

Arianna's Tale: The Resolution

Excerpt

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Chapter 1: Two Steps Forward

Something woke me up. It wasn't my alarm, because it was still dark outside the crack in my window. For a long moment, I just lay in bed, completely still, eyes closed, listening to the sounds of my room around me. Nothing sounded off. A year ago, I probably would have fallen back asleep... But that was before the troll, before my dad and my boyfriend were killed... That was before a lot of things.

Instead, I felt the powers already thrumming through my body, pooling in my hands. I hadn't called them consciously, they had just reacted to the fact that I felt threatened. This was starting to become the norm for me, but it was still freaking me out a little. I wasn't sure I would ever get used to having these stupid faerie powers, much less that they were becoming like another sense for me.

When I sprang from the bed, spinning in one fluid motion to face the front door, I was glowing. No, that's not some sort of symbolism... My entire body was letting off blue-white light as my powers hummed along my skin.

"I'm unarmed, Anna."

It was probably meant to be a soothing comment, but recognizing the voice caused a trickle of orange light to seep into my blue-white light.

"You're never unarmed, Taiyoo," I hissed while he took a cautious step into the circle of light coming from me, "Stop." He did and my eyes flickered across him, quickly cataloging the fact that he was in his human form, his faerie self hidden by the glamour that made him appear *almost* normal. Bright blue eyes were calmly watching me, but his fire-red hair wasn't spiked up anymore, it fell shaggily to the bottoms of his ears.

"I'm not here to hurt you," he tried again, but I only laughed and threw my hands up in the air.

"Then why are you here?"

"You ran away from the wolf house, from your family..." he remarked, remaining perfectly still in some ill-fated attempt to convince me he was docile.

You see... He was right, I had run away from the wolf house, and it had been far from easy. The first time I had tried to sneak out at night, of course they had heard me, and Elizabeth had followed me to the bus stop before Austin showed up in a car to take us back.

The second time, I had made it all the way to the closed front gate before anyone had shown up, and really, I think if I hadn't discovered the fact that the front gate was made of solid iron, I

would have managed to get further. As it was, being fae makes it impossible for me to touch iron. I guess that's also a bit of a hypothesis, because I haven't actually touched it... It makes my skin burn just being near it so I haven't had the nerve to try actually touching it.

It was the third time that I managed to get away. I had spent over a week working on learning how to use my fae concealment powers, and when I was absolutely positive I could make myself and my bag appear invisible to anyone even looking directly at me, I disappeared from the house. I had made sure to wait for a night when Taiyoo wasn't around since he could find me if I couldn't keep my mind settled even when I was invisible, and then I had just "vanished" as far as the wolves and the few fae that were at the house were concerned. As they ran around searching for me, I calmly made my way out of the house and waited by the front gate for them to eventually open it. Since I was only invisible, I could still hear them, and they had decided that I had somehow managed to transport myself away even though the grounds were supposed to have been warded against my transportation magic.

I had a few months to stew over that last bit: *who* had warded me into the house and why? Did they really think keeping me trapped inside a house of werewolves was a good idea?

I snapped out of my reminiscing and didn't even try to shoot the blast of ice magic at Taiyoo, it just happened because he had startled me.

"Are you going to kill me, Princess?" he queried with that same calm tone, but he had deflected my magic with his own and he had the faintest orange glow to him, not exactly orange... more like sunlight... more golden....

"I'm thinking about it..." I quietly admitted, but he knew I didn't *really* mean it, which made his eyes scrunch in confusion—you see, faeries can't lie, but for some reason, I was able to come closer to lying than any other fae that I knew, or that they knew.

"Everyone is worried about you. Six of your human world months have passed, will you please go back now?" he requested, but I instantly shook my head.

"No way. I can't be there, I can't handle being in the house where Jack should be, knowing that he's only not there because of me. Where my brothers have chosen to stop being human, at least partly because there's a Faerie Queen threatening to start a war with me... The town where my dad was killed by a troll that was hunting *me*. Don't you get it, Taiyoo? Ever since I went to that town, everything in my life has spiraled out of control!" I blurted, feeling my powers pulse briefly

stronger before I reined them in again. “Did you ever think to ask what I’ve been doing for the last six months?”

“I thought we could discuss it on the way back to the wolf house. Unless, of course, you have decided to return to Faerie and take your throne,” he reasoned with a shrug that was too graceful to be human, “Besides, Rei and the wolf you imprinted your powers on have been keeping tabs on you.”

My powers flared again, but I was completely in control of them. What I had spent six months doing, besides finding a job at a coffee shop and getting a room in a slightly less than sleazy long-term hotel, was mastering my faerie powers. It wasn’t easy, getting the job without a real address, because I had been sleeping on benches and in a church or two until I had gotten enough money for the hotel room, but I had managed. Part of me believed I completely deserved the less-than-luxury accommodations, the other part of me was arguing with that part, saying that no one deserved to have to live that way. Internal struggles are never fun.... But whenever I wasn’t working, after I got the job of course, and whenever I wasn’t applying for jobs before I got it, I spent all of my time testing and exercising my faerie powers.

I had said I didn’t want anything to do with them, and the reality of that statement was still true, in part, but I did like the idea of being able to defend myself. I didn’t know how much longer the Winter Court Queen, my biological mother, was going to leave me alone, so I needed to be prepared to fight her. I just needed it to be on my terms and not have the werewolves willing to risk their lives for me or a bunch of fae and exiled fae depending on me to help them by leading the way to victory, or something.... It was too much responsibility. But when it was my decision, because I needed to protect myself, and not because I actually *wanted* to fight anyone, the powers came relatively naturally.

“Leave, Taiyoo,” I growled, but he didn’t move. He remained perfectly still except for the strange golden-orange light that was faintly dancing around him.

“Six months, Princess... Your mother is starting to feel that your grieving time should have passed... You need to get back to the wolf house, to your exiles, where you will be safe,” he reasoned as he took a single step toward me, but that single step drew my attention to the tiny stripes of golden-orange light swirled in my own blue-white light.

“Six months I’ve been away from the wolf house, from you... and a couple of weeks before that... and your magic is still in me...” I murmured as I pressed my hand to my chest and looked up at him, “Why? You said it would leave...”

“Six human world months to repair the damage you caused to your own powers... Even the Winter Court Princess cannot heal herself that quickly in the human realm,” he considered with the faintest smile, “You hardly have any of my magic left in you, though. Does it really bother you that much?”

“Yes.”

“I can try to call it back, but to be honest with you, I’m not entirely certain it will leave you,” he admitted with another one of those overly graceful shrugs of his shoulders when I darted accusing eyes to him.

“What?” I suppose I become a little monosyllabic when I get upset, and I admit, it isn’t my absolute best feature, but there could be much worse things... right?

“In case you haven’t noticed, Princess... I’m quite fond of you, and so is my magic. I have a feeling it isn’t going to want to completely leave you, even if I call it back to me,” Taiyoo explained patiently, but I noticed the tiny step toward me and flared my powers again.

“Leave,” I repeated just before my alarm started to go off. I walked over to it, which forced me to have my back to him, and shut it off, then turned back to find him only a few steps closer. “I have to go to work. *You* need to *leave* because there is *no* way I’m going back to that town.”

He just stood there staring at me for a long moment and then nodded, just once. “I will deliver your message. But I think you’re making a terrible mistake, Princess,” he trailed off into a sigh and then was just suddenly right in front of me and pulled me against him into a hug. “If I am correct, and you are mistaken, I will come back for you, though.”

I struggled against him for only a second because my attention was drawn to the fact that the light around me and the light around him weren’t hurting either of us. Instead, they seemed to merge into some kind of almost green light where they touched directly, and swirled together where they didn’t, like a candy cane.

“What is this?” I whispered, even though I hadn’t meant to, and Taiyoo backed away from me the tiniest fraction so he could look into my eyes.

“Proof that we would be fine together,” he stated quietly, “Be safe, Arianna. Please, be safe.”

He disappeared as suddenly as he had come—just there, and then not—and I felt the absence of the strange warmth he brought with him whenever he was around. I stood there like an idiot for a long time, just thinking about, well... *everything*. Part of me felt safer knowing that Taiyoo knew where I was and would at least try to help me out if it came to that, but there was this other part that couldn't help comparing that to Jack... Jack had tried to protect me and look what had happened to him.... I still loved him. Six months didn't do anything to repair my broken heart, even if it did help with repairing my fae powers....

Another one of my alarms went off, and I shook myself back to reality to get ready to go to work. I'm a hard sleeper, and *very* good at shutting off alarms, so I always have a backup; this time it really just rescued me from my own thoughts, and not from weird dreams.