

The Fairy and the Princess

By Katie Alford

Let the chaos commence, Alyn's pale green skin creased into a smile. Bending down from his perch on a high chandelier his long, dark green hair brushed his neck. Beneath, milled human courtiers draped in silken finery trimmed with the fur of murdered animals.

Alyn's smile darkened. Humans were a brutish race who thought themselves cultured, yet murdered animals for sport and embellishment. The evidence was everywhere, with the walls decorated by the heads of dead stags and the banquet table lined with dead wildlife cooked on fires fuelled by hacked-up trees. All life extinguished by human touch - it was enough to make a fairy sick. All life was sacred. Something they were about to learn.

Closing his eyes, Alyn reached deep into the natural energy pool just beneath the surface of conscious awareness. Rich, multi-hued strands of living essence met the edge of his perception, dancing through his body and spirit like ripples through a lake. It seemed tranquil from the surface, but the currents beneath carried the cries of severed souls for which he reached. Dragging them across the great divide, he smirked as chaos broke loose.

Ghastly wails rent the air as the stag heads started gnashing from their mountings. Cooked carcasses climbed from their burnished silver trays and, flailing blindly, sent nobles scattering from their paths, while the fur trimmings started squeezing and choking their wearers.

"We are bewitched!" a voice roared above the screams and cries of panic. "Kill the enchanter."

Alyn laughed, his hand clutching his thistle down vest. They wouldn't find him here. They never did.

Below, armed men searched the terrified crowd, but not once did their gazes rise above their heads. Humans were as blind to the world above as they were to that inside. Perhaps they saw the beauty of a flower, but they didn't sense the delicate network of energy underlying it.

For a moment, Alyn pitied them. To never experience the full complexity of the world's dancing energies. To never feel the sunrise in your soul, the blooming of a flower or the dazzling surge of a birth, seemed an empty existence.

An earthy roar broke Alyn's thoughts as the whole room shuddered, setting the chandelier beneath him swinging violently. Jerked from his perch, the air rushed past him as he fell. Hastily opening

his wings, Alyn pulled up into a glide, but it was too late.

“There! A fairy demon. Kill it!”

A dozen bows creaked as they were drawn, their arrows trained on Alyn.

Demon? How dare they! Fairy kind harmed nothing, whereas humans killed everything. Yet they called *him* a demon. One day their murderous ways would catch up with them. It was as much Alyn’s hope as his belief.

His wings buzzing frantically, Alyn made for the large, open window at the hall’s end - the pursuing arrows leaving rippling currents in their wake. He could feel the trails shredding the air, and sensing the one arrow about to find its mark, he felt a flash of anger. Avoiding it without getting hit by the rest of the volley was impossible, causing his gaze on the window ahead to wilt with resignation.

So this is how it ends? Murdered by humans, like so many others. It was times like these he cursed the fairy way of protecting all life - even humans. They didn’t deserve it. They carried death, not life. It was a bitter last thought as the pain of the arrow’s impact took his breath, leaving him plummeting to the floor in a disorienting spin.

With the last of his fading energy, Alyn tensed ready for the bone-splintering impact against the pale, marble floor. But it never came. Something soft broke his fall, and dragging open his eyelids, he caught a glimpse of blond curls before a suffocating layer of fabric obstructed his vision, followed swiftly by unconsciousness.

Strange energies floated through Alyn’s senses. Was he dead or still alive? He could feel the world shifting around him, but something was off. Beneath the mountains to the west, a surge of fiery energy was building. As it rose up through the mountain, a belch of air escaped, sending a horrific shudder through the earth. It was an ill omen.

As he floated, watching from a distance, the power built and built, then exploded with such force it sent Alyn’s spirit reeling. His vision solidified into rivers of liquid fire tearing through human villages and finally the imperial palace itself. At last those humans would reap what they sowed. The thought was a satisfying one, but the visions of retribution faded all too quickly, replaced by a throbbing pain.

“He’s so small. Like a child,” a voice said above him, “and so beautiful. Look at his wings, Juien. The energy pulsing through them is so colorful and so beautiful. How could anyone shoot such a being?”

There was a pause. Alyn could sense the woman bending over him. Her spirit pressed against his, causing his energy to recoil sharply, as if touched by something dirty or corrosive.

“This isn’t a wounded animal or a baby rabbit, mistress. This is a fairy. You should have left it to the guards.”

Alyn stifled a shudder at the sense of barely-restrained bloodlust seeping from the second human’s soul. He was weak, as was his ability to channel magic. If the humans decided to kill him, he wouldn’t be able to put up much of a fight.

“Juien!” The woman’s tone was shocked. “Fairy or human, he’s injured and needs our help.”

“This is a dangerous being, mistress. Fairies command powerful magic. You saw what it did in the main hall.”

“Did I? I saw magic, but no proof it was done by him. Still, he was shot without question. We would never tolerate that kind of injustice among our own. You say fairies are dangerous. Yet the poor thing was the only one injured. How is that a fair accusation?” Lifting Alyn from the ground, the woman drew him into a tight, protective embrace.

Only able to shrink so far, Alyn’s spirit was overwhelmed by the alien energy pressing in. Sentiments of guilt and concern felt jarring from a human, and yet, somehow, from this one, flowed naturally. Her energy was pure and mesmerizing in its unexpected beauty. By the strength and pulse of her spirit, he could tell the woman was barely fully grown. But that was still twice his size.

“I... You’re right, mistress. I apologize.” The voice was unnaturally calm, and carried a threatening quiver of false remorse.

Jerking in fear, Alyn wished himself as far away from the human as possible; but contrary to myth, wishes were not a fairy’s specialty.

“Look! He’s waking.” A wave of delight pulsed from the woman holding him as she gently brushed his cheek.

Realizing the game was up, Alyn moved his head slightly. Immediately, the other human’s energy flashed with fear then sharpened with aggression. But the energy of the woman holding him remained bright, making her spirit all the more enchanting.

“Fetch Healer Varind, quick. Tell him I have another wounded charge.”

"I really don't..." The energy of the second human hardened defiantly, but then broke. "As you wish, mistress."

I must be dead, Alyn thought. *This just doesn't make sense*. Overcoming his aversion, he probed the woman holding him, to find only affection and concern. All humans were evil, flesh eating, killing machines. Humans like this didn't exist. Yet, as a being who spent half his time in the spiritual world, he knew, without question, he was still in the physical realm. But the realization only confused his sensibilities further.

As the threatening aura of the second human retreated into the distance, Alyn opened his eyes. Greeting him were blond curls and bright blue eyes along with a sweet, loving smile. The woman was every bit as beautiful as her spirit, setting his skin tingling at the sight.

She was clearly a courtier. Her dress was a rich red and made of very soft silk which humans deemed expensive. However, unlike her peers, not a single scrap of fur decorated her neck and cuffs or even the cloak she'd draped over him as a blanket. Instead, her dress was embellished with golden embroidery and strips of crushed velvet.

"Please, do not be afraid," she whispered, brushing his cheek again. "You were shot and fell on top of me. I...hid you in my cape to keep you from the guards. Had I not, I fear they would have killed you." Remorse dripped from her soul like tears.

Alyn knew well how to speak the human dialect. After a few hundred years living in fearful proximity, it was hard not to pick it up. He could have responded, but none of their sharp, guttural language had ever crossed his lips before. It felt like to do so would sully his soul. Instead, he turned his gaze to the pain in his shoulder. The arrow was still protruding from it, its shaft broken just above his skin.

"I really am sorry. Please, do not hate me." The plea rippled through the woman's very soul.

While a human's plea would not normally touch his heart, hers did. So with a gulp of discomfort, he answered. "I don't. Thank you for your help, human."

It was a formal and grudging response, but she smiled anyway. "Can you heal yourself?"

Alyn shook his head. He was too weak to channel any energy in this state. He would need another fairy to heal him.

Was this how it had been for his father? Shot by a human and left to bleed to death, powerless to heal himself? He didn't feel fear, just anger. Humans were bringers of death. He had to get back to the glade, but he could barely move.

Looking beyond, hoping to spot an exit, Alyn's spirit drained as he glimpsed the wooden roof beyond. The energy felt dead and stale. He couldn't understand why humans would make homes out of dead wood yet not out of piles of animal corpses. It all felt the same to him, lifeless and severed. However, this was no house, as he could smell animal dung and sense the dulled energy of captive animals below. He lay on a bed of straw pulled from a pile at the end of the long, vaulted room, revealing them to be in a hay loft above the stables.

It was hard to swallow the sudden swell of disgust. This was another thing he hated about humans. As if shutting themselves away from nature wasn't enough, they had to do it to other animals, too. No creature had the right to keep another captive, a notion which filled him with panic.

"And what will you do with me once I've healed? Keep me caged as a pet like the creatures below?"

The woman's eyes widened in horror at the accusation. "I would never! This is the royal stables, not a prison."

"It *is* a prison to the animals you keep here. Your horses are miserable. They should be grazing in a meadow. Not eating dead, dried grass. You humans are all the same. You care nothing for beings different to yourselves."

Alyn felt bitter and betrayed. He'd thought she might be different. He should have known better than to hope. Human kind had no redemption. And yet the woman showed genuine sorrow at the news.

"I...did not know. Poor Crystal..." Her sad gaze swept to the stairs leading down from the hay barn to the stables beneath.

Again, her reaction confused him. *If she cares so much for her animal companions, why cage them?* Humans were such a paradoxical race. Perhaps it was more naivety than malicious intent that led to their monstrous behavior. Although, whether that was a valid excuse was questionable. Naivety was, to some degree, self-inflicted.

Deep in thought, Alyn didn't notice the energy of two humans entering the stables until hearing the creak of their footsteps climbing the stairs. It was the evil woman again, and a male. Scanning the man's spirit, Alyn felt no danger, just a sense of the man's dread.

"And what do you have for me this time, princess?" The man's tone was uneasy.

Princess? Shocked, Alyn turned to the woman still holding him tight in her arms. *This is the human emperor's daughter and heir, Princess Arienette?*

He wasn't sure if the revelation was disturbing or reassuring. Her care and love for nature could change the human race for the better. But it also meant he was being harbored by the daughter of the very man who'd ordered him shot, leaving him with a nervous tic.

"I hope it isn't a wolf this time. I've been bitten enough by your so called 'helpless' charges." The man's head bobbed up from the floor below, and as his eyes fell on Alyn, his face drained. "Princess! The whole imperial guard is out hunting down that fairy. Do you do it just to torment me? Do you know what your father would do to me if he found me tending that creature?"

"I rather fear more what he would do to the fairy. I doubt he would order *you* shot on sight."

The man's eyes softened as he emerged fully onto the creaking boards of the loft's floor. "His action seemed harsh and violent, I know. But he has a duty to protect the kingdom, and that means eliminating any threat before it can establish."

The man was tall and quite plainly dressed in cotton, but his well-kept brown hair and soft, pale skin betrayed a higher standing than his clothes implied. In his hand, he carried a wooden box from which sounded a gentle chink of glass.

So this is what passes as a healer to the humans? His energy felt nothing special, being just as dull and unrefined as any other human's.

"And I have a duty to right his mistakes! This fairy harmed nothing except a few courtiers' appetites. That is no grounds for a death penalty." The princess' demeanor strengthened into a powerful and commanding presence. Even her energy expanded, glowing so powerfully Alyn could almost see it break into the physical realm. She truly was a marvel.

The healer's expression tensed. "Please, highness. Do not drag me into another argument between you and your father."

"I am merely asking that you tend an injury. Is that not your skill?"

"It is, highness." The man's reluctance broke with sympathy as his gaze fell on the arrow protruding from Alyn's shoulder. "I will, of course, do my duty."

The princess beamed, her smile captivating Alyn's gaze, at which he felt a terrifying lurch of longing. *No! Not for a human.* It was madness. Humans were evil and forever opposed to the fairy race. A union couldn't even be considered. Yet this was one part of his soul he couldn't control. As her eyes met his, Alyn blushed and turned sharply away towards the healer approaching him.

The man seemed wary but not afraid. Behind him, however, lurked the princess' maid. She wore a

simple black dress, but while her features were pretty and seemingly serene, her energy felt dark, pointed, and resentful. As she met Alyn's gaze, her eyes narrowed, her spirit seething with restrained hate. While her hatred could not logically be accounted for, it didn't shock Alyn. He'd expected all humans to be like this. In fact, he even found it slightly reassuring that at least part of his judgment had proven correct.

Alyn winced as the healer touched the broken shaft of the arrow, sending a shock of pain through his shoulder.

"The tip is buried deep against his shoulder bone." By his tone, the healer's statement seemed more an apology. "This will be dangerous to remove."

Princess Arienette's energy rippled with concern, her expression growing disturbed. "Is there no easy way? Magic, perhaps?"

Alyn shook his head. Not even fairy healers could remove an arrow with magic. All they could do was heal the wound once it was out. Or just watch the fairy die if the arrow had struck a mortal spot.

"He'll die unless the arrow is removed," the healer informed her, "but the trauma will be great. Perhaps too great for such a small being."

The princess's aura filled with panic, but Alyn, himself, remained calm. He was not afraid of death. It was simply a transmutation of being from the partly physical to the fully spiritual. In dying, he would rejoin nature's balance. There were far worse things which could happen. Even so, he felt for his mother, losing first her husband and then her son to the humans.

"I suppose we have no choice." Taking Alyn's small hand in hers, she gave it a comforting squeeze.

Reaching down, the healer took hold of the base of the shaft, and, after sending Alyn a glance of warning, pulled sharply.

Alyn tensed himself but could never have been ready. The tearing of flesh was more audible than when the arrow had first struck. Then his body was hit with the agonizing sensation of being sheared in half by slashing pains. His breath stuck in his chest, mixing with the pain as in a dizzying maelstrom, his senses vanished.

Again, Alyn drifted through the shifting energies of the world, feeling the disturbance beneath the mountains to the west. Fire spouted, and in giant rivers tore a burning path towards the human settlements. This time, on seeing the imperial palace ripped asunder, Alyn felt terror, knowing Princess

Arienne would be in there. He'd always resented humans, but she was different. She had a pureness of spirit he'd thought impossible for a human.

But it didn't make sense. The Flame Wytch had held those energies back for centuries. Why would she stop now?

As if in answer, he was given a glimpse of a grand hall deep within the mountains. In the throne at its back sat a wizened old lady, her hair white and skin sagging from her bones. Her weakness screamed to him across the distance as she looked up.

"Help me!" She held a bony hand out towards him. "I am dying.... Please. Help me. Or all will come to ruin."

Alyn held his hand out towards her, but it was wispy and indistinct, and as their fingers almost touched, his vanished completely.

Princess Arienne's energy still surrounded him as his awareness seeped back. Her affection washed over him as, holding his hand, she brushed her thumb against his skin soothingly.

Opening his eyes, he found the world around him much darker. Candles had been lit to replace the absent daylight, as only a faint moonlight now shone through the loft's small and distant window.

His mother would have noticed he'd not returned by now. She'd be worried, especially after what happened to his father. Would she send a search party? But even if she did, they wouldn't be sent here. Human settlements were out of bounds. A rule he would have done well to obey; but then he would never have met his princess. Looking up at her relieved smile, a sparkle struck his soul. Then the vision leapt back to his mind.

"You must go." He gritted his teeth at a particularly severe throb of pain.

"Go?" A deep hurt swept through the princess' emotions, her expression drooping.

"Yes. And not just from the stables. You must leave the palace. The Flame Wytch is dying. Her power is about to be released. This whole region will be decimated."

For the first time, Alyn felt fear flash through her, her face draining. "The Flame Wytch? Dying? I must warn my father. We must evacuate the villages."

"That could take days. You need to go now." With a struggle, Alyn pushed himself up into a sitting position using his good arm. He could sense a buildup of fire energy under the mountains already. The

disaster might not be imminent, but he could sense it coming. The earthquake earlier had been a warning. They had a day at the most. He could feel the earth crying out beneath them.

“But... my father... our people. I cannot just abandon them. I have a duty....” Her gaze turned, passing through the barn wall towards the palace beyond.

“You can’t save everyone. Anyone without a horse won’t make it far enough in time. You have to saddle one now and leave.”

She looked horrified. Scrambling to her feet, she then froze, clearly clueless on how to act, her gaze jumping back and forth between the stables beneath and the direction of the palace.

“Just go,” Alyn pressed, but then the tell-tale energy of the maid approaching filled him with dread.

A murderous aura had taken her now, and he was afraid, even more so than of the death of the Flame Wytch. The maid was coming to kill him. He was sure of it.

“Listen. Your maid. I think she - ” But he didn’t get to finish as she appeared on the stairs, her eyes narrowing sharply at his gaze.

“A calamity is coming!” the princess blurted to her. “We have to warn my father. Everyone could die!”

The maid’s gaze turned straight for Alyn, then narrowed again, this time in hateful suspicion.

The maid sent her mistress what felt to Alyn like an icily cold smile of reassurance. “Easy, mistress. I’m sure all will be well. Here, have a drink. It will calm you.” She handed Princess Arienette a glass of deep red wine, at which it was Alyn’s turn to feel mistrust.

“Don’t drink it!” But Alyn’s warning was too late, as the princess had already taken a deep gulp. “It’s drugged.”

The flash of triumph on her maid’s face revealed he was right.

“Juien would never....” But the princess froze mid-speech and blinked. “Oh....” Her eyes slipped momentary out of focus.

“Why?” she petitioned of her maid as, unable to remain standing, she fell to the floor, her eyes becoming unfocused again.

“Your mind is bewitched, mistress.” The maid turned on Alyn, her full fury and hatred creasing her face and marring her soul. “But don’t fear. Once the fairy is dead, you’ll be released.”

“Juien, no! I...not....” but the princess couldn’t finish as finally her eyes closed, and she slumped

back, unconscious.

“You’ll pay for what you’ve done, demon!” Grabbing a nearby pitchfork, the maid advanced on Alyn, her soul screaming with murderous intent.

“I’ve done nothing!” he insisted, but already knew it was pointless. The maid was completely insane. There was no reasoning with her.

“You bewitched my mistress! You were going to spirit her away, just like my brother! Well now you’re going to die!” She lunged at him with the pitchfork, forcing him to roll to one side.

Just that one movement streaked Alyn with pain, setting his mind spinning and his vision flashing. No, not now, he begged silently. If he passed out now, he would be killed for sure. Luckily his consciousness stabilized, but he wouldn’t be able to withstand much more.

“Please...I haven’t...” But his plea was interrupted.

“You took my brother!” Her scream was devoid of reason as any last strands of sense dissolved into madness.

So this was the other side of blame and prejudice. He’d felt the same against the humans for killing his father. Placing the blame on every human for a single human’s mistake. That had been wrong, as was this. But remorse for his previous attitude was not going to save him now.

Raising the pitchfork again, the maid readied another lunge, but froze at the sound of a tremendous crash and a groan of splintering wood from the stable below. Alyn sensed one of the horses escape its stall to thunder up the stairs.

Exploding into the hay loft, the beautiful pure white mare reared up, catching the maid in the chest and hurling her back against the wall with a horrific crack.

As the maid slid to the floor to lie still, Alyn took a deep breath, trying to calm his remaining panic. *It’s all over*, he reassured himself.

After passing its gaze over Alyn, the white mare moved to the princess’ side and, dipping its head, nudged her gently. To his shock, Alyn sensed affection in the horse’s soul. This was Crystal, the princess’ horse, and despite being locked up and fed lifeless food, it loved her. He was shocked, but couldn’t reflect on it for long, as all the noise had attracted attention. He could sense at least four humans nearing the barn, and he could only guess they were armed.

Turning to the window in despair, Alyn felt something else approaching, lured by the noise, and this one wasn’t human.

Highness, the fairy sent to his mind. *I'm coming*. But not fast enough, as the guards were already entering the stables. His would-be-rescuer knew that too, as Alyn could feel his panic through their soul link.

Alyn's gaze shifted to the distant window. He had to fly. Trying could kill him, but not doing so would as well. It was do or die, and like a true fairy prince, he wasn't going to go down without a fight.

Gritting his teeth against the pain, Alyn flicked his wings into action, lifting his weak, pain-torn body into the air. He shot through the open window, his vision flashing as he fell, then fading as he felt two fairy-sized hands catch him.

Without opening his eyes, Alyn could tell he was back in the fairy glade. Life danced everywhere, sparkling with energy. Compared to this, the human world felt dull and monotonous. Turning onto his side, he snuggled down into the soft moss lining his bed, its energy tickling his cheek. His ordeal was over. *I'll never leave the glade again*, he thought.

His wound had been healed. He could still feel the residual energy inside him. It was the magic of no normal fairy healer either. By the strength and deepness of the energy, it could be no other than his mother's, the oldest and most powerful fairy, the Fairy Queen. *She'll be really angry with me*, Alyn realized with a twinge of dread.

I am. His mother's voice echoed through his mind. *I warned you to stay away from those humans. You are lucky not to be dead*. He could sense her rage; but it wasn't a dark rage, as concern and love formed its core.

Opening his eyes, he looked through the delicate spider web netting enclosing his living, willow woven bed. Beyond stood his mother dressed in the finest moonsilk glowing a pale blue, like moonlight. On her light green hair rested a holly crown glistening with dew. She was a majestic figure.

There is a human approaching, The warning was called out to every fairy in the glade, as through the sentry Alyn saw visions of Princess Arienette on her white horse.

No! She should have left! Why didn't she heed my warning? He could feel his mother's shock at that.

Alyn! his mother's voice screamed in his head. *A human!?*

Not now, Mother, he sent back, then took off at full speed out the window. They could have that

conversation later.

“You are alive!” Princess Arienette burst out in delight. Opening her arms, she caught him in a tight hug. The love in her soul, echoed in his, while the sight of her glossy lips struck him with longing, but this was no time for romance.

“Why haven’t you left?” Alyn tried hard to ignore the shock and dissension passing through the glade on sensing their prince’s affection for a human.

“I am. The villages are being evacuated as we speak.”

“I told you there was no time for that!” The energy under the mountains had built dangerously high while he’d slept. They now had barely hours. The glade had magic to protect it, but the humans were all doomed.

There is no other choice. Alyn turned towards the mountains. I have to stop this myself.

The humans caused this mess, let them deal with it, his mother’s voice interrupted. They killed the ice dragon and destabilized the energies. This is their punishment. It is none of our business.

But it was his business now. Alyn’s gaze fell on the princess. He couldn’t let her die.

“Go to the glade. I’ll help the wytch.” Pulling himself from her embrace, he started off for the mountain.

“Wait!” she called after him. “You never told me your name.”

“Alyn, prince of the fairy glade.” A smile shone through her soul at his answer, along with prayer for his safe return.

Arriving at the mountain realm, he found it already being torn apart by the rampant energy.

“You came.” The Flame Wytch rose from her throne shakily. “Take my power. There is no time to explain.”

Suddenly she was consumed by fire, her body reduced to ashes, and in her place formed a majestic red dragon, it’s very aura charring all around it.

“My power is great, fairy, and you are small, yet your spirit glows strong. Seal me into your soul and balance will be reformed.” The great dragon bowed its massive head. “But know this. My power may

never leave these mountains, and nor can you. Only in the brief moment the sun touches the mountain can you venture outside. Will you give your freedom for the humans you once hated?"

Alyn felt a tear burn in the corner of his eye. "No, but I'll give it for her."

The dragon smiled. "Then my power is yours."

The dragon dissolved back into flames and, with a surge of energy, merged into Alyn's soul. The fiery energy beneath the mountain dissolved, and all returned to peace as a single tear of regret hit the floor and dissolved into steam.

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