questioningly.

“You have not revealed to the Princess of her true relation with her human father?”

Melandra confirms the cluelessness of the Princess.

“I think it is not yet the right time for it. Princess Ava and I agreed to inform our father first before making any move. Reed does not deserve to be miserable with us. He is contented with his life in the human world. It would be an injustice to complicate his life for now with my family’s history.”

“I granted my sister her request to spend some time with Reed. So, I think this trip with our daughter to see her friend would be a great opportunity for r Princess Ava to get acquainted and reunited with our human brother somehow.”

King Merlion explains but seems to be convincing himself too. He feels the burden of this new secret. He thought that his family is done with such things.

For now, he owes to his half human brother his peace,

****

Aldar and Melandra join the roster of visitors at the last minute. Both are eager to meet Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose from the house with the blue door.

At the moment, the fairy visitors are seated comfortably on the sofa at the living room. The fairy folks were able to finally enter the house. Melandra’s and Aldar’s combined magic counter

acts the spell previously cast over sixteen years ago for Princess Aria's protection from any magical being.

The fairies are now having tea and chatting lively with their human hosts.

Princess Ava casually requested Popsie Reed to narrate to their group the tale he once shared a few days ago with her brother. The Princess is cautious not to ask about it earlier when the younger fairies were still present.

Currently, the only ones left to hear about this tale are Aldar, Melandra and herself. Princess Aria, Caspian and Bran are outside at the Willow tree. Marmee Rose is busily preparing dinner for all of them.

The Princess ranger intends to hear with her own ears the "Tale of the Water Prince".

Popsie Reed narrates with the same serious expression. It seems to give him a feeling of melancholy each time he recalls that particular story.

Aldar and Melandra listens intently as well which gives them the missing piece of the puzzle on why the magical locket chose this couple to entrust their princess to, way back when she was still a baby.

"That is such a sad tale. Your mother seems to confuse children stories. Isn't it supposed to be happy endings for fairy tales?"

Princess Ava tries to sound plain with her question though her motive is to get to know the human whom her father loved.

"I thought that way too. When I was younger, it seems just one of those fairytales about love. When I grew up, I felt like my mother made that up because it was her way to ease her loneliness for my father's death."

Popsie Reed rationalizes himself.

"All I know is that she misses him and this town. When she died, I moved here hoping to understand her better and to feel closer to her even though she passed away already."

"That led me to Rose."

Popsie Reed gazes lovingly at Marmee Rose from afar. He wears that bright smile once more.

"It's dinner time. I hope you all like baked beans and salads. I roasted chicken too."

Marmee Rose announces.

"Reed kindly call the young ones now."

Bran bursts through the door without any warning.

"Is it time to eat already? Mmm, that smells soooo delicious. Let's eat?"

Bran blurts out all these words, not giving time for anyone to react anymore.

Caspian and Princess Aria come in with confused faces.

“What happened to you Bran? You suddenly left us there.”

Caspian asks, very concerned.

“I knew it! It’s the food again!”

Caspian answers his own question upon smelling the food as well.

Everyone laughs then seated themselves to share the lovely dinner that Marmee Rose prepared.

Princess Aria stares around her with a contented expression. She is glad to be back home once more.

She just has to wait a few more days until she is reunited with her best friend. That, she could do patiently.

Chapter 51: Camping Trip

“Are we done yet with this project of yours Princess?”

Bran asks impatiently but tries to stay polite.

“I can already smell lunch.”

Bran adds sniffing exaggeratedly to convey his hunger.

“It’s done okay? I am just double checking if everything is perfect already. Jo and her parents will be arriving tomorrow.”

Princess Aria replies while scrutinizing the wooden swing attached to the broadest branch of the willow tree. This is her surprise for her best friend. She is aware it is not much but she is positive that Jo will be thrilled to this additional feature of their willow tree.

The vines holding the seat in place are filled with alternating blue and green flowers. This color combination corresponds to both their color preferences just like with their color-coded letters to each other.

“Alright, we are done here.”

The Princess finally concludes.

Bran sprints across the street, so much eager to be the first for Marmee Rose's cooking.

Caspian shakes his head in embarrassment for his fellow ranger’s shameless behavior. He follows after the Princess as they casually return to the house. He feels good about taking part in the Princess’ happiness. Even back then, he knew how much the Princess misses her friend.

When both Caspian and Princess Aria step inside, Bran is already seated, ready to eat.

“Marmee, I apologize for my friend's over eagerness to eat.”

Caspian says politely as he pulls a chair offering his Princess to seat on.

“It is fine my dear. I would be put off if my guests dislike my cooking.”

Marmee reassures Caspian in a joking manner.

With that, their group starts their lunch.

Aldar, Melandra and Princess Ava left since yesterday to resume their duties in training the rangers. Princess Ava decided to leave with the two already to avoid betraying her brother. She was tempted to reveal to Popsie Reed her knowledge about the Water Prince but she has promised to her King Brother that she just came along to get to know Popsie Reed, though unaware of any connection to them.

The younger fairies are having a nice time right now since they are just like teenagers who are having an ordinary vacation with friends.

Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose are entertained by the ongoing banter of Caspian and Bran while they are having their lunch. Their Anna laughs in amusement to both her fairy companions.

This makes her human parents smile even more. They can see how happy their daughter is, just like a typical girl hanging out with friends. The best part is that Jo would finally arrive the next day. That would surely be the highlight of Anna's vacation here.

Popsie Reed has everything planned already. Both Marmee and he would take Mark and Liv to town while the young ones would go camping overnight.

Popsie Reed has been to town the other day for all the supplies and equipment Anna and her friends would need for the camping.

Anna is over the moon when her Popsie Reed announced this morning about the camping. Later after dinner, both her parents will help them pack everything so nothing would be missed.

Later that evening, they all sit outdoors admiring the full moon after their dinner.

Bran is amazed yet again on how Marmee Rose could make such simple meals taste so good.

After an hour or so, everyone decide that it is time for bed. Tomorrow would be the day they have all been preparing for…Jo's arrival with her family.

So when things are all packed up and good nights are all said, they went to sleep looking forward for the morning.

****

Princess Aria is the first to rise with her anticipation really high. She stares at her reflection.

"So, today is the day! I cannot believe it! Finally I will see Jo again!"

The Princess talks excitedly to herself in the mirror.

"Well, I miss her too! I know this is really going to be a great day."

Even her reflection is thrilled.

"Okay, I better wake up everyone. Jo's flight back was early this morning so I am guessing they are on their way back here in Bellmont by now."

Princess Aria waves at her mirror reflection then exits her room.

She knocks at the guest room loudly.

"Hey are you both awake already?"

She asks.

Caspian opens the door and gives his Princess a warm smile.

“Good morning Princess!”

He says.

“Can we have breakfast now?”

Bran exclaims behind Caspian.

“Okay, let’s go downstairs and I will see what I can whip up for you for breakfast.”

Princess Aria invites both rangers as she goes downstairs ahead of them.

“Isn’t it embarrassing to let the Princess serve us breakfast?”

Caspian tells Bran in a whisper.

Bran merely shrugs as both follow their Princess in the kitchen.

“It’s alright boys. Since you are on vacation with me, for now, I am not a Princess. Just call me Anna.”

Anna assures them.

She starts frying eggs and some sausages. She also prepares pancakes. The two rangers watch silently as Anna busies herself.

“Popsie and Marmee will be back soon.”

Anna predicts as she instructs Caspian and Bran where to retrieve the plates, cups and cutlery.

Caspian and Bran set up the benches outdoors and help Anna bring out the breakfast she prepared.

In no time, Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose are back and are delighted for their outdoor setup. They all eat quietly in contentment.

As they pack up the dishes, a gray van slowly approaches.

“It’s Jo!”

Anna exclaims loudly, not taking her eyes off the van stopping in front of their house.

When the van door opens, Jo's face peaks out.

“Anna!”

Jo shouts, just as excited as Anna.

Jo alights from the van and rushes to her best friend’s open arms.

“I missed you!”

Anna says almost in tears from happiness upon embracing Jo.

“I missed you more.”

Jo retorts back.

From the van, Mark and Olivia Daniels emerge.

“Liv, Mark, welcome back.”

Marmee Rose approaches the couple then embraces Olivia.

Popsie Reed shakes Mark’s hand in greeting.

“Have you had your breakfast yet?”

Popsie Reed inquires.

The couple nods.

“Jo insists on going here first. We have to go to Lila's house for our keys.”

Mark replies.

“We shall leave Jo here for now.”

Olivia informs them as she observes Jo with Anna and her friends.

“Anna, introduce your friends first.”

Marmee Rose reminds Anna who has totally forgotten the introductions in her excitement.

Caspian and Bran walk towards Jo’s parents and offer their hands for a shake.

“These are Jo's parents, Uncle Mark and Aunt Liv.”

“These are my friends, Caspian and Bran.”

Anna says politely.

After the formalities, the young group returns to their chatting.

“Well then, let’s meet up at your house later and we can help you unpack.”

Marmee Rose volunteers as they continue where they left of in their conversation.

“Then later, the four of us can have some adult time in town. We can hang out at Sally’s. Harry and the rest are all excited to see you.”

Popsie Reed has everything planned already.

“Well, see you later then.”

Mark agrees.

“Jo enjoy your stay here honey.”

Liv hollers to Jo as they ride the van once more.

When the van is out of sight, Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose join Anna and her friends.

“Jo honey, nice to see you again.”

Marmee Rose says.

Jo walks up to her and gives her a tight hug then does the same with Popsie Reed.

“So, who's ready for camping night?”

Popsie Reed asks all hyped up.

The others cheer in approval.

****

Jo sits on the swing totally enjoying it like she is still a little kid. Anna stares at her best friend very pleased that her surprise is just what Jo would like.

It is already mid afternoon. Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose left after lunch to head for Jo's house.

Caspian and Bran are inside Anna’s house arguing about how much food to bring for their camping later.

Anna laughs with her best friend over-hearing the two boys from across the street.

“We are not going away to some long range mission!”

That is Caspian’s voice.

“Fine! Just don’t ask for extras from me when you have finished yours!”

Truly Bran's words are full of threat.

“Boys…huh?”

Jo comments lightheartedly and laughs with Anna once more.

“So, you and Caspian are really good together. “

Jo states.

“You really think so?”

Anna asks, just to confirm her best friend’s approval.

“I think he likes you a lot and will protect you with his life.”

Jo replies in all honesty.

“Very fairytale like…”

Anna points out.

“Are you kidding me? You’re a part of a fairytale coming true!”

Jo reminds her.

“I totally missed your words of wisdom Jo. I am so glad you’re here. I love you my friend.”

Anna says emotionally.

Jo merely smiles and starts swinging again.

****

Finally, Caspian, Bran, Jo and Anna are hiking on the all too familiar trail. Each one is carrying their own camping pack.

Anna and Caspian lead the way while Jo and Bran are behind them.

Even Jo is being entertained by Bran's antics. From the time the two met, Bran goes nonstop in trying to make Jo laugh.

“I think your best friend stole Bran’s heart.”

Caspian warns Anna humorously.

Anna looks behind her. It seems Caspian is right. Bran has been monopolizing Jo's attention. Anna grins imagining if these two would work out as a couple.

The sun has fully set when they finally reach the spot intended to be their campsite. The stars shine brilliantly replacing the sun. Even the moon is there to give them light.

The boys busy themselves setting up the tent. Popsie Reed got a big one so they could share it instead of having separate ones. According to him, it’s more fun that way.

Jo and Anna start unpacking the food items so they can prepare their dinner. They chat animatedly about each other’s stories so as to catch up after their long separation.

After Caspian and Bran successfully set up the tent, without magic, they decided that they need to build the campfire.

“Are you ladies going to be okay?”

Bran inquires.

Anna and Jo exchange meaningful stares.

“Are you insinuating something?”

Jo snaps back proudly.

“We know these woods since we were young!”

She adds.

“No offense ladies. Caspian and I will just gather some firewood so we will leave you alone a little bit.”

Bran replies with both hands up as a sign of peace.

Anna and Caspian look at each other and laughs out loud.

“What?”

Jo and Bran ask at the same time.

“Nothing…”

Anna and Caspian chimes in reply.

Jo and Anna go inside the tent when both boys left. They continue their stories about each other. Anna insists that Jo should tell her more about her stay in Alaska but Jo feels it’s a boring topic so mostly the conversation is about the fairy realm.

“Wow Anna. I wish I could see those magical things you have told me about.”

Jo exclaims.

Suddenly, both girls sense some movement from outside the tent. They stop talking and listen once more.

“Caspian, Bran, are you back?”

Anna hollers.

Both wait for a reply…nothing.

“Hello…Stop fooling around boys!”

It is Jo's turn to shout, a bit annoyed by this juvenile prank.

Still, nobody replies.

Suddenly, the tent is ripped from the ground like some giant is pulling out weeds effortlessly.

Then both girls see scary creatures with big eyes staring at them when they are exposed.

Both girls scream then everything turn pitched black.

Chapter 52: Unthinkable Schemes

“Jo, are you alright?”

Jo hears Brans voice but she cannot manage to reply. She can hear a slight ringing in her left ear. She stares at Bran’s face. He seems to be saying something but she cannot understand anything coherent. All she can hear are slurs and constant ringing.

She touches her left ear and feels something wet and sticky there. She inspects her hand… It’s blood! Her left ear or some part close to it is bleeding.

Bran helps her sit up and positions her under a nearby tree so she can use the trunk to support her back.

Jo closes her eyes to refocus herself. She feels so disoriented. Wait… now her mind is starting to make sense again.

When she opens her eyes, she observes her surroundings and finally notices their campsite that seems to be blown by a hurricane. Her attention is caught by Caspian’s desperately worried expression.

“Anna…”

Jo gasps in horror when she connects her black out to the last incident she recalls.

“Everything happened so fast. One moment we were in the tent then we were suddenly surrounded by three scary creatures. Oh my gosh! They took Anna!”

Jo utters weakly as she attempts to stand.

“Please stay put, Jo. You are hurt. I think one of those monsters threw you like a doll and thought it got rid of you.”

Bran explains to Jo as he holds her still against the tree trunk.

Caspian remains speechless but busily flips everything in the campsite looking for some clues…anything to help him so he can find his Princess.

All of a sudden, Jo screams in pain. She clasps her left arm with her right hand. She can feel the burning sensation there as well as smell of charred flesh. She stares at her arm which is now ablaze with orange flames. She continues to scream in pain and panic.

Bran cradles Jo’s arm in an attempt to soothe the pain. He whispers a silent spell to try and counteract whatever is happening. But nothing changes. Jo's arm remains that way like a flaming sword.

Caspian rushes to Jo's side and murmurs another kind of magic spell. Still, nothing…

Jo loses consciousness once more.

“Jo! Jo! Can you hear me?”

Bran shouts in panic too.

Then the blazing flames disappear abruptly as if extinguished by water. The flames are replaced by words scribbled in orange.

“Come after your Princess my nephew.”

Each word starts to vanish after Caspian utters it.

Jo's arm returns to its spotless condition, not even any scar or burn at all.

Bran carefully rubs Jo's arm in disbelief.

“Alirion!”

Caspian shouts out in anger as if the Dark fairy can hear him.

“Bran, I have to go back to our realm. King Merlion and Queen Alina must know about this at once!”

Caspian tells Bran.

“What about Jo?”

Bran replies, as he combs back Jo's hair away from her unconscious face.

“You must stay with her. She cannot enter our realm. I will send for Nurse Zella. Wait for her. She will know what to do to help Jo. Don’t worry, she will be alright.”

Caspian instructs his friend. This is the first time Bran ever got worried.

“When she awakens, explain to her everything but please you both must not let Popsie and Marmee find out about the truth. Tell them that the Princess and I had to go back to the Green Haven for something important. I know Princess Aria will not want them to get worried. This is for the best. I will get her back Bran!”

Caspian touches Jo's face gently while saying,

“Jo I promise to bring her back. I am sorry we left you alone.”

****

“My King, forgive me for my negligence. There are no excuses for this.”

Caspian’s head is bent so low. His shame for losing Princess Aria in his watch is indescribable not to mention his fury at himself and his evil uncle.

"We must take action at once. Aramir gather all our rangers now and we shall head for the Dark Mountains immediately! We shall inform the other realms along the way."

Aramir does not speak. He bow instead and takes his leave.

King Merlion shouts his orders slightly ignoring Caspian. The King does not like to say anything out of anger for he is aware that he cannot blame Caspian solely for this.

He is frustrated with himself too because this seems to be history repeating itself all over. He has taken the Dark fairy lightly again and again. Due to that oversight, those who are close to him suffer or die. Marion, Hagan, and now…he cannot even bear to think about it.

"My King, I would go ahead now."

Caspian exclaims when King Merlion has not uttered a single response to him.

King Merlion takes a deep breath and says,

"Caspian, I apologize for ignoring you for a moment there. We cannot afford to let Alirion get his way. He obviously plans to get you alone by using my daughter. He might have been spying on us for some time now. I am to blame for this as well."

Caspian is about to reply but the King is not yet done.

"We shall face him together, along with the other fairies of the four realms. Our unity is what we need. That is the difference between him and us. United, we will stand and divided, we shall fall. This will be the key to our triumph against him."

"Time and time again, he hurts others for he does not care about anyone but himself. He used his sister, his only friend, now you and my daughter. He stooped down so low to such unthinkable schemes for his greed for power."

"This time it has to end permanently."

King Merlion stops then pulls Caspian to stand. He makes Caspian face him by placing his hands on both his shoulders.

"Caspian, we would be victorious only if we stand together."

King Merlion embraces Caspian after that.

"My King, we will get her back."

Caspian promises. That is all that matters to both of them.

"Now, let us go and gather all our allies in the four realms."

The King responds.

King Merlion and Caspian exit at the same time with determined expressions to face what they have prepared against for such a long time now.

Chapter 53: Sins of a Dark Fairy

Princess Aria is awoken by the rowdy laughter outside her makeshift cell room. She is lying sideways on the cold floor facing the uneven surface of a mossy wall. She keeps still, pretending to be unconscious at the moment.

She closes her eyes to reassess her situation. Her brain begins to recall the campsite and the scary-looking creatures that destroyed their tent. She can even seem to hear her own scream, as well as Jo's.

Jo…

Her thoughts reach the peak of panic. Where is Jo?

She starts to shiver uncontrollably from the dread that Jo is hurt or worse…

“No…”

She screams in fear.

“Princess wake up!”

She hears an unfamiliar voice exclaims.

Princess Aria sits up slowly. There is no use pretending to be knocked out. She faces the other way where the cell bars are.

In front of her stands a hideous-looking creature. She suppresses her urge to shriek once more in recall of seeing that same creature at their campsite.

This one resembles the orcs she and Jo saw in “The Lord of the Rings.”

“Jo…”

The Princess recalls again.

“So, good sleep princess?”

The creature asks with toddler speech.

This one speaks not just grunts and roars.

“Where is my friend Jo?”

Princess Aria ignores the question and gathers a little courage to talk herself.

“Small girl hit tree.”

The orc-like creature responds proudly. Apparently it can understand but talks in a weird way.

Princess Aria's eyes opens wide in shock upon comprehending what happened to her best friend.

"Why did you kidnap me?"

Princess Aria demands to know.

The creature merely laughs at her question.

"My Princess you have finally awoken."

Another unfamiliar voice comments behind the laughing creature. This one appears to know how to talk like her.

"Leave us!"

The voice echoes in her cell.

Then the orc walks away with a sour expression, having cut off from its fun. A hooded figure comes into the Princess' view.

"So, Princess, we meet at last."

The hooded figure says with delight.

"I have been meaning to get my hands on you for a long, long time now. But those heroic rangers tricked me. They have smuggled you out of the realm without me knowing it."

The figure explains further.

"You are Alirion!"

Princess Aria says in recognition.

"Well, well, well. You have heard about me then. I didn't know I was so famous."

Alirion removes his hood and the Princess finally sees the face of the Dark fairy. He does not look scary at all. In fact, he resembles Gandalf, in the Princess' opinion, except for the pointy ears which is a trademark of fairies.

"Why did you kidnap me?"

Princess Aria asks once more. She senses her locket glowing under her clothing. She tries to calm herself hoping the Dark fairy would not notice her magical amulet.

"Correction my Princess, my orcs kidnapped you, not me."

Alirion qualifies.

"You are such a coward ordering others to do your dirty work for you!"

Princess Aria snaps back but attempts to control her anger.

“Well, they share my views in getting back the four realms after we get rid of those high and mighty Kings and Queens. I need you as leverage. Your father and mother would never put your life in danger.”

“You see I have been watching you since Aldar and Melandra woke up from my spell. Since they broke my spell, your secrecy spell broke too. I just could not figure out how those two broke my spell.”

Alirion ponders.

‘So, he is not aware of my magic.’

The Princess thought to herself.

The news on how she broke the sleeping spell was kept secret for her safety. Her fairy parents as well as her aunt made sure it did not become a common knowledge among the fairies, for this reason. So Alirion would not have any idea of her magical powers.

The Princess continues to remain calm so she would not give any hint that she has knowledge of her fairy magic. She would lead Alirion to believe that she remains unaware of her magic for growing up in the human world.

“I know you could not resist returning to your human world. I could not touch you when that aunt of yours was with you and both Aldar and Melandra. So here we are.”

The Dark fairy continues his story clueless of the Princess' act.

“What do you plan to do now? Bargain with the fairies again?”

The Princess keeps Alirion talking.

“I told you. You are my leverage. Using the Fire Lord became much too risky for me. I should have killed him instantly. For my hesitation, I lost the Orange Haven once more. I had to flee for my dear life and live to fight another day.”

Alirion says proudly.

“You are a coward! You killed Prince Hagan, after you used him to escape! You even used your sister but she did not follow you…”

She is about to say more when the Dark fairy cuts her off in anger.

“She could have been a Queen! Either way, she could have been the Air Realm’s Queen Successor or future Queen if she married Hagan. But she chose that stupid ranger with your Father’s blessing. Then got herself killed for giving birth to that brat! So I killed Marion as retribution!”

Alirion shouts like a crazy fairy.

“You have no right to kill anyone! You are supposed to protect not destroy!”

The Princess' locket glows brightly from her anger after hearing what Alirion said about Caspian and his family.

The Dark fairy gets distracted by the pulsing locket which sends magical sparks making it undeniably difficult to conceal anymore. He smirks evilly.

Princess Aria gasps when she is suddenly pulled by an unseen force. She slams hard on her cell bars towards Alirion's waiting hand.

The Princess yelps in pain as her neck is imprisoned in Alirion's fingers that grip it hard as if to choke her. Tears fall unguardedly from her eyes.

"So, that is the magic I am sensing around you!"

The Dark fairy uses his other hand to pull out the magical locket from the Princess' neck.

Princess Aria gasps once more to catch her breath as well as reign in her own magic so that Alirion would remain unaware of it.

Alirion releases her by slamming her back on the ground.

Princess Aria does not resist the magical force from Alirion. She stays slump on the floor.

"So, Queen Alina left you this for protection!"

Alirion states this as if it is a very important answer to the mystery of Princess Aria's protection.

"If you wouldn't mind, I would hold on to this now. It is safer that way."

"You know Princess, you have no idea what I have gone through myself. You are so much loved by your family while my father couldn't even own up to having me."

Alirion's tone starts to change.

"Even though he got my mother pregnant, he did not honor her because she was a fire fairy! He married Cara's mother instead. What a hypocrite! He wants to stay with his kind? When I was born and my mother died from my birth, he still did not care about me. He only loved Cara and her air fairy mother. They are like one happy family."

He sounds so bitter now.

"Cara however gets caring for her poor half-brother. That is how I bid my time. I let my pure-hearted little half-sister be my loving sister while I befriended the Fire Lord's only son. I learned every magic I could while happily watched Cara and Hagan became close. But that stupid Cara fell in love with your father's ranger! Your King Father even gave his blessing for that wrenched love!"

He ends his narration with anger in his eyes.

“Why couldn’t everyone be like me? Hagan just let Cara marry Marion! He was not even angered by that!”

Alirion adds in frustration.

“That is called love. You would not understand that because you are not capable of that for all your hatred.”

Princess Aria answers bravely although she was not asked. She merely whispers her words.

“You can experience that as well if you let your heart be free from all your anger.”

The Princess adds some more.

“How dare you lecture me about love? You lived in the human world for so long. Fairies are different. They are harsh beings who only seek to dominate.”

Alirion counteracts.

“I lived with humans and they are not any differ. They feel pain, sorrow, hatred and all other negative emotions but letting love triumph over all the other feelings makes them better people. You can do that too.”

Princess Aria insists.

“Stop now! You don’t know anything at all Princess. You know why some creatures chose to stay here beyond the mountains? They were driven away by my kind. The fairy kind feels superior to others.”

Alirion argues.

“But that is what you are doing right now. You feel superior too!”

The Princess points out.

“Well now I really am Princess. I am the greatest fairy in all the realms and apparently I have these angry orcs to support me to overcome the four realms.”

Alirion turns his back from the Princess and walks away with a very amused laughter.

Chapter 54: Facing Destiny

Jo is finally conscious and appears to have no permanent damages from the physical assault by the orcs who kidnapped the princess combined with the magical burning done by the Dark fairy's message spell. Nurse Zella healed her relatively quickly.

"Thank you for healing my friend immediately."

Bran says in a serious tone.

Even Nurse Zella did a double take hearing Bran become subdued for the first time. This human girl must mean a lot to this young ranger.

Nurse Zella knew Bran well enough to observe the sudden attitude change here. She has taken care of Bran, along with Caspian when they were young since their fathers were busy with their ranger duties. Both young fairies grew up without their mother since they were born.

"Bran, just let your friend take it easy for a while. Now, I must return to our realm."

Nurse Zella replies dutifully.

"Young lady, can you handle the knowledge of what transpired here? If not, I would be willing to cast a memory magic."

Nurse Zella asks Jo directly.

"I would not even dare choose to forget this madam. My best friend is in grave danger. If I could do anything to help her, I would. So, the answer is yes. I can keep a secret madam if that is what you mean."

Jo responds quickly without hesitation.

"Very well then, you could help Bran here think of a very convincing story for the absence of the Princess as well as Caspian. Please call me Zella, my dear."

Nurse Zella smiles appreciatively to this human girl for her strong loyalty to their Princess.

"I must go now. Bran, do not leave this lady. This is your duty for now."

Nurse Zella makes her way out of the house silently.

"She is nice. I like her."

Jo comments as she closes the blue door of her best friend's house.

It is already dawn but her parents and Anna's are still out. They must have gone to her house to help unpack.

Jo takes a deep breath to relieve the tension she feels. She just got back and it feels like a lot of things happened already.

“So, I have fixed all our stuff from the camp. There are no clues of destruction. We just have to make sure our story is plausible enough.”

Bran informs Jo.

“Better leave that to me. I just hope Anna is alright.”

Jo answers confidently but somehow her fear for her best friend’s life overwhelms her. This fairy tale is turning into a nightmare.

She just prays for Anna’s safe return.

****

Princess Aria sits quietly on the floor. She is debating with herself if she would dare escape from her cell now or wait for a better opportunity. She still blames herself for losing her locket for her lack of emotional restraint. But then again, it served as a decoy so the Dark fairy cannot attribute the magic he senses from the Princess’ true knowledge of it.

Alirion seems not keen to dispose of her at the moment. If she stays and continues to pretend that she has no magic, or not able to use it, she would have some time to talk to this misguided fairy.

She thinks it is her destiny to somewhat change the heart of Alirion. She just wishes she would succeed. After all, he is still a fairy and Caspian’s uncle. Maybe there is still hope for him.

****

The fairies of the four realms have gathered at the foot of the Dark Mountains. What used to be color-coded garments from the last gathering at the Azure is now a cohesive shade of white representing the stand of the united realms for purity in their endeavors to rid the land of all evil.

Only the leaders of each realm wear a distinct color: green for earth, blue for water, silver for air and orange for fire. King Merlion, Aramir and Aldar lead the earth fairies. Melandra insists on coming but the King decided that she should be with the Queen.

Cleon stands proudly in front of the other air fairies. The seasoned ranger was able to convince Queen Aine to remain at the White Haven.

Princess Ava stands side by side with Ailsa, with an eager expression to move along. Her water fairies trooped behind them.

The Fire Lord resembles an intimidating character in orange garments with both hands emitting electric sparks. He stands way ahead of all his fire fairies with his loyal Haco beside him.

Caspian and Cleo scout ahead with four other fairies for whatever creatures that would hinder their climb to the Dark Mountains.

No one dares to speak. Words seem to be unimportant for they have all planned this mission together. Each fairy, each realm works synchronously being linked mentally by magic. This is the moment they have prepared rigorously for.

After the historical battle a long, long time ago, this is the destiny they all have to face to secure the peace in the fairy kingdom once and for all.

The fairies start their climb. Each one steadily keeping up with one another carrying an air of confidence. Their group resembles an army of ants as observed for the peak of the mountains.

Surely, their progression is being watched from above those peaks. However, their numbers are undeniably great.

But is it enough?

****

Caspian and Cleo sprint soundlessly along with four other scout fairies. They are attempting to cover more grounds to secure that their advances are not opposed by any other creatures inhabiting these treacherous mountains. So far, they have encountered a few pixies arguing among themselves but let them pass undisturbed.

When they reach halfway the first mountain, they overheard some orcs bantering nearby. They stop at their tracks to listen.

“Dark fairy say wait here.”

One orc says.

“I want hunt food. Hungry.”

Another one grunts in anger.

A smacking sound follows.

“Ouch! Stop. Pain…”

The complaining of the first orc clearly heard.

Cleo nods to Caspian and the others in silent conversation. So, Alirion has enlisted the services of these orcs. What were they promised by the sneaky fairy?

Caspian signals to their group to surround the arguing orcs. It appears there are just three of them in sight. They can handle this easily.

The other four fairies move to opposite ends while Cleo and Caspian stay in between.

“Be quiet. Hear something.”

They heard one of the orcs command.

The fairies hold their breath in suspense.

“Smell them.”

One of the orcs reacts.

“Now!”

Cleo shouts.

All of the fairies move to enclose the orcs. The first battle encounter starts now.

Chapter 55: Battle with Orcs

The orcs are ready with their maces. They show no fear though they are aware of being outnumbered. Is it bravery or just plain arrogance?

Cleo and Caspian strike with their swords at the orc in the middle. The other two orcs are busy attacking their other fairy companions.

The fight is more of a test of strength and not of magic. The fairies battle with the orcs using their weapons.

The orcs are very noisy as they fight with grunts and shouts, while the fairies remain compose and of sure footing.

The fight is quick to end. The three orcs lie unconscious. Cleo uses her magic to bind the orcs where they remain sprawled.

Their group continues their climb up. They don't need to interrogate the witless orcs. Caspian and the others know that Alirion would keep a few of these orcs close to him for protection. Also, the more orcs they encounter the closer they are to Alirion's location.

Surely, the Dark fairy would have brought the Princess at the peak of the tallest mountain. His ego would be that predictable.

****

The Fire Lord and his fire fairies move quicker and with lesser difficulty. They are charged up with the fury that is still unquenched. They are like relentless soldiers who would stop at nothing and would not have second thoughts to harm anyone who hinders their approach. Each fire fairy nurtures an electric bolt on their fingertips, ready to fire.

As for the other fairies of the Air, Water and Earth realm, they follow behind the fire fairies ready with their weapons such as swords, daggers, bows, and others but also ready to conjure magic when necessary.

So far, their progress is uneventful. Caspian and his companions have done their job well. It might also be partly due to the threatening appearance of their numbers that keeps other creatures out of their way.

As they pass, there are obviously myriads of watching eyes from the trees but never dare approach or let their presence be known.

****

"I sense the approach of my fairy kin. Spread out and do not let anyone through my magical barrier."

Alirion shouts at the more smart looking orcs yet a lot frightening in their appearance.

“Our numbers are plenty. They cannot win against us.”

Surely this orc is more intelligible but over confident.

“Stop bragging to me. Just make sure you will not fail me!”

Alirion snaps back.

The orc left without another word.

Alirion starts to pace around a bit worried if he has really prepared this mountain peak well enough with as much dark spells and hideous creatures he has bent to his will to rid of some of the more valiant fairies who would try to penetrate his protection spell around this mountain peak.

He does not intend to be foiled once more, like what happened in the Orange Haven.

He checks the emerald locket on his robe pocket. He is positive that he might find this useful later on.

He then stares at the Princess slumped on the floor facing the wall. She appears calm rather than scared or panicked. Is she confident that she would be leaving this place alive?

“I admire your composure my Princess. I have not heard you even cry.”

Alirion attempts to converse with this Princess who seems not too afraid of him despite his reputation.

“I am ready to die for the ones I love. I would rather be dead than let any of them get hurt.”

The Princess replies calmly. She tries to sound defeated.

“You have such heart-warming words from a little girl who has been forgotten to be retrieved in the human world!”

Alirion tries to mock her.

“Surely a fairy like you could only see the bad side in everything.”

Princess Aria states in monotone.

“Stop lecturing me again!”

The Dark fairy says, truly annoyed. He regrets starting this conversation.

The Princess does not dare to answer back. She is avoiding losing her control again. It caused her the locket.

Alirion decides to leave her alone. He has better things to do than listen to this too-forgiving Princess.

****

Caspian and Cleo reach the foot of the tallest mountain. Their group is confident that this is where they would find the Dark fairy and the Princess as well.

As they are bracing for another climb, they are taken by surprise by a group of yet another set of orcs. This time they are the ones outnumbered.

The fight ensues. Each fairy tries to combine physical and magical tactics. The orcs seem to be coming from all directions as if they have waited for them.

Everything is a blur since one of their fairy companions conjures a fog to camouflage the battle. However, this becomes a disadvantage for them since the orcs attack randomly without caring if they hurt one of their own. Unlike them, the fairies try to limit their attack to avoid accidentally damaging an ally.

Suddenly, the fog starts to clear.

Caspian does not waste time, realizing that this means his fellow fairy who conjured the fog has fallen.

“Cleo, go inform the others.”

He shouts.

Cleo is about to argue but when she sees that only the two of them remain standing, she understands Caspian immediately.

Cleo nods and quickly flees.

Caspian conjures a tornado to distract the orcs so Cleo would not be followed.

Sure enough, the orcs concentrate on evading the tornado.

Caspian wills the tornado to disappear when he is sure that Cleo got away safely without any of these orcs following.

“Okay, I give up.”

He shouts at the dumbfounded orcs.

“Take me to my uncle.”

He tells them with both his hands up in the air as a sign of surrender.

The orcs look at one another. Then the taller one hits his enormous knuckles on Caspian’s face.

Caspian blacks out.

****

Meanwhile, Cleo reaches the rest of her fairy kin advancing towards her direction. She does not recall how fast she sprinted to get to the other fairies.

It is the Fire Lord who sees her first.

“Where are the others?”

The Fire Lord demands.

“We got ambushed by more orcs. We were outnumbered. Only Caspian and I survived but Caspian told me to warn you all.”

Cleo replies hurriedly.

“Where is Caspian now?”

King Merlion inquires with a worried tone.

“I am positive that he surrendered himself so he could get to the Princess."

Cleo replies with certainty.

“Well then, let us hurry. We shall bring the fight to those orcs and to Alirion.”

Aldar says.

Their group continues their progress. They did not stop until they reach the foot of the tallest mountain where they saw their fallen kin.

Some of the fairies carry the bodies of the four fairies then place them carefully away in a covered site.

Then they continue on. This time, King Merlion and Fire Lord Hakan are both front liners with Aldar, Aramir and Princess Ava behind them. Their faces are full of determination to finish this battle.

Not long, they encounter a large number of orcs and three overgrown giants. However, these orcs seem to be disfigured with additional horns and bigger built. The three giants are flanked by these orcs ready for battle.

The battle with the orcs and giants begins.

King Merlion and Aldar fight back to back while Princess Ava and Aramir guards each other in a synchronized fighting stance. The Fire Lord engages on a one-on-one with one of the giants as he throws fireballs nonstop. Cleon, Ailsa, Cleo and Haco also occupied themselves in their battle with every orc they face.

The other two giant picks and crushes any random fairy they could get their hands on. Some of the other fairies perish for the giants are formidable.

Each fairy fights valiantly. The battle rages on creating a disturbance to these unexplored terrains.

By the looks of it, the victory could not be predicted.

Aldar and King Merlion has slain as many as they could. The Fire Lord is getting the upper hand as the giant he is fighting starts to get tired. In his impatience, the Fire Lord casts a burning spell that sets fire to the giant. The other two giant get distracted with the dilemma of aiding their fellow giant who is burning. Ailsa attempts to strike one of the two giants. The giant near her swat her like a fly. She goes flying in the air and hits a nearby rock. Ailsa dies instantly.

Princess Ava shouts in fury. She approaches the giant guilty of the act and conjures spiky ice spears that hit the giant instantly. It falls defeated and unconscious.

The other giant grunts furiously upon seeing both his companions hurt. He zooms in his attack towards Princess Ava. The Princess is ready to combat.

Aramir use this to their advantage by mentally instructing the Princess to combine their magic of water and earth to create a sinkhole so the other giant is sucked underground. It disappears completely without a trace.

Princess Ava runs to her second-in-command by the rock. She says a silent prayer. She appears distraught but immediately reigns in her emotions. The battle is not done. They have to get her niece back.

Haco and Cleon fight the remaining orcs while a few starts to flee from the scene.

It would seem that they are winning but the battle is not yet over. There is still Alirion to deal with.

Chapter 56: Choices We Make

Caspian's temple hurts terribly when he regains consciousness. He finds it difficult to open his left eye, as if something is blocking his vision. However, his right eye seems fine and when he finally opens it, the first image he sees is Princess Aria's worry-stricken face.

“Princess?”

Caspian is bewildered but relieved at the same time to finally be with his Princess once more. He senses the soft lap of the Princess beneath his pulsing head.

“Caspian, do not force yourself. I am here.”

Princess Aria's voice is like music to his ears. He closes his eye to ease the spinning sensation. In doing so, he remembers the whole encounter with the orcs with some of his fairy companions perishing. He wishes Cleo made it to the others.

“That is why my head hurts so much.”

Caspian says as he reaches the conclusion of why he could not open one eye.

“That stupid orc! I already told him I surrender.”

He complains.

“Wait, are you alright Princess?”

Caspian inquires as he slowly forces himself to a sitting position. He observes that they are in a cell of some sort. He feels the binding spell casted to prevent him from using it, when he attempts to use his magic to open the cell door.

Princess Aria appears to realize what Caspian is trying to do. She shakes her head in silence to warn the ranger that he should not make the effort anymore.

“He took my emerald locket. I do not have any magic.”

Princess Aria utters as her way of explaining to Caspian that she is not using any magic. She is hoping he understood what she meant.

“Did he hurt you?”

Caspian asks sounding very worried.

Princess Aria gives another head shake.

“So, my nephew, you got my message.”

Alirion suddenly speaks mockingly from outside the cell.

Caspian does not immediately notice his uncle's presence. That is the reason why the Princess is very cautious.

"You are such a coward. Why do you have to involve the Princess?"

Caspian shouts at Alirion.

"Be very careful Caspian. I have not decided what to do with you yet. Don't make me regret sparing your life."

Alirion speaks calmly but obviously full of threat.

"Why are you so full of hatred? You act as if you are the only one who had such a bad life. I am the one who is supposed to be angered. You killed my father!"

"By doing so, I was left alone just like you but I chose a different path. I made a decision not to let my sadness destroy my chance for a happy future. Despite what you did, I would not give in to revenge. My mother would not have liked that for me. So would my father."

"Our happiness comes from the choices we make. Is this really yours?"

Alirion stares at Caspian in shock.

"You don't know what it's like…"

Alirion begins to argue but is cut off immediately by Caspian.

"What? To be alone? But I do! You are just using that as an excuse to justify yourself. I know the feeling of seeking revenge but you being my kin afford me some restrain. That helps keep my anger in check."

Caspian bravely argues.

Their argument is cut short when an orc rushes in.

"Dark fairy…more fairies coming!"

The orc reports urgently.

"Bad fairy with fire coming!"

The orc adds.

"Hakan!"

Alirion utters the Fire Lord's name like a curse.

"I shall get rid of him once and for all."

He states as he storms out with the orc.

Once the Dark fairy is out of sight, the Princess embraces Caspian then cries nonstop.

“My Princess please do not cry. I promise we’ll get out of here soon.”

Caspian tries his best to calm the Princess.

“No, I am not crying out of fear. I am in tears because of so much relief that you picked not to be like your uncle. Even though it is such a hard choice not to avenge your father, you overcome the hate so you will not turn out like him.”

Princess Aria clarifies, in between sobs, to her ranger.

“You are truly correct in telling him that the kind of life we live depends on the choices we make. I am so proud that my ranger chose to be in the path of goodness.”

The Princess hugs Caspian again.

“My ranger?”

Caspian expectantly asks if he heard his Princess correctly.

“I have always known you are my ranger from the very first time I saw you.”

Princess Aria states with such boldness she never had before.

Caspian smiles despite the painful feeling when his swollen eye crinkles.

“Come on, Caspian. Now is our chance.”

Princess Aria pulls Caspian to stand.

“Your magic is binded but not mine. He doesn’t know I can do magic.”

The Princess whispers to him.

“Let’s grab this opportunity while he is distracted.”

The Princess says with determination. Having Caspian with her gives her more courage to attempt an escape. Her earlier plan to talk some sense to Alirion is fully abandoned. It seems the Dark fairy could not be altered any more than he has done for himself.

Surely, the Dark fairy and his orcs are preoccupied with so many fairies surrounding them.

The Princess freezes the cell lock with her water magic and allows Caspian to force it open. This is easily and quickly done. This also shows how subtlety is much better than brute force. They are able to leave their cell without any open confrontation.

The two young fairies creep slowly out to rejoin their fairy kin.

****

Alirion sees the flaming form of the Fire Lord even from afar. He himself is almost ignited with the fiery magic. The Fire Lord emits an intimidating orange aura while his is more like dark smog full of evil magic but equally threatening.

The magical barrier made by Alirion prevents the intruders from approaching any closer. The fairies stand together bent to break that barrier.

Alirion knows these fairies are capable of that. He just meant to slow them down. He stares around his company. He is very confident that they have the advantage with their number. He has more than enough creatures to spare to eliminate his enemies.

His own army lines the perimeter of his barrier. An assortment of orcs, ogres and giants comprise his evil defense. These creatures feed on destruction and chaos. Their hunger for flesh, especially fairy flesh aided the Dark fairy to get their cooperation. He has promised them free reign of the four realms with the exemption of his own supremacy over them.

The Dark fairy could care less if they spread chaos over the realms. He just wants to have them under his rule. Ruling without rules as long as they follow him…

He would spare those among his fairy kin who would bow to him as their new King.

Alirion focuses his attention on the fiery figure of King Hagan. In his mind, destroying the Fire Lord would prove that he is the strongest fire fairy.

The barrier breaks without a warning as an arrow hit the orc beside him.

“Aldar, you missed!”

Alirion shouts at the ranger he once cursed to sleep. He laughs insanely.

“You are mine!”

It is the Fire Lord who shouts out already sending electric sparks like a whip towards Alirion.

The battle commences. Alirion and King Hakan engage in their duel of fire ‘til death. The Fire Lord is not known as the forgiving kind.

King Merlion and all the other rangers busy themselves with the giants first, aware that these creatures would be more damaging than the ogres and orcs combined. Aldar releases arrows left and right with such precision that most of the giants have been hit several times in a row. The Earth King commands glaciers to sprout from underneath where a great number of the giants stood. He also makes use of the earth magic he acquired from his Queen. The glaciers emit mounds of earth boulders to destabilize orcs and ogres from their footing.

Meanwhile, Cleo leaves quickly unnoticed to rescue Princess Aria and Caspian.

Princess Ava engages several orcs in a single fight. She hacks each one with her sword with such accuracy that no one would doubt that a three against one fight is possible. The Princess’ face is full of anger from these creatures for what befallen Ailsa, her commander ranger. When she finishes with the bloodied orcs, she moves on to a giant near her and sends her daggers straight to its eyes then hacks with her sword.

Aramir and Cleon are also busy with some of the fairies assaulting the other orcs and ogres, combining their magic as well as physical strength. The rest of the fire fairies set the battlefield ablaze with so much precision to only burn the enemies around them.

Haco stays close to his King in a protective stance as he battles any creature approaching the heated encounter of his King and the Dark Fairy.

Alirion is fully concentrated in damaging his opponent. However, King Hakan is not named the Fire Lord for nothing. He becomes the most terrifying fairy in the realm when his anger is at its peak. His wrath is somewhat feared by any fairy.

“Give up now while you still have a chance. I would not be as generous later.”

The Fire Lord warns the Dark fairy. He is aware of his agreement to spare Alirion’s life during their summit at the White Haven. However, he would end this fairy if he has his way.

“Why would I give up? So you can imprison me again?”

Alirion shouts angrily.

“You have to face your punishment for your crimes.”

King Hakan seems to reason with himself too, as he tries to be easy on the unrepentant fairy.

Suddenly, Caspian and Princess Aria arrive with Cleo.

“Uncle, please stop. Surrender now and end this war.”

Caspian shouts as loudly as he could manage amidst the chaos of the battle.

“You stupid brat! I shall never surrender! It is too late for me now! I’d rather die than bow to anyone.”

Alirion responds defiantly.

Without warning, he shifts his left hand and directs an electrical bolt of fire in Princess Aria’s direction.

Caspian is about to shield the Princess but to everyone’s surprise, Princess Aria conjures an earth boulder just in time to safely cover not just herself, but Cleo and Caspian as well.

With this split second of distraction, Alirion is hit by the deadly electric fire bolt of King Hakan combined with a burning fire. He stares in disbelief at the Fire Lord. The Dark fairy is in shock that the Fire Lord has beaten him. He falls to the ground lifeless as he burns allover.

Princess Aria screams in horror. This is the very first time she sees someone dies and burns in front of her. This is real, not a fairy tale.

Caspian takes the Princess in his arms and uses his shoulder to shield the sight of his burning uncle from the Princess.

Princess Aria sobs uncontrollably.

Caspian feels sort of ironic that it is the Princess who seems to mourn for his uncle.

The battle continues to rage around them. After a while when the enemies realize that the burning figure is the Dark fairy, some stop resisting and others run away from the battlefield.

When Alirion's burning body turns to ashes, what is left on the ground is the glowing emerald locket. King Merlion picks it up. He slowly approaches his daughter.

Princess Aria embraces her King Father with her sobs a bit softer now. The King places back the locket on her daughter's neck.

All the fairies are silent. They are all muted by the turn of events. The fairies stare at the charred spot from where the Dark fairy burned a few moments ago. They could not believe that it is all over.

The Dark fairy is gone.

Chapter 57: A New Beginning

The reality of Alirion's end takes a while to sink in amongst the fairies of the four realms. After so many years of fear and uncertainty, the fairies tend to expect that Alirion would come back from his final death with stronger dark magic than ever.

However, in the passing of days, the fairies of the realms begin to breathe easier. Finally, peace is achieved.

The first act of the Kings and Queens of the four fairy realms is to pardon the creatures who did not participate in the battle at the Dark Mountains. The Kings and Queens of the Four Realms allowed them to return to the Fairy Kingdom. As for the orcs, ogres and giants, they were all left to forever reside beyond the Dark Mountains. Crossing over is punishable by death.

The Kings and Queens use their combined magical elements to cast a protective barrier between the Dark Mountains and the Four Realms to ensure the safety and peace incase the banned creatures attempt to start a war once more.

This act serves as a symbol of a new beginning in the fairy land.

Another gathering takes place in the Azure to honor the fallen fairies from the battle. Each fairy makes a silent wish that this would be the last of such kind of gatherings involving untimely deaths of a fairy kin.

The ceremony is subdued since death is always a permanent one that all fairies never wish for their kin. Queen Aine leads the ceremony.

"This is a sad day for us but a new beginning at the same time."

The Queen pauses a while to look around her, at each and every fairy present. She would like to make sure that she can put to memory each of her kin. She is after all the eldest here. She has seen a lot of battles that brought sorrow to their lands.

"We honor our fairy kin who fought bravely in this battle with the Dark fairy. May we always keep in our memory the lives they sacrificed to gain peace in our lands once again."

"May this battle serve as a reminder that when we are united, we endure. But when we are divided, we shall fail."

The bodies of the fallen fairies are on separate pyres. The pyres are lit and set to float on the Azure River. All the fairies bow their heads to say a short chant to send of their kin.

After watching the pyres burn, the fairies begin to leave one by one in silence.

****

Mark and Olivia Daniels are chatting animatedly with Reed and Rose Rivers in our corner of Sally's Diner. They are waiting for their lunch orders to arrive. Every once in a while Harry joins in their conversation as he passes by serving food to other diners.

On a nearby table, Caspian, Anna, Jo and Bran are seated with their own conversation on past events in the fairy realm. No one seems to pay attention them nor hear them for Sally's is as busy as ever with people chatting loudly nonstop.

"I think it's really cool how Anna saved your ass too Caspian. I have always known she is not a damsel in distress, not even in fairly land."

Jo teases Caspian.

"But I'm glad you're both alright. That's something really serious even here in my world."

Jo adds a bit seriously.

"You were brave too Jo… handling yourself and all."

Bran exclaims cheerfully. He is really impressed with this human girl. She takes all these supernatural stuff quite levelheadedly.

Jo just smiles at Bran. She is not used to praises from the opposite sex.

Caspian and Anna look at each other meaningfully. Somehow, they have had enough of talking about the things that happened in the fairy realm. They are just content to be back here, in the human world for some normalcy.

After a while, Roger brings their order of milkshakes with a bright smile on his face.

"Hi Anna! Good to see you again. Hey Caspian, I hope everything is well in the valley. Jo welcome back!"

Roger greets everyone with a smile.

"Hi Roger how are you? It's really nice of you to help out your Dad here. I think I will be staying for good this time. This is Bran by the way."

Jo replies enthusiastically as she introduces Bran.

"Hey there!"

Roger greets Bran too.

"Nice to meet you. I was at the valley too, remember?"

Bran says.

"Oh yeah. Well, see you around. "

Roger makes a saluting gesture with his hand and turns to go back to work.

“I can see how he seems to be intimidating. Really a nice guy.”

Bran turns to Caspian who appears disinterested for the first time.

“Are you alright?”

Bran inquires looking worried for both Caspian and Anna.

“We are fine. I think I could speak for both of us that it’s a bit emotionally tiring having to worry about what would happen every time we get back to our realm.”

Caspian replies.

“I feel guilty that I am not even sad with the passing of my uncle.”

Caspian confesses further.

“It is okay Caspian. You don’t have to force yourself to feel anything about him. You barely knew him.”

The Princess couldn’t help but intervene. She understands how confusing the past events could be especially for Caspian. He was ready to forgive his uncle but it seems it was not enough. His uncle made the wrong choice in the end.

“Hey, this milkshake is really awesome!”

Bran blurts out changing the serious atmosphere.

The four of them ends up laughing.

****

Later in the evening, after Caspian and Bran have gone back to the Green Haven and Jo's parents has left, Anna and Jo sits arm to arm on Anna's bed. Jo is able to convince her parents that she prefers to sleep over yet again in her best friend’s house.

“Hey Anna, are you sure you’re really alright?”

Jo asks with a very serious tone.

“Why wouldn’t I be okay? Everything worked out well in the fairy realm. Also, I have my human family and my fairy family. Best of all, my bestest friend is right here with me.”

Anna enumerates all these facts as if she is counting each as a blessing.

“It’s true, nothing else matters.”

Anna adds to convince Jo.

“Oh yeah, and best of all, we are going to a fairy wedding!”

Anna reminds her best friend excitedly.

Chapter 58: Fathers, Brothers and a Wedding

Princess Aria sits beside her best friend Jo amazed by the busy scene. This fairy wedding is really fascinating for them. Seeing a lot of fairies dressed formally in real life is like a dream come true. This is one of the fairy tale scenes from the books that these two girls read over and over again when they were young. They adored the lovely dresses of Cinderella, Aurora and all the other princesses in fairy tales.

“Look at that Anna…I mean Princess Aria. I like that blue one your aunt is wearing. It is classy and not too feminine.”

Jo points shamelessly towards Princess Ava's direction. Her aunt is sitting beside King Oberon and Queen Meridian who are both in dark blue ensemble, which complements the pair.

“She looks very elegant like a Queen.”

She adds appreciatively.

Princess Aria could see how much Jo is enjoying herself. She smiles at her best friend. She is so much happier that Jo is with her here. An occasion like this is best shared with your closest friend.

The Princess is very thankful that the bride and groom decided to have their wedding here at the valley. If not, Jo would not be able to come for sure in the fairy realm. With that thought in mind, Princess Aria glances at Aldar and Melandra standing up front.

Both rangers are glowing with so much love in their aura. The pair wears unconventional mint green.

Her father, King Merlion stands beside Aldar while het mother, Queen Alina is right beside Melandra. Her fairy parents wear forest green garments.

Her attention is caught by Caspian sitting right beside Aramir. He looks so handsome in his dark green attire.

Caspian suddenly turns his head and stares back at Princess Aria. He smiles at her. This made the Princess’ heartbeat quicken. She returns his smile shyly as if guilty that he could hear her excited heart.

Caspian pays attention once more to Queen Aine, who is presides the ceremony. The Queen is wearing a silvery dress accented by white gleaming pearls.

Princess Aria stares at her Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose, both invited by the bride and groom. They sit beside Princess Ava, with similar fascinated look on their faces. Her human parents are also amazed by this event involving so many fairies.

Her aunt keeps smiling as she glances at Popsie Reed once in a while.

“The fairy realms witness the union of Aldar and Melandra. Their love shall nurture our land now and always.”

Queen Aine solemnly utters.

The audience claps loudly in pure happiness for the bride and groom.

Young fairies plays flute-like instruments as the newly weds approach the crowd of fairies waiting to congratulate them and wish them well.

The ceremony moves to the open plain where various food and drinks are waiting. The guests partake in the fair-like event. The atmosphere is of a merry kind.

Fairies are chatting everywhere Jo stares. She beams in delight like she is dreaming while awake. Bran keeps her entertained with his funny antics.

The Princess could see her fathers, King Merlion and Popsie Reed sitting together having a conversation. She smiles at this scene.

“Hey Princess! You are radiant with such beauty.”

Caspian appears from nowhere with a single green rose for her. He places it on her hair near her ear.

“Thank you Sir ranger. You look handsome yourself.”

Princess Aria replies politely.

“I thought I could not have my chance with you. You seem preoccupied with Jo. It’s a good thing Bran kept her entertained.”

Caspian says teasingly.

“Well, I am here now…”

The Princess exclaims.

“Let’s dance…”

Caspian suggests as he take Princess Aria by the hand and slowly lead her to the other young fairies dancing.

Aldar and Melandra are in the center of the dance area. Both seem to be ignoring everyone as they stare at each other lovingly while dancing slow.

****

“I am glad that you and Rose came. I hope you are enjoying your time here.”

King Merlion says to Reed.

“It was kind of Aldar and Melandra to have invited us to share this important milestone in their lives. The fairy wedding is pretty interesting.”

Reed replies enthusiastically.

“My Rose there is enjoying her chat with your Queen.”

Reed stares in the direction of his wife talking to Queen Alina. Reed gazes at Rose with adoring eyes.

“You and Rose are very special.”

King Merlion states as if wanting to say some other point.

“Um, Reed, have you ever wondered about the tale your mother tells you when you were young? You know…about the Water Prince?”

Reed looks at King Merlion a bit confused.

“You see, we lost a water prince before. This prince we never thought is a brother of mine.”

Reed’s reaction is indecipherable.

“Whenever my mother tells me about it, it sounds so sad and I feel so sad too.”

Reed recalls his conversation with King Merlion about it.

“Have you found this water prince?”

Reed asks, very concerned.

“We did. He is sitting with me now…”

King Merlion confesses carefully.

Reed stares at the King once more to check if he is being serious.

“Yes brother, it is you. You are the lost water prince. Your mother’s story is hers and yours. The locket of Arianna brought her to you. You are after all our kin.”

King Merlion explains to Reed.

“I am…a water fairy?”

Reed asks in bewilderment.

King Merlion merely nods.

“Maybe that’s why I settled here. I feel Bellmont is the best home for me!”

Reed exclaims in realization.

“Rose, honey, I have something to tell you!”

Reed hollers suddenly. And that is it for him. No more questions and no more fuss.

Both Rose and Queen Alina join King Merlion and Reed.

****

Princess Aria squeals in delight when Princess Ava tells her about Popsie Reed. She runs to her parents still sitting together. She embraces her Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose first then her King Father and Queen Mother.

“We are truly one family!”

Princess Aria utters proudly.

“You are not just brothers but both my fathers!”

The Princess declares with content in her heart.

King Merlion and Popsie Reed smiles at each other as recognition to the bond they now share.

Chapter 59: Coronation

The wedding of Aldar and Melandra is one that would be remembered in the history of the Four Reams. Both rangers serve as an inspiration to all the fairies because their love gives everyone a positive feel of a happy life despite being destined to be the protector of the realm. This is yet another sign that a long lasting peace is achievable when the fairies are at ease to live their days without fear.

The valley is back to its usual farming atmosphere. The place is abundant once more and back to its original glory. Market fairs are taking place every weekend and more and more humans visit and enjoy the fruits of Mother Earth.

The fairies have so much to be grateful for. The balance has been restored and the fairy kingdom exists harmoniously with the human world though unknown to them.

Currently, the four realms are kept in check by their Kings and Queens. Yet a grand coronation would take place soon to crown another Queen.

The news of the coronation has been unexpected throughout the realm. However, the soon to be Queen's reputation and service to the realm could not be questioned.

The Azure River would be the venue which is chosen by the Kings and Queens in order for the whole fairy kingdom to witness such a momentous event.

The fairies of the four realms are gathered around the Azure in their colors of blue, green, orange and white. Each fairy anticipates the crowning with much excitement and reverence.

The future Queen has been known throughout the fairy land as a brave ranger. She is a formidable protector of the realm and this has been proven time and again during siege of the Orange Haven and at the battle against the Dark fairy beyond the Dark Mountains.

Princess Ava walks carefully towards where her King Father Oberon and Queen Mother Meridian stands. The Queen carries a shell-like container. She smiles proudly at her daughter.

Princess Ava kneels in front of King Oberon. The King retrieves the crown for her from the shell-like container. The crown is made of pearls and topaz gem stones.

King Oberon gently places the crown on his daughter's head.

"Rise, Queen Ava of the Water Haven."

King Oberon announces proudly.

Queen Ava stands and faces all the fairies of the realm. She bows to the crowd in humility.

"I swear my allegiance to the Four Realms of our Fairy Kingdom. You have my wisdom and protection."

Queen Ava declares to the crowd in a steady voice. Her stance is truly of one worthy to be Queen.

She glances back at her father and mother with a smile. Her mother could not help get teary-eyed for her overwhelming joy for her daughter's as ascension. Her father wears a triumphant smile. He has always pinned for her to rule their realm.

Now that King Oberon and Queen Meridian has decided to give more time to their relationship, they have surprised the whole fairy kingdom with this news to step down and give the reign over the Blue Haven to their daughter.

Both would remain advisors to the new Queen as her Regents. But of course she has her brother King Merlion to support her as well.

"Congratulations Queen Ava. You made us proud. I have always known you are destined for greater things."

Queen Aine is the first to approach Queen Ava. She has always been rooting for this brave ranger and Princess.

Both share their ferocity in battle and making wise decision, though from different generations.

"Thank you for your strong confidence in me, my Queen."

Queen Ava bows reverently to the Queen of Air fairies.

King Merlion and Queen Alina are the next to express their well wishes for the young Queen.

"Queen Ava, your crown suits you well. You deserve it my little sister."

King Merlion's comment appears casual but sincerely proud of his sister.

"You have the support of the Green Haven."

Queen Alina assures the new Queen.

"Thank you, my brother and sister."

Queen Ava replies, giving both King and Queen an embrace at the same time.

Princess Aria walks up to the group with Caspian and Aramir behind her.

"My Queen Aunt, congratulations!"

Princess Aria says as she hugs her aunt excitedly.

"My Queen, you have our loyalty as well."

Caspian promises.

"My Queen, I would like to take this moment to request for your permission to be your first ranger in command. I hope I am worthy of your trust."

Aramir states in all seriousness as he bows in front of the new Queen.

Queen Ava stares in surprise at the ranger kneeling in front of her then she glances at the King and Queen of the Earth fairies with a questioning expression.

“It has been granted before this Coronation. After Ailsa's…”

The King pauses.

“What your brother means to say is that Aramir asked our permission to be your head ranger. He could not part from a certain Princess he saved in the past.”

Queen Alina explains more casually.

King Merlion smiles with gratitude to Queen Alina. She has always known the right words to say.

“Don’t worry, I have a lot of rangers to spare.”

King Merlion adds jokingly.

“Well then, who am I to refuse such a valiant ranger? Rise, Aramir, our first ranger in command.”

Queen Ava utters with a slight smile on her face.

“Congratulations Queen Ava! Aramir has been worried that you might refuse since you know that I am a better ranger than him.”

Aldar exclaims, obviously teasing Aramir.

“Oh really? Better among our male rangers you mean?”

Melandra joins in the teasing.

“Of course, my love.”

Aldar answers quickly.

Everyone who overheard Melandra laughs.

“Congratulations Queen Ava.”

Melandra greets the new Queen.

“Congratulations young Queen. We have high hopes for your reign.”

Everybody turns silent when they hear the voice of King Hakan. The Fire Lord has not been seen since after the battle at the Dark Mountains. He did not even attend the wedding of the two rangers.

The Fire Lord walks up to Queen Ava and bows humbly.

“The Four Realms need new governance for our future generations. I have to say, you are a perfect model fir them.”

The Fire Lord comments with sincerity.

“Thank you for your strong support. I hope I live up to the expectations.”

Queen Ava replies humbly.

Just like that, the Fire Lord turns and walks away from the group. Queen Aine follows intending to have a word with him.

“Queen Ava, could I have a word with you?”

Princess Aria asks suddenly.

“Yes, my niece.”

Queen Ava leads the Princess a bit a short distance so as to have a private conversation.

“What is it my niece?”

The Queen inquires.

“My Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose wishes to congratulate you for your coronation. My Popsie says he is honored to have a Queen Sister.”

Queen Ava is lost for words upon hearing this. She embraces her niece as her reply.

The Water Prince has made the decision that his life is in the human world. His brother and sister honor that so they never forced him to enter their realm. It is enough that they found him well and happy.

Even their father, King Oberon honors this choice. He does not insist on meeting him. Maybe later on, only when his half human son is ready.

“You have such a formidable body guard. He would guard you with his own life.”

Princess Aria says.

“I know. But you have one too.”

Her aunt teases.

Both laugh as they rejoin the festivities in honor of the new Queen.

Chapter 60: The Best of both Worlds

The snow falls beautifully on the trail. Princess Aria marvels about it upon their magical appearance at the trail that she has often treaded when she is still living in the human world.

She previously planned to return here without using any magic so she can see and feel once more what she misses in this world. It is the time of the year when she used to go on hikes with Popsie Reed and Marmee Rose with the mission of finding the perfect Christmas tree for the holiday. Of course, Jo would tag along. Half of the time, they end up having snow ball fights. That is one of the best ever memory she has during Christmas season.

For now, she is convinced by Bran to just magically transport them here. He reasoned that they are already late for the Christmas dinner. Jo would be furious at them if she has to wait any longer.

Caspian takes Princess Aria's hand as they cross the street while Bran follows behind carrying extraordinary presents from their realm for Popsie, Marmee, and the Daniels.

For tonight, they wore ordinary jeans, shirts with jackets, boots and gloves for the sake of Jo's parents who have no idea about fairies and other out of this world stuff.

"I couldn't imagine how Jo manages to pretend to her folks not knowing about anything in our world."

Bran asks most probably just to himself. He is truly puzzled on how Princess Aria could have such a very loyal friend.

Caspian and Princess Aria does not reply anymore. Bran appears to always marvel on Jo's acceptance about strange things and treating them like ordinary day-to-day events. He seems hopeful that he and Jo could be more than just friends.

There is only the four of them tonight. The others are busy with certain changes in the Four Realms. Having Queen Ava gives the other Kings and Queens something to discuss about since the new Queen has been giving different ideas on how the fairy realms could adapt better to the outside world like the werewolves and vampires. So for now, everyone is on their toes to figure out if these suggestions could work for the fairies as well.

Queen Ava even hints on allowing fairies to co-exist with humans in even closer proximity like living among them. But of course, it would be with certain precautions.

King Merlion and Queen Alina allow Princess Aria to have this holiday in the human world.

This works perfectly well for her because Christmas season is the best time in this part of the world.

"Umm, I could already smell the hot chocolates with marshmallows."

Bran exclaims sniffing. By now, he has been accustomed to some aromas of the human food and drinks.

Princess Aria smiles as she knocks at the unchanging blue door but for now has an additional wreath decoration for the holiday ambiance.

“Hey, you’re late!”

It is Jo who greets them with a pretend frown. Then, she smiles widely at her best friend.

They hug each other tightly as if they didn’t she each other for a long time.

“Sorry, we got caught up with Queen Ava’s meetings.”

Princess Aria responds apologetically.

“Hello boys! Merry Christmas!”

Jo says as she lets everyone in as if it’s her own house.

When Princess Aria looks around the house, she notices the prettiest Christmas tree she could ever imagine. Standing beside it are Popsie and Marmee with a bright smile.

She rushes to them and gives each one a warm hug.

“Merry Christmas!”

She greets them.

“Happy holidays Uncle Mark and Aunt Liv.”

She then says to Jo's parents.

Caspian and Bran greet everyone in like manner and they all settle themselves at the dining area.

The table is filled with roast turkey and beef, potatoes, carrots, apple pies, and hot chocolates and other stuff for the sweet tooth.

While they sit and share this wonderful holiday dinner, Princess Aria could not help but get nostalgic of every Christmas she has spent here in this loving family who took her in. She stares at each and everyone here that has been a part of her life while growing up.

She might have felt like she has been forgotten by the fairy world for a while back then, but spending her time in the human world is something she would never trade even if she is a Princess in her own fairy realm.

After dinner, everyone settle at the sofa and exchanges gifts. They sip warm chocolate once more as each one shares their story about Christmas.

Caspian and Bran enjoy listening to these stories of the holiday most especially about Santa and his elves.

Later in the evening, the parents of Jo excuse themselves and leave but as usual, Jo stays behind.

Popsie and Marmee goes upstairs to let the younger ones enjoy their night cap.

“Merry Christmas everyone!”

Bran says a bit breathless for stuffing himself so much with Marmee's cooking.

“Merry Christmas guys! I am so happy to spend it with all of you. Last year is a bit too boring in Alaska. Oh by the way Anna, Josh says hi and wishes you a happy holidays. He chatted with me this afternoon. I used your computer upstairs.”

Jo says nonstop.

“Merry Christmas too. Same feeling here.”

Princess Aria replies back.

“Who is Josh?”

Bran asks intrigued.

“My friend in Alaska.”

Jo answers quickly, clueless of Bran’s sour expression.

Caspian and Princess Aria laughs out loud while Jo looks at them with a puzzled look.

****

Princess Aria and Caspian stand facing each other on the frozen lake. Caspian’s expression is of uncertainty.

“Are you sure this is safe?”

He asks the Princess.

“Trust me, this is easy.”

The Princess replies unable to hide the amusement on her own face.

She lets go of Caspian’s hand and slowly slides her own feet on the frozen ice. She glides gracefully a few paces away from Caspian.

Caspian observes the Princess with utter concentration. It looks easy enough. He thought to himself.

Caspian moves in imitation of what the Princess has demonstrated earlier. He seems to be getting it but suddenly he loses his balance and falls hard with his bottom first on the ground.

The Princess gasps but giggles uncontrollably. She goes to her ranger to help him stand.

“You are really enjoying this, aren’t you?”

Caspian says in pretentious hurt.

“I just think for a fairy with the air element up his sleeves, you should use that to your advantage.”

Princess Aria explains.

“You said you wanted to learn how to skate on the ice. So here we are…”

She states further.

“Okay, okay. I would try again.”

Caspian takes a deep breath and starts over. He moves slowly and a bit reluctant at first. Then after a while he glides as gracefully as the Princess in no time.

Princess Aria claps loudly in appreciation.

She glides towards Caspian and he receives her hand in his. They skate on the frozen lake hand in hand. They are like professional figure skaters on the ice.

The young fairies look like enchanted creatures under the light of the moon.

For Princess Aria, having met his ranger is the best part of this world.