

The Secret to Atheness

S. M. Gilson

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Smashwords Edition

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To my wonderful husband and daughter, you are my inspiration. Without you these pages would be blank.

Chapter One

Little waves crashed on the shore of a private cove. They danced around Princess Simona and Prince Varek's feet before being pulled back to the sea. The siblings giggled in delight as the waves washed over their feet again.

"Simona, Varek darling, brunch is set; come sit with your father and me." Queen Narcia called to her young children from under the shade of a silk tent. A small table was set in front of the King and Queen. The table was filled with decadent pastries, tea and sandwiches. The children obediently took their seats as two servants began to serve the group.

A conversation grew about the children's future as rulers. Prince Varek told wild stories of how he would protect every woman from the dragons and evil pixies. Princess Simona sat up tall and talked about how all the people needed to be protected, not just the women. "That's why you'll make such a great Queen someday, my sweet." King Damek said lovingly. The young Princess ran around the table and threw her arms around her father. "I love you, Daddy!" The King smiled sweetly and then laughed. "I love you, too." He looked over at Prince Varek. "I love both of you."

Varek jumped up and began running out of the tent towards the sea. "Bet you can't catch us, Daddy" Varek yelled, motioning for Simona to follow him. Simona wiggled out of the King's arms and ran after her brother. The King looked over at his wife and smiled sheepishly. The Queen smiled back and nodded her approval.

He stood up and began chasing his children through the crashing waves. He almost caught up with them, but slipped on some seaweed and fell, crown first, into the muddy shore. Varek and Simona paused a moment then laughed excitedly as he began to pull himself up.

Simona's eyes squinted at the setting sun, dropping into the sea. She snapped back to reality. She was no longer a ten year old child, playing on the beach. She was now an eighteen year old woman, sitting by the window of her castle.

She looked out at the mermaids in the lagoon below. She thought about how her great, great grandfather, King Alroy, built the castle many years ago just to overlook the mermaid lagoon. The mermaids seemed so happy and carefree in the lagoon; no worries to keep them down. She remembered the times her father would take her down to the lagoon, bringing a picnic lunch with them. They would spend hours talking about little things that were going on in their lives and about her future as Queen. The castle seemed quiet these days, since it was just her and her brother Varek, living in the castle, along with the many servants.

Her parents were killed two months prior and the causes were never known. Some say it was a wild animal, others say it might have been murder. Simona was now the next in line for the throne. Her brother, whom she seldom saw, was a couple years younger than she was. He had no interest in becoming King. In the land of Atheness, age was more important than being a man or a woman. Princess Simona, being the oldest, was now the next in line to be Queen.

She sighed sadly to herself; she was not ready to become Queen and to rule so many people. A knock at her door disturbed her thoughts.

"Enter if you wish", she said in a tone harsher than she intended. A young man dressed in servant attire entered the room and bowed as if on cue.

"Your majesty, I am sorry to disturb you, but it is time for your riding lesson. If it is convenient, can you please change and meet the instructor in ten minutes?"

He waited patiently for her response, standing as straight as he could without falling over. He had been a member of the court's

staff only a few days before the King and Queen's deaths. He knew that the Princess had left the staff on pins and needles ever since. Sometimes the servants would draw straws when it came to giving the Princess bad news. They all knew that she hated her riding lessons, so to his dismay, he got the short straw today.

She frowned, still looking out the window. "Very well, I'll be down soon."

The young man gave a sigh of relief; he then bowed and closed the door behind him, leaving Simona back to her unhappy thoughts.

She kept reliving the day her parents left, over and over again, trying to find some clue as to how they died, or better yet, who did it and why.

She brushed her long golden hair and looked blankly into the mirror, wishing none of this had ever happened. She had not planned on becoming Queen until she was well into her thirties. Being barely eighteen, she wasn't ready. Her parents had just begun to teach her how to rule when they left. Now her coronation was only two weeks away.

Varek hardly came around the castle anymore. Reports said he had now been missing for an entire week. He was very adventurous for a sixteen year old, and knew how to take care of himself. Nevertheless, Simona sent out a search party for him a few days before and still waited word. She couldn't lose anyone else. Varek was all she had left.

She opened her closet and pulled out a plain blue riding dress. After taking off her depressing black dress, she slipped the blue one over her head. She returned to the mirror and picked up a black ribbon as she carefully pulled her hair back. After adjusting the blue gem necklace she wore around her neck, she left her room as it was. She quietly walked down the large stair cases that lead to the main entryway of the castle. The same young man waited at the end of the stairs, to take her hand and escort her to her horse. Simona groaned to herself as she spotted her instructor.

“Is learning to ride really necessary?” Simona asked the young man.

“It is in your best interest, Princess, to learn this. You won’t always be entering from a carriage, you know.” He said, trying to sound as positive as he could. Simona said nothing.

“Princess Simona, I’m glad you made it today!” Her instructor said, a little too eagerly.

Simona just gave a fake smile as the young servant helped her up onto her horse. She held on tight to the reins when she got up and settled. She hated her lessons; her instructor was always difficult to please. Also, Simona couldn’t stand horses, they smelled and were not gentle, like cats were. *Why couldn’t I just get around in a carriage?* She thought to herself.

“Ok, Simona, today we are going to learn how to do jumps. It is really easier than it looks.”

The instructor slapped the back of the horse to get it to run. The horse got very scared and took off running. It ran as fast as it could until they could no longer be seen by Simona’s instructor and the young servant. All Simona heard was the instructor yelling something about turning the horse around, but she didn’t remember how. She held tightly to the reins and closed her eyes.

The horse finally stopped several miles away from the castle, when it saw a nice patch of grass. Simona carefully got down and looked at her new surroundings. She was standing at the edge of a very dark forest. The trees were as dark as ebony with leafless branches that reached up and out in the strangest places, as if a child put them there. They were very crooked and some even intertwined with each other. On a thick branch sat a large black raven. The raven tilted its head forward and stared down at Simona with its small black eyes. Simona looked up at the raven and forced a smile. The raven let out a loud “caw”, and then flew off its branch and began to circle Simona. Simona screamed and tried to bat the bird away. The raven then began to glow and in a flash, turned into a very beautiful pixie, standing the same size as Simona.

Her long crimson hair was pulled back into a loose ponytail and flowed down, past her shoulders. She stood and stared at Simona before she spoke. "I didn't mean to scare you, Princess. I wanted to take the opportunity to express my regrets about your mother and father. It came as quite a shock to all of my people. Let me introduce myself; my name is Zendra, Queen of the pixies and ruler of the land of Rugonden". She bowed slightly to Simona and smiled. Her smile wasn't a comforting one as most smiles aim to be. Her smile was full of distrust and plotting.

Simona bowed to the Pixie Queen. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Queen Zendra." She paused for a few seconds before speaking again. "Yes, I've heard of you. My parents spoke of you once before. They said you can't be trusted. They told me you were banished by the fairies and soon became the ruler of Rugonden, followed by creatures of evil." Simona now realized what she had said and took a few steps back.

The Pixie laughed. "Oh, is that what they told you? Well, you mustn't believe everything you are told. Do I really look evil to you?"

"Well...no, you don't," Simona said, her voice still shaky. Despite the Queen's smile, she really didn't look evil at all. She looked almost friendly.

"Well Princess, you look a little shaken up. Horseback riding can do that to you. A horrible activity, I would say. It is not a thing you would see me doing. Come to my city and have a bite to eat. You look half starved," Queen Zendra said, holding out her hand to the Princess.

"Thank you, but I really must be getting back. They must be wondering where I am. I also need to see if my scouts found my brother yet." Simona said, apologetically.

"Well, maybe another time. My court will be most displeased to hear that they missed out on meeting the future Queen of Atheness. But I see you have more important things to do than visit with us.

I'm sure they will understand," The Queen said, starting to walk a few steps away. Then stopped and looked back at the Princess.

"Well, maybe I can stay for a few minutes, you know, just to make an appearance." Simona said, walking towards the pixie Queen.

Queen Zendra smiled that same smile Simona was unsure about, and then motioned for her to follow. They walked through the dead trees until a path made of black rocks, appeared on the ground. They followed the rocky trail up a hill where it stopped in front of a large dark fortress. The look of it made Simona shiver with fright. The fortress was made of the same black rocks as the path they followed. It stood over sixty feet high and was as wide as it was tall. There wasn't any visible towers, or pillars from the outside of the fortress, only heavy walls. The top of the fortress was surrounded by thick spikes. Dark stone gargoyles seemed to be glaring down at Simona. A loud horn was heard from the inside the fortress. The large gate then opened with a loud creak, as it let in their Queen and a visiting Princess. Two heavily armored guards stood on either side of the gate. Simona couldn't see who or what they were, but could see their long snout and sharp fangs sticking out from under their thick helmets.

"They are harmless, Princess. Now follow me to the dining room, while I get you something to eat." Queen Zendra said walking through the crowd of pixies and creatures that Simona had never seen before. They entered a room that was surprisingly bright and filled with color. A large table was set to the side, surrounded by high-back chairs.

"Sit here, Princess, while I talk to my cook about getting you a proper meal." A young pixie walked in, holding a golden plate with a single goblet placed upon it. Queen Zendra took the goblet and placed it in front of Simona. The goblet was filled with a thick, red liquid. "Drink this while your meal is prepared. It will calm you."

The pixie Queen left the room, leaving Simona alone with her drink. She sniffed the red liquid. It smelled of sweet wine. She placed the cup in front of her again. Something didn't seem right.

He parents wouldn't lie to her about Queen Zendra being bad. She stood up and quietly walked out of the room. She walked down the hall and then peered into a room that was filled with capes and armor. She quickly grabbed a long dark cape with a hood and placed it over her head and shoulders. She slipped out onto the streets, being careful to stay in the shadows. She knew that she couldn't just walk through the front gate to leave the fortress. As much as she didn't want to, she knew she needed a horse. She walked through the allies and around shops that sold types of magic drinks. She then came to what she was looking for; the stables.

She entered the stables unnoticed, and began looking for a horse that was the most calm of the bunch. A white horse in the farthest stable caught her eye. Its' stable had bars almost like a cage. As she neared it, she realized it wasn't a horse at all, but a Unicus, a unicorn with wings. The creature was very beautiful, but looked very sad. It turned and saw Simona staring at it. Its' ears perked up and put its' face as close as it could to Simona's. She looked into his big blue eyes and gasped.

“Varek, is that you?” Simona asked, shocked. It moved its head up and down, as if to nod a yes. “We have to get you out of here. Can you break down the door or is there a key someplace?” Simona asked her brother. Varek neighed and motioned his head to the entrance. Above the door was an iron ring with five iron keys. Simona ran over and grabbed the key ring, being careful not to make much noise. She went back to the cage that held her brother, and began to try the many keys. She tried the first key, but it was too big. She was about to place the second key into the lock, when the stable doors slowly begun to open. A large creature walked into the stables, holding a spear in his left hand. He looked almost like a man, except for two fangs that hung out of his mouth, like a bull dog. His dark hair was matted like a mop upon his head. He slowly looked around the stables. Simona quietly crawled to the other side of Varek's stable, and crouched down. The creature grunted and walked over to Varek's stall. He looked around for a second, with his flat black eyes and then turned and walked out of the stables, closing the door behind him. Simona gave a sigh of relief and picked up the keys again. She quickly placed the second key into the

lock and turned it to the right. It made a loud click, as it opened. She opened the door to the cage and Varek walked out.

“Do you know how to get out of here? Can you fly with those wings you have?” Simona asked climbing on to her brother’s back. He nodded once more and walked out of the stables. Varek stretched out his massive wings and jumped into the sky, just as the Queen and some of her servants walked out of the dining hall.

“Wait! You can’t leave yet!” The Queen yelled after them.

“I’m so glad I found you, Varek. Now we need to find out how to break this spell that’s on you.” Simona said, once they were out of site of the fortress. “I wish you could talk to me. How could something like this happen?”

They landed just outside of Queen Zendra’s realm. Simona got off and stretched her legs, as Varek began to pace back and forth, nervously. Simona began to think of where they could go to be safe and how to get there. Then she remembered it; Amos, the realm of the Butterfly Fairies. Her parents told them to go there, if they were ever in danger. The only problem was she didn’t know how to get there. “Maybe...” Simona started as she was cut off by a voice from behind.

“Maybe you shouldn’t leave without a proper goodbye, Princess. Didn’t your parents teach you any manners at all?” Queen Zendra said, leaning on a tree behind them. Simona gasped in astonishment. Simona tried to climb back on Varek’s back, but was pulled off by the Pixie Queen. The Princess fell to the ground with a thud. “Varek, fly away. Try to find Amos. I will find you there!” Simona yelled. Varek stood there, shocked. “Varek, go!” Simona yelled from the ground. Varek opened his wings and jumped into the air. Simona could see the pain in his eyes as he left his sister behind. Knowing her brother was safe; Simona jumped up and tried to run again. The Pixie Queen laughed.

“You foolish child, there is no where you can go, that I won’t find you.” Despite this, Simona ran. She ran as fast as her legs would

carry her. She looked over her shoulder and she couldn't see the Pixie Queen anymore. When she looked forward again, the Queen stood before her. She skidded to a stop, inches from the Queen.

“You just don't get it, do you Princess? You can't leave me. I can be anywhere within seconds. You can't defeat me. Now, you have something I want of yours.”

She pulled the necklace off Simona's neck, and put it on herself. Magically, Zendra began to change. Simona screamed as Zendra transformed, to look just like the Princess. It was like looking into the mirror. Two more pixies appeared next to Zendra. “Find Prince Varek, and bring him to me. I'm not threatened by the Princess; this was too easy.” The two pixies flew off in the direction that Prince Varek took.

“Now, I have a coronation to prepare for. My kingdom is waiting to crown me Queen of all Atheness. Oh, don't be sad. You never wanted to be Queen, anyway. I'm doing you a favor, really.” The Pixie Queen laughed and then disappeared into the woods.

Simona tried to speak, but her own voice didn't come out. She understood it, but she knew that no one else could. She had to think quickly. She knew she needed to find Varek before the Pixies did, and then get help. She realized that all her senses seemed heightened, somehow. She looked down at her feet, which were not feet at all but hoofs. Well, so much for the sense of touch, she thought. She was taught to remain calm in any situation, though she was never prepared for a situation like this. She tried to walk, but with four legs, she didn't know how to get them to move the way she wanted. She felt like a new born fawn who was taking its first steps in the world. She moved her front leg forward and then the opposite back leg. It worked and she moved up a step. She tried again, with the other side, but got her legs too close and she fell, face first, onto the dirt below. If only she had been interested in her riding lessons, she wouldn't be in this mess. Slowly, she managed to pull herself up and after what seemed like hours, learned how to walk and then progressed to running.

She was surprised at how fast she could run in this form. She was aware of her wings, just like Varek had, but she was too afraid to use them just yet. Varek would have to show her how to use them, if they didn't find a healer to fix the spell first. She had never been so far from home before and wasn't sure where Amos was. She stopped and looked up in the sky. The sky was as clear and as calm as she had ever seen it. She then heard a commotion of birds in a clearing up ahead. She followed the sound and saw the same pixies Queen Zendra sent out after her brother. They were stopped in the middle of a clearing and somehow had upset the birds that nested there.

"He stopped this way, I know he did!" One of the pixies yelled to the other.

"Sure, he did. I say we keep going straight. We can't go past the clearing or we'll be in the butterfly fairy territory. I don't want to be caught by them. They don't know of Queen Zendra's plan and we need to keep it that way. The boy is foolish; he'll never find Amos, let's keep going." The second fairy said, starting to fly back into the air again.

"Fine, fine, but if we find out that he did go to Amos, you are taking the blame for it. I don't want Zendra to find out we let him go."

"She never will. She is busy at the moment, posing as Princess Simona. Right now, they are rejoicing at her return and preparing for her coronation. She will forget about Varek as long as he doesn't show up at the palace. Besides, he will be a Unicus forever, anyway." Both the fairies laughed and flew through the forest.

Simona walked into the clearing, after the pixies were out of site. Amos is near, she thought. She turned to the sound of the bushes rustling. *Did they come back? Would they know it's her?* She thought in a slight panic. As she was about to run back to the shelter of the forest, another Unicus walked into the clearing. It was Varek.

“It’s about time you showed up. I have been hiding in a nearby cave for hours. I thought you knew how to get to Amos.” Prince Varek said, walking forward.

“How did you know how to get to Amos?” Princess Simona said, rather irritated that he never told her before.

“I’ve been there a few times, but that doesn’t matter now. We have to find Queen Adrianna and tell her what has happened. There’s going to be a battle in the near future. Maybe they know how to turn us back to humans again.”

Princess Simona nodded and followed her brother deep into the woods where beautiful purple flowers grew. Prince Varek then stopped in the middle and stomped his hoof four times. A door that seemed to appear out of thin air, opened. A tall male fairy stood at the doorway. His green wings glistened in the afternoon sunlight.

“My name is Chadwick. How may I be of service?”

“I am Prince Varek, and this is my sister, Princess Simona. We are very short of time. May we speak with your Queen at once?” Prince Varek asked pleased that they could understand him.

Chadwick bowed and led them into the castle. He led them through a beautifully decorated hallway and into the Queen’s chambers. As soon as the Queen saw the two Unicus’, she welcomed them in. Prince Varek wasted no time to tell their story and what Queen Zendra had done.

“This is very upsetting news. Chadwick, please go and send for the elders. We must have a meeting at once.”

“As you wish, my lady,” Chadwick bowed again and left the Queen, to prepare.

A grand council was called at the center of Amos. Princess Simona and Prince Varek stood on the side, to watch. Being magical beings,

the fairies understood their new language. The fairies sat in chairs that looked like giant leaves. The council was held in a small arena that was filled with all the high fairies of Amos. All was quiet when the Queen of the butterfly fairies stood up. They called her Queen Adrianna, which was the name she was given 600 years ago. Since fairies are immortal and can only die from magic, they age very slowly. Even though Adrianna was over 600 years old, she looked no more than 30. She was called the most grand and beautiful fairy in not only Amos, but all of Atheness. Her dark brown hair flowed from the top of her head to her mid-thigh. Her eye lashes were longer than most, which drew attention to her most exquisite eyes. Her body was slender and shapely and covered by a sleeveless red dress that stopped just above her knees. Her wings were almost the length of her body and full of color. They resembled those of butterfly wings.

She walked into the middle of the council, for all to see. She looked around the arena for a moment and saw other fairies watching from the trees. “Queen Zendra has stolen the key to Atheness from the royal court of Princess Simona.” She started, as the crowd gasped in amazed horror. She raised her hand to quiet the crowd and then continued, “We need to find a person that is pure of heart, is not afraid to believe in the unbelievable, and with a true spirit for adventure of the unknown.” A member of the council stood up. He was much older than Adrianna, but respected her very much. He pushed back his shoulder length white hair. “Where would we find such a person? There are none in all Atheness. Let me take a few of my men. We will fight her and get the key back! We have fought her before; I don’t see how this will be any different.” The crowd roared in agreement, but fell silent when Adrianna raised her hand again. The older fairy sat down.

“I appreciate your concern, Keanu, but we’re not just dealing with Queen Zendra. With the key in her hand, we don’t know what she is capable of. She has an army to protect her and a force of evil I have never imagined was possible. There isn’t much time. I found someone beyond our realm that will help us. She just doesn’t know it yet. I need your help to get her here...”

Chapter Two

(World of Man)

Katie awoke to the obnoxious beeping of her alarm. She fumbled around with her eyes half opened and turned it off. She looked over at her husband James, still fast asleep. She got out of bed and opened her closet. She pulled out a pink tee-shirt and some blue jeans. Then slowly put them on in the half lit room. Grabbing her sneakers, she walked out of her bedroom leaving James to continue sleeping soundly. She looked at herself in the mirror.

She wasn't very old, still in her early twenties. Her dark brown hair flowed down to her waist. She had bright green eyes, and was told that her eyes would light up a room when she smiled.

Katie then began applying light makeup to her eyes, lips and cheeks. She smiled at her reflection. Finishing it all off with a blue gem necklace that James gave her the day before, for their anniversary. He had surprised her with it after work. He never said where he had gotten it, but that didn't matter, she loved it all the same. It was the prettiest thing she had ever owned.

She grabbed two granola bars and threw them into her backpack. In her pack, she kept a flashlight, a change of clothes, snacks, a toothbrush, and a hair tie. Working for a daycare, it was necessary to have a backpack instead of a purse.

She grabbed her house key and took one last look around to make sure she hadn't forgotten anything. She blew a kiss to her husband who was still asleep and closed the door behind her. She then began her short walk to work. She lived in a high-rise apartment in Chicago, just around the corner from where she worked.

Katie worked at a daycare called "Care for you", for preschoolers. It was a rewarding job, but could also be very stressful at times.

"Katie! Thank God you're here. Rebecca called in sick, so you will be alone in the room today." Her boss said, holding a stack of papers to file.

Katie nodded and slowly walked down the hall. When she opened the room, the children cheered with glee. “Ms. Katie is here!” One dark haired little girl ran to her and put her arms around Katie’s waist.

“It’s good to see you too, Sophia. Okay kids; let’s start the day with our sharing. If you brought something to share, please get it out now and sit in the circle.” Katie said, as she hung up her backpack next to the children’s. She began walking over to the circle rug and sat in a chair at the edge of the rug. The children slowly joined her, each with a different toy in their hand. One by one, the children stood up and began sharing their toys.

“This is my best truck. I got it for my birthday. See the back moves so I can dump stuff.” A small red haired boy named Joey said, as he tilted the back of the truck.

“Thank you, Joey, for sharing. Sophia would you like to share something with us?” The dark haired girl that sat next to Katie’s chair nodded and stood up.

“This is my cat, Chait. He is very soft and I love him very much. He is a special cat.” Sophia said, holding up a small stuffed animal of a cat.

“Thank you, Sophia, he is very cute. Okay class, now that we shared, let’s put our toys away and get ready for story time.”

Sophia ran over to her backpack, but saw that there was an identical green backpack next to hers. She looked at both packs and didn’t know which one was hers. She then put her stuffed cat in the bag closest to the door, which was Katie’s bag. She ran back to the circle.

“Okay, today we are going to read a fairy tale about Mermaids, since our letter of the week is M.” The children got settled on the ground as Katie proceeded to read them the story.

The hours passed, and as the children lay down for a nap, Katie picked up her backpack and left the room for lunch. It was a nice day, so she decided to spend her lunch on the empty playground. As she stepped outside, the sunlight hit her face and made her squint. She shaded her eyes with her hand, until she was adjusted to the light. She sat down on a bench and watched the birds land on the trees and in the bushes.

She looked over at the bushes and she thought she saw something glowing. She knew the children in room two were learning about lights. Today they got to play with flashlights; maybe one got left on and fell in the bushes. The light in the bushes then flickered on and off.

“Hello? Is someone there?” She stood up and looked back at the school and then walked toward the bushes.

The light came from the bushes that lined the fence. The children were always trying to hide in the bushes; was one still inside playing with a flashlight?

Katie walked up to the bushes. “Is someone there?” Katie called. “You know you’re not supposed to be in the bushes.” She crept down into the crawl space the kids always used. When she got inside, she looked around but saw nothing but ordinary bushes and a bug or two. She saw an opening at the top of the bushes that let light in. She shook her head, “no flashlights or children here.” As she was about to crawl out, she saw that her necklace began to glow. The light was so bright; she had to cover her eyes. The light slowly faded and she uncovered her eyes. She was amazed by what she saw.

Everywhere she looked she saw green. A giant field of bright colored flowers was to her left and a field of green grass was to her right. She saw mountains and waterfalls in the distance, along with a castle high up on a mountain. She also saw a forest that looked like it went on for miles and a trail that led through it.

She secretly hoped this wasn't a dream. She turned around to the playground, but it was gone. The bushes were gone as well. She was standing in the middle of an unknown land.

Suddenly, she felt something move in her backpack. She took it off, unzipped it and placed it on the ground. The toy cat Sophia had brought for sharing popped his head out of the bag. It wasn't a toy anymore; it was a real cat. Katie fell down on the grass in surprise.

The cat stepped out and licked his paw. He then looked up at Katie. "What is going on?" Katie asked herself.

"I was going to ask you the same question?" The cat said.

Katie screamed and moved further back from the cat. "You're real. You're a real cat and...you can talk." Katie said her voice still a little shaky.

"I guess I can. I never really thought about it before. Now I can talk to you and you can talk to me. I heard that meowing never works, anyway. I'm hungry do you have any tuna?"

"Tuna? You're a talking cat. I'm in the middle of...well; I don't even know where I am. I don't have time to look for tuna!" Katie yelled in hysterics.

"Well, can I at least go with you? I am in the middle of nowhere too, you know. If you haven't noticed, I'm alone as well," the cat said looking up at her with his big green eyes.

"Well, why not? Things can't get any weirder. Alright Chait, which way should we go? I mean, we can't stay here for very long. I don't know what kind of creatures live here." Katie said looking around.

Chait sniffed the air from all around. "If we go north, I smell food and water. I think a village is that way, and I don't know about you, but I'm starving!"

“Good! Now we’ll at least have a place to stay. As long as they are friendly people, we’ll be safe. We need shelter before dark. I don’t know what comes out after dark in this place and I don’t want to wait around here to find out.” Katie said, surprised at how calm she was about being stranded and talking to a cat that can actually answer back.

They walked on the grass along the giant flower field. Katie stopped to take her shoes off and walked bare foot on the cool grass. Chait lay on top of her back pack and slept as she walked. Katie still couldn’t comprehend that a place like this was actually real. She kept asking herself how she got here. Why did her necklace glow? Why did Chait come to life when she entered the bushes? Would everyone at work worry when she didn’t return? Would James? These thoughts kept racing through her mind over and over again.

Katie stopped to get a better view of any evidence of a village up ahead. She stood at the edge of a grassy field and saw only a faded dirt path in front of her. She frowned at the path and reluctantly put her shoes back on. She looked to her right and saw a tree that was perfect for climbing. If she climbed as high as she could, she would get a good look at the valley, and see if there really was a village ahead. She carefully took her backpack off and placed it on the ground. This woke up Chait.

“Hey, what are you doing? I still have another hour of cat napping to do.” He said, stretching his legs.

“Sorry Chait, but I need to climb this tree to see if we are going the right way.” Katie said, grabbing onto a branch.

“Oh, don’t do that, allow me the pleasure.” Chait said as he quickly jumped from branch to branch. He was at the top within seconds. “There it is, over the next hill.” He sniffed the air again. “I smell fresh fish! Let’s go, before it’s all gone.” He was back on the ground in a few jumps. “Come on, take your bag and let’s get out of here,” he said, pulling at her backpack with his mouth.

Katie laughed, “Alright, alright, I’m coming.” She put her backpack on and raced Chait up the hill. They stopped short when they reached the top overlooking the village.

The village was nothing like Katie thought it would be. All the homes looked like small huts made out of straw and mud. Children wearing nothing more than loin cloths and simple dresses chased each other around the huts. Some men sat around a fire and exchanged stories, while the women cleaned the fish to cook.

“Chait, you must not talk when we go down. Act like a normal cat, I don’t know how they will react, if you do.”

“Are you kidding? As long as I get some fish, I’ll stand on one leg and dance.” Chait said excitedly.

They headed down the hill and slowly approached the village. A young boy playing with two sticks in the dirt sat at the base of the village. He looked up when he saw the strangers approaching. He began yelling in a language that Katie and Chait didn’t understand. Several men, also in loin cloths, ran up to Katie, holding spears. They pointed the spears at Katie and started talking in the same language as the boy did. The boy poked his head from behind one of the men.

Katie raised her hands in the air to show she meant no harm. They lowered their spears. One man grabbed her by the arm and led her to one of the larger huts. She was a little frightened and began to regret coming to the village at all. She felt Chait’s soft fur on her leg and she began to feel a little better to know he was near. They sat her down in a small chair as they turned to leave.

“What’s going on, why did they all leave?” Katie whispered to Chait. Chait’s attention turned to the door as an older woman with long white hair pulled back in a braid entered the hut leaning on a walking stick. She wobbled over to Katie very slowly, relying solely on her stick for balance.

“Young lady, it is not safe to travel alone these days, danger is everywhere. Sorry for the rough treatment; one can’t be too safe.” The woman said, in a raspy voice.

“You can speak English?” Katie asked a little relieved.

“We had a visitor many years ago that taught us. Where did you get that beautiful treasure around your neck?” She said, pointing a bony finger at her necklace.

“It was a gift from my husband.” Katie replied, now clutching the necklace in her hand. “I think it brought me here.”

“It did indeed. Why it came to you, I don’t know, but I do know you are here for a purpose. You have an important purpose in Atheness, maybe to save us all from destruction.” The old woman said, now smiling.

“Atheness? Is that where I am, in Rome? What do you mean, save us all?” Katie now became very concerned with this situation.

“Child, Rome? You are no longer in your own realm. Atheness is a whole different world from your own. You will like it here once you get to know it. My name is Kaia and this is the village of Adriel. As far as your destiny goes, you will have to find that for yourself. You must only stay here tonight and then continue on your journey once the sun rises.”

“I think I need to lie down for a while. I thought you said it wasn’t safe to travel alone. I don’t need to go on a journey; I don’t even know where to go.” Katie said, starting to feel a little dizzy.

“You will find your way. Now, no more talk of this, there are spies everywhere. I’ll put you up for the night and give you a nice meal to eat, but as soon as the sun rises, you must be on your way.” Kaia took Katie to a bed covered in a soft deer skin. She gave her a plate of food and a glass of cold water. Chait was given a bowl of chopped fish and another bowl of water. After their stomachs were full they crawled into bed.

“I don’t know about this, Chait. What is this journey they are talking about? I just want to find my way home, not go on some crazy quest!” Katie said feeling a little tired.

Chait curled up at the end of the bed and began to purr happily. “This is going to be a long night”, Katie thought, staring at the small hole in the roof of the hut. It was made so smoke could be released when a fire was made. Katie turned to her side and fell into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter Three

(Atheness)

A lone bat did lazy loops in the early morning, searching for a meal before the sun came up. A splash of color came up just below the tree tops, making the bat screech and fly off into a nearby cave.

Katie was awakened by a little girl tugging at her shirt. She opened her eyes and sat up until her eyes adjusted to the dark room.

“Kaia said that danger is near, and you must leave us now.” The little girl handed Katie her backpack, which was now filled with extra food for their journey. Chait jumped onto the bed and rubbed against Katie. The little girl led Katie and Chait to the edge of the village to bid them farewell. “Goodbye, I know you will be able to save my village and the rest of our world.” The girl said, smiling up at her with big brown eyes. Katie began to feel a little nervous. How can she save this child’s village when she didn’t even know how to save herself? She shrugged and looked at the girl again.

“Where do I have to go? I don’t know what I have to do.”

“Well, if I were you, I would try the forest. I always find my little treasures there. Maybe you’ll find someone who can help you; good luck.” The little girl said, holding up a shiny rock and a perfect pinecone. *These must be her little treasures,* Katie thought.

Katie and Chait began to walk away, feeling a bit uneasy about the whole thing. The villagers weren’t much help and what was this danger they were always talking about, anyway?

The sun had just begun to rise over the hilltops, but the land around them was still very quiet and covered in shadows. They walked in silence for a long time, not really knowing what to say about the whole situation.

Katie finally broke the silence. “I don’t know if we are going the right way to the forest.” She stopped and sat on a large boulder next to the path they had been following. The path now broke into two different paths. But which one will lead to the forest? Katie thought as Chait jumped up on her lap and got comfortable. Katie began to stroke his back.

“We need a break anyway; I think the forest is only a few miles ahead. I don’t really want to go; there are much bigger animals in the forest that would consider me a tasty snack. Why couldn’t we just have stayed in the village?” Chait said, yawning.

“They told me we couldn’t stay with them, that I am a danger to them when I’m there. I don’t get it, though. My husband James gave me the necklace as a gift a few days ago for our anniversary. How could it have chosen me? Did he find the necklace instead of buying it for me?” Katie asked, fumbling through her pack for a granola bar. Suddenly, the large boulder began to shake. Chait flew off Katie before she could even stand up. The boulder grew bigger and bigger until Katie could make out arms and legs and finally a head.

“It’s alive!” Katie shouted, ready to run away.

The rock creature shook off the dirt he had been laying in. He turned and looked down at Katie. Katie was frozen where she was. She was too afraid to run or even scream. Chait pulled at her leg which broke her from her trance. She backed away slowly and then turned and ran. She didn’t know where to run or if it was even worth it. Could she out run a rock monster?

“Wait! Don’t go. I won’t hurt you!” The monster yelled in a deep voice, trying to keep up after them. He left deep foot prints in the ground as he ran. Katie stopped and turned around to face this odd creature. A few yards ahead, Chait was still running. He turned to see Katie walking back towards the monster.

“I didn’t mean to scare you. I just don’t get many visitors. So many creatures are hiding now. No time to sit and enjoy life.” The rock monster said in a loud but pleasant voice.

Katie stood there puzzled for a moment before she spoke. “I’m pleased to meet you, Mr..? I’m sorry; I don’t know your name.” Katie said, relaxing a bit.

“I have been called monster by so many people, I have forgotten my name. Now let’s see, what was it again...Oh yes, my name is...wait! I lost it again. Oh well, I guess monster is ok with me. It kind of grows on you after hundreds of years.” Monster said in a booming laugh that made Katie almost lose her balance.

“I was wondering if you knew which way it was to the forest.” Katie asked, pointing to the fork in the road.

“The forest is a lovely place to go. Just be careful of the Oglaire. They aren’t dangerous, just annoying. You will take the path to the right. The path to the left leads straight to the ocean.”

“Thank you so much. I won’t forget your kindness. If I come by this way again, I will make sure I say hello to you.” Katie said, putting her backpack back on and looking around for Chait. She found him crouched down in the tall grass, trying to stay hidden.

“Chait, it’s alright! You can come out. I know which path to take, now.” Chait slowly crept out and hid behind Katie’s legs, looking out at the monster. The monster laughed his booming laugh again.

“It was a pleasure to meet you, young lady, and I hope we do meet again. If you ever need me, you know where to find me.” The monster then yawned and began to lie on the ground until only his back was visible again. He looked like nothing more than a boulder. Katie smiled and then began to walk on the right path, as Chait followed behind.

After walking almost a mile, the path they stood on soon became covered in thick green grass. Despite the missing path, they agreed to continue going in the same direction they had started. A few trees started to appear around them along with a few more bushes. The travelers saw a few signs here and there, warning them to turn back. In hopes of finding answers and a way home, they continued into the forest.

The forest was rich and green. The soft songs of birds filled the air, and the scent of sweet grass filled her senses. Katie took a deep

breath of the freshest air she ever breathed in her life. She almost felt like singing a song, like the maidens do in the movies she'd seen. But nothing came to mind. Chait's mood seemed cheerful as well, as he trotted next to her.

"A cat can really breathe out here. Isn't the air just perfect?" Chait commented, taking another deep breath.

"I was just thinking the same thing. I don't think I have ever been in such clean air before. I never knew I could tell the difference until now," She told Chait, laughing a little. Then she paused and looked over at Chait.

"I see someone ahead. It looks like someone is standing next to that cart." She pointed at a small cart that was drawn by a sickly looking goat. A cloaked figure stood in front of it. Katie looked over at Chait. "Should we go over to him? Maybe he was the person we were looking for."

"Sure! Maybe he has some food. I haven't eaten since last night." Chait said, licking his furry lips.

"You should have told me; I have food in my bag." They continued to the stranger in silence.

"Welcome, traveler!" The cloaked figure said, taking off his hood and straightening out the wrinkles in his cloak. Katie tried not to make a shocked face at the creature's appearance. His skin was the color of mint ice cream; his ears were large and took up most of his face and his large nose curved slightly at the tip. He smiled and his teeth came to a slight point at the tip. "Are you buying or selling today?" The creature asked Katie.

"Neither, sir, I'm just passing by." Katie declared, realizing that the creature was a traveling salesman. He glared at Katie.

"Surely you have something in the bag of yours, which is worth a shilling or two." He asked, looking over at her backpack.

“Well, let me see.” Katie started opening up her bag. “I have an apple, some dried meat, extra clothes, a toothbrush, a brush and a granola bar. Anything look appealing to you?”

“Well, let’s see here. This; what is it for?” He asked, picking up the toothbrush. Katie smiled a little, looking at his yellow teeth.

“It’s for cleaning your teeth. It helps make them smooth and clean.”

“Is that so? Well, I’ll give you two shillings for it?” He said, handing two shiny coins to Katie. She took it and placed her things back in her bag hopeful that she could be on her way. Her necklace slipped out and became visible from under her shirt.

“What about the jewel around your neck? I’ll give you five shillings for it.” The creature said, licking his lips.

“Sorry, it’s not for sale. I really must be on my way, sir.” Katie said, trying to push past him. He grabbed her arm to turn her around.

“Everything is for sale or trade! There has to be something on my cart that you would be willing to trade for such a beautiful jewel. Come, come take a look.” He led her back to his cart. He started pulling out random things that look like they may have been stolen. Other things he pulled out looked like they had been found in the trash.

Katie shook her head, as he showed her his last item in his cart. It was a teddy bear with a missing eye. “I really must be going. I thank you for your time.” Katie picked up Chait and began to walk very fast past the cart.

“I’m sure we can make some sort of a deal, here. How about 10 shillings? Now, that’s a great deal!” The creature yelled after Katie, who was now almost out of site.

“Why would anyone put a store in the forest? No wonder he is having bad business.” Chait said, jumping out of her arms and trotting next to Katie.

“I think he was one of the Oglair that Monster was talking about. Now, weren’t we supposed to be looking for something?”

“For help, but I don’t see how we are going to find help in the middle of the forest. That crazy sales guy wasn’t any help. We should just look for a place to stay for the night.” Chait said as he stopped to stretch.

Katie sighed, “Yeah that makes sense. I hope there is another village nearby like the one we stayed at last night. However, we may need to hide my necklace. I don’t want to cause any more commotion.”

“Good idea. That lady said danger was near because of it. If they don’t see it, maybe we will be safe... for a while, anyway.” Chait said, becoming very aware of his environment. He froze where he was and very calmly whispered, “Don’t move...we’re not alone.”

Katie looked around as far as her eyes would let her without moving her head. She saw figures of what looked like women, quickly running from tree to tree, watching them while trying to stay hidden at the same time. What amazed Katie more was, that their ears were pointy, like elves and their skin was a pale green. She very much wanted to meet these lovely creatures, but at the same time, knew that they could be dangerous.

Suddenly, Katie heard a sound in front of her which made her look up. What she saw amazed her more than the beautiful green ladies. A lovely creature slowly stepped out from behind the trees as if it were told to do just that. It walked slowly up to Katie and Chait and finally stopped at the edge of the small grassy slope they stood on. Chait’s mouth hung open and he stepped behind Katie. The creature shook it’s mane to one side and looked into Katie’s eyes. Its’ beautiful horn glistened as the sun reflected off of it. Katie reached out her hand and stroked its nose.

“Katie, I need your help,” said the Unicus.

Katie’s hand jumped back. “You’re...talking,” Katie stammered.

“Well, besides the fairies, you’re the first to understand me. They said you would, because of the keys’ powers. You have the key, don’t you?”

“The key?” Katie asked. Then she thought of the necklace. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Katie said, taking a few steps back.

“Well, to you it would look like a necklace, not a key. You have it, don’t you?” The Unicus said, looking for it on Katie.

“I...don’t have anything like that on me.” Katie said, hoping the necklace didn’t slip out from under her shirt again.

“Sure you do; it’s hiding under your shirt, like we talked about.” Chait said proudly. Katie glared down at Chait. He cowered back behind her legs.

“So, you do have it then?” The Unicus asked anxiously. Katie sighed and revealed the necklace that was under her shirt.

“Thank goodness! When Queen Adrianna told me that a mortal from the world of men had the key, I was a little more than worried. I thought, once coming into Atheness, you would sell it for the first shilling that was offered to you. I’m quite impressed that you made it this far. Why would you lie to me about it?” The Unicus asked, as it brushed the grass with its hoof.

“Because I was warned to keep it safe; how do I know you don’t just want it for yourself?” Katie asked, unsure of the Unicus’ motives.

“You humans are just like I pictured you to be, so ignorant. I really am surprised you didn’t sell it to that peddler of the Oglairé.” The Unicus said.

“What do you know, anyway? How dare you talk to me that way! I don’t need this from a horse!” Katie yelled, glaring at the Unicus. She glanced over at Chait, who was still hiding behind her legs. “Come on, Chait, we don’t have time for this horse’s nonsense. We were on a mission to...get home.” They turned to walk away.

“Well, maybe I learned not to trust man. There are very few I do trust, now.” Katie and Chait stopped walking, and slowly turned around, hoping to hear a better reason for the Unicus’ rude behavior. “You may not see it now, but I was once the daughter of a great King and Queen. I wasn’t always a Unicus. Now, as much as I don’t like depending on others for help, I do need yours.

That’s why I came to you. My brother is also a Unicus, but I am having trouble finding him. He ran away from the fairy village of Amos, where we were staying until you came.” She said now pacing back and forth.

“I’m sorry for yelling at you earlier. What’s the name you prefer to be called?” Katie apologized.

“My name is Princess Simona and my brother is Prince Varek.”

“Ok, Princess Simona, so are you...um...were you human before you turned into a Unicus?”

“Well, yes I was. Actually, I was going to be named Queen before ...shall we go? We are really wasting time talking.” Simona said suddenly. Katie knew she was hiding something about her past, but knew it was better not to press her on the subject. She did get turned into a Unicus by something, and that had to be a great story.

“Where are we going, anyway?”

“We are going to the lagoon to ask the mermaids if they have seen Varek. He was always fond of them and they loved him, as well. I would have gone sooner, but Adrianna said to wait here for you. We have been waiting a long time.” Simona said, as she motioned

with her head for Katie to follow. Katie picked up Chait and began to follow her.

“If you don’t mind me asking, who is Queen Adrianna and how did she know I would be coming?” Katie asked, now stroking Chait’s back.

“Adrianna is the Queen of the butterfly fairies. She is also my godmother, in a way. When I was born, she gave me the gift of courage. But when my parents left, I didn’t have much courage at all. Queen Adrianna is also the original owner of the key.”

“You keep talking about this key. Why is it so important? What’s it for?” Katie asked, looking down at her necklace once more. She didn’t see anything special about it. It was very beautiful, but so were many other necklaces she had seen.

Simona stopped and knelt down. “Come, climb on my back; we’ll get there before nightfall, if I run.” Katie did as she was told and climbed on, holding onto Chait with one arm and onto Simona with the other.

“Hang on tight, Katie.” Simona said as she started to run. She felt kind of bad to have Katie sit upon her without a saddle. She always hated her riding lessons and knew how hard it was to hang on. She was running out of time quickly; Queen Zendra would be named Queen of Adwin in only seven days. If they didn’t stop her, then all would be lost.

Chapter Four

Katie held on to the back of Princess Simona with all her might. She almost fell off, but caught herself just in time. She cringed as Chait dug his claws into her skin. His eyes were wide and wild with

fear. After several minutes, Simona finally slowed to a trot. Chait calmed down and retracted his claws but left a small mark on Katie's arm.

"I'm sorry; I didn't mean to hurt you. I got so scared I didn't realize what I was doing. My animal instincts, I guess." Chait said, looking at her arm with concern.

Katie held onto her arm and smiled at Chait. "It's okay, it's only a little scratch, and I'll be fine."

Simona started to walk very slowly now. She looked back at Katie and Chait. "We have to be very calm when speaking with the mermaids. They are very temperamental, and will swim off before we can get any information from them. Katie, you and the fairies are the only beings who can understand my speech now. The mermaids cannot. I will need you to speak with them on my behalf."

"Alright," Katie replied, trying to hide her excitement of seeing real mermaids. She had always been fascinated with the idea of mermaids when she was a child, and now she was getting the chance to see one up close.

When they reached the water's edge, Katie climbed down and looked at Simona. "I'm ready; what do you want me to do?"

"Well, I have never done it myself. My brother Varek once told me that you have to walk slowly to the edge of the lagoon and then bow slightly to the water. Though they are only mermaids, they consider themselves a higher class than the rest of us. When they come up, ask for permission to speak. Once granted, tell them what has become of my brother and me. Then ask them if they have seen him in the past few days. Now go." Simona said, giving Katie a quick shove with her head. However, she stayed only a few feet away from Katie, so the mermaid could see her. Chait remained calmly on Simona's back.

Katie walked up to the edge of the water and gave a quick bow. She felt a little foolish bowing to nothing. She almost thought it was a mean joke the Unicus was playing on her, until she saw small bubbles appear on the still water. Suddenly, a red haired woman lifted her head out of the water. Katie was surprised to see that her hair wasn't very wet. It looked like normal hair, but the water trickled off her long red hair like it would on the feathers of a duck. "Permission to speak," Katie said quickly.

The Mermaid pulled herself up a little and rested her arms on the shore. She looked up at Katie and began to laugh. "You must be Princess Simona, Varek's sister."

"No, but that is why I am here." Katie said a little confused.

"You must be Varek's sister. He planned that whole bowing and asking permission to speak, if you ever came. He said you probably never would, because you were afraid of us. Are you afraid of us?" The mermaid asked, putting her head in her hands and looking up at Katie.

"I am not Princess Simona, but I am speaking for her," Katie giggled a little, glancing over to the Unicus at her side. "She did tell me that was the only way you would talk to me, though. Prince Varek must be a very amusing guy."

"He is my dearest friend. He was always playing tricks on his sister; they are very close, I assume. I'm Niela, by the way. If you're not the Princess, what is your name and are you human?"

"I'm Katie and yes, I'm human, but I'm not from around here. I am here to ask for your help. Prince Varek is missing. He and Simona were turned into Unicus'. The key that the Princess held was stolen as well. All I need to know is if you have seen a Unicus hanging around lately?" Katie asked Niela. She loved talking to this wonderful creature, if only she had more time.

"Well, now that you mentioned it, I did see him just yesterday. I know now it must have been Varek. He was trying to talk to me but

when I couldn't understand him. He gave up and ran off toward the river. I remember when I first met the Prince, when I was very young." She smiled, as if deep in thought.

"You see, long ago, mermaids were never seen on the surface. We were told it was filled with fish-eating monsters. It wasn't until Varek's great, great grandfather decided to build his castle near the sea. He discovered a way to breathe underwater for hours at a time. We knew about this, but never shared it with surface dwellers. He visited our Queen and told her that your world was not as savage as our Queen led us to believe. The Queen then gave us the choice to visit the surface whenever we wished. We can only surface within the boundaries of this cove.

The Queen has never come to visit the surface. I am a free spirit, I guess, I come up all the time and sometimes even further when no one is around. That is how I met Varek, many, many years after this law was made. His grandfather took him out on a ship.

There was a terrible storm and Varek fell in. I was very young and Varek only a boy, himself. I swam as fast as I could and I saved him. He has come back almost every day since then, to see me. I showed him the secret of how to breathe underwater and even took him to my village, once. Since he was the grandson of the King, he was welcomed. I saved him once, but now it seems like he is always trying to be the hero and save others. I was there for him the day his grandfather died and his dad was named King. Now it's only Varek and his sister left to rule." She looked over at Simona. "You must be the Princess, then. I know this isn't the best situation, but it is a pleasure to finally meet you."

Simona looked back over to Katie. "Can you please tell her that at my present state, I cannot understand her?" She said, rather annoyed.

"I'm sorry Niela, but Simona can't understand you."

“Oh, I didn’t realize. I have a good feeling about you. You are going to do something amazing for Atheness. I know we will meet again. If there is anything you need, you know where to find me.”

Katie started to bow, and then remembered it was no longer necessary. The mermaid waved goodbye and dove under the water. Katie walked back to the grassy shore with Princess Simona.

“So what did she have to say?” Princess Simona asked, impatiently.

“She said he was headed toward the river, just yesterday.”

“Good! He might still be there. Get on my back and we’ll be there in no time.”

Katie climbed on and Chait jumped back in her arms. He made sure he was very careful with his claws this time.

“Wow! What a story Niela told you about meeting the Prince. He must be something great.” Chait said, as Simona began to run.

“I know; I can’t wait to meet him.”

Princess Simona ran next to the water for a while. She veered right when she smelled fresh water. The river ran through a thick forest. The fresh water reminded Katie and Chait of how thirsty they were. Simona stopped at a clearing. Katie and Chait then climbed off and walked to the water. Katie bent down and scooped her hands to drink.

Simona wasn’t concerned about the water, even though she was a little thirsty. Since she had become a unicorn, she had learned how to use her enhanced senses. She sniffed the air and then kicked around the dirt. “He was here; hasn’t gone far.” She said to herself. She took off running in the same direction she had smelled the air.

Chait looked up, just as Princess Simona ran off. “She’s coming back, isn’t she?”

The water fell from Katie's hands, as she saw nothing but a trail of dust left by the Unicus. She stood up and walked back to the clearing.

"I knew we shouldn't have trusted any other animal but other cats, and even then, I would do the talking. Now, we are left here in the middle of the forest with nothing to eat!" Chait exclaimed, glaring at his reflection in the water.

"Calm down, I'm sure she just went to find her brother, she'll be back. Let's just sit on the grass and wait. She'll be back." Katie said, almost reassuring herself.

Chapter Five

Princess Simona ran as fast as she could, dodging branches and jumping over logs. Flying would have been faster, but she would have lost his scent, if she took that route. She stopped short when

she saw a familiar creature staring gloomily into the water. She knew it was her brother, Prince Varek. Even though he was a Unicus, she would recognize him even if he were a toad.

“Here you are, Varek. I have been looking for you for a long time. Why didn’t you stay in Amos?” Simona said, now standing next to her brother.

“What’s the point of hiding with fairies? We need to form an army and claim the throne! We can’t just cower in the forest and let Queen Zendra win!” Varek said, stamping his hoof in the dirt.

“Didn’t you even listen to the Queen’s plan? She sent someone who is to help us. She can talk to us and she has Adrianna’s key.”

“She? Is she a Fairy, a Wood Nymph, an Ogre?”

“Well... she’s a human, from the realm of men.” Simona said, trying to sound positive.

“She’s from the realm of men? Does she know how to fight? Use a sword? Or even lead an army?”

“We can teach her. We have seven days, but she’ll have to learn in two. Adrianna knows what she is doing.” She looked up at Varek’s unsure face and smiled. “You’ll like her, I know you will. Follow me, so you can go meet her.”

Varek followed Simona along the river. He wasn’t happy about wasting two days, training a girl who didn’t know the first thing about fighting or even holding a sword. He was almost angry about the whole thing. He could use this time to gather an army. No one knew the people like he did. Not even Simona. While she busied herself with her Queen training, Varek spent time with the people of Atheness. He traveled all over the realm, learning new cultures and even languages. He discovered people hidden in the mountain that were born and bred to fight. They were called the warriors. They would be great allies for his army. If only he wasn’t a Unicus, then he could speak freely with the warriors. He would ask them to

join in the upcoming battle and defeat Queen Zendra without this woman's help.

Katie and Chait stood by the river, still puzzled about why Simona ran off so quickly.

"I knew we shouldn't have trusted a strange, talking animal!" Chait yelled, now pacing back and forth.

"What do you think you are, Chait? A talking cat is more than a bit strange." Katie said, laughing. "You know, I'm really glad you're here. I don't know if I could do this without you. Thank you."

"The same goes for me, Katie. You didn't have to let me follow you after I came alive, but you did. I know that the worst is yet to come and I will be by your side through it all."

"Thanks Chait, that means a lot. I haven't had a true friend in a long time; I'm glad I have one now. I just remembered the food that the Kaia gave us. Let's sit down and eat."

"Well, I can't argue about that." Chait said, poking his nose in her backpack. They settled on the ground and started pulling out the food to eat.

They looked up and saw Simona, followed by another Unicus.

"This must be your brother, Varek. It's a pleasure to meet you, Varek." Katie said, now standing up and bowing slightly to the prince.

Prince Varek gave Katie the once over, and then continued walking past her. "It's getting late; we must get to Amos before nightfall." He said over his shoulder. Katie was a little offended by the Prince's behavior, but did as she was told. She climbed onto Simona's back and Chait climbed onto Varek, as he was told. Instead of running as they had been, the two Unicus' opened their wings wide and then jumped into the sky.

Katie's heart began to beat faster, when Simona told her to hold on tight. They then soared higher into the sky. She looked down and saw the country side. The land looks as green as a clover, thought Katie. She couldn't help but laugh at the thought that she was living her dream. However, she never dreamed of flying with a Unicus; she never thought that would be possible.

She did always dream of going on an adventure; doing something exciting for once, and not relying on others to plan it out for her. She looked back at Prince Varek, who was flying gracefully, like he had been doing it all his life. Chait clung to his back with all his might.

"Is flying really necessary?" Chait growled keeping his eyes tightly closed.

Katie laughed again. "It's probably the fastest way to get around; otherwise I imagine we would be walking for a long time!" Chait didn't respond. Instead, he kept his concentration on holding onto the Prince's back.

Katie's thoughts drifted to her husband, James. *What happened when she never returned from work?*

Simona looked back at Katie. "We have a long journey ahead of us and being worried is only going to make it longer." Katie forced a smile

"I still don't understand why the fairies chose me out of everyone else in the world. Wait, could you read my thoughts just now?" Katie asked Princess Simona.

"No, but I know that face; I have made it so many times in the past."

Simona lowered herself to the ground, and Katie climbed off. She looked down at Katie and smiled. Katie looked at her new surroundings. They were standing in the most beautiful forest that Katie could ever imagine.

The trees were so clean and perfect; it was as if they came right out of a painting. They rose up from the ground as if trying to touch the sun. The ground was covered in very green grass, not a blade of it was discolored. A beautiful creek of crystal clear water flowed in front of them. Shiny pebbles that looked almost like blue crystals and pearls lined the bottom of the creek. Little purple flowers were arranged perfectly around the forest floor. Katie bent down to smell one and the scent of lavender filled her senses.

She looked up at the Princess, “where are we?” The Princess smiled as only a unicorn can do. “We are in the land of Amos, the realm of the butterfly fairies. Your questions will soon be answered.”

Chait jumped off the Prince’s back and into Katie’s arms. Katie began to stroke his back as she waited for something to happen. She didn’t know what she was really waiting for, but she knew it must be something amazing.

Suddenly, a butterfly flew towards them, followed by a rainbow of colors. The butterfly flew frantically around Katie. Katie was too amazed to be afraid. The butterfly began to grow and change into a beautiful woman. The butterfly’s wings grew and they remained on the back of this stunning woman. She smiled at Katie. Her dark hair flowed over her shoulders and down to her waist. Her eyes were the color of the sea and a red crown of flowers, placed on her head, matched her red dress. The dress glistened in the sunlight.

“I would like to introduce Adrianna, the Queen of the butterfly fairies, and second keeper of the key.” The Princess bowed to the Queen. Katie held the necklace tight in her hand.

“Then this key belongs to you?”

“It does, but I would like you to hold on to it for a while. It will do you some good. Queen Zendra would not expect a human from the realm of men, to hold the key. However, you can only stay here until you have completed your training; the key is not safe here, she knows it is in Amos. She will do anything in her power to retrieve

the second key. If she has both of them, all will be lost.” She gave Katie a reassuring smile.

“Why choose me, of all the people in the world and yours, why me? I’m no one special.” Katie said in discouragement.

“Oh, but you are. You don’t realize how special you really are. Your heart is pure; the most pure of hearts that I have seen in a long time and I have been around a very long time. Dear Katie, all of Atheness needs your help. You, Simona and Varek, were chosen by the key. No one else can do it for you; it is your own task, appointed to you three.”

Katie looked down at the water in the creek she stood next to. “What if we fail, what if we can’t do it?”

“I’m going to be honest with you Katie, I’m not going to tell you that it’s not going to be hard and that someone else can do it for you. If the other key is not restored in seven days then all of Atheness will be ruled by Queen Zendra, and I will perish, as well. The keepers of the key are linked to it as it is to us. If our key is in evil hands, we will no longer be as we once were. If Simona’s key remains in Zendra’s grasp, Simona and Varek will remain Unicus’s, forever. Do you understand, Katie?”

Katie looked up at Adrianna, “I understand.”

“You look very troubled. Follow me; my people have prepared a feast for you. After we eat, I’ll have my servants show you to your room for the night.”

They walked into the forest for a short while, when Adrianna stopped and as if by magic, opened a door. Katie looked behind the door, but nothing was there. Just the forest, as it was. Katie placed her hand next to the door where a wall should be, but she felt nothing. A normal person could walk right through this forest and never know about this secret door.

Adrianna smiled, “It has to be invisible, to protect our village. It is protected with magic. Come, let’s eat.” They walked through a long hallway that appeared to be made of crystal walls. The lights above them looked like hanging flowers with fireflies illuminating from the center of it. There wasn’t a whole lot to look at in the hallway, and as they walked, Katie started to wonder if this was really a castle at all. She always imagined a castle full of gold, and portraits of the royal family. This was a fairy castle after all, so maybe they just liked things to stay simple.

At the end of the hallway, there was a great entry of golden double doors. Two fairies stood guard. If it wasn’t for their wings and ears, Katie would have thought they were human. Their long hair was pulled back into tight ponytails. Light body armor was slightly visible from under their long tunic and pants. Leather boots came to their calves and buckled at the side. They each held a large decorative spear in their right hand. They both took a door and opened it for Adrianna and her guests.

The room they entered was bigger than a baseball field. Adrianna told them that many grand balls had taken place in this room. Katie smiled at the thought of a grand ball with fairies. In the middle of the large room was a very long table full of food. The food didn’t look familiar to Katie. Meat of some sort of animal was placed in the middle of the table on a silver dish. The smell emitting from the meat was quite appealing to Katie. Other dishes were placed delicately around the meat as if it were an art. It was an array of colorful dishes, all in silver plates and bowls.

Each seat was covered in a white cloth and tied with a bow. It reminded Katie of a wedding reception. A silver plate was placed in front of each chair with three forks, two spoons and a knife, displayed on each side of the plate. In front of each place was a crystal goblet.

Katie was seated near the end of the table next to Queen Adrianna. Chait was placed on the ground. A small setting was laid out just for him. Simona and Varek excused themselves since it was not possible to sit at a table to eat. After the Prince and Princess left,

the servants began to take the plates and serve those who sat at the table. At the table sat the elders of Amos. On the other side of Queen Adriana sat her most trusted advisor and guard. She told Katie his name was Chadwick. A plate was then placed before Katie. The silver plate was filled with the strange meat, fruits, what looked like leaves, and a pudding- type substance that was as green as the leaves on the trees outside. Everyone watched Katie, until she took her first bite. To her surprise, all the fruit was so delicious, it melted in her mouth. She tried the strange meat next. It tasted almost like ham, but was juicy and tender, like chicken. When the parties of fairies were satisfied that Katie was enjoying her meal, they all began to start on their own, as well.

There wasn't any talk at the table about Katie's quest. They talked about the upcoming war, other fairies, and others asked Katie about her realm, and about James. Katie felt very proud of the world she lived in when she talked about it.

After the meal, the guards took Katie and Chait to a beautiful room with crystal windows that viewed the forest. Her bed was filled with feathers and cotton and was lined with silk. "This will be your room for the next few nights. I hope you find it acceptable. There is a robe hanging on the door. You may use it to sleep in." said one of the guards standing at the door way.

"Thank you, this will do very nicely." The guards bowed and then left her and Chait alone in the room. Chait trotted around the room awhile and then settled in a little basket bed that sat next to Katie's bed. Katie smiled at Chait and then changed into the night gown that hung on the door.

She placed her other clothes in her almost empty backpack. She walked to the window and sat down in a chair next to it. Looking out the window she saw Queen Adrianna talking to another fairy. She sat down next to the river and placed her hand in the water. Suddenly, the water she touched glowed and showed pictures of something Katie couldn't make out from where she was sitting. Katie sat up, left her room, and walked outside toward Queen Adrianna. She felt like she was imposing, but she couldn't help

herself; she wanted to know what was going on, and get some answers.

Queen Adrianna stood up and faced Katie. “So, you were watching me?”

“Well, I didn’t mean any harm and I don’t even know why I came out here. I guess to see you. What did you see?”

“Child, I had to be sure you really were the one. I fear you have an even greater purpose than to just return Simona and Varek to the throne.”

“Then, am I the one? What did you see? Please tell me!” Katie almost yelled.

“You will know before you leave us. There are many tasks you must complete, but first you must learn to fight. This is a trade you may not use, but you will need to know before going on. Now, please get some rest; tomorrow is a very busy day for you.”

“Before I go, can you please explain the importance of the key? Where did it come from? Why is there two of them?” Katie asked while her hand tightly grasped the blue gem necklace.

Adrianna sat quietly for a moment before she began. “It began many, many decades ago.” She stopped and watched a purple flower fall from a tree and land softly on the still water. “There was once a portal that linked your world to mine. It was similar to the one you traveled through, when you came to Atheness. This is how humans live in Atheness, today. The first human to come through the portal was a man named Alroy Sceffington. This man made an alliance with the butterfly fairies. He showed the portal to many more humans. They loved Atheness so much, that they settled here and made Alroy their king. At this same time, I was in the middle of the Pixie rebellion. This led to the battle that banished the Pixies from Rugonden. King Alroy and his followers helped in the battle. We were successful in the battle, however the Pixies showed many of the evil creatures of Atheness, where the portal was. They began

terrorizing your realm. King Alroy came to me to discuss a plan that would close the portal. With much effort and time, we made the keys. One I would care for, and the other was to be passed down King Alroy's bloodline. The one, who possesses both keys and places them together, can close the portal and undo any spells that have been done. The same can also be done if both keys are in the wrong hands. The portal can be opened and spells left untouched and be permanent, if the keeper so chooses.

King Alroy and his men removed as many creatures from your world as they could find. We closed the portal and returned to our kingdoms, always wearing the key around our necks. Do you now understand the importance of the keys, and the importance of retrieving the stolen one?"

"I do. So all the myths and legends of dragons, Big Foot and the Loch Ness monster were all true?" Katie asked excitedly.

"King Alroy couldn't find all the missing creatures in your world. Some may have very well been left behind. The dragons however, there were many in your world in your medieval era. We successfully removed all of them before the portal was sealed." Adrianna said, standing up.

"So, even though they were true, they will always be nothing but a myth, in my world?"

"Yes. It is better that this world remain a myth, as well. Now it is late and you must rest for your training tomorrow." She nodded Katie over to the direction of the palace.

Katie walked back to the invisible door and it was obediently opened by one of the guards. As she continued to her room, she past a door that was slightly opened and a light was on. She slowed to a stop as she overheard her name in two fairies conversation. "How can this girl, Katie, be the one? She doesn't look like any warrior I have ever seen," said the first fairy

“I know; maybe Queen Adrianna was wrong when she sent her here.” The second fairy answered.

Katie heard enough, so she continued on her way. She entered her room and closed the door behind her. Chait was already fast asleep in his basket bed. She climbed into bed. Sleep didn't come easy after that. She tossed and turned until finally, she fell soundly asleep.

Chapter Six

Katie awoke, feeling surprisingly refreshed. She looked over at Chait, who was still asleep in his basket bed. He lay on his back with his front paws curled in front of him. Katie smiled and then got out of bed.

Suddenly, there was a light tapping at her door.

“Come in,” Katie called.

The door opened; a very tall and very handsome fairy stood at her door. He wore a large, long-sleeved top with a vest and knickers with boots. He had a belt around his waist, with a sword attached. On his back, he wore a bow and some arrows, placed in a leather quiver. His wings were a beautiful green.

He smiled at Katie, “Are you ready for your first lesson?”

“I’m ready as I’ll ever be.” Katie looked down at her garments she had been sleeping in. “Eh, maybe once I’m properly dressed, anyway. Well, do you get to train all the fairies?” Katie asked, brushing off her appearance as an afterthought.

“Yes, all the ones who are born to fight, anyway. You will be my first non-fairy and female for that matter, which I get to train.”

“Should I be worried?” Katie said with a grin.

“Oh no, I’m told I’m the best. Here, put this on and meet me outside, when you’re dressed.” He said, handing her a red dress and some black boots. He gave her a slight bow and then left the room, leaving Katie alone once more.

She put on the dress and boots and then admired herself in the mirror on the wall.

Red is a good color on me, thought Katie. She spun around to let her dress twirl. She laughed a little, as she walked out of her room and into the hall.

After getting a little turned around in the hallway, Katie finally made her way outside. She turned and looked back the way she had come from; it appeared that she came out of thin air. She stood staring at the ‘would be entrance’. She tried feeling it, but her hands only touched air.

“That was my reaction on my first trip to Amos, too.” said a voice behind her. She turned to find Prince Varek.

“Oh, you’re... highness...um...good morning.” Katie said a little caught off guard. She still felt weird talking to a Unicus.

“Good morning Katie. I’m sorry about my behavior yesterday. You have to understand though; with everything that happened ...”
Katie cut him off.

“Queen Adrianna talked to you, didn’t she?”

“Yeah, she did; she is very wise. I can see why she is Queen. Well, we should get started on your training. Normally, I would be in charge of your training, but as you can see, I am in no condition to teach you how to use a weapon.” Prince Varek said, shaking his mane to the other side.

“Well, I’m ready, so lead the way.” Katie said anxiously.

Prince Varek led Katie to a clearing in the forest, where many fairies were also practicing. She had seen movies where the knights were practicing using swords, lances and such. What she saw was similar, but the knights had wings, which gave them a slight advantage over their enemy. She spotted the fairy that had given her the dress, helping a smaller fairy use his sword. His name, she soon found out, was Chadwick. He looked over and saw her. He smiled and waved her over.

“This will be your new best friend,” said Chadwick, handing Katie a sword, once she approached him. “Now, all you need to know is how to use it properly.” He then put a belt around Katie’s waist with the sword’s sheath attached.

Katie looked down at the belt and the sheath. This is really happening, Katie thought. I’m really going to learn how to fight. She felt a little uneasy about the possibility of using the weapon in a real battle. She pushed the thought aside. She held the sword out, as

it glistened in the sunlight. Katie lightly brushed her hand over the cool smooth metal.

Chadwick took out his sword and stood facing her. “Alright, are you ready for your first lesson?” He asked, holding up his sword.

Katie grinned and nodded.

“Alright, to start with, you need to have a ready position; watch me. I’m holding my sword with my right hand and my left hand is ready to block. Got it?”

“Right hand and left hand, ready to block. I got it.” Katie said, positioning her hands to what her teacher told her. Her right hand felt heavy. “Wouldn’t it be easier if I had both hands on my sword? It’s a little heavy.” Katie asked, twisting her wrist to relieve some of the pain in her arm.

“That’s another lesson. You will learn the main points today. There is so much you need to learn in such a short time. Most of my pupils take months, if not years, to learn what you get to, in a few short days. Please follow my lead. I won’t steer you wrong.” Chadwick said, handing Katie a slightly smaller sword. “Always be aware of what is going on around you. When you’re fighting an enemy in front of you, be aware of what is going on to either side of you and behind you.”

“Alright, be aware of your surroundings”

“Good; now let’s work on your blocks and your strikes.”

The lessons continued the entire day, with little breaks in between. Katie caught on very quickly. The sword was a little heavy at first, but as she got better, the sword seemed almost weightless in her hands.

“You are improving very fast, Katie. It will still take many years to be a master with this weapon, but I believe you will get there.”

Chadwick said, patting Katie on her now very sore back. Katie winced, and then smiled a little at his comment.

When the sun slowly disappeared over the horizon, Katie joined Adrianna for dinner. After a light meal, Katie went back to her room and climbed into bed. She felt very tired and sore from the morning's training. Chait ran in from a small door that had been added upon their arrival.

"And where have you been all morning, Chait?" Katie asked, snuggling into her soft bed.

"I was exploring this wonderful place. Did you know they have a fairy and all he does is cook for the entire palace? What wonderful food he made for me." Chait said, licking his furry lips. Katie laughed.

"It is very common for a palace to have a cook, Chait. You should have seen me today, practicing with a sword. It is a lot harder than it looks, but Chadwick said I was really good. I am so sore because of it, but it was worth it. I have always wanted to take up sword fighting." Katie said, turning over to sleep. Chait jumped into his basket bed, circled it once, and lay down. "I'm glad they're not making me fight with a sword; I wouldn't know what to do. Goodnight, Katie." Chait said, putting his head down and slowly shutting his eyes. Katie closed her eyes for a second when there was a tapping at her door.

"Come in," Katie called, and Adrianna walked in. Katie jumped out of bed and stood up.

"It's okay, child," she said, motioning for Katie to sit back down. "It's time for you to know some of what I saw." Katie's heart started to beat faster as she prepared herself for what was about to be said.

"Starting at dusk tomorrow, you will be leaving us. Princess Simona, Prince Varek, my advisor, and your trainer, Chadwick, will be going on this journey with you. Queen Zendra is very powerful

and must be stopped. In order to do that, you must make a Cane of Power to restore Princess Simona and Prince Varek to their true form.”

“Where do I get a Cane of Power?”

“You will have to build it yourself. Many have tried, but the items are in many different villages. That is why you are not going alone. You will need to get a flower from the top of Pixie Mountain, a raindrop from the village of rain, snow from the valley of ice, and lava from the castle of Dinesh. The cane is found in the forest of the wood nymphs, and the stone of Evandor, found beneath the sea, in the town of Derya. When all the items are collected, it will make the Cane of Power, when placed next to each other. When you point it at Prince Varek and Princess Simona, it will restore them to their true selves. It is only temporary though; they will not stay their true selves unless you destroy Queen Zendra and get the key back to Princess Simona. I know this is a lot to take in; that is why you will not leave until dusk tomorrow. I have written down the list of items you will need and given them to Chadwick.”

“I won’t let you down, Adrianna. Can I ask you something, though?” Katie asked as Adrianna nodded a yes.

“When I came to your realm, what happened in my own realm? Are people looking for me?” Katie asked a little concerned.

“When you left your realm, your world rearranged itself, as if you were never in it. When you return, it will go back to the way it was, as if you had never left.”

“But what of my husband James, is he married to someone else, now?” Katie said, a little sadly.

Adrianna sighed. “That was one thing I didn’t expect. Love is a very powerful thing. I never got to experience it myself; however I can see how powerful it is for your James. Though the world has forgotten you, somehow James never did. When you didn’t return, he became very worried. He asked around, but people started

thinking he was crazy to make up a wife. He will stop at nothing to find you. I am a little concerned about this, but when and if you return to your world, all will be fixed and you will be back with him, again.”

“We have to do something. I can’t just let him go crazy, thinking I died or something. He really does love me more than I had ever thought he could. Isn’t there anything I can do?”

“Hurry on with your journey. That’s all I can say. When you destroy Queen Zendra, you can return. You can’t go back now. You are needed here, to help our people. Would you sacrifice thousands and thousands of innocent creatures, for one man? You will see him again. He is not in any immediate danger. It will be alright, now please try to rest; tomorrow, you start your journey.

Chapter Seven

The next day went by slowly. Chadwick continued with Katie’s lessons and taught her some new ones, which included learning how to use a bow and arrow. To Katie, this proved to be a little harder than a sword. With a sword, it was more strength and balance than anything else. With a bow, it was more accuracy and timing.

After the lessons; Katie, Chadwick, Princess Simona, Prince Varek, and Chait were told to get ready for the night's first journey. They were told to pack as light as possible, because heavy bags could slow them down. Queen Adrianna gave them three crystal vials of water that with one sip, their thirst would be quenched for hours. Katie had to leave the clothes that she came to the realm with, behind, and could only bring the red dress, and clothes that she would wear to battle. The butterfly fairies also gave her a cape and boots, which would protect her against any weather, and would come in handy when she went to get the lava from castle of Dinesh; a task she was not looking forward to.

When dusk finally came, the group was greeted by several butterfly fairies of Amos. A crowd grew to bid them farewell. There was a rainbow of color from their wings. Katie wished she had a camera to take a picture of such a wonderful site. Chait got settled on Princess Simona's back and watched the goodbye's from the fairies. He was given small boots to wear, when the time came to get the lava. Small Vials were put in Katie's backpack to collect the items they needed to make the Cane of Power.

"Good luck, Katie; we're counting on you to complete this task. I trust these items will help you on your journey," Queen Adrianna said, holding Katie's hands.

"Thank you. I won't let you down, no matter what it takes." Katie smiled and climbed onto Prince Varek's back. She waved goodbye to the cheering crowd as Prince Varek and Princess Simona sped up and flew into the air. Chadwick opened his large green wings and began flying behind them. The light roar of the crowd could still be heard in the distance as they flew on, not knowing what to expect on the journey ahead of them.

They flew northwest of Amos, towards Pixie Mountain. It was dark and hard for Katie to make out the scenery or where she even was. She heard rushing water of a nearby river. She smelled the scent of pine, as they flew over part of a forest. Soon a light fog began to appear, and then thicken, as they neared the mountain. They tried to find a safe area to land, but they couldn't see the mountain's top.

“We could wait until morning when the fog clears; however, we will waste a lot of time that we could use finding the first item. It’s your call, Katie.” Prince Varek said, hovering back and forth next to the mountain side.

Katie sighed heavily, “Well, I think you should get me as close to the mountain as you can. I’m going to have to climb the rest of the way.”

“Katie, no, it’s not safe. If we can’t even land, how can we expect you to climb? We are risking too much to let you do this. I know Varek said it was your call, but we’re going to have to wait.” Princess Simona said, cautiously.

“No! If we’re going to do this, we have to do it now. I’m climbing the rest of the way up. We are wasting too much time discussing it already.” Katie said, straight forth. They all stopped arguing and began moving in closer to the mountain’s side. Katie secured her backpack and carefully grabbed onto the mountain’s side, making sure she was settled enough for Simona to back off. Chadwick flew close behind her, if she needed help or an encouraging word. He was told to never leave her side. If he flew up by himself, he would be breaking the oath he had made to Queen Adrianna. Katie had to find the items herself. He could only help her so much.

“Be careful!” Chait yelled up to her, from on top of Varek’s back.

“Don’t worry; I’ll be fine, Chadwick is here with me. When I get to the top, I’ll shine a light to guide you to the top. I have a flashlight in my backpack; it should help.” Katie yelled back through the thick fog. She had trouble finding handles in the rocks to grab onto, since her visibility was very limited. She blindly felt around for handles to pull herself up.

She soon began to regret the words she had said earlier, as she tried to pull herself up again. With every inch she climbed, she found it more and more difficult to find a handle to latch onto. An icy gust of wind shot threw her like sharp needles. She desperately wanted to let go of the cliff, for her cold hands began to burn every time

the wind blew across them. She was thankful for the cape she wore around her, but dearly wished she had jeans on, instead of a dress. A sharp rock that Katie had not seen in the dark fog, lashed against her knee causing her to shout out in pain. A warm trickle of blood ran down her leg and into her boot. She ignored it, and kept on climbing.

“Are you okay, Katie?” Chadwick asked from below.

“I’m fine. How far do you think we are from the top?” Katie asked finding her breaths coming out in short spurts.

“Not far now, I’m sure. We started half way up.” The fairy said, as if he could go on for hours. Katie didn’t respond, but was glad of the answer, for she was growing very tired.

She struggled up the mountain for what seemed like hours. Her back began to hurt, because the backpack she wore, weighed her down. She lifted up her now very heavy arm, to grab another handle. She was quite surprised to find a flat surface within her grasp.

“Chadwick, I think I found the top! Hurry and fly ahead of me and help me up!” She yelled excitedly. Chadwick did as he was told, and landed on top of the mountain. He grasped Katie’s outstretched hand, and carefully pulled her to the top. Katie laid collapsed, on the flat surface, breathing heavily. She suddenly remembered that Princess Simona, Prince Varek and Chait waited for her signal below. She pulled off her backpack, relieved of the weight being released from her back. She searched through it for a few seconds and pulled out her flashlight. She turned it on and crawled over to the mountain’s edge, shining the light down into the thick fog.

“Do you think this will work, Chadwick? Will they see the light?”

“I sure hope so,” Chadwick said, making himself comfortable on a grassy bank. Suddenly, a gust of wind came up from the cliff, making Katie fall back. Princess Simona and Prince Varek flew up like rockets, landing next to Chadwick.

“Your highnesses,” Chadwick said, bowing to Prince Varek and Princess Simona. He was glad to be a butterfly fairy, so he could understand the Unicus’ words. This journey would be a lot harder if they couldn’t communicate.

“Thank you, Katie, we couldn’t find the top in this thick fog.” Princess Simona said, giving a slight bow to her. Chait jumped off Prince Varek’s back and ran up to Katie.

“Are you okay, Katie?” He asked eyeing Katie’s wound on her knee. Katie looked down at her knee and touched the dried blood.

Chait ran on ahead, grabbing a piece of cloth from Katie’s bag and wet the cloth on the damp grass that was filled with dew from the fog. He walked back to Katie and placed it on her wound.

“Thanks, Chait, but I’m fine, really. Now, we need to find that flower; where would it be?” Katie asked, looking around and then carefully cleaned off the dried blood from her leg. She tied the cloth around her knee. The fog cleared a little, and she turned her flashlight back on, to get a better look at her surroundings. It was still very dark out. It must be the middle of the night, she thought with a yawn. The top of the mountain was covered in grass that yellowed in some parts. A few trees were scattered here and there and large boulders could be seen in the distance.

“I was told, as a child, they reside in caves. They grow where it is damp and dark. Here, get on my back; we must keep moving.” Princess Simona said, moving next to Katie.

“Do you know where the caves would be?” Katie asked the Princess, climbing on her back.

“This is my first time up here. I haven’t really ventured much out of the castle. As children, we weren’t allowed to go far from the castle gates.” Princess Simona said, scanning the area for caves. Prince Varek stood for a second with a blank expression on his face.

“I know the way.” He said suddenly.

“You do? Why haven’t you said this before?” Princess Simona yelled.

“It wasn’t for you to know, until a time such as this. I have only been here once, and I had climbed, just as Katie has done. It’s not far from here. We haven’t time for more questions.” Varek said, continuing on forward. They said no more, and followed Varek through the now thinning fog. They all walked in silence for a while. Katie was glad of that, so she could rest her body and mind, while they continued to the cave.

When they got to the mouth of the cave, the moon came up, just over the horizon. A bright yellow color, painted a beautiful portrait over the distant mountain tops. Katie sighed at its beauty.

“Katie, are you listening to me?” Princess Simona said, breaking Katie out of her trance.

“I’m sorry, were you saying something, Simona?” Katie said apologetically.

Simona sighed. “We are at the mouth of the cave; what shall we do next? You are the leader on this mission, are you not?” Princess Simona sounded tired and almost bitter with her task at hand.

“I think that Varek shall lead the way. He has been here before, so he will know what will lie ahead.” Katie said, motioning toward Prince Varek. Prince Varek agreed and moved to the front of the group and entered a damp cave. He looked back at Katie. “Katie, we will need your flashlight to continue. It is very dark, and I don’t think it would be wise to go on without it.”

“Alright,” Katie pulled the flashlight out once more and shined it in the direction that Prince Varek was walking, so he had a bright view in front of him. She had wished he was human so he could hold it himself; it was hard to angle it from behind him.

“Varek, wait. If you don’t mind my asking; I think it would be easier for the both of us, if I stand next to you; its better, instead of riding

on Simona's back; since I'm holding the flashlight." Varek and Simona agreed, as Katie left Princess Simona's back and stood next to Prince Varek. Holding the light in front of Prince Varek was much easier now that she stood next to him. As they walked, the echo of Princess Simona's and Prince Varek's hooves clanked on the stone floor, making rocks fall from the ceiling of the cave.

"If you must talk, only whisper, this cave isn't very stable. We must find the flower and continue on our way." Prince Varek whispered, looking forward. As they walked on, the flutter of bat's wings could be heard from above them. Prince Varek's ears suddenly perked up as he sniffed the air around him. "I smell water," he whispered, "we must be close. Keep your eyes open."

Katie saw a small trickle of water escaping through a crack in the wall, collecting in a small pool on the cool stone floor. She had Prince Varek stop, and she walked forward to get a better look at the pool. The pool of water didn't feel wet, but was cool to the touch and was black as pitch. She leaned in closer to the pool to see if any plant life grew around the pool. A strong force pulled at Katie, she tried her hardest to pull back and found herself holding with all her might, onto a large rock that sat next to the pool. The rock loosened from the stone floor, pulling Katie into the black pool and out of site.

"Katie!" The group called in unison. Chadwick looked around at the stunned faces of his companions, and then dove into the pool after Katie.

Katie screamed at the shock of falling, until she realized she wasn't really falling, but was floating to the ground. She couldn't see a thing, except for a light below her which was growing closer. She landed on the ground with a soft thud. The room was filled with an orange- colored light. She couldn't tell where the light was coming from. She looked up from the way she had come and saw that Chadwick was also floating down. She watched as he landed, a lot more gracefully than she had. She stood up to greet Chadwick with a hug. "Oh, Chadwick, you came after me. Thank you so much.

“Didn’t we fall into water? What happened?” Katie asked, as she dusted off her dress.

“It’s a magic pool. I didn’t think there were any left in Atheness. The Butterfly Fairies destroyed those, hundreds of years ago. This must be a new one. They aren’t just formed by nature, someone had to make it.” Chadwick told her, as he circled the area.

“There is a way out, right?”

“Yes, with every magic pool, there is also an escape hatch. It’s a rule of magic. The pool won’t form unless an escape hatch is formed first.” He surveyed the area again. “By the looks of this one, I would say, it has only been here for a few years. Enough time for plants to grow.”

“Did you say plants? Do you think we’ll find the flower we need down here?” Katie asked hopefully.

“It’s a possibility; we’ll keep an eye out as we look for the escape hatch. Varek and Simona said they will continue looking, and meet us outside of the cave.”

“What would the hatch look like?”

“It can be anything; a boulder, the side of the wall, or maybe, under some flowers. Just start moving and touching stuff that might trigger the door. It’s bright enough down here, where we don’t need your light anymore. Stay close enough where I can see you. I’m not losing you again.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t be too far.”

Katie walked over to a large boulder that sat nicely between the grass and some very beautiful flowers. “What do the flowers look like, anyway?” Katie asked, eyeing the flowers by the boulder.

“Well, I have only seen them once before. They are white, almost transparent, and they seem to emit light from them. Those are not

the ones.” Chadwick said, as he turned back to a stone wall he was feeling.

Katie bent over the boulder, and tried to push it out of the way, but it wouldn’t budge. She sat with her back to the boulder and tried pushing it with her back; nothing. She sighed and stood up, kicking the rock with her foot. “Stubborn boulder,” Katie said under her breath. Chadwick looked over at Katie and laughed.

“You know, for someone who has come here to save the whole kingdom of Atheness, you’re not very strong, are you?” He said, feeling around on the walls again.

“Well, you’re here to help me, right? So help me move this boulder. Maybe the hatch is underneath.” Katie said, as she tried to push it again.

Chadwick sighed and walked over to her. He stood over the boulder and raised his hand above it while he chanted something in a language Katie didn’t understand. “Del namova.” The boulder moved slowly to the other side of the room.

“Wow, that’s amazing! How did you do that and what did you say?” Katie asked, amazed.

“Well, as a guardian fairy, I was given some very special abilities to help in missions such as this. The words I spoke were just simple fairy words for “move.”

“Wow. Is it possible that I can learn to do that? I mean, when the mission is over.”

“When we have time, I will give you some power. You can’t fight Zendra on strength alone, since we know you don’t have any.” He smiled and looked down at where the boulder used to be. In place of the boulder, wasn’t a hatch, but five beautiful flowers, glowing as if a light was lit from the inside.

Katie's eyes widened. "This is it! These are the flowers we're looking for." Katie took off her backpack and took out a vial she was given, by one of the fairies. There was one vial for each item that she would need on her mission.

"Good; now we can find a way out of here." Chadwick said, now walking to the other wall and feeling it. "I have a good feeling that this magic pool's hatch is on one of these walls. Come, help me look." Katie nodded and stood up. After putting her backpack on and carefully placing the vial containing the flower in her pack, she walked toward the wall in front of her and started to feel around for something out of place. The room wasn't very large and had four stone walls.

"How would I know if something is out of place in here?" Katie suddenly announced.

"Oh, you'll know." Chadwick said, as he slipped his hands over the wall very carefully. Then he stopped at a fist size hole in the wall. "Katie, come over here, I think I found it."

Katie ran over to his side. "A hole in the wall is the secret hatch?"

"Not everything is as it appears, Katie. Your hands are smaller than mine; I want you to stick your hand in the hole. If I'm right, this will open the door."

"Okay, but if my hand is chopped off, it's all on you." Katie said, as she moved her hand slowly toward the wall. She then placed her fist in the hole. It was a perfect fit.

Katie then gasped. "How is my hand such a perfect fit for this? I have never been here before... have I?"

"Some things are better left unexplained until you are really ready to know the answer." Chadwick calmly explained.

"What are you, a fortune cookie?" Katie asked, annoyed. "Besides, this didn't solve anything; the door didn't open." Just as Katie had

said that, the ground started to shake. Katie removed her hand from the wall, fast. The wall moved to reveal a small opening, just big enough to crawl through. They could see a light at the end of the cave. “Chadwick, we did it!” Katie yelled, running over to give him a hug.

“Come, we still have a long journey ahead of us.” Chadwick said, starting down the tunnel.

“Right,” Katie said, following Chadwick in the tunnel.

“So what did you mean when you told me about my hand fitting into the wall like that?” Katie asked.

“If you were to know your whole life ahead of you, things may change. This would change history. You see, Katie; everything that has happened to you thus far, was planned for you. It was supposed to happen. Do you understand?” He said, looking over his shoulder to her.

“I guess so. But why was it planned for me to fall down the magic pool and for my fist to fit in the hatch?”

“You’ll find out someday, just not right now.”

“Do you know why?”

“Yes. I do. Fairies can see the future ahead and the past behind us. Not our own, just of others.” Chadwick said, stopping in the tunnel to look back at Katie.

“Stop with all of this! This is not ok. I need to know some answers. Have I been here before, or not?” Katie yelled back at Chadwick. Chadwick sighed, and looked back to the tunnel in front of him.

“Yes, you have. No one knew but Queen Adrianna and me. It was a few years ago, before you met your husband, James. We pulled you here for only a few days. You were almost in a dreamlike state, that’s why you don’t remember. We knew of the attack from the

Pixies and Queen Zendra. So, Queen Adrianna and I went to look for a hero. We found you. In that time, I did teach you a little magic and you must have made this pool. I don't know why you made it, because they are very dangerous things. That's why we destroyed them."

"Wait! If I knew magic, then why don't I know any, now? I would have to remember a place like this." Katie said, very surprised.

"When you return to your world, the magic you once had, slowly fades if it's not being used properly. I only taught you a little. Someone must have taught you a lot more. I just can't figure out who did it, in the short time you were here." Chadwick said, very concerned. He shook his head and continued through the tunnel.

"I'm not going to lie to you, Chadwick. I am upset that this was kept from me. I'm also frustrated that I didn't remember and that I made something the butterfly fairies tried to destroy. Do you think someone else knew of my being in Atheness back then, and tried to teach me dark magic?" Katie asked following Chadwick down the small tunnel.

"It is a very good possibility. We will discuss this later. Look, we made it; there is Princess Simona and Prince Varek." They crawled out of the tunnel and stood up to greet their companions. Chait jumped off Prince Varek's back, and jumped into Katie's arms.

"Don't ever scare me like that, again. I thought I lost my best friend." Chait said, now purring in her arms.

"We did it; we found the flowers." Katie said, grinning, holding the vial that contained the glowing flowers.

"That's great. Well, I think since the fog has cleared, we should go visit the mermaids again. They have the stone of Evandor in their village." Princess Simona said. Katie looked over at Prince Varek. He stood very quiet and almost angry.

“What is Prince Varek’s problem? Shouldn’t he be even a little bit happy? We found the first item.” Katie asked Princess Simona.

“I’ll have Chadwick talk with him. You better fly with me, so they can talk on the way to Derya.”

“Alright,” Katie said, climbing onto Princess Simona’s back. She held tightly onto Chait, as Princess Simona spread her wings and jumped into the air.

“I can’t wait to be human again, but I am sure going to miss flying.” Princess Simona said with a laugh. Katie laughed, too.

Chadwick flew next to Prince Varek. “What’s going on with you? We found the flowers and Katie is safe, thanks to me.”

“That’s just it, Chadwick, because of you. Since we have been on this journey, it has always been because of you! I can’t protect Katie like I want to. Ever since I was a boy, my father trained me to protect the weak and helpless. So far, I have failed.” Prince Varek said in disgust.

“Don’t blame yourself, Varek, blame Queen Zendra. You’re doing the best you can in this situation. Besides, Katie might not be as weak and helpless as you may think. I know you can’t go with Katie when we get to Derya since it is underwater, but while we are there, you and Simona can start gathering an army for the upcoming battle. That should help you feel like a man. You can bring Chait with you to translate.”

“Thanks, I guess. It seems like that’s all I can do for now.” Prince Varek said bitterly. In truth, he knew Chadwick was right. They needed more warriors and waiting for Katie to find all the items, will take a long time. Time he needs to train an army.

Chapter Eight

(World of Man)

James stood in his kitchen slowly sipping his morning coffee. He hadn't slept since the disappearance of his wife Katie, three days ago. His friends and family told him that he was crazy because he kept going on and on about Katie. They said she was not real and he was never married.

“I know you’re a little lonely, James, and haven’t had a date in three years. But to make up a wife is just crazy. Maybe you should see a therapist or something. Listen, my wife has this friend Jenny, really nice girl, maybe I can arrange something with the two of you, what do you think?” His friend Jerry once asked him.

“No, I only want Katie. Just leave me alone for a while.” He said.

James knew they were wrong. He remembered her long silky brown hair and her bright green eyes. Her eyes would light up a room when she entered it. Along with her infectious laughter, she was the perfection of a woman, in his eyes.

Looking back, he had wished that he had spent more time with her, instead of always thinking about work. He wished he had kissed her more, held her more and told her he loved her more. When he found her again, he would spend every moment with her as if it were his last.

She couldn’t have just disappeared, and why did everyone but him forget about her? Would he ever see her again? Did someone take her? He asked himself these questions over and over. All the pictures he had of her, the wedding videos, her clothes, all disappeared when she did.

He sipped his coffee again and looked dimly out the window. A hummingbird hovered around the window, sipping some red liquid out of the bird feeder. He watched the bird fly from one side of the feeder to the other. Soon the bird had its fill and flew off over the trees. Katie loved to watch the hummingbirds, he thought to himself. He pictured her looking out the window smiling excitedly at the hummingbirds and calling him over to see it, too. He would never come over, he always said he was busy working. I should have made more time for her.

He finally decided that it would be up to him to save his beloved wife. He would try to follow the last steps she took the day she disappeared. He put his empty cup in the sink and began to write down the things she usually did during the course of her day.

He knew that she packed her backpack in the early morning and always walked to work. If she did make it to work that day, she would eat lunch on the playground. He knew he would have to wait until dark to look for clues at her work, when the school would be closed. When the sun went down, he would be ready.

The hours seemed to drag on forever, until the sun fell slowly over the horizon. James left his house and walked down the hill. He took the same route that Katie walked everyday on her way to work. He looked closely for anything of hers she may have dropped on the way. There was a slight chill in the air as he walked under the streetlights, looking closely to the ground. He held his arms closer to himself in hopes of keeping warm.

When he arrived at the school, he slowly opened the gate and then closed it just as cautiously, behind him. He didn't want to draw any attention to himself, since he was walking onto private property. The dark playground was slightly lit by the pale glow of the moon. He knelt down on the ground, and brushed his hands over the cool grass, desperately trying to find something of Katie's. He did this for an hour with no luck. He slammed his fists to the ground.

"Why? Why is this happening?" He yelled, now not caring who heard him. He sat on the grass with his head in his lap. He began to feel like this was a lost cause. None of his friends or family believed him about Katie. If he went to the police, they would just try to put him in a mental institution. He sighed again as a small tear rolled down his cheek and into his lap. He wiped off his wet cheek and looked over at the bushes. Lights started to form in a particular part of the bushes. Suddenly he heard a voice. "James..." The voice whispered.

James jumped up. Now I really have lost it, he thought.

"James...please come to the bushes." The voice said in a haunting, almost eerie way.

"What? Am I going crazy? Did someone call my name?" James asked aloud.

“Yes, James. Come into the bushes. Follow the light, Katie needs your help.” The haunting voice said.

“Katie! You know where she is? Take me to her!” James yelled, desperately.

“Come to the light, James. Follow the light.” James did as the voice said and crawled into the bushes. Lights twinkled all around him as if he had climbed into a Christmas tree. Suddenly, a bright light flashed and James covered his eyes with his arm. When he removed his arm, he looked around to see the bushes were gone. He stood in a large field of grass with huge flowers. It was hard to see, since the street lights were gone, and the moon seemed different than what it was, only moments ago. He turned back to look at the playground, but it was gone.

“Hello? Who are you? Where’s Katie?” James yelled into the night. He heard an animal howl in the distance. Suddenly, a voice from behind made him fall over.

“Welcome to Atheness, James.”

James looked up to see a beautiful woman standing in the moon light. He sat puzzled, to see that she had wings like a butterfly.

“We have been watching you for a long time. You weren’t supposed to remember Katie. We don’t understand love as much as we thought. Your undying love for Katie is so strong, that even though the world changed while you slept, you didn’t. We soon realized that your determination to find her couldn’t be stopped. You would die trying to find her, wouldn’t you?” The woman said.

“Yes, I would. Where is she? I must go to her, is she near?” James asked the woman. “Who are you, anyway?”

“I am Adrianna, the Queen of the Butterfly Fairies. Katie is on a mission to save our world. I am sorry to take her away from you. She is not alone on her journey, but I’m afraid she may not finish her first mission in time. She has many items to find, but she is

running out of time. I need your help, as well.” Queen Adrianna said, as she helped James up.

“What kind of creatures kidnap an innocent girl, and forces her to go on a mission, for creatures that don’t even live in the same world as she does? Don’t you have people to fight your own battles? I assume I’m not on my own planet, since you’re a fairy. Or I really did lose it.” James said, becoming very angry.

“James, you are on earth, just a different realm. Katie wasn’t kidnapped; she willingly went into the bushes, as you did. She also willingly agreed to go on this mission. She is on her way to visit the mermaids, if you would like to find her.”

“Yes, I would. I’m going to find her and take her home. If I know my wife, she is going to want to go home as soon as she sees me. So, I’m not going to help you on your little crusade. Just point me in the right direction and I’ll be on my way.”

“Very well, James. I understand, but I know you will change your mind, once you find her. If you would like, you can stay in our castle for the night. It is not safe making a journey like this one at night. Will you stay for one night? I can offer a warm bed and food.” Adrianna asked, very politely.

“I must find Katie.” James said with determination in his voice.

“It will be no use tonight. She may already be under the sea, by now. She will be safe in the mermaid village. You need not worry about her tonight. Come, stay with us just for the night.”

“What do you mean, she is under the sea? How is that safe?” James yelled at the fairy.

“James, you must understand this world is very different from yours. You must believe me when I say she is safe. I have my most trusted advisor with her to protect her. Now please, come and rest for the night.” Queen Adrianna asked, holding out her hand to James.

“How can I trust someone that’s not even human? Just show me which direction Katie is and I will be leaving.” James said, standing up.

“I can’t let you do that, James, not yet. You don’t know what is out there in the night. Katie is safe. You will see her again. Now I’m asking you again, follow me to the castle.” Adrianna said, as calmly as she could.

James sighed in defeat. “Very well, but once the sun comes up, I’m going to find Katie.”

When James was set up for the night, he was surprised to find that he fell right to sleep in the cotton bed. Maybe it was a fairy trick, or the fact that he knew that Katie might just be safe after all. He didn’t believe that she was really under the sea. How would that be possible? Then he remembered where he was, and realized that maybe anything can be possible in this strange land.

Chapter Nine

(Atheness)

The journey to the sea was a lot further than Katie had thought. The sun had already begun to set over the mountain they had left behind them. ‘Had we been in the cave all day?’ Katie thought to herself. It really didn’t feel like that long. They were running out of time very fast. She grew tired and laid her head on Simona’s neck as they flew towards the sea. Katie soon fell fast asleep.

Dreams soon came flowing to her, as she slept. She was back at home again, sitting at the dining room table while James began

cooking her breakfast. The smell of eggs filled the room. He looked over at her and smiled a crooked smile.

“You know I love you, don’t you?” He asked her.

“I know you do,” She replied, almost puzzled at the question.

“Just never forget that I do. I love you, Katie, I love you.” James said, suddenly disappearing.

“James! Don’t leave me, I can’t do this alone! I need you!” Katie yelled out to him. She was now standing on the edge of a cliff, looking down at the thick fog below.

“You’ll never save Atheness. You’re just one woman. It’s a hopeless task; you might as well just give up now.” A voice said behind her. Katie turned around to see a pixie with a green dress and crimson hair standing before her. Her smile made Katie shiver. She looked so familiar to Katie. It was like she had seen her before in a forgotten dream. Who was this pixie standing before her? Then the pixie reached out her hand to Katie and pushed her off the edge of the cliff.

Katie couldn’t get out a scream, not a sound. Was this really a dream? She asked herself; it felt so real. Tears flowed off her face and back up into the sky. So this is it, this is how I’m going to die; in a land I don’t even belong to.

Something caught her, she felt it under her, but she still felt like she was falling. “Katie! Katie, you need to wake up! Snap out of it!” Katie’s eyes flew open.

“What...what happened?” Katie asked, a little disoriented.

“You fell off of Simona’s back. Varek saved you, but you were in such a deep sleep, we thought you would never wake up.” Chait said, curling up next to Katie.

She looked around; they were still up in the air and now she was on Varek's back. The soft whoosh of his wings could be heard as he flapped them. She became overwhelmed by the dream she had, about James and what the pixie had said to her. She began to cry, once more. She couldn't help it or stop it. Warm tears began to roll down her cheeks and disappeared in the fabric of her cape. Chait rubbed his head against her arm. "It's going to be fine Katie, you have me, remember."

"I know, Chait, thank you for being here with me." Katie said, sniffing. She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and held on tightly to Prince Varek's neck, being careful not to fall off again.

"We're almost to the sea, keep hanging on and you'll be fine, my lady." Varek said, looking back at them, trying to flash a smile, though he never got the hang of showing emotions as a Unicus did.

Katie gave an uneasy laugh. "I promise I won't fall asleep again." Then she thought about the dream she had and shivered a little. Was it really a dream? It felt so real, and who was the pixie that had pushed her off the cliff? It was almost as if she met her before. She had thought about these questions and opened her mouth to ask the Prince; she then quickly shut it. It was better not to ask Varek about a stupid dream she had. He was a Prince after all; he wouldn't want to hear about a dream...would he? She looked up and saw the sea in the distance. Varek's speed increased until he was almost near the Sea of Evandor. He slowed down and landed on the sandy shore next to Princess Simona and Chadwick. Prince Varek stopped next to a large bush and Katie climbed down. Chait remained on his back.

"Alright, Katie, we're here. Remember, the city of Derya is beneath the sea. If accepted by the Mermaids, you will be offered some seaweed. Eating this seaweed will allow you to breathe and see beneath the water for 3 hours. You must return with a piece of the stone of Evandor in that time or you may drown."

"My friend Niela, you have met her before, will take you to Derya and you will meet the Queen. The King is away tending to some

business in a further part of the sea. The Queen knows where the stone is, and if she sees fit, she will take you there. You're going to be fine. I will return in a few hours. I'm going to rally the troops to prepare for war." Katie walked up to Prince Varek and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"Be careful, Varek. I won't fail you. I know I can do it this time." She walked around to his side, to pet Chait on the head. "Do whatever they ask, Chait. Don't worry about me; Chadwick is going to be with me. I'll see you in a few hours." Chait nodded and did a few circles on Varek's back, until he found a comfortable spot and lay down.

Katie moved next to Princess Simona. "Please try to be back when I return; we do only have five days left with four tasks to do."

"Well, look who is finally taking charge. You are growing in such a short time. There is hope for you, yet." Princess Simona smiled and then joined her brother. They both bowed and ran off towards the forest.

"Well, we better get to it Katie." Chadwick said, taking her hand and walking to the water's edge.

Suddenly, Niela appeared out of the water from nowhere and looked up at Katie and Chadwick. "You don't have to say a word, Katie; I know why you're here. You need the Stone of Evandor to free Prince Varek and Princess Simona from their beastly bodies."

"That is exactly why I'm here. How did you know?"

"We're Mermaids, we know everything. Besides, I did tell you that you would be back, didn't I?"

"Well, if you knew I needed it before, when I came by, then why didn't you give it to me in the first place?"

"The Stone of Evandor can't be placed just anywhere. Besides, you only need a piece of it and you have to do that yourself."

“Alright then, let’s get to it. Prince Varek said something about having to eat seaweed of some sort.”

“Yes, you both will need that. Wait right here and I’ll get it for you.” She disappeared beneath the water and returned only a few minutes later with two long stands of sea weed and handed them over.

“We have to eat the whole thing?” Katie asked, holding the slimy green plant.

“Oh, you humans are really finicky, aren’t you? I love this stuff. Varek protested the first time too, but now he loves it. If you want the stone, you will have to eat it all.”

Katie sighed and took a large bite of the slimy plant. A bitter and salty taste filled her mouth. She chewed and swallowed over and over until the plant was gone. She almost gagged on the last piece, but was able to hold it down. The air seemed to thicken around her and suddenly, she felt a strong desire to jump into the sea. It must be working, she thought.

“Katie, come on, we don’t have much time.” Chadwick called to her from the water below. He must have already jumped in when she was trying to eat the last piece, Katie thought to herself. She walked up to a rocky ledge and dove into the sea.

Up on the shore, a bush that Prince Varek had just stood by began to rustle. A small butterfly fairy flew out and then grew to the size of a human. She was once a highly sought after fairy, but was banished when she joined the pixies in the rebellion a hundred years ago. Her pale complexion turned almost pink against her pink dress and wings. Her blonde hair draped over her dress in messy strands, as if she didn't care for her looks. She glared down at the sea, watching Katie and Chadwick follow Niela deeper and deeper until they could no longer be seen beneath the sea.

“Stupid fools. They will surely fail for putting a human in charge.” She then turned back into her small form and flew off toward the Forest of Rugonden.

Chapter Ten

Prince Varek and Princess Simona ran as fast as they could from the sea. They then jumped into the sky with Chait holding on to Varek’s back. They first flew back to Amos so they could have the warriors prepare for war. They also asked them to send the best warriors to rally more troops in the area. Varek knew that not only the fairies but the centaurs, wood nymphs, and ogres were prepared to fight, as well. There were many more creatures and even rebel humans, hidden in the mountains ready for battle, and the butterfly fairies of Amos knew where to find them. Varek and Simona left Amos, with the hope and belief that the word would be spread for miles. War was here. Varek and Simona planned on meeting the

new troops in a few days. They would meet in the dead valley, once they were back to their true form.

They knew Katie would still be in Derya for several more hours. So they decided to take the long way back to pick Katie up. They had hopes of finding more allies to help fight.

“I hope Katie is doing all right. You would never find me anywhere near the sea. I hate water!” Chait said, stretching, and then beginning to groom himself, still sitting on Varek’s back.

“I’m sure she will be fine. Chadwick is with her and she has progressed very well, in such a short time.” Varek said, looking back at Chait. Chait nodded in agreement and then continued licking himself.

They continued on in silence for a while, walking in a new, unfamiliar area. They slowed their pace so they could be cautious of where they were. Chait’s ears perked up as did Varek’s and Simona’s. “Do you hear that? I think I hear someone singing. It’s beautiful.” Varek said, now trotting faster. He stopped at the edge of a cliff and looked over to the sea. “I hear something, but I don’t hear any singing. It sounds more like someone being ordered around.” Simona said, joining her brother and Chait at the edge of the cliff. She gasped, when she looked in the direction her brother was looking.

A small island sat in the middle of the cove they stood over. On the cove were women singing a song in such perfect harmony. The song was so entrancing, that all who listened stood and stared. They acted as if they were stranded on the island. Simona looked over at Varek in fear. He had a dreamy look in his eyes and they began to cloud over. “Varek, no, look at me! Varek, look at me!” Simona said, starting to panic. She knew who they were; the Sirens.

The Sirens were creatures that preyed on only males. The song they sang was so entrancing that any male (human or beast) hearing their sweet song, becomes hypnotized and falls under their spell. The sirens then would change into their true form, a half woman,

half bird beast. They took their new prey and kept them as slaves forever. If they ever became bored with them, the prey would then become dinner to the bird beasts.

It was too late, Varek opened his wings and flew down to the island below, and all that was heard was the faint screaming of his sister above. The wistful sound of the ladies below, singing a sweet song was all that Varek and Chait could hear. The song entranced Varek so much that he had to be with these women. He had to hear their song for as long as he could possibly listen to them. The war and all his problems began to go away as he neared the beautiful women. As he landed on the island, he realized he wasn't a Unicus anymore. He looked down at his hands. They were now his hands he once had, not hoofs. The women stopped singing and smiled at Varek, then looked down at Chait standing next to him.

"A cat? Well, I guess we can find some use for you." The woman said as she spread out her arms as far as she could. Her arms began to grow very long and then turned into the wings of a monstrous bird. She then picked up Varek and Chait in her large talons and flew off into a nearby cave that was away from the island. Simona helplessly watched in horror.

"I must get back to Katie. I'm going to need her help." Princess Simona said to herself, flying back to the sea to find Katie and Chadwick.

"I hope it's not too late." She said, flying furiously back to the cove.

Chapter Eleven

Katie was surprised that she wasn't gasping for air. How is it possible that eating some seaweed would give her the ability to breathe under water? The thought amazed her. She swam down deeper and tried to swim faster to keep up with Chadwick and Niela.

A school of brightly colored fish swam beside her, moving in a unit, as if they were a single being. Katie smiled and followed Niela deeper to the ocean floor. A few dolphins swam around Katie curiously, but swam off when Niela spoke words that calmed their curiosity. As they swam on, Katie admired the many different kinds of seaweed and coral. The coral was bright red with some yellow.

She noticed that the coral and seaweed were home to many strange creatures she had never seen before. She wished she could spend more time exploring this place, but knew she had a job to do. So reluctantly, she swam on, becoming less chilled the farther she went.

She was surprised that she could hear every sound as if she were on the surface. “Hurry Katie, please take hold of my hand, there is a current ahead that is very strong.” Chadwick said, holding out his hand to Katie. Katie reached out and grabbed his hand as they swam toward the current, following Niela as close as they could.

“Alright you two, get ready, here it comes!” Niela said, suddenly maneuvering into the current. Chadwick and Katie followed as fast as they could; the pressure of the water moved them forward at an incredible pace.

“Chadwick, don’t let go! I’m having a hard time hanging on!” Katie yelled as the current moved them forward. Niela stayed at a swift pace, flowing beautifully with the current. Katie and Chadwick felt like they were tumbling over and over, while trying desperately to stay in a straight line. Katie felt Chadwick’s hand slipping. He looked down at her in desperation. He tried to move his other hand down to grab onto hers, but it was too late. His hand slipped, leaving Katie behind him.

“Chadwick!” Katie yelled, watching him trying to swim against the current to get to her. She knew if she was going to save this world, she needed to be a little braver, and to do things on her own. She then calmed herself down, and swam as fast as she could. Since she was moving with the current, she caught up to Chadwick quicker than she expected to. She grabbed onto his arm and they continued to follow Niela.

Niela soon signaled them to jump out of the current and down to a tunnel. “Okay, on the count of three, we’re going to jump. Get ready; one, two, three, jump!” Chadwick said, never letting go of Katie’s arm. The force of leaving the current and moving into calm

water, made them go flying past the tunnel. They both looked at each other and laughed.

“That was actually fun.” Katie said still laughing. “Well, we better follow Niela; we are running out of time. Simona and Varek may be waiting for us.” Chadwick said, motioning to the tunnel. Katie became a little uneasy. The thought of going in a tunnel or even a cave underwater made her feel a little scared. What if the seaweed wore off and she ran out of air? She shook the thought off, thinking of how Simona and Varek were depending on her. She swam down to the tunnel and entered it. It was warmer in the tunnel; however, it seemed to get darker and darker the further in they went. “Niela, Chadwick? I can’t see anything, where are you?” Katie said, trying to feel for a wall to follow.

“Oh, I forgot, land dwellers can’t see in the dark. Here, try this.” Niela put a small fish in her hand. “Go ahead; pet its head, it will light up for you. You won’t need it for long though, we’re almost there.” Puzzled, Katie stroked the fish on the head and to her surprise, it lit up like a glow stick.

“Wow! That’s amazing,” Katie said, trying to hold the fish as gently as she could.

“Yes, yes, it’s wonderful, now follow me, we’re nearly there.” Niela said swimming a bit faster than she had been. Katie and Chadwick did their best to keep up. Soon they found the end of the tunnel. It was lit by many of the same fish that Katie held. She let the fish go and it joined the others that lined the tunnels’ end.

Katie stopped swimming and stared in amazement at the city below. All the buildings seemed to be lit by golden light. A grand palace stood in the middle of the city like a giant in the middle of a field.

“Welcome to Derya! Follow me; I’ll bring you to the Queen. She will show you where the Stone of Evandor is.” Katie nodded and began swimming again.

Katie found it interesting that the city wasn't that different from the one she had left. There wasn't a street to walk on, but there were stores and houses that surrounded the castle. The mermaids and mermen stopped what they were doing and watched the visitors pass, with amazement. "Niela, I haven't seen any children. Are they all in school right now?" Katie asked, now swimming next to her.

"We only have one child in all of Derya. Very few of us are able to reproduce and when we do, it is a great honor and responsibility. Just like the fairies, I am told. We were very lucky that the Queen was one of those that can have children. However, she hasn't had a child in a very long time. The newest child was born only a year ago. Since this was the first child in over fifty years, the mother and baby were welcome to live in the palace and get all the treatments that the royals get. Come; the Queen is just behind these doors."

Two large doors stood in front of them. They were lined in gold and the main part of the door was made of opal; it glistened from the city lights. The doors were opened by two guards that stood on either side of the door. They both wore nothing but a metal breastplate over their chests. They each held a long spear in their right hand and a shield in their left hand.

They entered a grand room with blue marble floors. At the end of the room sat the Queen. She sat in a large chair that was raised several feet from the ground. Behind her chair, a large window was covered with dark seaweed that acted as a curtain. Her long black hair flowed around her with bright blue streaks throughout it. Her tail was very unique among the mermaids Katie had seen, since she had been to Atheness. Her fin resembled that of a beautiful beta fish. She looked down at Katie and Chadwick with a stern face, and then she looked over at Niela.

"Why have you brought two land dwellers down to my kingdom? You know this is forbidden."

"I'm sorry, my Queen, but I didn't have much choice in the matter. Prince Varek and Princess Simona are in danger. They have been

turned into Unicus', and Queen Zendra is planning to take over all of Atheness. She has one of the keys." Niela said, bowing.

"I see, but that doesn't explain why you brought a human and one of Adrianna's men here."

"This is Katie. Queen Adrianna picked her from the world of men to defeat Queen Zendra. She needs a piece of the stone of Evandor to help restore Princess Simona and Prince Varek to their true form. Will you not help them?" Niela asked hopefully. The Queen pursed her lips and stared down at them. After several minutes, she began to speak again.

"I have the utmost respect for Queen Adrianna. I trust her judgment in people, no matter how odd it seems." She looked down at Katie. "I will show you the stone and once you get your piece, you must leave here, for you still have a long journey to endure."

"Yes, your Majesty and thank you." Katie said, taking an awkward bow. She felt she would never get used to doing normal things in the water. Her body wanted to float up to the surface. She had to tie a few rocks around her waist to keep herself from treading water and to stay in the same place.

"Fine, follow me. The stone lies just outside of my grand city." The Queen stood up and swam down to the three visitors. She glanced at Katie with quizzical eyes and then moved on past them. The three looked at each other and then began following the Queen. Everyone they passed on the street obediently stopped what they were doing and bowed to the Queen as she passed. She made no notice of them. Katie realized that even though she was rude, she was still highly respected amongst her people. If only her world were like that. Her people had freedom of choice; what they did and even what they can say. If only they showed their leader a little more respect. Even if her president had made a few bad choices in the past, that was no reason to constantly say horrible things about him all the time. If people did that to their Queen, who knows what would become of them; she didn't want to even ask.

Outside the city, sat a large black boulder that stood thirty feet tall. Many soldiers guarded the rock from all directions. They all bowed as the Queen neared. The Queen handed Katie a small hand pick and motioned her to the rock. "Take only what you need," the Queen warned.

Katie took out one of the vials the butterfly Queen had given her. She had it tied around her waist, since she no longer had pockets when she put on the dress, and she left her back pack on the surface. She took the pick and lightly tapped the rock. To her amazement just the right amount she needed fell off the rock and into the small bottle. Katie grinned at Chadwick. He smiled and bowed.

"Alright, you have what you came for, take great care of it. Niela will take you back to the surface. If your battle leads to the sea, we will be ready to help you. Be warned; Prince Varek is like a son to us. Take care that he doesn't get hurt. Good luck, Katie." The Queen said with almost a smile crossing her face. Katie bowed another awkward bow.

"I thank you, your Highness, for everything." Katie turned and followed Chadwick and Niela into the tunnel once again. This time, she made sure to grab Chadwick's hand so as to not lose him. "So, you think that Chait, Varek, and Simona faired okay, trying to find help, while we've been away?"

"Oh, I'm sure they are fine. Varek is one very determined man, and Simona is a very brave woman. But... Chait, I don't know. You know him a lot better than I do. But in Varek's care, I'm sure he will be fine."

"Yeah, you're right; I have just become quite fond of that cat and you, too. I know you have only come to protect me, but I do think of you as a friend, now. Not just my body guard. Am I out of place to say that?" Katie asked, holding the vial tightly in her hand, while undoing the rock belt around her waist. She let it fall to the cave floor with a loud clunk.

“No Katie, I think of you as a friend, too. You have a good heart and a sense of humor. Most people I have to guard are stuck up and bland. It is refreshing to find someone like you in this land. You know, Katie...” He stopped short when he and Katie both realized their air was running short. Niela saw this too and grabbed their hands, pushing them out of the cave with all her might and leading them to the surface.

Katie looked up to see that the surface wasn't much further, but her lungs felt like they were going to collapse. She knew she had to stay calm; however, it was hard to do under the circumstances. Just when she felt like she was going to pass out, her head came out of the water and she was able to breathe fresh air again. Relief consumed her. Katie felt utterly exhausted. She looked around and saw that the shore was a lot further than it had been when they left it.

“My lungs are a lot stronger than yours, Katie. I'll be able to make it back to shore. Can I carry you back?” Chadwick asked Katie, flying out of the water and shaking off some of the water from his hair. Katie realized as awkward as it would be, she was too tired to argue, so she nodded a yes. He picked her up and held her in his arms. They said their goodbyes to Niela, and flew back to the shore. Katie put her head on his chest and thought of James as she closed her eyes.

When they got to the shore, Chadwick put her down on the soft sand. He sat next to her to rest a while. Katie shivered and closed her arms tightly around herself. She was wet, but at least she got the second item. Chadwick walked back over to Katie and placed her backpack next to her. She placed the vial containing some of the stone into her bag with the rest. Suddenly, they heard a call for help. It became louder and louder and they saw a Unicus running up the beach.

“Katie, Chadwick, help! It's Varek and Chait; she took them, help me!” It was Princess Simona.

“What happened? Was it Queen Zendra? Where are they?” Katie said in a panic as Chadwick stood up ready for battle.

“No, it was a Siren. She took them. We don’t have much time, get on my back, we’ll think of a plan on the way.” Katie and Chadwick got on her back. Chadwick didn’t know how far away it was and he was too exhausted to fly any further. Princess Simona jumped into the sky and flew off into the clouds.

Chapter Twelve

James awoke to the sound of birds singing a happy tune. He stretched in his cotton bed, completely relaxed. He then realized where he was. He sat up and looked around for his clothes. He found his jeans and shoes but his tee shirt had been replaced with a long sleeved shirt and a brown vest. A vest, he thought. Why would they think I would ever wear a lame vest? Reluctantly, he put on the shirt, jeans, and shoes and held the vest in his hands. He then walked out the door and into the hallway, looking for a way out.

At the end of the hall, walked a tall fairy with long blond hair tied back into a pony tail. He stopped in front of James and courteously bowed his head quickly, as if to say hello. "James, I presume. Queen Adrianna has told me a little about you. Let me introduce myself; my name is Vermont. I am one of the warriors here in Amos, and as we prepare for battle, I was told to give you a few instructions on how to fight before you leave to find Katie." James opened his mouth, preparing to argue, and then shut it as Vermont continued. "There is no point in arguing. I can see you are fit and in shape. Have you used a sword before?" He asked curtly.

"No I haven't, and I don't see the point of..."

"Of learning how to defend yourself, I'm sure. So, if we let you leave without a few minutes of instruction, you feel you will be able to keep yourself alive if a Gryphon, a Pixie, a Siren, or any other beast attacks you?" Vermont asked, getting rather annoyed.

"Well, I..." James started.

"That's what I thought. Come with me; you are strong, this shouldn't take more than a few hours of your time." He walked passed James and feeling his pride sting, James followed him.

Once outside, James followed Vermont to the battle ground where he saw not only fairies, but many other creatures sparring with swords and sticks; some even were fighting with magic. Vermont handed him a large sword and asked him to take his stance. Puzzled, James backed up and held up the sword.

"Oh, young man you have a lot to learn in such a short time. Look at my stance; the way I am standing. This is how your legs and arms must be or an enemy can attack you from any position. Eventually, you will acquire a shield, so hold your left hand in a fist as if you already have one. This will get you in the habit of blocking. Now, come at me; don't be afraid to hurt me." James thrust his sword at Vermont, and with one swift smack, Vermont knocked it out of his hand. Vermont signaled him to pick it up and try again. This time, James came at him slower and was able to block some of Vermont's

moves. After an hour of this, James wasn't so awkward at sword play.

He was still a bit crude in his stance, and a little slow at his attack, but all in all, they felt he would be able to defend himself, if ever he got attacked.

Many of the fairies came around from the battle field to bid James a safe journey. Queen Adrianna handed him his vest and he put it on reluctantly, so as to not offend the fairy Queen. Vermont gave him a thick leather belt with a sheath to hold his sword. He tied the belt around his waist, thinking that having a sword at his side was going to take time getting used to. They gave him a small leather bag full of water and food for his journey. He put the bag over his shoulder as he turned and walked into the lush forest.

He looked back over his shoulder, to give one last goodbye to the fairies, but they were already gone. The air felt fresh and clean, as a soft breeze brushed past his face. He never cared that much for nature, not like his wife did. He was more into modern technology and the improvements of making life easier, instead of living off the land. He figured that Katie would have enjoyed walking through this forest a lot more than he did. Then he realized that Katie might have already been through this same forest. If he found someone, or rather something, that may have seen her, and then they could lead him in the right direction. The sooner he found her, the sooner they could leave this place and get back to civilization.

He decided his best chance of getting out of the forest was to continue going straight. However, he didn't know how big the forest really was. He could be walking for hours or even days at this rate. He then saw a small clearing up ahead and thought it would be best to stop and clear his head. When he entered the clearing, he realized he wasn't the only one who used the clearing to rest. A small old man sat crouched under a tree. His head bowed down as if he were sleeping. On his head, sat a small red cap that almost resembled a cap one would wear in the snow. Wisps of grey hair escaped from under his hat. He looked very thin, almost skeletal, in his arms and legs. Though he was sound asleep, he still clung to a

walking stick as if his life depended on it. James knew he had to wake him to ask of Katie, but he didn't want to startle him, if he could help it.

He gradually walked up to the sleeping man and respectfully, cleared his throat. The old man jumped up off the ground and did a flip over James, grabbing him from behind, knocking him off his feet and pinning him to the ground with his stick.

“Who do you think you are, young lad? Never awaken a resting elf, if you can help it, or I'll have to fix you! Who sent you, anyway? Was it that atrocious Queen Zendra? Come on lad, speak up, speak up.” The old man glared down at James, still pinning him with his stick.

“I just cleared my throat, you crazy old man! Besides, no one sent me. I have come this way looking for my wife, Katie. I don't even know who this Queen Zendra is. Please, I need to find her, have you seen her?” James said, rather annoyed and irritated by this old man's rudeness. The old man looked up at the sky, as if thinking back. James was surprised to see that his ears were pointed, just like the fairies were.

“No, the name doesn't ring a bell. I don't recall seeing anyone out of the ordinary here, except for you, today. I...” He stopped short when two women clad in almost seductive armor, walked up to the old man, their skin the color of new spring grass. The old man released the stick that was pinning James, and let him stand up, as the women spoke softly to the old man. “Oh, I see,” said the old man to the women, as they nodded and walked away, disappearing into the thick woods. “I'm afraid I owe you an apology. My name is Okelle. I am one of the few remaining elves here in this part of the woods.”

“I do deserve an apology. But why now, what did they say? Have they seen Katie?” James asked him, dusting off his clothes.

“Well, young man, James, I presume, if you are Katie's husband. Those lovely ladies are the wood nymphs. They look after the forest

and for the last week, they were looking after Princess Simona.”
The old man said in a shaky voice.

“That is great for them, but what has that have to do with Katie?”
James asked impatiently.

“It has everything to do with Katie! We have all been waiting for her for such a long time. She is now traveling with Princess Simona and Prince Varek, though they are not what they appear to be. They have been turned into a Unicus’ by Queen Zendra. Katie is on a mission to restore their true form before the battle.”

James sighed. “Well, did they see her? Which way did she go?”

“You have no patience, do you, young lad?” Okelle said, poking James in the chest. “Do you not care for the fate of our realm? Is this not important to you?” He said, shaking his head.

“I care about Katie. I don’t live here and frankly, I’m still hoping this is a bad dream. I don’t think this is real; how could it be possible?”

“Not possible? Not possible?” He yelled. He pushed James back to the ground, harder than he had the first time.

“Ow! What was that for? What did I say?”

“That hurt, didn’t it? Is that real enough for you, lad?”

“Ok, I get your point. This is just a bit overwhelming for me right now. How can Katie be the ‘one’? What is she expected to do anyway, after she helps the Prince and Princess, that is?” James said, still lying on his back.

Okelle eased up on his walking stick and stepped back a little.

“Well, young lad, you must go to Katie and help her save our world. It is her destiny to defeat Queen Zendra. However, there is a force far worse than the Queen. But, that will come in time, when you will have to face her. We hope you will never have to face her, and

return safely to your realm, before she ever shows herself. Here take this.” He helped James up and handed him his walking stick.

“Why do I need this?” James asked, examining the smooth wooden stick.

“You don’t need it, but Katie does. She is on a mission, and this is the cane she will need to make the Cane of Power. The final item she will need to restore Simona and Varek to their true form. Take these small vials, as well. You will pass through the rain village, and you will collect a few drops of rain in one of the vials. After that, you will continue on and pass by the Valley of Ice. You will need to put some snow in the last vial. When this is completed, you will find Katie on your way. She will be in search of the same things; together, you will have completed the Cane of Power.”

James put the vials in his bag and looked up to thank the old man, but he was gone. “Okelle, Where are you? Which way do I go?” He heard laughter in the distance from the old man and the green women he had seen earlier.

“What does your heart tell you, James?” The voice said, suddenly.

“I don’t know what my heart tells me! Can’t you just show me?” James yelled into the forest. Suddenly, a light breeze filled the air and the leaves from the trees started moving past James in a whirling motion. James watched the leaves and then decided to follow them. The leaves moved on and on, moving around corners of large bushes and trees, then as fast as they came, the leaves stopped and fell to the ground.

“Wait, you can’t stop. Where do I go from here?” He picked up the leaves, crumpled them and threw them back down to the earth below. In frustration, he continued on through the forest until finally, he found the end of the lush wood.

He stepped out of the woods and made his way down the small hill it stood on. The cool air was a welcome change to the heat of the forest. James slowed his pace to take in the breeze that he felt on

his face. He examined the cane that the old elf had handed him. It stood about four feet tall and on the top, sat a twisted sphere made of the same wood that the stick was made of. He didn't know how this was going to save Katie, but he knew he had to do anything he could to see her again. He looked up at the sky as the sun was slowly setting over the horizon. He noticed that the sky was quite clear, except for a cluster of clouds that seemed to be gathering and even raining on just one spot. Walking closer, he noticed that it was raining on a village. This must be the same rain village that the elf had told him about. He searched in his bag and pulled out a vial to put some of the rain drops in, and took off running towards the village of rain.

Chapter Thirteen

Princess Simona's castle was said to be the most beautiful castle in all the land of Atheness. It had many rooms of many different sizes. Some would say that you can spend a whole year at the castle and never see all that the castle has to offer. Everything was running normally in the castle. All the servants went along with their normal routine; the kitchen began buzzing with servants getting ready for the evenings' dinner.

A small fire sizzled and spat in the kitchen's fire place, with a large black iron pot slowly getting red from the hot fire beneath it. A very thin young man with straggly hair and boney shoulders went over to the pot. With a wooden spoon, he stirred the thick contents that began bubbling inside the pot. He took the spoon and lifted a heaping spoonful of the soup and brought it up to his mouth.

“William!” A large lady yelled behind the young man, making him drop the spoon onto the hard stone floor with a loud thunk. William looked longingly at the spoon and the soup that was now splattered on the floor.

“Clean your mess up! You know we are not allowed to eat any of the food until the Princess has eaten it first. She hasn't been the same since she has returned from her riding lesson.” She handed William a dish towel and walked back to the other ladies that were starting dishes. They gathered around the dishes like a bunch of hens in a coop, talking about the latest news of the royal family. She gave William another warning glance as she went back to her conversation with the other large ladies.

“I think Simona is so much better, now,” started a lady with gray hair, tied back in a sloppy bun with a small bonnet covering most of it. “Think about it; before she was quiet, and hardly left her room. Now, she is giving orders like a Queen should, and all she talks about is her coronation next weekend. She is very excited to be Queen.” She took a plate and began to dry it with a dish rag.

“I don't know,” said the first lady. “I have known Simona and Varek all of their lives. Simona wouldn't just forget about her parents like that. She loved them very much. What happened to Varek? He never came back, and Simona doesn't seem to care. Also, did anyone notice her eyes? They are green.”

“What's wrong with her eyes being green? Green is a lovely color.”

“That's just the problem; Simona has had blue eyes since the day she was born. I used to call her sea child, since her eyes were the color of the sea. I don't think this is the Simona we know.”

“What are you saying that there is an imposter in the palace?” Another woman in the group asked.

“Oh, you worry too much. How could she be anyone but our Princess? In one week, she will be Queen, and all will be well again in the kingdom. How about you go rest Rolanda, and relax, it is going to be fine. You have far too much on your plate these days. I know it has been hard since the King and Queen’s deaths. You were very close to them. Practically family, you were. Go to your quarters and rest; we have it from here.”

Rolanda nodded thoughtfully and began walk out of the room. As she passed William, she handed him a piece of dry bread. He gladly took it from her and nodded his thanks and he slipped it into his large pocket. She smiled sweetly and left the kitchen.

As she walked back to her quarters, she began to put some of the pieces together. When Simona returned from her riding lesson, her eyes were different. She brought back with her, several servants’ she had never seen before; servants’ who seemed cold of heart. Varek had still not returned and this Princess did not care if she ever saw him again. She was suddenly excited about being Queen. The Simona she knew was still in mourning for her beloved parents. She knew this was very wrong and she was going to find out before an imposter was put on the throne. She entered her room and began writing down the facts before it was too late. Someone had to know what was going on.

Chapter Fourteen

James approached the large wooden fence that surrounded the small town of Rain. The fence stood over thirty feet high with only one large wooden door in the front. On top of the town, stood a giant umbrella that completely covered the village beneath; protecting it from the never-ending rain. He was anxious to get in, for he was now starting to get very wet from the falling rain. He knocked on the large door with loud pounding. Three feet from the ground, a small door opened and a little man poked his head out.

“Yes, is someone there?” He said, looking up at James. “Oh.” He said, and then closed the door quickly. There was a clattering sound and a small thunk against the door, and then at almost James’ eye level, another small door opened and the same man poked his head out, again. “Can I help you, young man? What brings you to our town of Rain?”

“I have come to collect a few of your raindrops to help my wife. If you don’t mind, I will take some and then be on my way.”

“Katie, I assume? Yes, yes, come in and I will show you just what part you can get the rain drops from. Follow me.” James did as he was asked, and entered the town of Rain, once the large door opened.

“Has Katie’s story traveled this far, and is it so great that you know of it, too?” James asked, following the small man into the brick streets of the town.

“Oh yes, we all know of your dear Katie. We were told she was going to come here to collect the rain, but she has only gotten two of the six items.” He paused and looked over at James before he continued. “Oh, I see you have the cane. She will be finished in no time with your help.”

“As long as I get to see her again, I will do whatever I need to.” He felt like he was in the city of OZ, with the bustling of little people in the city. Some stopped what they were doing to watch James, who was following the gatekeeper. They walked past some small homes that almost resembled mushrooms. The windows were lit by small lanterns that hung on the window ledge. They walked down a narrow alleyway where James had to walk sideways to follow the small man. They came to the end of one alleyway and stopped in front of a brick wall. The small man peeled back the wall, which to James’ surprise wasn’t a wall at all, but a sheet that only appeared to be a brick wall. Behind the sheet was a work shop that was bustling with small men and some women, as well. They were taking the rain water and pumping it into different rooms. All the rooms were labeled differently, like ‘for the home’ and ‘for the heart’.

“What is this place” James couldn’t help asking the gate-keeper, who James found out, had quite a lot of jobs in the city of rain.

“This is how we keep the rain going for all these years.” He said, walking into the workshop.

“You mean you want it to keep raining like this? Why?” James asked, watching some of the rain water slide down a whirly tube and into a room called ‘love’.

“James, this isn’t just any rain water. Well, some of it is that is the part that falls outside the walls; it is just pure rain. Each drop is unique and has a different purpose. That’s what we do here; these machines sort the water into different parts and move them into the appropriate rooms. Almost like remedies, in a way. Some are just fresh drinking water and are moved to the houses for drinking and bathing. Some are to help you get well or just feel happy. People come from all parts of Atheness to buy our rain water. The King used to come all the time before he died; his children never visit us anymore, since they passed, though I don’t think they would, figuring the state they are in. That’s why you are here, I assume. Now, hand me that vial and we’ll go to the secret room.” He said, gesturing to the vial in James’ hand. James handed it over and followed the gatekeeper into a room at the far corner of the workshop. It was covered in words that said ‘keep out’, ‘secret work’, and ‘no admittance’. The man slid a clear card into the slot by the door and it opened. James followed him in until an alarm went off and lights started flashing around him. The little man raised his arms and said he was with him, and all was quiet again. A large clear tube ran into the room and emptied into a black cylinder container that was as big as a small house. The little man walked up to the cylinder and turned on a small nozzle on the side and poured the contents into the vial James had handed him. The clear liquid seemed to swirl and glisten in the vial. He handed it back to James, and looked up at him with stern eyes.

“Take care of this, lad; this is the most important ingredient your Katie will need to return the royal family to their bodies, again. This is the healing rain. There is none in all of Atheness. It shows your

true self, once you use it. Now, all you need is snow and lava, is that right?”

“Um, yeah, I think that is what the fairy lady told me.” James said, putting the vial in his side pack and then shifting the cane in his hand.

“Adrianna is her name. I will show you the way to the ice castle. Any snow on the top of the mountain is fine to use. Just be aware that no one is around near the castle, so get the snow and get out before you are caught. I believe that the lava is something that Katie will get, or you will have to help her get it. I will take you back to the front gate, for you must leave us now. Follow the trail out front and it will lead you to the castle of ice. Be careful, James.” With that, the small man snapped his finger and James was alone at the front gate again. He realized he had a thick jacket on, made of soft cow hide with a wool lining.

“That was easy.” He said, checking to make sure he still had the vial of rain water and the cane. He looked over and saw a dirt path that wound around and slowly snaked up the mountain. James took in a deep breath, and ran as fast as he could down the path. He knew he had no time to lose. Trees, rocks, bushes all seemed a blur as he ran on by. The only thing that mattered was the task at hand; get the snow and then he could be with Katie once more and be lying in their bed, in their own room, as if none of this had ever happened.

Katie was the goal, the only thing that mattered; he still didn't care for this world. It was beautiful, but without Katie to share it with, none of it mattered. He grew tired but never stopped or slowed down; he kept treading on. The air around him grew cold and a chilly wind whipped across him, freezing him inside and out. He slowed his pace because of the strong push from the wind, but he never stopped. He moved on up the mountain, holding the jacket closer to his body. He used the cane as a hiking stick up the mountain. The cruel wind kept beating against him, threatening to push him down the cliffs. His fingers and ears felt cold and started turning red from the harsh cold in the air. Snow started to fall all around him and he smiled for he knew he was close to the top. He

slowly walked for another half an hour when he finally made it to the top.

A large castle stood on the top of the mountain. It was carved completely out of ice, though he couldn't see the inside, for the castle had been frosted over from the new snowfall. Guards that looked like they had the head of a boar, paced back and forth in front of the castle's large door. Other strange looking guards paced in the court yard, never once noticing James.

James scooped up some snow into his last vial and placed the lid on. The snow sparkled and shone inside the vial and James watched in amazement.

"Hey you, you have no right to be here!" One of the boar guards snorted, running up to James, with his spear extended. James stood up and ran in the other direction as fast as he could. He looked back and noticed that a few more boar guards had joined the first. James turned, jumped off the snow-covered path and into a small hole that was hidden by bushes. He lay perfectly still and the boar guards ran right past him. He gave out a heavy sigh and stood up.

"Now, where am I?" He asked himself. Suddenly, the trees rustled and moved and James stood in front of a large cave. He smiled and walked inside. The trees rustled again and a small pile of branches and twigs sat in front of the cave. "Thanks," James said to the trees. He opened his pack and took out a small lighter he had, from before he left in search of Katie. The branches instantly lit on fire and James began warming his hands. The fire spit and crackled under his hands. The sound was quite comforting. He looked up at the sky and it was now clear with beautiful shining stars. He didn't know, but at that moment, only a few miles away, Katie sat and looked up at the same sky, thinking of James.

Katie curled up next to Simona for warmth in the cool night air. Simona was already asleep though Katie knew by how she stirred, her dreams weren't peaceful. She looked up at the sky and thought of James. Thinking how nice it would be to be back in his arms again. To kiss his warm soft lips and have everything as it was,

again. She hadn't eaten much since the day she arrived. She had only been there a week, but tonight, she felt a little ill. Chadwick was curled up next to a tree and shivered in his sleep. Katie stood up, feeling a little dizzy and walked over to him. She stood over him for a moment and found his cape next to her pack. She picked it up and placed it over him; he stopped shivering. Men always think they are so tough, she thought to herself. Nausea took the best of her; she ran a little further and vomited behind a bush. She walked down to the river and rinsed her mouth out. This can't be possible, can it? If I didn't really exist in my world, how could I be pregnant in this one? Wouldn't my child disappear, as well? Katie asked herself.

"Only if the father was still in the world of man, and he didn't believe you existed, as well." Katie turned around and saw Queen Adrianna standing before her. Katie bowed. "How did you know? And how is this possible; James is still in the world of man, remembering me or not."

"Oh no, Katie, he came looking for you, so I let him in. He has already found two of your items. All you need to do is get the lava from the Valley of Fire. You will see him soon enough. Your babies will be safe enough for now."

"Wait, slow down... babies? You mean two, and James is here?" Katie felt nauseous again, after hearing that news.

Queen Adrianna smiled a sweet smile down at Katie. "Yes Katie, two babies; a girl and a boy. Also, James is here. He has already gone through a lot to see you again. He has stopped at nothing to see you, and bring you home. Please don't give into him, not yet, anyway, we need you here."

"How can you know that I'm having two, and that they are both a girl and a boy?" Katie asked, again trying to hold back the nauseated feeling she was having.

"I know. I haven't been around for hundreds of years for nothing, you know. They have a great life ahead of them and so do you and James. You must wake Chadwick and Simona now, and you need to

get the last item tonight, and then save Varek and Chait. Now go, Katie, there isn't much time. GO!" With that, Adrianna was gone. Katie touched her stomach, smiled and then walked over to wake up her companions. They woke before she got any closer.

"Did you hear that?" Simona asked standing up. The sound of a small bell was ringing softly.

"What is that?" Katie asked.

"It's the Centaurs. I have heard of this, but I have never before witnessed it. The midnight parade; I hear they do it on the eve of the first of every month, which is tonight. Follow me and be quiet." Chadwick said, as he crouched behind a bush. Simona joined him, followed by Katie, trying to hold back her nausea.

The forest was lit by glowing lights and flowers. Several bells played the same rhythmic tune. One by one, pairs of centaurs' men and women began parading in lines through the forest. They sang to the tune of the bells, dancing as they went. They decorated their tails with flowers and some had crowns of flowers on their head. It was an amazing sight.

"I have been told that the centaurs are so vain that they think they are the loveliest creatures in all of Atheness. That is why they have this parade, to celebrate their beauty. They don't care about the wellbeing of others, and will never fight in a battle, for they might get dirty." Chadwick said, watching the parade.

"We need to go. Queen Adrianna said that all I have left to do is get the lava from the valley of fire. Then, we can get Varek and Chait." Katie said suddenly.

"What about the other three items?" Simona asked, turning from the parade.

"It's been taken care of. Come, we must hurry before dawn hits to save them." Katie said, now standing up and putting her backpack on. Simona nodded and waited for Katie to get on her back. Once

settled, she stretched out her long wings and jumped into the sky, followed by Chadwick.

Chapter Fifteen

James held his jacket closed as he walked down the far side of the mountain. It was still snowing lightly and the newly fallen snow was being crunched under his feet. He didn't know the way to the sea but he knew he had to get off the mountain before he froze or was caught by one of the boar guards.

He sneezed and sniffled a little from the cold air, but smiled as he saw the bottom of the mountain, with welcoming green grass. It was still a good hour's walk, but hope was at the bottom and that kept him going. He heard a muffled sound that grew clearer as it

got closer. He stopped and looked around, but he couldn't make out where it was coming from. He shrugged it off and continued down the mountain side.

The voices were very close now and sounded very familiar. Who could it be, he asked himself. He looked up as a white horse with a long horn flew just above the trees. There was a girl on the horse's back, but James couldn't make out who she was. Following them, was a man fairy with shimmering green wings. As they flew further away, he realized who the girl was on the horses' back; it was Katie!

"Katie! Katie, come back!" He desperately yelled. It was too late; he sadly watched as Katie, the horse, and the fairy, flew over the tree tops and to the other side of the mountain. James sighed.

"Now what am I supposed to do?" He yelled to no one in particular. But to his surprise, he got an answer from behind him.

"Go the way you were going, to the sea. You will find help there, and soon enough, Katie will join you, as well." The voice said, giggling a little. James turned around, expecting to see some sort of creature but saw no one. He looked around a little but realized after reviewing the creatures he had met since he arrived in Atheness, that he really wasn't surprised to find the tree he was standing next to, appeared to be smiling. He walked closer to the tree and smiled back.

"I suppose you are the one that gave me this advice." He said to the tree. The tree shifted a little and then suddenly, turned into a green woman. Her hair was as yellow as straw and on her arms and legs, she wore thick metal armor. Her small top and skirt was a deep teal. She smiled again at James and he noticed she held a long blade in each hand.

"Oh, I thought you were a tree."

"I am a tree, or a flower or the grass you walk on. I can be anything in nature I want to be. I am a Wood Nymph, or a Changeling, that some might call me. Katie is off to get the last item, the lava from

the castle of Dinesh, the Valley of Fire. Don't worry yourself; you will see her again, very soon. I would advise that you to continue to the sea. The Prince will need your help, too..." She paused for a few seconds as if thinking of something. "Oh, you will need these, when you go along. The Sirens are very dangerous and they only prey on the male race. That is why Prince Varek is in so much danger and Chait too." She said, handing James two small cotton balls.

"This is never ending, isn't it? I assume the cotton balls are for my ears, and who is Chait, I haven't heard that name yet?" James said, putting the cotton balls in his pack.

"Yes, you must not hear the Sirens sing. The results could be deadly, as it is for Prince Varek and Chait. Chait is Katie's cat. Well, more like her companion through this journey."

"Where did he come from? We never had a cat before, and why does he matter to be saved, anyway." James asked with annoyance.

The wood nymph laughed a little. "He isn't any ordinary cat, James. He can talk, speaks his mind that one does. Anyway, you must get going or you will miss your ship at sea. When you get to the town, go straight to the dock. You will find a ship preparing for a voyage. You must get on that ship, no matter what they say; find a way. This is the only advice I can give you. Good luck, James." She smiled and turned back into the same smiling tree he saw but a few minutes before.

"This place is crazy." James said to himself. He started thinking of a cat that talks, a flying horse, a male fairy, and a Prince that were all traveling with his wife. What an amazing place this was.

He finally made it down the mountain and continued on a dirt road. He stopped at a sign that said, 'Sea Side Village, 3 miles'. "That's not too far; I can make that in no time at all." He said aloud, as if he had company. With new hope ahead, he continued down the road, passing beautiful flower fields on either side of him. A small cart pulled by an old mare, pulled up beside him. The cart was filled

with many different fruits and vegetables. A young man drove the cart. He was dirty from a day's work, a beard started to shadow his unshaven face, and match his dark brown hair. He wore an oversized white shirt that laced in the front, and pair of brown trousers that were held up by suspenders. At least James thought they were brown, for the dirt that covered them made it hard to make out the original color.

“Going to town, are ya?” The man asked James suddenly.

“Yes, I am. If you don't mind, may I have a ride?”

“Not a problem at all. Are you from out of town?” He asked with what sounded to James, like an Irish lilt.

“Yeah, you can say that. I don't really belong anywhere around here.” James said, climbing up and sitting next to the young man.

“Well, we don't get many visitors, but we welcome them greatly. You must join me for a drink in the pub, once I drop them off at the market.” He said, gesturing to his fruits and vegetables in the back. Then he gave a command and the mare started forward again, pulling the cart behind him.

“I'm Jessup, by the way. What's your name?” He said, offering his hand.

James took it in his and gave a sturdy shake. “My name is James.”

“Well, it is nice to meet you, James. We'll be in the village in no time.”

Jessup talked all about the small town of Sea Side, about the people, the pub, his business, and his wife and small boy. James never once got in a word, so he just politely nodded when Jessup told him more of the town's history, of the pirates that would come and go. This greatly interested James, since he would have to get on a ship and wondered if it was a pirate ship he had to get on.

The Sea Side village seemed very busy this early morning. People hurried all around with their morning business. Jessup parked his cart by a small store that had a faded sign that read 'Freshest Food in all of Atheness'. Jessup took his mare around the back to one of the stables to rest and feed, while he did his business with the shop keeper. He offered James a place to stay which James politely refused, and asked where the ships ported, instead. Jessup looked at him skeptically, but then directed him the right way. James walked past people in the market, asking him to take a look at their goods for sale. He smiled but never stopped to look. He finally found the port and just as the wood nymph had said, a very large ship was preparing for a journey at sea. He saw men, and to his surprise a few women, get on the ship, carrying their bags for traveling. He figured if they let women on, then it would be no problem to have one more man join the crew. He looked up and saw that there was no pirate flag and felt relieved.

"Excuse me, sir. Who do I speak to about joining the crew?" He said to a very large man that was about to board the ship. The man stopped and looked down at James and laughed. Then he shook his head and continued on the ship.

"Miss, I would like to join the crew; who do I talk to? I must get on this ship!" James said to a young lady that was dressed almost like a pirate, with a sword at her side. She looked James up and down and came closer to him. She smiled and put her hand on his cheek.

"You're a cute young man, but we need no land lovers on our boat. I don't think you're man enough to join our crew!" She said, turning to walk away.

"Wait! I can do it, I am not a lover of land...I'm a lover of...of the sea. Right...the sea. Please, my lady, I need to get on this ship. I have traveled very far to get here and I'm not going to hear, no. So one more time! Let me on this ship!" James said, now yelling. She pulled her sword out of her hilt and ran toward James. He blocked it with the Cane.

“Alright then, you will have to see Captain Lenard. He will be on deck, but this doesn’t mean you will be joining us.” She said, giving him a small smile as she pushed back her dark hair and got on board. James followed her to the main deck, where he saw a large man sleeping in a wooden chair. His hat nearly covered his face. James could see that he had a thick beard and a large belly that was covered by a large blue coat. Gold buttons lined the inside of the coat, in a stunning design from top to bottom, all with gold trim. This must be the captain, thought James.

“Captain, this man says he wants to see you.” The young woman said and then walked away.

“What is your business, young man?” Said the Captain as he scratched his stomach and then sat up adjusting his hat in place.

“I’ve come to join your crew.” James said standing up strait and tall.

“My crew, you say? And what qualities can a man like you bring to my crew?”

“Any qualities you want, Captain. I am quick to learn new skills and I have some skills with the sword. Please Captain, give me a chance. You will not regret it.”

The Captain looked him over and thought for a second.

“All right, I’ll give you a chance. You know, this won’t be easy and you will have to work really hard. One slip up and you will be thrown overboard. We don’t want anyone to stop our task at hand! Welcome aboard!”

“Thank you, Captain you won’t regret this.”

“See that I don’t.” The Captain slapped him on the back and walked into nearby room.

Within an hour, the ship was ready to go. The crew set the main sail and fore sail. One of the crew men yelled out and the ship started to

move out to sea. James looked out over the quarterdeck and out to the water below.

“Hey if you are going to join us, you’re going to work! Now grab a mop and help the cabin boys swab the poop deck!” The same large man that had laughed at James earlier that day said, as he threw a mop at him. James reluctantly took it and walked across the ship to the poop deck.

Katie stood very still, as she thought of the best way to put the very hot lava into the tube without hurting herself. She stood on a small rock Island with lava and fire all around her. Chadwick stood by her side with Simona not far behind him. She had to do this herself, without anyone’s help. She placed the hood of her cloak around her, after she remembered what Queen Adrianna said about it protecting her from any element. She looked around and found a stick on the ground; she picked it up and then knelt down at the edge of her small island, dipping the stick into the lava. It caught fire instantly. She quickly and carefully let the lava drip off into the tube before the entire stick was consumed with fire. When she was satisfied that she had gotten enough lava, she dropped the stick into the lava and watched it sink and disappear. She carefully closed the lid of the tube, and was a little surprised that the outside of the tube felt cool. She placed the tube in her backpack with the others and wiped the sweat from her forehead. She then smiled at Chadwick and Simona, as she walked back towards them.

“We did it; we finished the tasks and have gotten all the items.” Katie said, climbing on Simona’s back.

“Our task now is rescuing Varek and Chait. We must hurry now, there isn’t much time. We’re going to need a plan.” Katie said, as Simona stretched out her wings and jumped up into the air, with Chadwick following them.

“Alright, we need a distraction of some sort. The Sirens can fly too, so we need to keep them out of the sky long enough to get Varek and Chait and get out of there.” Katie said, feeling a little nervous and bit heroic at the same time. Was she really going to go against a

mythical beast like in the old movies and books? Didn't most of them die trying something so foolish? She loved Chait and was becoming very fond of Varek, even though he was very arrogant. He was the Prince and someday, King of Atheness, she needed to save him to save their whole world. She was proud of the fact that she felt more confident and that she could pull this off and be a hero; there aren't many women hero's in history. She would never go down in history, because no one knew of this world and that was ok with her. She didn't need the honor of people to know she was great, she was feeling that on her own.

They had to fly back over the ice mountain, unseen by the ice palace guards. When they passed the first time, they tried to hit her and Simona with their bows and arrows. Luckily, Simona was really getting the hang of her flying and was able to dodge all the arrows. This time, Simona stayed with the trees to blend in so no one would be able to see them. Chadwick then put a small spell over them that kept them unseen for a few minutes which was enough time to get past the boar guards. As soon as they were safely past the castle, they all relaxed and started to work on a plan to get Varek and Chait back.

James found it very difficult to mop the poop deck when the ship kept swaying back and forth. When he mopped one area, the ship would rock to the left, and sea water would splash onto the deck and he would have to start all over again. If he wasn't being watched so carefully by the crew, he would have stopped hours ago.

He felt as if he was there as a joke to the rest of the crew. No one helped him as the Captain said they would. How was he going to find Katie in the middle of the sea, anyway? He looked out at the sea as the waves crashed against the ship, and this time, a wave of water landed right on top of him. Laughter could be heard on the deck as he took off his shirt and wrung it out.

"Oh, come over here, lad, we were just having a bit of fun with ye," the large man from earlier that morning, said to James. He took off his bandanna and exposed a bald, tattooed, head; his face was unshaven for at least two days now and a nice black beard was

forming. “I think you have done enough work for now. Let me show you to your quarters and get you dried off and put in proper attire. Ye stand out like a cat in a pack of dogs and we don’t need you to stand out on this mission.”

“What mission is that, may I ask?” James asked as he was led into the crew’s quarters.

“You can’t know that until we are sure you can be trusted. Who says you aren’t a spy for Queen Zendra or some other evil force.” The large man said throwing some clothes at James. James caught them and put on a shirt with long full sleeves and a V cut in the front that was able to be laced up with the leather string. Then he took off his wet jeans and put on the chalk-colored trousers. The man then handed him a pair of brown bucket topped boots and James took them, reluctantly. He put them on and was surprised at how well they fit and how comfortable they were. The man smiled and put a tri-cornered hat on top of James’ head. “There now, you’ll at least blend in, as long as you don’t talk when we’re in the company of the rest of the crew, and you’ll fit right in.”

James walked over to a small mirror and looked himself over. He felt like he was in a pirate costume. Despite it all, the clothes were quite comfortable with lots of room to move. James put his bag on a small bed that was in the middle of two others on the wall. He knew it was going to be hard to sleep on something so small. It made his back hurt just thinking about it. He shifted in his clothes, they were comfortable but they were so loose they were going to take some getting used to. He then put his belt back around his waist and attached his sword. He wasn’t going anywhere without this sword as long as he was in this world.

“Stand your ground men!” said a man from outside of the room. James and Aaron looked at each other and then they both ran out of the room and onto the deck to see what the commotion was all about.

The same flying horse that James saw Katie on earlier that day was hovering over the ship with Katie on its back. The same male fairy

hovered next to the horse, which James now could see was not just a flying horse, but a unicorn, as well. He couldn't help notice how beautiful Katie looked, with her hair blowing in the wind. She wore a flattering red dress with a brown cape, a sword at her side and arrows with a bow across her back. He shook himself to reality when he saw members of his new crew readying their bows. He ran in front of their aim.

"Wait! Hold your weapons!" James said in desperation. He waited so long to see his wife again; he wasn't going to see it end so soon.

"By what rights do you have us do this, boy? Do you not know the mission we are on and who we seek to destroy? Stand aside!" The Captain said, holding his sword ready.

"No, I don't know your mission! No one will tell me! Now, you don't understand; they aren't bad at all. The woman on the horse, she's my wife." James said, trying to take hold of the Captain's sword.

"Is that right? Stand down, men; this is James' wife. She better have an explanation for this inconvenience she has caused us. Let her land on the main deck." The Captain lowered his sword and the crew did the same, as Princess Simona landed on the main deck with Katie on her back and Chadwick next to them. Katie dismounted and ran to James, as he caught her in mid-flight and held her close, never wanting to let go. He looked deep into her emerald eyes; the eyes he had dreamed about.

"I thought I would never see you again." James said, putting his hands on either side of her face. She swooned, and smiled back at him.

"I knew I would see you again, I just didn't know how long that would be." Katie said, putting her arms around him again and squeezing him tight. "I'm so glad you're here," she whispered in his ear.

“Oh, how rude of me,” Katie said suddenly. “I would like you to meet my friends. James; this is Princess Simona and my friend and bodyguard, Chadwick.” She said as Simona and Chadwick bowed.

“How can this be the Princess? She is back at the castle, getting ready for her coronation,” the Captain spat.

“Queen Zendra, she did this to her and to Prince Varek. She now sits on their throne, and unless you help us, she will be crowned Queen of all Atheness in less than four days!” Chadwick said, stepping forward.

“Oh, James, you have the three items, don’t you? Queen Adrianna said you did.” Katie said, suddenly concerned. James just grinned at her.

“Great! Now if your men and women want to help us, we need to save the Prince and my friend, Chait, from the Sirens; they have them held captive under their spell.”

“The Sirens, I forgot! The wood nymph told me about them. She gave me cotton balls for my ears, though I don’t think they will do me much good.” James said, putting his arm around Katie’s waist.

“No, I think not. Simona, Chadwick and I have a plan, though. I hate to say it, but all the men need to stay in their quarters during this rescue. We may even have to lock you in there. The women on the crew may stay and help, and we will need your best archers, as well. The Sirens are very dangerous and prey only on men. The women will not be affected by their song.” Katie said, looking around at the disappointed men of the crew. James looked adoringly at his wife; he was so impressed by the leadership she had taken. She had never been so outgoing in the past. The crew discussed the matter for some time and the men, including the captain, reluctantly agreed to the plan at hand. The Captain and James both took cotton balls as an extra precaution; for they would be in the gun port, readying the weapons for the women and for themselves, if they had a chance from the small port hole to shoot from.

As they sailed near the cove, the men were locked in their cabins. The Captain and James went down to the gun port and began readying the guns with powder for the women, after they put cotton in their ears. James looked out the small port hole as he loaded the last gun to see a small island coming into view. The island of the Sirens, the first battle of this adventure he and Katie would share. He was ready.

Chapter Sixteen

The women of the crew, along with Katie, Simona, and Chadwick, stood ready as the ship slowly sailed into the cove. They all stood silently with weapons in their hands, ready to shoot and fight if needed. Chadwick put a spell on himself that would make him immune to the Siren's song. He could never master the spell that would make it work on humans. Of Course, he hadn't been around enough humans where such a spell would be useful. Katie stood

stone-faced, trying to hide the fear she felt inside. This was going to be her first battle that she had ever experienced.

A soft song was now growing over the sea. It sounded like a beautiful choir of women, singing in a cathedral. As they neared the small island in the cove, Katie could see the women who sang. They were indeed beautiful, with long flowing dresses that moved in the wind, along with their long blond hair. The women seemed to encourage the ship to come port on the island. The women of the ship knew better and were not as easily fooled as the men had been. The men heard the tune but not the words that the women heard. The woman heard: "Come to the island, you will be ours forever, come to the island and never leave again." They stopped the ship where it was and weighed anchor. Simona spotted Varek on the Island; he carried some heavy bricks on his back and brought them into a nearby cave. Chait followed him with a single brick strapped to his back. There were many men on the island; men from the sea village, soldiers, and even some from the pirate ship.

The women on the island called for the ship to come closer. One of the women on the ship yelled out to one of the pirates that were heading to the cave with an armload of bricks. The women of the island heard the call, and turned and looked back at the ship. They stopped their song and stood up, one by one. The women stretched out their arms to reveal large golden wings. They opened their mouths and instead of a sweet song emulating from them, a loud screech came out, instead. The screech was so loud that the women covered their ears in misery.

The Sirens flew off the island in the direction that the ship was anchored. "So, the women have come to save their little men, have they? Turn back now, or you will be destroyed!" The first Siren said, as she hastened her speed in the sky, followed by the others. They flew toward the ship with great haste.

"Ready your weapons ladies!" Katie yelled, as she grabbed an arrow from across her back and readied her bow. The first Siren flew down and picked up an older woman that had her back turned as she tried to pick up her gun. Within seconds, she was dropped back

on the main deck as the Siren was hit in her left wing by Katie's arrow. She shrieked and flew back into the cave. The other seven Sirens came at full force toward the ship. James and the Captain fired the cannon and hit two of them, just as they were about to land on the ship, knocking them into the sea.

"All right, reload your weapons, it's not over yet." One of the women said, holding three fresh guns she got from James and the Captain.

The remaining five Sirens circled the ship, which had made them a harder target, as they swooped up and down trying to damage the sails of the ship. Three women lined up next to Katie and they all shot their arrows, hitting two more of the Sirens, one in the head killing her and the other, in the side, making her squeal with pain. She glared at Katie and flew back to the safety of the cave as one more followed her.

Katie put her bow down and took out her sword. She stood ready, as the last two Sirens flew down to attack Katie at the same time. One was shot down by the fresh guns that had been brought up. The last Siren looked back at her dead companion and angrily flew toward Katie.

"You will pay for killing my sister!" She shrieked. Katie swung her sword in one quick slash, cutting her head off. "No, YOU will!" Katie said, as she grabbed a cloth to clean her sword. "Now, let's go get our boys back!" The women all cheered and brought back the anchor, so they could sail closer and anchor again as close to the island as possible. Most of the women got off to help the lost and now very confused men on the island, while the others stayed aboard and prepared to sail again, once everyone was aboard.

Katie and Simona walked cautiously into the cave, knowing there were still a few more Sirens in there ready to fight, even though they were injured. Chait ran passed them, using his sneakiness as a cat to escape the cave unnoticed. He smiled as he passed and ran across the beach and onto the safety of the boat. Smart cat, Katie thought to herself. They found Prince Varek unloading the last of

his bricks off his back and walking to the mouth of the cave to retrieve some more. Katie adapted her eyes to the dark cave and saw that these men were building a palace for the Sirens, and were probably going to be their servants forever, as well. Simona motioned for them to leave and get to the ship as they heard the screams of the Sirens coming from the back of the cave.

Varek continued collecting bricks. It didn't make much sense to Katie why he did this, because everyone else was free from the spell that was cast upon them.

"Varek, you can stop, they won't hurt you anymore, and you're free. Can't you see we're going to leave this place now?" Simona said, in the kindest way she could.

"Go without me. They need me to stay here and help them finish their home." He said walking past them with his load of bricks. Katie looked out at the ship and saw they were loading the last few people.

"We need to go now, Varek. We need you more than they do. You are a Prince, not a servant or a slave. Come, we must leave now, the war is upon us." Simona said, releasing the bricks from his back as they fell to the sandy floor with a loud thud.

"No, you mustn't do this! They said they would turn me back into a Unicus if I didn't listen. No one has needed me in a long time. Let me stay, I don't want to be a horse again!" Varek said, struggling to get the bricks back onto his back. Simona and Katie were shocked.

"Varek, look in the pool of water next to you," Simona said slowly. Varek sighed and looked down.

"See, you are still a Unicus; they lied to you. What you feel is only an illusion, it isn't real. Katie and her husband found all the items we needed. We will be human again soon, and then we will lead our warriors to victory! Please get on the ship." Simona said, as she turned to walk to the ship. Varek looked at his reflection in

disbelief. Katie walked up to him and put both hands on his face and looked into his deep blue eyes.

“I need you, Varek, and so do your people. Don’t give up on us so easily. If not for us, do it for your parents.” Varek smiled and turned with Katie to the ship. “Wait. There is one thing we need to do before we leave. I don’t want the Sirens to rein terror on anyone else. This ends now.” Varek said, as he grabbed a long stick with his mouth. He found Chadwick and quietly asked him something that Katie couldn’t hear. Chadwick nodded and also picked up a stick. Chadwick then said a few words in the fairy language and the ends of the sticks lit on fire. They went to the mouth of the cave and after covering the entrance with sticks and dry leaves, they set it on fire. Katie watched in amazement as the cave entrance became a wall of flames. Screams from the Sirens could be heard from the inside. Varek nodded and walked back to the boat. Once Katie, Chadwick and Varek were safely on the ship, they brought up the anchor and put the sails up. The ship turned away from the island with twenty new members of the crew. Some old members and some new ones joined the crew for the first time. Others on the ship only stayed and helped until they found their way home again. Until that time, every member vowed to fight along the side of Princess Simona and Prince Varek’s warriors when the time came.

Soon, they were far enough into sea where the Sirens cove and island could no longer be seen, save for the thick smoke that billowed into the sky. When it was safe, the men came out of their cabins and were joined by James and the Captain. They all greeted the new members of the crew with great joy. Some men took out a few of their instruments and started playing a merry tune while others began to dance and drink some of the ale that was brought out. Katie gladly took a mug of water and drank with gusto. She was very proud of the leadership she took forth this day and James told her the same. James took her hand and they danced with a few others of the crew. She smiled at James and then looked over to see Chait dancing around with a scruffy looking cat that must have belonged to the crew. She laughed at the sight of them.

The next few days went by quickly. The crew went on as they normally did, with some extra help. Chait and the other cat spent most of the day on the quarterdeck. James got to know Chadwick very well, and wished he could know Simona and Varek, but wasn't able to talk to them like Katie could. She told him all she knew about Simona and Varek and the adventure they shared and James told of his adventures, as well. Chadwick told them that once they got to the forest, the items they collected would activate with the Cane of Power and it would be ready to use on the Prince and Princess.

On the third day of sailing, the ship anchored back at the seaside village. Prince Varek, Princess Simona, Chadwick, Chait, Katie and now James, all got off and said their goodbyes to their new friends. Chadwick relayed a message from Prince Varek, that they would send word once they were needed for battle. The Captain bowed his thanks and waved goodbye. Some of the crew got off to see their families again and to get fresh supplies for the ship.

The nearest forest was a short distance from the village, so they all began to walk. Chait made himself comfortable in Katie's arms as Katie and James talked, they both were a little skeptical that the Cane of Power was even going to work at all. They discussed things like; did they get the right items from the right places? What would they do once we have the items together? They all began walking in silence until the path they walked on was then surrounded by a forest.

"Okay, bring out all the items and place them on the ground," Chadwick said to Katie and James. They took off their bags and took out the tubes they were given and James added the cane that the old elf had given him.

"Um, is something supposed to happen?" James asked Chadwick. Chadwick didn't respond; he just raised his hand over the items and said a few words in a language they didn't understand and suddenly the tubes opened and the contents started to swirl around each other in the air. The cane then rose in the air and the contents of the tubes swirled around it until they all collected inside the wooden

sphere on top of the cane. The contents hardened into a glowing sphere of light. Chadwick was satisfied and handed the completed Cane of Power to Katie. She took it and looked up at Chadwick, puzzled.

“I don’t know what to do next. How do I make them human again? Do I just point it at them or do I have to say something?” Katie asked, almost embarrassed that she didn’t know.

Chadwick smiled at her. “You know what to do. Yes, you have to point it at them and say something from the heart, but only you can do it. Whatever you say, it has to be instructions for the Cane of Power.” Katie thought for a moment... instructions to undo the spell. She closed her eyes and pointed the cane at Simona and Varek.

“A spell was done that wasn’t norm, so turn them back to their true form.”

Katie then opened her eyes to see a light shine through the Cane of Power and made its way around Simona and Varek and consumed them. Katie and the others had to cover their eyes for fear they might be blinded. When the light had finally faded, a woman with long golden hair and a blue riding dress stood before them. Standing next to her was a very good looking man with the same golden hair that came down to his shoulders. He stood tall and proud and wore clothes fit for royalty with an emblem of the necklace that Katie wore, sewn into his shirt.

“We’re back!” Simona said, as she ran to Varek and threw her arms around him. He held her tight and spun his sister around. They looked over at Katie and bowed.

“You’ve done it Katie, now let’s go back to Amos and prepare our people for battle!”

“How long will that take from where we are? You can’t fly anymore.” Katie pointed out.

“Have you forgotten the magic of the forests in Atheness?” Simona said, as she whistled. Two wood nymphs appeared, leading five white Pegasus’. Simona and Varek laughed out loud.

“This will be a weird experience for us.” Simona said, as she took the Pegasus from the wood nymph that led it.

They all mounted their own Pegasus and Chait jumped up with Katie and settled in her lap. Prince Varek took the lead and they all flew into the sky in the direction of Amos to prepare for the upcoming battle.

Chapter Seventeen

As the travelers flew over the forest, Simona and Varek moved their Pegasus next to Katie and James. “This is where we part from you.” Prince Varek said, as the breeze blew his hair around his face.

“You’re leaving us? I don’t know what I need to do now.” Katie said, looking over at Simona with concern behind her eyes.

“We will return before the war takes place. We need to go back to our castle and stop Queen Zendra before she is crowned Queen of all Atheness. We will need you to help prepare our troops for the battle. They are already training as we speak. Chadwick knows the way back to Amos; I will need Chait to come with us. I have a feeling I will need his help.” Chait jumped up on Simona’s lap with pride. “You’ve got that right!” Chait said, as he comfortably stretched and relaxed in her lap. She stroked his head and he began to purr.

“I don’t know how to prepare the troops for battle; I can barely fight myself.” Katie said, almost panicked.

“I have nothing but faith in you. You had no problem giving commands on the ship, this isn’t that different, just a lot more people for you to lead. We will return soon enough, good bye, you two.” Simona said, putting her arms around Katie. Varek handed Katie a single yellow rose and turned back to Simona.

“Come, we don’t have much time.” Varek said to Simona, now looking very serious. “Good luck, Katie,” he turned and looked at James. “Take care of her.” He said with a slight smile.

“You know I will.” James said with a nod. Varek smiled and then looked over at Simona as she nodded back and they both turned their Pegasus’ around as they flew off and disappeared over the trees.

“May God be with them,” Chadwick said, watching them fly off. “Well then, we must be departing; the Queen awaits us.” He gave them a reassuring smile, and then led them over the valley, and over two forests, until they slowed and landed in the realm of Amos. A crowd of not only fairies, but men and other creatures, gathered to welcome the weary travelers. Chadwick helped Katie off her horse and James took her by his side once more.

Part of the crowd cleared to make way for Queen Adrianna. “Welcome back! You have returned the royal family to their true form. But that is only the beginning. You now have the choice to return to your home or stay and help save our world. It is up to you, you no longer have to stay here, if you choose not to. You have kept your side of the bargain.” The crowd started chatting with one another with stunned tones. Katie thought she heard one of them say to another “would she leave us in our time of need?”

Katie looked over at James. “This is our chance, they don’t need us, and we can go home.” James said with a smile. Katie looked down at the ground and then back at James.

“I love you very much James, but they need me here. I am going to stay until the end. What do I have back there? Besides you, all I have is a job I’m not too happy with and no friends. If you stay with me, I’ll have no reason to go back. Please, I need you now.” James smiled back at her and took her in his arms.

“I’ll never let you go again. I’ll see you through this to the end.”

“Queen Adrianna, we choose to stay and fight with you.” Katie said with renewed confidence. The crowd cheered around them.

“Wonderful! Let’s feast, then I will lead you to your room to rest; tomorrow we continue training, because the battle is but a few days away.”

Prince Varek and Princess Simona landed in the mermaid cove next to a waterfall. “Why are we landing here? We need to get into the castle.” Chait said, jumping to the rocky ground below.

“There is a secret entrance behind the waterfall. It’s a cave that leads to many rooms in the palace, particularly my chambers. I used it many times to get away unnoticed.” Varek said, dismounting from his horse. He looked over at the sea just as Niela appeared from beneath the water.

“Varek, you’re back, I knew Katie could do it! Oh, this must be your sister Simona; it is a pleasure to meet you in your human form.” She said, pushing herself up onto a large boulder and letting the tip of her tail sit in the water.

“I sure did miss you, Niela, but I’m only human for a few days unless we can get the key back from Queen Zendra and reunite it with both keys. The coronation is in a few hours and if we don’t hurry, Zendra will be crowned Queen, not Simona. There might be a battle in a few days and I will need you to help the pirates, if the battle gets as far as the sea.”

“Anything for you, Varek; you must be going. Good luck, I will be here if you need me. Be careful, I wouldn’t know what to do if you got hurt.” She gave a seductive smile at him and jumped back into the sea. Varek just stood there and watched her disappear into the dark water.

“Come Varek, we must be going.” Simona said, as she and Chait walked slowly behind the waterfall and into the mouth of the cave. Varek took one last look at the water, sighed, then turned and entered the cave behind Simona and Chait.

The beginning of the cave looked like any other you might stumble upon. The ground was dirt-packed with scattered rocks here and there. The walls of the cave were made up of thick rock and were cool to the touch. Chait carefully scurried on ahead of the siblings, being cautious of anything that might jump out at him. The walls and ground soon turned to brick and every so often, a torch was seen on the wall. Varek went up to a torch, lit it and took it in his hand to light the now dark passageway. Chait slowed his pace and trotted beside Varek with Simona close behind.

“So, all my life I never knew of this secret passage that is right between the walls of our palace. This is amazing. Where does it lead to, Varek?” Simona asked from behind Varek, slowly touching the walls of the passage.

“You will soon see. I can’t believe you never knew of this. This is how I always used to leave unnoticed, all these years, even with a guard at my door. It made Father so mad, when I would leave like that.” Varek said with a little laugh.

“Where did you go when you left? You did it more often once mother and father died.” Simona said, putting a hand on his shoulder.

“Most times, to see the mermaids; Niela mostly, though sometimes I would just take my horse and ride through the forest.” He said, as he felt around on the brick walls.

“Niela is a friend of yours, isn’t she?”

“Yes, she is. She is more than a friend... I love her. Crazy, I know she is a mermaid and not even a Princess. It would never work...” His voice trailed off.

“Well, when this is all over and I am Queen, we can figure something out. You are all I have left, Varek, and I want your happiness more than anything.” Varek stopped walking and turned and looked at her.

“You will be a great Queen, Simona.” He smiled and continued to walk through the narrow passage.

“Okay, up these stairs now, and we’ll be almost there. Be careful though, they curve around a bit.” Chait ran on ahead, since as a cat, he had impeccable eyesight in the dark. Simona on the other hand, stayed close to her brother’s side. The flame on the torch lit up the small staircase, casting shadows of the three on the brick walls.

“What I would do to have my sword right now.” Simona said bitterly, knowing that Zendra probably removed it, once she took over her castle.

“We’ll get it back; you’re not the only one that has a thing or two to say to the horrible creature they call a Queen.” Varek said, as they

came to the end of the staircase. Chait sat at the top step, swishing his tail back and forth anxiously.

“Okay, which way now?” Chait asked, getting ready to run ahead again. Varek stopped on the top step next to Chait and looked around a bit. He smiled and looked back at Simona, motioning with his head for her to follow him as he turned to the left. Chait took off running, once he knew the direction Varek was heading. They entered another narrow hallway, also lined in thick brick. There were a few cobwebs and fresh spider webs in corners and crevasses of the brick walls, but no one paid notice to them. Varek finally stopped in front of a blank brick wall. Chait skidded to a stop a few feet down and trotted back to Varek’s side as Simona waited by his other side. Varek pushed the wall as it slowly moved forward and then he pulled it over to his right, revealing a secret passage that led right to a very large bedroom. Varek smiled at his companions and entered the room through an unlit fireplace. Chait and Simona followed cautiously behind.

“This leads to your room. Are there any other secret entrances in this passage?” Simona said, helping Varek close the passage door behind them.

“There is one in almost every room, except most of the servant rooms. No one really knows about it, though. Your door is inside your fireplace. That’s probably why you never stumbled upon it. Grandpa showed it to me when I was real young. I have used it ever since. He said to keep it secret, just in case any danger came to the family. That was grandpa, always thinking ahead.”

“I am truly impressed. I am glad we have an escape plan if this doesn’t go well.” She stopped and looked around his room. It was still untouched, and no one had been in this room since Varek left a few weeks ago. She knew her room wasn’t a safe place, since Zendra must have taken it as her own.

“Your room hasn’t been touched; do you have any weapons we can use. I don’t want to try and stop the coronation, defenseless.” She said, as she started to look around his room.

“Yes, look in my wardrobe; I have my battle garments in there, as well. Hand them to me will you?” She opened his wardrobe, removed his garments and handed them over to him. As Varek began to change, Simona went back to his wardrobe to take out his weapons. Lying in the back, were two large swords, each placed in a thick leather sheath, and a large blue ruby lay on the pommel of the swords. On the bottom of the wardrobe, lay two more dark daggers. She gathered up all the weapons and handed a sword and dagger to Varek and then attached the other sword and dagger to her leather belt. Varek attached his sword and dagger and then finished by attaching his dark red cape.

“How long do we have until the coronation begins? She will not be crowned Queen, if I can help it!” Varek said, glaring into a small mirror on the wall.

“Not much time; a little over an hour, at most; everyone should be gathering in the great hall to start celebrating. There should only be a few servants around, so this will be a perfect time.”

“Well, let’s not waste any more time. Chait, Simona’s room is just down the hall, I will need you to sneak in and get her attire, as well. There are a lot of cats around, so you will be unnoticed. If you hear anything, let us know as soon as you can. We will be headed towards the grand hall. Be careful.” They opened the door half way and looked to the right and left of the hall. No one was in sight. Varek and Simona ran to the left and Chait ran to the right.

Chait scurried next to the wall and sniffed the first door he came to. He didn’t smell anything familiar that was in the room. He looked behind him and then scurried to the next door and sniffed the crack under the door. He smelled Simona’s scent all around the door. Then he began to smell another scent that he hadn’t smelled before, although he had only been able to smell or do anything for that matter, when Katie walked through the bushes and into Atheness. He knew this new smell was evil; his first reaction to it made him hiss at the door and even growl a little. His ears then perked up as he heard voices from within. He needed to get inside the room without rising suspicion. He then noticed a large brick that was

loose on the outside wall of the door. He took his front paws and scratched at the brick, loosening the sides enough for him to pull the entire brick out. He did this as quietly as he could, so the voices he heard inside wouldn't stop because of the noise outside of the room. The absence of the brick left a hole in the wall, small enough where it would go unnoticed for a long while, but large enough where a cat like Chait could fit through, effortlessly.

Chait slipped through the hole and into the large room. He was pleased to find that the other side of the hole he made entered under a large bed. He wouldn't be seen, for sure. He carefully crawled to the end of the bed and looked out to see who was in Simona's room in her absence. He saw a large older woman brushing the long golden hair of a younger woman. The younger woman sat in a chair and faced the mirror. Chait almost yelped in surprise, when the young woman in the mirror appeared to be Princess Simona herself. He knew it couldn't be her, for she was the one with the awful scent. Who was she, then?

"Are you almost done?" The young woman snapped impatiently.

"Almost done, your highness, you want to look your best for you coronation, don't you?" The older woman paused for a moment. "It is a shame your brother has disappeared, isn't it? Wouldn't you have wanted him to be here for your moment to be crowned Queen?" The woman asked putting some jeweled clips in the young woman's hair.

"Oh Varek, he should never have left. It is his fault, not mine that he is not attending my coronation. It is not like he is going to be crowned King, so I don't care if he is here. Yes, this will do nicely, indeed."

"You have turned cold, Princess; the Simona I knew and helped raise since she was a baby, cared so much for her brother and would have canceled her coronation until her brother's safe return. Who are you? For I know you aren't the Princess, and I will not let you be our Queen!" She turned to the door, but the young lady hit her over the head knocking her unconscious.

“The foolish old lady, she has no idea who she is dealing with. I knew I should have put her in the dungeon long ago, when she started snooping around asking questions about me. No matter, she is out of the way, now.” She laughed a malicious laugh, and looked back into the mirror, this time the reflection that looked back at her wasn’t the Princess, but a pixie with bright crimson hair and an evil grin.

Chait shook under the bed with fear. A knock at the door made him jump a bit, but he held his ground and didn’t move from his position. His claws were now extended and his fur stood up in all directions.

“Who is it?” The imposter Princess yelled.

“Open up, milady, it is imperative that I see you, now.” The voice said from the other side of the door.

“Yes, yes, be right there!” The impostor Princess said, looking frantically around the room. Her eyes stopped on the large wardrobe. She picked up the older ladies leg’s as she lay lifeless on the floor, and began to drag her across the room. When she got to the closet, she got behind the woman and pulled her into the closet, pulling up her legs to get her to fit properly. Then she got some rope and tied up her arms and legs before she had a chance to wake up. *She’s lucky I didn’t kill her after a stunt like that.* The last thing she did was bind the woman’s mouth before she closed the wardrobe door. She then walked over to the door and opened it with a fake smile. Her smile faded when she saw one of her subjects standing in the hall.

“Faelyn, What are you doing here? Come in quick, before someone sees you.” She led her in and then quickly shut the door behind them.

“I’m sorry to disturb you, your Highness, but I made sure to dress like one of the Princess’s servants’ to go unnoticed. I have followed the human girl as you instructed, and I’m sorry to say that her human man had followed her here too, and they have restored

Varek and Simona to their true form. Last I saw, they were on their way back to Amos. They are preparing to go to war. What will you have me to do, your highness?" She pushed back her blonde hair from her face and waited for instructions.

"So Adrianna thinks she is smart, does she? This means nothing. Go back to Rugonden and prepare for battle. Tell everyone to be ready in three days' time. Tell them that everyone must fight; this is not a request, it's an order. Those who don't fight will die. I will return to lead our troops at that time, and as the Queen of all Atheness! Now, go!" She opened the window and her faithful subject turned back into a small fairy in a pink dress, and flew off to prepare for battle. Zendra closed the window and slammed her hand on the wall, yelling out in frustration. She took a deep breath and walked to the door, opened it and slammed it shut behind her.

Chait crawled out from under the bed and scurried across the room to the wardrobe. He heard a moaning from the inside and knew it was Simona's nanny. He pulled the doors open with his paw and revealed the poor woman sitting helplessly, with her legs and arms tied. Chait climbed into the wardrobe and onto her stomach. He pulled down her gag from her mouth and sat back to look at the poor woman. She opened her eyes and groaned, looking down at the black cat who sat on her stomach.

"Oh my head..." The woman said, moving her head slowly back and forth.

"It's okay; I'll get you out of this." Chait said, jumping up and then gnawing at the bindings around her arms. She looked down at him in alarm.

"You're a cat, a talking cat."

"Well, I can do more than just talk, I'm saving you aren't I?"

"I have heard of your kind, but that was only in stories. I didn't know talking cats really existed." The shocked woman said.

“Is that right? Well I am here with the real Princess Simona and Prince Varek. The coronation is less than an hour away, am I right?”

She nodded a yes to the cat, still very much confused.

“The woman that was here is really Queen Zendra. She wants to take the throne and be ruler of all Atheness. We are here to stop her.” The bindings around her arms snapped free.

“Thank you cat, I knew she wasn’t Simona from the moment I looked into her green eyes. You see, Simona’s eyes are blue.” She bent down and began to untie her legs.

“Actually, my name is Chait. I came in here to find Simona’s battle attire. Is it in here?” Chait asked, looking around.

“Oh yes, it is right behind me; ah, here it is.” She lifted the attire that was placed nicely in a bag and placed it on the ground next to Chait.

“Thanks. Now I must be going, they need me. See that you put something on your head, it is starting to swell.” Chait grabbed the tie at the end of the bag and began to drag it under the bed and through the hole he had made. Once he tugged it through the hole, he turned left and ran down the long hallway to find Simona and Varek.

He continued down the hall, still dragging the bag with his teeth. He stopped every so often to hide around a corner as a guard walked up and down parts of the castle. Once they had passed, he continued on his way, relying on their scent to guide him. He came to an open area of the hall where there was only one wall and the other was open, to overlook the grand ball room below. The scent of the Prince and Princess had stopped. Chait looked around, but didn’t see them anywhere.

“Chait, we’re over here.” whispered a voice from behind him; he turned around and saw Simona sticking her head out from one of

the rooms. He ran over to her, letting go of the bag and letting her pick it up.

“Chait, I’m going to change; please scratch on the door if you see anyone coming.”

“Be careful and hurry. I saw Queen Zendra, she knows you’re human again, but I don’t think she knows that you’re here.”

“Good, I hope she doesn’t. For we will reveal ourselves soon enough, now we will be out in a second. Stand guard for us.” Chait nodded and sat in the shadows of the hall as Simona shut the door. He looked around for anything that might be coming from any direction. Music began to play in the ballroom as the room filled with people. Chait cautiously trotted over to the railing, and looked over at the people beginning to dance cheerfully below. He saw the royal seat with a beautiful crown sitting in the center of it, waiting for its new owner. He looked around and didn’t see Zendra anywhere. His ear turned as a door opened behind him. He turned around to see Simona and Varek exit and crouch down beside him.

“So, it has started.” Varek said bitterly, looking down at the oblivious people below.

Simona watched the people dance, they seemed so happy not knowing how much danger they really were in. She saw children happily chasing one another and couples having their first dance together. She then realized how much she cared for her people and that she really was ready to be Queen. Why had she been so selfish in the past? These people mattered, every last one of them. She knew it was up to her to save them.

“All right, we must wait until Zendra reveals herself, and then we move. Otherwise, she will get away. It should be soon.” Simona said, not taking her eyes off her people.

“It seems that’s all we can do. We must be prepared. We don’t have powers like she does. Varek said cautiously, watching the entryway

for Zendra to appear, with his hand securely around the hilt of his sword.

Suddenly, a loud trumpet was blown and the crowd drew their attention to the trumpet player and stopped dancing. An overly dressed man walked up to the front of the crowd to make an announcement.

“Attention everyone, please place your attention to the grand doors. I present her majesty; Her Highness Princess Simona Adelaide Nola Sceffingen. Please rise to greet her!” He declared in an almost overpowering voice. Two servants each opened one side of the door to reveal the Princess standing tall and proud in a beautiful green dress that made her green eyes shine.

A servant took the Princess’ hand and escorted her through the crowd and into the middle of the dance floor, where a young duke from a kingdom on the other side of Atheness, waited to dance with her. “Now the Princess will do the traditional waltz before she is crowned.” The crowd cheered as the orchestra began to play. The young man led, as the Princess smiled and did the best she could, to follow along.

Varek looked over at Simona with a stern look upon his face. “All right, we move now.” Princess Simona said nothing, just nodded and followed him down the open hallway almost crawling on the ground to go unnoticed into the crowd below them. Chait ran ahead and then stopped next to a grand staircase that led to the ballroom floor. When Simona and Varek caught up, they crouched next to Chait and watched the imposter Princess dance with the young duke.

“Enjoy it while you can Zendra, for this will be your last dance.” Simona whispered bitterly. The music faded and the crowd cheered again. The young duke took the Princess’ hand and led her to the grand chair with the crown sitting on it. She didn’t take her eyes off the crown as he kissed her hand and stepped back. A priest then stood and walked over to the Princess, to anoint her Queen. He took out his oil and was about to speak, when a cry came from the

back of the ballroom. The crowd turned around and gasped as they saw Princess Simona standing there.

“Stop, I am the real Princess Simona and she is an impostor!” yelled the Princess, followed by Prince Varek and Chait. Someone saw Varek and cried out.

“It the Prince, he still lives; she must be the real Princess!”

“I am the true Princess, as I have been for the past eighteen years. Don’t believe this woman; she must have changed her form with magic. I am the rightful Queen,” said the impostor Princess as she picked up the crown and put it on her head. The crowd became shocked and started talking amongst themselves about the events taking place in front of them. The priest didn’t know what to make of this odd situation and that one of the women had already placed the crown on her head.

“You have no place here, Zendra! You are already a Queen and that is of the pixies; you cannot have my kingdom! You must leave now and return the key!” Simona shouted as she and Varek removed their swords from their sheaths. The impostor Princess began to laugh a loud evil laugh.

“Oh, I’m Queen Zendra, am I? Then where are my wings and my subjects? You are the one that is deceiving us all. I have the crown, I am the Queen!” The crowd became angry at the actions of the ‘would be Queen’.

“If you are our Queen, then show us the mark of the royal family that all members receive at birth. Show it to us!” The crowd demanded of the impostor Princess. Varek and Simona smiled at each other at this request.

“I don’t need to show you anything! I have the crown; that is enough, it is all you need to know!” she yelled in frustration. Two lady servants then came up and stood next to the impostor Princess in defense. The crowd looked over at Simona and Varek. They both pulled back the clothing that covered their shoulders. A small tattoo

became visible for the crowd to see, with the family crest and the emblem of the key in the middle. The crowd cheered for the royal family.

“Long live the Queen!” They all shouted at once.

“Long live the Queen, indeed.” The impostor Princess shouted, now turning back into Queen Zendra and trying to use her power to knock out Simona. Varek saw it coming in a flash of light, and bounced it off with his sword. The magic hit a statue on the other side of the room and shattered it into pieces.

“This isn’t over, Princess! I will meet you again in battle! You will be sorry!” She then was covered by red smoke and disappeared in a puff of dust, with the two servants who turned back into pixies, following behind.

“She took the crown.” Someone from the crowd yelled out.

“We will get it back, along with the key.” Prince Varek said, putting his sword back into its sheath. Princess Simona walked to the front of the room.

“My people, I have not forgotten you and will do everything it takes to protect you. This is just the beginning of the battle. I will need every man willing to fight for Atheness to join me in battle. We leave in the morning for Amos and will have horses and swords ready. This isn’t just my battle; it is yours too. It’s for your family, your friends and for our lost King and Queen. Who is with me?” Princess Simona asked, proudly holding her sword up high. All the men walked to the front and gave a loud cheer.

“Tonight we rest and say our goodbyes to our families. Tomorrow we will fight!” The crowd cheered once more and Simona knew she had her people’s trust again. She had renewed confidence for the upcoming battle.

Chapter Eighteen

Katie awoke refreshed and worry free until she realized where she was and of the upcoming battle. She turned and was happy to see

that James was next to her in the cotton bed. He opened his eyes and smiled at her.

“Good morning beautiful, are you ready for today?” he asked putting his arms around her and squeezing. She suddenly felt ill again and sat up to take a drink of water from the bottle that Queen Adrianna had left her to help with the morning sickness.

“Are you ok Katie?” James asked concerned. Katie looked up from her water and smile reassuringly. She knew she couldn’t tell James about the twins just now because he would stop the whole thing and make her go home. She had to stay, these people needed her.

“I’m fine just a little nerves about the battle, that’s all.” She took another sip of the cool water.

“Yeah I feel that way too, no matter what happens during this battle I’ll protect you. Although I may not have to since you are really good with that sword of yours. I heard how you cut that Siren’s head off. That was amazing.” James said as he got out of bed and began to put on his clothes that Aaron got him. This is the only place he would actually wear such attire and not feel ridiculous. Katie on the other hand would wear them every day if he let her. He then thought of the collection of costumes she had in the closet and how she looked forward to every event where she got away with wearing one. The thought made him laugh a little and how cute she looked in her pointed ears, a not uncommon thing in this realm.

“Queen Adrianna told me that Simona and Varek are returning today with their army, also the commander of the mountain dwellers is coming today. That will help me a lot; I don’t know the first thing about leading these mountain warriors. Have you seen them? They are tough people. Some of them are wood nymphs too.” Katie said as she was attaching her sword to her belt.

“So Simona and Varek did it, they stopped this Zendra lady?”

“No, not exactly, they stopped her from being anointed Queen by the priest, but she took the key and the crown anyway. I guess we are going to face her in the battle nonetheless.” She put on her blue coat and then turned to James.

“Well, are you ready? We have a lot of training to do today and we have to get fitted for our mail. I hope it won’t be so hard to fight with all that heavy armor on.”

James stood up and opened the door for Katie and then followed her out. He knew she was worried about the battle, but her confidence in fighting seemed to outweigh it. He only hoped he would be able to fight half as well as she did. Maybe this new commander that was coming could help him improve a bit. Vermont only had a few hours to teach him the basics before he left to find Katie.

The early morning air felt cool and refreshing as they stepped outside and onto the field. It seemed to Katie that the number of people that came to Amos had doubled overnight. There were Fairies, men, women, Elves, Wood Nymphs, and even a few Centaurs out on the field practicing for battle, which had surprised her after what Chadwick had said about the Centaurs not caring to fight.

She saw three Elves standing in a perfect line getting ready to fire their arrows at a target that was ten yards away. They raised their bows and in unison let go of their arrows. Katie watched in amazement as all three arrows landed in the center of the bull’s eye. “That is what you’re going to practice on. Your aim has always been a bit sloppy.” Katie turned to see Chadwick standing behind her holding up her bow and pack of arrows.

“Thanks, I would love to be as good as the Elves. Well at least as close as I can be in the short time we do have. Is there any word of Varek and Simona? Are they coming soon?”

“Yes they have just left their castle with six hundred of their men and a few women as well. They should be here by midafternoon if

they hurry and don't find any trouble on the way." Chadwick looked over at James with some concern.

"I will not be able to teach you, James. Follow my friend, River over there; he will lead you to where we expect the Commander and his army to arrive. They will be arriving any moment now so go with haste." He motioned to a tall fairy with broad shoulders; his dark hair was tightly pulled back with twine.

James looked hesitantly at Katie and then over at the large fairy. "Go on, you will be fine and so will I. I will see you for dinner tonight when Varek and Simona return." Katie said giving him a slight shove. James sighed and joined the waiting fairy.

"Glad to meet you James, my name is River. Follow me; the Commander will arrive any moment and he won't be happy if there isn't anyone to greet him and his warriors." James followed River to the stables, which to his surprise, were also behind an invisible door. No one would know that Amos was the realm of the butterfly fairies if they stumbled upon it. To a normal eye it looked almost like any other part of the forest. River took out two white horses that were already prepared to ride. They led them out of the stables and mounted them. River gave a command and the horses took off running. The horses ran to the edge of the forest of Amos and there they stopped. River and James dismounted from the horses and waited.

After a few minutes they heard a horn blowing in the distance. They looked up at the hill above them and saw a man looking down, dressed in armor.

"Is that him?" James asked River, looking at the man on the hillside.

"No that is just one of his men. You will know him when you see him. He will be the last to join his warriors. They are coming now." River said as more men and even women warriors began to appear on the hill side. They all dressed differently, some with more armor than others. River told James that was because some chose to wear

less armor since they couldn't move freely in the heavy armor, and others choose to wear less, because they wanted the thrill of fighting more dangerously. They all had their reasons, some wore more armor because of the look it gave them and put fear into others. Other warriors wore more armor to keep up the higher status they had earned in past battles. River went on to say that all these men and women had been trained for battle since they were children, and only came out of hiding when they were requested to fight in battle by Queen Adrianna or Princess Simona and Prince Varek's court. When they were not fighting they practiced. They were born and bred to fight. That is their only purpose in life and they love doing it.

"But aren't they afraid to die. Don't they think that it's a possibility that they might die a horrible death fighting this way?" James asked appalled at the story of these warriors.

"No, death does not stop them, it keeps them going. What's to fear? They believe that to die in battle would be a glorious death indeed, a much better end than dying in one's sleep. For who would remember one that dies in their sleep? If they die in battle they will always be remembered for the heroic deeds they did and stories will be told about them forever more." River said as he watched the warriors come down the hillside.

"I never thought about it that way. Well, I still would like to die in my sleep. No heroic death for me."

A cloaked figure appeared on the top of the hill, his face shadowed by the hood of his large velvet cloak.

"It's him isn't it?" James asked as a beautiful black mustang trotted next to a cloaked figure that was being led by his reins. The cloaked figure then mounted the grand horse and trotted down the hill behind the rest of the warriors. The warriors stopped in front of River and James, they stood as if they were to fight in battle right at that moment, all in groups of fifty. The cloaked figure stopped his horse next to River and then turned to look at James. He pulled back the hood of his cloak to reveal a striking young man. His

medium skin tone seemed flawless in the sunlight. Upon his head he wore a fabric type crown that tied in the back; his dark hair came out on the top in spikes. He glared down at James with dislike in his deep brown eyes. River saw this look and put his hand out in front of James.

“Do not strike this man, he is Katie’s husband and he helped Simona and Varek become human again. He has come with me in hopes that you will teach him to fight in battle.”

The Commander’s eyes softened a bit and he nodded and then snapped his fingers. His horse continued past River and James as his warriors marched behind him. River looked at James smiling.

“I think he likes you.” He said with a little laugh.

“Oh really, I hate to see him when he is hates someone. So what is his story anyway? I didn’t expect him to be so young.” James asked as he and River mounted their horses and waited until they were at the end of the group of warriors, to follow them back to castle of Amos.

“His real name is Durango, it means brave and strong. Everyone born a warrior is given a strong name. Nothing is known of his true parents because he was found in the mountains when he was only a few months old. It was right after the last battle we had over twenty three years ago. They say his parents may have helped win the last battle but died before they could celebrate. Some claim they saw a beautiful woman being chased by the cave goblins at the eve of the battles end, she must have put Durango in one of the mountain caves before she perished. He was found after the battle by the last Commander of the warriors. He was coming to the end of his long life and he never had the chance to have children of his own, so he took the child and named him Durango. He raised him to be a leader and taught him everything he knew. He died a few years ago and Durango became the new commander.”

“But why doesn’t he talk? I mean can he talk?”

“Oh yes. He just doesn’t, unless he is training or giving orders. He feels it wastes the time he could use otherwise. Most of the warriors choose the same. Though there are those that can’t keep quiet.” James thought about this as they entered the castle grounds. It amazed him that someone could have that much dedication and never be afraid to die. He looked forward to being trained by such a man.

“I did it!” James looked over to see Katie, and saw that the arrow she just shot hit the bull’s eye. What a wonderful woman he had. This crazy fairy tale that they were having, was something from her dreams. Even though he wanted to go home, he was glad for her happiness and wouldn’t trade that for a warm bed and hot shower. He watched as Katie turned and gave Chadwick a hug. “Thanks, I couldn’t do it without you, you’re a great teacher.” Katie said to Chadwick. He still wasn’t sure of Chadwick, and of his intentions on being so friendly with his wife. River saw what James was looking at, and put his hand on James shoulder.

“Don’t you worry about Chadwick; he is to marry Lady Solana next spring. He is only Katie’s body guard and teacher. Well I guess they’re friends too, but don’t worry he is the most trustworthy fairy we have in Amos. He is normally Queen Adrianna’s right-hand fairy.”

“Well if you say so.” James dismounted and left his horse in the care of River as he walked over to the Commander, who was standing away from the rest of the warriors, who were beginning to practice. His cape was still over his back as it flapped in the wind like a flag. He stood tall and proud and seemed deep in thought as he stood watching his warriors practice for the upcoming battle. James stood silently next to him trying to see if he was looking at anyone in particular. He looked at the commander and followed his gaze, it was right at Katie. What was with these men and looking at his wife?

“Chadwick is a very good teacher, your wife is getting very skilled with the sword and bow. I heard what she did on the ship to the Sirens. I have faith that she will do well in this battle.” He never

looked over at James; he continued his focus on watching Katie and Chadwick. Katie seemed very relaxed with the bow now, every shot she made hit the bull's eye in a perfect clean shot.”

“I think so too. As for myself, I think I am going to need your help in teaching me what you have taught your warriors, Durango.” James said watching Katie.

Durango turned to look at James. “Never call me by my name, just call me Commander, for that is who I am. I am not just a man with a name; I am a Commander of many great men and women. I will never be just Durango again, is that clear?” The Commander snapped.

“Yes, Commander, I didn't mean anything by it. So will you teach me?”

The Commander said nothing; he just nodded and motioned for James to follow him into the further part of the forest of Amos. James followed him in silence. He had so many questions for the Commander, but knew that he wanted to keep his past in the past. The questions still pressed him. Has he ever been married? Had children? Has he ever wanted to know the truth of his parents? James knew he could never ask these questions, not now anyway.

They stopped in a large grassy clearing where two horses waited along with several different weapons that lay on the ground. The Commander stood next to a grey horse and then took off his cape placing it on the horse's back. He wore no shirt to cover his large muscled body. A thick material covered the top of his large ninja style pants made up like a belt or sash. He wore two large gloves that came to his elbow, and on his shoulder he wore a pad of large metal spikes. He picked up two large swords and tossed one at James. James jumped back not prepared to catch it as it fell at his feet.

“I see we have a long way to go. Did Vermont teach you anything at all? Lesson one, catching a sword.”

Katie held her bow comfortably in her left hand as she placed an arrow on the arrow rest and as she pulled back next to her mouth she let go. The arrow flew from the bow at a rapid pace and landed in the center of the mark that Chadwick had placed for her. She let out a breath and smiled.

“You’re doing great, Katie. I see much more improvement since early this morning.” He looked passed her and then began adjusting his shirt. “Can you continue without me for a little while? There is someone I have wanted to speak with for a long time now.” He said not averting his eyes. Katie turned and followed his gaze which fell on a beautiful blonde fairy. She wore a flowing purple gown and had matching flowers placed evenly down her long wavy hair. She stood holding her bow, arrows and quiver, while conversing with another fairy.

“She is very beautiful.” Katie said breaking Chadwick’s thoughts.

“What? Oh, yes she is. I haven’t been able to speak with her since we left to free the royal family. I will see you in an hour or so and then we will take a break to eat.”

“Sounds good Chadwick, enjoy your time with her.” Chadwick smiled and walked towards the blonde fairy.

Katie lowered her bow and began to stretch her arms around. The constant work on her archery lessons made her arms very sore. Feeling a little dizzy she placed her short bow on the ground and took out the glass bottle of water that was tied to her silver belt. She was told to drink every few hours, but she was so consumed with learning the art of archery that she had forgotten to drink the special water. She took two large gulps of the surprisingly cool water. Relief consumed her and her dizziness and sore arms dissipated. *Wow I need this kind of water for home*, Katie thought to herself. She took in a deep breath and then picked up her bow and put her quiver with arrows back on her back. She placed an arrow on the bow and just as she was about to take her aim she heard the warriors say the royal family had arrived with their army. Simona and Varek, Katie thought as she placed her arrow back in her quiver

and walked over to the crowd of fairies and men that were greeting the newly arrived fighters. She moved through the crowd until she was at the front and saw Princess Simona and Prince Varek entering on two brown horses followed by at least six hundred men.

They stopped and dismounted as some of Queen Arianna's servants came to take the horses to stables to rest and feed. "Katie! It's good to see you again. How has your training been going?" Simona asked giving her a hug, which kind of surprised Katie. Simona didn't strike her as the hugging type.

"I heard what happened. I am glad your people are safe."

"We did save our people for now and we are here ready to fight." She smiled reassuringly and then walked on towards the palace. Varek then stopped in front of Katie and put his hand on her shoulder.

"I have heard how well you're fighting and your archery skills have improved. You're going to be great out there. You have nothing to worry about; you will have the Fairies to help protect you as well as the new warriors, my army, your husband, that is if his training goes well, and don't forget you will also have me." He looked down at her grinning.

"Wow this is the first time I have seen you smile since I met you. It's not me I'm really worried about though." Katie said putting her hand on her stomach. Varek looked down and his smile diminished.

"You're expecting? Why on earth would Queen Adrianna expect you to battle in your condition? This is an outrage! Is your husband letting you fight too, knowing this?"

"No, he does not know. I haven't told him in fear of a reaction like yours. I want to battle, though the thought is a little scary. People of Atheness are depending on me. I was chosen to help this world and I can't let them down now."

“Katie, we have many Warriors, Fairies and my army to fight. I’m sure everyone will understand if you stay hidden until the battle is decided.”

“But how can you be sure? All of my training, all I have worked for to save this world, I can’t just hide like some scared mouse.”

“Alright I will call a meeting tonight and it will be decided what will happen for the battle in the fortnight. Until then keep drinking that water you have on your belt and rest.”

“I’ll be fine Varek. Have you seen Chait? I wanted to talk with him.”

“Chait is on his own mission. He should be back before the sun rises. Please think about what I said.” Varek looked at her sternly and then ran off to catch up to Simona, who was already walking towards a tent to get her sword sharpened.

Katie stood there stunned. She didn’t know how to react to Varek’s forthright remark to her pregnancy. The pregnancy was still new news to her as well. She knew she had to be careful but she had hundreds if not thousands of beings depending on her alone to save their world. She hoped this meeting wouldn’t involve James, though it might offend him that she may be invited to attend and not him. Hopefully Durango would keep him busy the rest of the afternoon. She slung her bow on her back and decided to find James and watch his progress. Like Varek had instructed, she needed to rest and take it easy until the council had made a decision.

She found James sparring with Durango in an open field away from the other warriors. He was doing surprisingly well. Durango did knock his sword out of his hand a few times as they sparred, but as they continued, James began to catch up and even match some of his moves. As Katie watched the two of them fight, she noticed they didn’t talk much, but she could tell that James was actually enjoying himself. His moves began to quicken and he was able to block several of Durango’s attacks, and as the sun began to set, James finally knocked Durango’s sword out of his hand. Durango

didn't look upset, he just picked up his sword, nodded an approval, and as he walked away he said, "This is all I have time to teach you. You are ready." James looked over at Katie who was sitting on the grass, and smiled a happy smile.

"Did you see that Katie? I can fight as well as you can now." He walked over to her and helped her to her feet.

"I did. You are very good now, a true swords man and a real knight." She smiled and threw her arms around him and then she whispered, "We're going to be okay, no matter what happens we need to look after each other. I love you James."

James then looked down at her in concern and put his arms around her as well. Nothing he could say would help the situation. The upcoming battle was very real and they were going to be part of it. He tried not to think of the fear he had inside of him. "Don't worry my dear Katie, I'll look after you. I won't let anyone harm you. This battle will be over before we know it and then we will be back at home again. Everything will be the same again. You'll see."

"James even when we do return home again it will never be the same. We may live the same, do some of the same things, but after all we have seen and done we will never be the same again. Come, we both haven't eaten since yesterday, we need our strength for tomorrow." James agreed his stomach hurt from being empty all day and working so hard with the sword.

They walked back to the palace where the forest was littered with tents and campfires. They were each offered a bowl of soup with some bread. They took it eagerly and sat down on a fallen log to eat. A fairy walked by and poured them mugs of cool water. James took one large gulp of the water. Relief came over his dry throat.

"There you are Katie; I have been looking for you for hours. Where have you been?" Chadwick said as he sat next to Katie on the log holding a bowl of soup.

“I’m sorry Chadwick, Varek told me to rest and then I wanted to see how James training was going on. How did your talk go?”

Chadwick smiled. “Very well, once this battle is all over Lady Solana and I will marry right here in Amos. She talks of the plans often to her friends. She will make a fine wife.”

“You will be a wonderful husband to her. Maybe you will be one of the few to produce a child.” Katie said with a sly smile.

“Oh no, as wonderful as that would be, we are not suitable to be parents. I am a top guard and she is but a lady’s maid to Queen Adrianna. It’s a nice idea though.” He thought for a second, shrugged and took a bite of his bread. “Well rest up you two. I will wake you in the morning. I have a meeting I am requested to attend.” He stood up and began to walk away.

“Wait Chadwick, aren’t I to attend this meeting as well?” Katie said in concern.

“It is of a private matter, I wasn’t told to include you. I will keep you informed if anything is for you to know, Katie. Please get some rest.” He then walked to open the near invisible door to the palace and closed it behind him. Katie looked down miserably into her soup.

“What was that all about? Why would you want to attend a meeting?” James asked curiously.

“Oh, I don’t know, I just thought that they may need me to be there. I am supposed to be sort of big part of this battle, so why wouldn’t they want me to attend. At times I have no idea of what’s going on, and at other times I know exactly what’s going on, but I seem to be the only one.”

“I have felt that way about not knowing anything going on, since I got here. You know what? I still don’t know.” James said as he took a large bite of bread. Katie laughed a little. If you weren’t here from the beginning, it would be hard to keep up on everything that has

been happening. She thought as she placed an empty bowl next to her on the ground. A serving fairy quickly came and picked up the bowl.

“More soup my lady?” She asked.

“No thank you. I have had my fill for tonight.” Katie said, handing the fairy her empty mug as well. The Fairy nodded and began to walk away.

“I would like some more if you don’t mind. It is very good.” James said handing her his bowl. The Fairy smiled and hurried off to retrieve some more soup.

“Hey they said to rest and eating is the best way for me to rest. I’d ask what they put in the soup but in a place like this I rather enjoy it by not knowing.” James said with a grin. The fairy returned with a full bowl of soup and bread and handed it to James.

“Will that be all, my lord?”

“Yes thank you.” He dipped his bread in the soup and let it soak some up before he took another large mouthful of it. The servant fairy bowed and turned to walk away. She then stopped in her steps and turned back around to face them.

“I’m sorry to disturb you, but I forgot to mention that when you are finished the blacksmith is ready to fit you for your mail armor if you so choose to wear it. He is in the tent over there.” Katie and James followed the direction she had pointed, to a large tent. Men, Fairies, Wood Nymphs came in and out with swords to be sharpened, fittings, and armor to be made.

“Tell him we will see him promptly after we are finished eating.” The Fairy bowed once more and left them alone once again. Katie stood up and stretched.

“I think I’m going to go on ahead while you finish eating. He can’t fit both of us at the same time anyway. Besides he looks very busy so I don’t know how long I will have to wait.”

“Well if that’s what you want. I will be there when I’m done. Who knows, this could be my last meal, I want to enjoy it.” James said taking a spoonful of soup to his mouth.

“Don’t talk like that. I’ll see you soon then.” Katie said as she walked away and joined the crowd of men and fairies in the tent.

“Katie, I’m glad you have come. I didn’t know your exact size so I haven’t chosen your complete mail quite yet. I have one that I made out of a guess to your size it should be about the right size. Come put it on and I will see what I need to do. I made your mail out of flat links. They are the best I have heard in battle. I wanted to make it form fitting but still flexible enough for you to easily move around and wear it under your battle dress.”

Katie walked forward and placed her arms through the cool metal material. The sleeves fit her nicely and stopped just before her wrists. The rest of the mail fell slightly below her knee. The blacksmith came behind her and pinched the back of the mail cloth.

“Hmmm, you’re a lot thinner then I had expected. No matter, it will be easier to take off some links than to add some more. I will have it ready for you in the morning my lady. I took the liberty of sharpening your sword earlier today and I also made some more arrows to put in your quiver. You can never have too many in battles you know. Is there anything else you may need?” He asked as he worked on removing some links from Katie’s mail.

“To be honest sir I have never fought in a battle before. I don’t know what I will need. I don’t even know if I will be on foot or on horseback. Do you have any suggestions?” Katie asked admiring the work on her mail. The blacksmith laughed a deep laugh.

“My suggestions are insignificant. I have never been in a battle myself but I have helped make many weapons for them. I also saw

the horrible aftermath of such battles. Times have changed since I was a lad. Battle is no place for a woman, which is what I have always been taught. But now it seems that women are getting just as tough as the men. Nothing wrong with that at all, I just feel women should stay away from battle and be safe, especially a woman such as yourself. I can give you a few more daggers for you and your husband.” He motioned to the entrance of the tent as James walked in. “Come lad I was just talking to your lovely wife about any extra weapons she would like. If anything comes to mind for you, let me know.” James nodded as the blacksmith put down Katie’s mail and picked up James’. “Okay please place your arms in here so I can see if I have to add some more links to your mail.” James did as he was told and put his arms through the mail sleeves.

“It is a little tight around my arms otherwise the rest feels fine.” James said uncomfortably. The blacksmith helped take off the mail and then examined James arms. “Oh I see the problem, though it’s not really a problem at all. All that practice you have gotten since you arrived made your arms leaner and more muscular. I was given your measurements as soon as you came into Atheness. I really had hoped I would have it right on. Well a blacksmith never sleeps on the eve of battle anyway. It will be done by morning along with Katie’s. Oh give me your sword I will sharpen that as well.” James handed over his sword along with the sheath.

“Is there anything else I will need for this battle?” James asked wanting to be covered from head to toe with armor in hopes of not getting hurt.

“I can do anything you wish. Let’s see, you will need a helmet, oh would you like some mail for your head as well?”

“Yes please. Anything that’s not too heavy. No point in armor if you can’t move in it?” James said as the blacksmith handed him a metal helmet to try on. He placed it on his head but realized the visor in front made it hard for him to see out of. “This fits nicely but is there anything you can do about the visor. I can’t see very well.”

“Oh that’s no problem. I can remove it and make it without a visor. Ok let’s see we have your mail, your helmet, and sword. I will make some metal guards for your arms and legs and a protective vest to wear as well. Oh and the last thing you will need is a shield. I have an old one around here somewhere; it has seen many battles I will fix it up like new.” He turned to look at Katie who was watching the matter quietly. “Though I don’t approve of you fighting I will make guards for your arms and legs as well. I will make sure you both will be on horseback as well as the Prince and Princess. Now get some rest, tomorrow will be a big day I am sure. I have much to do before the sun rises.” The blacksmith quickly went to work on their armor as well as many others.

The pair walked back into the palace and into their room. It felt weird to Katie being unarmed for the time being, she had become accustomed to her bow and sword by her side. James quickly undressed and lay down in the soft cotton and feather bed.

“I’m exhausted. I have never gone to bed so early before but I can hardly keep my eyes opened. You coming to bed, we have to keep up our strength for tomorrow. Please lie down and don’t think about tomorrow, just think about right now.” He put his hand out to her to join him in bed to sleep. She took it and sat down next to him. She then took off her boots and belt and lay down. He put his arms around her and before she knew it she was fast asleep.

A slight tapping on the door made Katie jump up in alarm a few hours later. She looked over at James who was still in a deep sleep and was not aware of her now alertness. She carefully slipped his arm off of

her waist and back onto the bed. Sitting up she placed her boots and belt back on and carefully slipped out the door.

“I’m sorry to wake you Katie but we are just about to end the meeting and we felt you should be there to hear what we concluded.” Chadwick said with worry behind his eyes.

“Is everything alright Chadwick?” Katie asked with concern.

“I can’t say. Just follow me to the conference room. They are waiting.” Chadwick said putting his hand on her shoulder and leading her down the hall. They walked in silence, the palace was very quiet and still. All were asleep, resting before the battle.

Chadwick stopped in front of a room with double doors. He opened the door and led Katie inside. The room wasn’t decorated in art or with plants; it was bare except for a long oval table placed in the middle with chairs all around it. Sitting in the chairs were Queen Adrianna along with some of the grand council, Simona, Varek and Durango.

“Come Katie have a seat so we may talk with you about our decision on this pressing matter.” Katie sat down in an empty chair next to Simona, and Chadwick sat on the other side of her. “Varek raised some concern about having you battle in your condition. However, he wasn’t aware that I already knew you were with child when I chose you to help us.” Katie looked over at Varek who still seemed very upset by the decision of the council. He quietly opened and closed his fists as if to help calm any outbursts he may have.

“James doesn’t know of this yet does he?” One of the older council members asked in a shaky voice.

“No, I felt it better he not know, until the battle is decided. I fear he may act as Varek is right now. It’s not that I don’t appreciate your concern Varek, I do very much.” Varek didn’t respond he just continued to open and close his fist this time a little tighter than before. Simona quickly put her hand on one of his fists and he stopped.

“We have decided Katie that you will fight as originally planned. Chadwick will put a spell on your children to protect them and you. If something happens to you, your children will be safe even in this early stage of life. They will be placed in a chamber where they will continue to grow.” Queen Adrianna said calmly. Katie sat there stunned and didn’t know what to say to this. Her children will be safe, that’s wonderful but they were saying that she still may not be,

or even will die. Varek saw the look on Katie's face and had enough.

"Can't you see she's frightened, you just told her that she will die, great for her kids, that's all you wanted anyway, didn't you? Fairies and Mermaids don't have many kids, so let's find someone else to have them for you, is that it? This is ridiculous! Well I'm not going to let this happen, she is not going to battle as long as I have something to say about it!" Simona sat him back down and put her arm around him in hopes of calming him.

"Your words are honorable Varek, just as they were before. However, her pregnancy had little to do with why we choose Katie. Yes her children play an important role in the future but we don't plan on kidnapping her children. If we wanted someone's children, we would want them to have Fairy blood in them too. Katie will be surrounded by our best Fairies, your best men, Durango's best men, Katie's husband, and of course you, Varek. If you want to protect her so badly, I give some of the responsibility to you. But remember, Katie is the one who needs to get the key back, not you. She wears the key around her neck, so she needs to unite them both to destroy Zendra." Queen Adrianna looked firmly at Varek whose face calmed slightly. She looked back at Katie's concerned face. "This won't be an easy job Katie, but I have the utmost faith in you. I didn't choose just anyone, you know. I have been waiting for you for a long time. Do you have confidence in yourself? If you don't, you can leave now, Katie it is up to you."

Everyone in the room looked at Katie. She felt at the moment, that she was dreaming and was ready to wake up. Wake up, wake up! She screamed in her head. She thought of the little girl in the village she met when she first came to Atheness. 'You will save our village and our world.' She had said looking up at Katie with her big brown eyes. She was counting on Katie as were so many people. She couldn't let them down because she was afraid. Katie looked up at them with a new strength. "I'm ready!"

"Good, get some rest we will wake you early in the morning, your armor will be waiting at that time." The council stood up and

walked out of the room. Durango stood up and stopped at the door looking curiously at Katie.

“You could have left, you know. I wouldn’t have thought less of you.”

“I know, I just realized who’s on my side, and I shouldn’t be afraid.”

Durango’s eyes brightened and Katie could have sworn she saw him smile. He then gave a slight bow and walked out of the room followed by Chadwick who patted Katie on the back as he walked past her.

“You won’t fall in battle. I can promise you that.” Varek said suddenly standing in front of her. Simona stood at his side. Katie just smiled.

“Thank you. I know I will be fine, as will my children.” Katie gave a little curtsy even though she knew she didn’t have to, and walked back to her room. She quietly got back in bed, being careful not to wake James. As she lay there, she gave a quiet prayer and thanked God for being on her side and protecting her and James.

Chapter Nineteen

The morning light crept slowly over the hillside, leaving parts of the fields and forest covered in shadows. Droplets of dew clung to the leaves, only to be licked up by a little mouse, waking from a restful sleep. He twitched his nose at a fallen berry and as he was about to snatch it up in his mouth, a large armored foot stepped on the berry, crushing it. The mouse scurried back into the ground before he too, was trampled.

Queen Zendra's army of Pixies, Boar Guards, and many other horrific creatures, began to march just six leagues away from Amos. Queen Zendra didn't walk with the creatures she traveled with; she flew above them with the rest of her winged companions. She could have gotten to Amos in moments with magic, but since most of her army didn't have the magic ability, she would have been out numbered, if she didn't take her time. Her face was stern and impatient, knowing that at this rate, they wouldn't get to the battle field of Amos until well past noon. This human girl better be ready. She will be sorry she ever came to Atheness! She can't defeat me! She thought, continuing forward over the vast field of grass.

Katie and James were up and about before the sun rose. With the upcoming battle, sleep didn't come easy for Katie. James woke with her and they quickly got up to get dressed and met the blacksmith to pick up their battle armor. Chait sat on one of the tables in the tent, watching them attentively. He wore a little red cape on his back and had a mini-sword and belt at his side.

"Are you going to battle, as well?" Katie asked with a slight grin.

"You find that amusing, Katie? As you were training, I assembled the best cats in all of Atheness, to help me fight." He said proudly, sitting up tall.

"Oh, so you're not the only talking cat in Atheness, then?" Katie asked a little surprised.

"It is true. Some of the Fairies told me about it after I left with Simona and Varek. They stayed hidden, since most of the land has been taken over by Zendra's creatures. They were more than happy

to help fight on our behalf and regain their honor as cats of Atheness.”

“Well, that’s great; we need all the help we can get.” Katie said as she placed her red battle dress over her chain mail armor. The flat links were surprisingly comfortable and a little cold against her skin.

Varek and Simona walked in next to James, already dressed and ready for battle. Varek had a thick red and black cape, with metal shoulder pads underneath. On the chest of his armor, he wore the family crest and the mark of the key. His hands were covered with brown leather gloves and on his waist, he wore his sword proudly. In his hand, he held a long spear that had been beautifully decorated by the wood nymphs.

Simona wasn’t as covered as Varek, though she did wear a small silver cape and golden shoulder pads. She wore a small skirt instead of thick pants like her brother, though they matched in color. Her red gloves matched her thigh high red boots and a fitting red vest. She carried a large sword in one hand and another smaller one on her hip.

“Are you ready, Katie? The archers are ready to meet you and anticipate your orders.” Simona glanced over at James, who was putting on his mail back gloves and examining his newly sharpened sword. “James, Durango awaits you. He will be fighting by your side and is ready to speak with you.” James nodded, but didn’t respond. Katie walked up to Simona and Varek.

“I’m ready; let’s meet the archers. Who are they, anyway? Are they Fairies, or Durango’s men and women?” Katie asked, placing her sword in its sheath.

“It is some of each: Fairies, Warriors, Wood Nymphs, and even some of my army. They are very skilled archers and will do whatever you ask.” Varek said opening the tent and moving out of the way, so Katie could exit first, followed by Simona. Katie turned to look back at James, who stood watching her leave.

“I will see you, soon.” Katie said to him, seeing the concern in his eyes. James gave her an uneasy smile as she smiled back and turned back to Varek and Simona. They led her to the target range where the archers were practicing. They were all dressed in light mail armor and had beautifully decorated quivers on their backs. When the archers saw them approach, they collected their arrows and stood, waiting for instructions.

“Archers, as you may already know, this is Katie, she will be your commander during this battle. You will do as she says, but also keep her protected, if given the chance. Is that understood?” Varek said, as he paced back and forth in front of the archers.

“Aye!” The archers shouted at once, as they turned to look at Katie. Katie became a little uncomfortable at the thought of giving battle commands to archers that were more skilled than her. She held her head high and thanked them for their support.

“Who is my strongest archer? Please come forward, so I may know you.” Katie asked, trying to sound a little forceful. The crowd parted and a man with light facial hair and bright blue eyes, stood tall in front of Katie. On his back, his quiver was full of black feathered arrows and he held in his hand, a large black bow.

“What is your name?” Katie asked, looking him over.

“Erwin, my lady. I was trained with the bow since I was old enough to hold it.” Erwin said, proudly.

“Well, that is good to hear. If I am to help elsewhere in the battle, you will be in charge of the archers. I trust you will make the right choice. You may continue practicing; we have only a few more hours until we march to battle. I suggest you rest, to save your strength. I will meet you at the battle field as soon as you are ready.” Katie said to Erwin and the rest of the archers. She joined Simona and Varek in the stables to meet the horse she would ride on in battle.

The stables had an overpowering stench of hay and manure. Simona and Varek already had their horse's saddles and bridles on and were working on Katie's horse. Most of the stables were empty because the horses were already on their way to the battle field. Katie's horse was dark brown with dark splashes of black over its body; its mane and tail were black, as well. Then she realized as she walked around the horse, it wasn't a horse at all, it was a Pegasus. She carefully touched its large black wings. It looked down at Katie, as its' saddle was being placed on its' back.

"Katie, meet Delancey. He is a good strong Pegasus, and will take good care of you." Katie smiled and began to stroke its nose.

"It's nice to meet you, Delancey." Katie said, as Simona handed her the reins and led all three animals out of the stables. Katie saw that she was the only one that had a Pegasus, out of the three.

"Why didn't you choose a Pegasus, as well? Won't flying be a bit more of an advantage?" Katie asked, as she adjusted her feet under her Pegasus' wings.

"We have done enough flying in the past few months. We will be much more helpful on the ground. James has a Pegasus, as well." Simona said, turning her horse and leading the rest to the battle field. She looked back at Katie. "Besides, we figured you would be more comfortable on a Pegasus, since that is all you have ridden since you came to Atheness." Katie laughed a little. "You're right on that one."

Once they got to the battle field, they found many others already on the field, ready to fight. Chadwick sat proudly on his horse and when he saw Katie, he rode up to her.

"Katie, please follow me, I must speak with you before this battle begins." Chadwick said, leading his horse away from the rest of the crowd of fairies and men. He helped her off of the Pegasus.

"I must put a protective spell on you and your children before it is too late. Don't worry, it won't hurt at all. Just stay still." Katie

nodded and stood as still as she could. Chadwick put his hands on her head and she then saw colorful lights begin to circle her. A feeling of warmth went down her body, as if she just drank a warm drink. The lights dissipated and Chadwick moved his hands from her head.

“This is all I can do. It won’t fully protect you, but it will help from a stray arrow or even a few swords.”

“Thank you, Chadwick.” Katie said, throwing her arms around him. “I am glad to have you by my side, in this battle. When this is over, we should start planning your wedding.”

Chadwick laughed a little. “That is for my bride to do. You can talk to her about that. She would be happy for you to help.”

A loud horn blew in the distance, and as Katie’s eyes adjusted to the dust from the horses they rode, she saw it was Durango and his warriors. James rode on a white Pegasus by his side. To Katie, he looked like a dashing knight as his armor glistened in the sunlight. He had several swords on him and his Pegasus. Durango must have trained him well, she thought.

Durango wore black metal armor, which reminded Katie of all the movies about black knights, except that Durango didn’t wear a helmet and his armor was much lighter than those knights in the movies. He wore his thick cape over his armor and had his hood covering most of his head, just as the day he came to Amos. He sat tall and proud upon his horse as his warriors followed behind him. He carried two blades on his back, one at his hip and his horse carried two, as well. He instructed his warriors to line up Verek and Simona’s army. Flags of Princess Simona, Queen Adrianna, and even the Wood Nymphs kingdom, were held proudly by some of their warriors. One of Durango’s men even held a flag high which bore the mark of the mountains.

Katie’s archers arrived and she led them away from the others who fought solely with swords and other blades. “We will be on the side over here; this way, we can shoot over our men that fight with

swords. This will give us a slight advantage.” The archers lined up where Katie instructed, with Erwin standing in front. “Erwin, I will be in the front of battle with Varek and Simona. I need you to take charge. I will ride back here from time to time. Keep an ear open for my commands. I trust you can do this.” Erwin stood proud, in front of the archers.

“I will not let you down, my lady.” He said, with a slight bow.

“I know you won’t.” Katie climbed back on her Pegasus and rode to the start of the line, next to Simona, Varek, Durango, Chadwick and James. The Pegasus backed up in line, to be straight with the other horses. James looked over at Katie with concern in his eyes. Katie looked back, trying to show love and hope, through hers.

The fields of warriors were quiet and still. The only sound that could be heard was the sound of the horse’s sighs and neighs. The field seemed a little eerie for the wait; the silent wait of battle. The faces of those ready for battle seemed almost blank, no emotion seemed present on their faces. Katie turned her attention back to the field ahead of her when a Fairy that waited high in a tree shouted out. “The enemy has arrived! Prepare your weapons!”

Swords were pulled from their sheaths and arrows were readily placed in their bows. The lines of horses adjusted and fairies got ready to the fly. Over the hill, Katie saw a thick cloud appear and move very fast. As the cloud neared, she realized it wasn’t a cloud at all, but pixies and a few other flying creatures that she had never seen before. On foot, there were creatures of all sizes and all heavily armed.

Varek moved his horse in front of the warriors. “This day, we fight to free Atheness and put our Queen on the throne. We will protect each other, as well as ourselves. We will not stop until this evil is destroyed and the keys are united, once again! Who is with me?” Varek yelled atop his horse. Everyone gave out a cry of approval. “Do not lose hope, in the midst of battle; if you die, you die with honor and you will always be remembered as a Knight of

Atheness!” Varek ran his horse down the line, tapping his sword against the others in line, as they yelled “for Atheness!”

Zendra’s army lined up on the other side of the field. Zendra relayed her orders to her army. Though her orders were less friendly and heart felt. She landed in front of her army, holding nothing in her hands. On her head, she wore Simona’s crown and around her neck, she wore the key. The key glistened in the bright sunlight, drawing Katie’s gaze to it. She knew what she must do but wasn’t sure how she was going to accomplish it. She fought well enough with the sirens, but this was much bigger than that small battle. She adjusted herself in the saddle and pulled out her sword from its sheath.

“This is for Atheness and for its people!” Katie shouted, as the warriors behind her, cheered. “Archers, look to the sky! Take the Pixies and Sirens down!” Katie ordered, as she held her sword high; she then moved her sword down and the rest of the warriors on foot and horseback began to charge Zendra’s army. Katie led her Pegasus to follow the others, as she yelled to her archers. “Archers, release the arrows now!” Her archers then released a shower of arrows into the sky, taking down many pixies. Cheers rang out through the field.

The battle now began as the two sides clashed in a mix of Fairies, men and creatures that had never been seen together until this day. Chadwick ran through the crowd, cutting down many that stood in his way. He looked to the sky and saw hundreds of Pixies taking down some of the warriors with their magic. He took out a horn that was attached to his belt and blew a loud low sounding gust. Suddenly, several hundred Fairies’ came out of the trees like a swarm of angry bees. They too, collided with the Pixies and other winged creatures. The sky seemed filled with spurts of color, as magic was shot from Fairy to Pixie and Pixie to Fairy, all in hopes of defeating the other. The unlucky ones that got hit by the deadly magic fell to the ground. Some that fell were trampled by the stampede of horses and large creatures. Some of the Fairies that fell were quickly pulled to the side, and tended to by other Fairies that stood hidden, waiting to be needed.

Katie rode through the field, knocking everyone out of her way with her sword. She realized that she was so protected, that there was a cocoon around her of men, Fairies and warriors. How was she to get the key back, if she stayed so protected like this? As her protectors continued forward, Katie fell back and had her Pegasus jump into the sky.

“No! Katie, you must stay with us!” Varek yelled from below. “No, I must do this. Protect James, he is with Durango. I can handle this.” Katie yelled back as she looked around to see a sharp fanged creature diving towards her. She maneuvered the Pegasus away and then strung her bow and released the arrow into the creature’s heart. The creatures shrieked and fell to the ground. Katie continued to do this to many other creatures that stood in the way of her getting closer to Zendra. Katie hovered over Zendra in the air and she watched, as Zendra blocked any attack that came on her. She wasn’t looking to the sky. Here’s my chance, Katie thought. She strung her bow and aimed it right between Zendra’s eyes. As she released her arrow, she heard a loud shout from behind. “Nooooo,” Katie looked back to see Chadwick hovering behind her. She looked back to see her arrow had been splintered into several pieces by Zendra, who was now looking right at Katie. She lifted her hand and released magic from her that shone a bright blue light and shot it at Katie. Katie gave her Pegasus a command to flee, but the beast was too frightened to move. Chadwick then jumped in the way and got hit by the deadly magic before Katie could be harmed. As he began to fall to the ground, Katie caught him on her Pegasus and flew to the forest to place him in a safe spot.

Katie quickly landed and placed Chadwick on the ground. She took off her cape and placed it over him, in hopes of keeping him warm. “It’s going to be alright, you’re safe, now.” Katie said as calmly as she could. Chadwick reached up and took her hand. She felt a surge of warm energy fill her body. “What did you do?” Katie asked, alarmed. “I gave you what remains of my magic. You can stop Zendra with magic, not with arrows. Take care of your babies; they are a new hope for the future of Atheness.” He coughed and his breaths shortened. “Tell Lady Solana I love her.” Katie held his hand tighter, tears filling her eyes.

“You will be able to tell her. You’re going to be alright, Chadwick. I need you here with me. You are one of the few friends I have. Please don’t leave me.” she said, wiping back a hot tear on her cheek. “You will do great things, Katie.” Chadwick said with a weak smile. He then closed his eyes and his body went limp. “No, please come back. Chadwick, please.” Katie couldn’t stop the tears from falling down her face. It was all her fault that he was dead. She covered his face with her cape. “Rest easy, my dear friend.” She looked out to the field and saw Zendra, an evil smile played across her face. Anger consumed Katie; how dare she take Chadwick away from her. Fire could be seen behind Katie’s eyes.

Varek and Simona worked as a team, fighting off anything that came their way. They never left each other’s side, as they used sword and spear to take down many boar guards and creatures of dark. “Have you seen Katie around?” Simona asked, as she kicked a dark creature away and stabbed the next, with her sword.

“No, she took off into the sky; I sent Chadwick after her. She said to look after James. He will be fine; Durango is with him.” Varek said, as he thrust his sword behind him taking down a boar guard that tried to come in from behind them. He put down his spear and took out both of his swords, swinging them around his head and taking his stance. “Come on, I’m just getting warmed up!” He yelled, as a dozen or so creatures began to charge the duo.

The battle began to spread past the field and to the sea. The Fairies flew over the sea and the winged creatures followed, not realizing that the Fairies also had allies with the Pirates, who were ready and waiting to shoot them down at a moment’s notice. If, for some reason, the pirates failed to completely finish off a creature that fell to the sea, the Mermaids were also waiting for their turn of the action. This went on for several hours, when finally, the creatures of the sky and the Pixies, fell back from the sea and went back to the safety of the fields. The Pirates gave shouts of delight in their success of helping Simona and Varek.

On the far side of the field, Durango, James, and several of his warriors, were fearlessly fighting. It seemed that nothing stood in

their way of complete victory. Many bodies of boars and creatures lay before them as they continued to fight with hardly a scratch between them. James had the most significant injuries, since he was less experienced than the rest. He didn't let the pain bother him, but kept his guard up and fought the best he knew how. He looked over at Durango, who was now circled by many dark creatures. He kept a firm face, as he took out both his large swords and began taking down every creature in the circle, without a blink. The bodies of the creatures lay limp as he wiped the blood off his sword on the grass. Three bore guards came running towards him with their spears extended. He knocked them out of their hands with one blow. One ran away as the others stood stunned, and then ran to fight him with their fists since their spears were now missing.

Behind Durango, stood a dark creature in black iron armor, he stood over ten feet tall and his fangs were as big as knives. Durango stood fighting and killing the remaining boar guards. Just as he removed his sword from the last body, he felt a blast of pain from behind. He looked down to see a large sword like talon being removed from him. As he slowly turned around, he heard a loud bellow of laughter from this creature, as it hit Durango across the face. James yelled out to the creature from behind, and as it turned in anger to look at him, James sliced him across the neck, killing the large beast where he stood. James ran around to Durango, who lay helplessly on the ground. He tore off a piece of his shirt and held it tight to Durango's stomach to help stop the bleeding. He held Durango's head up with his hands. "Hang on, you're the toughest guy I know, you said you would never fall in battle." James said, frantically.

"Stop with the talk, it's my time to go, James. I have already picked my successor; he will be a great leader of the mountain warriors." He said in a raspy breath. "It's not over yet. Katie will defeat Zendra, and there will be peace again in Atheness. Take care of your children; they will make great warriors..." Durango said in his last breath, as he grabbed James' arm and went limp. "My children..." James said puzzled. He took Durango's cape off, and covered him with it. Then he signaled for some of his warriors to remove him from the battle field, so he may rest peacefully. James

didn't have time to mourn for his new friend and teacher; he had to fight to keep alive, himself. There would be plenty of time to mourn, after the battle was over. If only he knew if Katie was safe.

Katie stood in front of Zendra with both keys glowing around each of their necks. "Give me the key, Katie!" Zendra shouted. "I will never!" Katie yelled, holding out her sword. "You can join me, Katie. Imagine all your worries and pain will be gone forever. You will have power; more power than you ever thought possible. The power we once had together, before they sent you back. They were scared of what you could become, and held you back from your true potential." She paused and smiled furtively at Katie. "Isn't that what you really want? Just give me the key, and all this will be just a bad dream. You can go home and live like this has never happened, or you can stay with me and have riches and power. It's up to you Katie, just give me the key." Zendra held out her hand with the phony smile plastered on her face. Katie took a step forward with her hand on the key. She took the key off of her neck.

"We had power together? When I was here once before, we were friends?" Katie asked, taking a step forward.

"Yes. You had so much power and so much potential. If only they hadn't taken you from this place and made you forget everything I had taught you. They said you would be more powerful than Adrianna and I combined. They were holding you back, Katie. If you stay with me, I will give you the power you once had and so much more."

"If I give this to you, will you promise that James and I will be safe?" Katie said, stepping a little closer. "Oh yes, you will be safe and happy. Now, give me the key."

"What about my friends, will they be safe? My friends that helped me since I came to Atheness, can you promise me that?" Katie asked again.

"I'm your friend Katie, you can trust me." Zendra said, reaching out for the key.

“Say it, will my friends be safe?” Katie asked again.

“Sure, sure they will be safe, now the key, Katie, hand it to me!” Katie put her hand out, with the key, to Zendra. As Zendra went to reach for it, Katie took her sword and stabbed the evil Queen in the heart. She stood back and reached for the magic inside of her. Once she found it, she focused all her energy and released it on Zendra.

Blue and pink lights shot out of Katie’s hands and hit the sword that Zendra tried to pull out. The sword began to glow a bright red and Zendra began to scream and shake, and then turned to a black dust, leaving nothing but the key and Simona’s crown in her place.

Katie stood over the pile of dust and picked up the second key and the crown. “You lied! My friend is already dead!” Katie yelled to the dust pile with tears forming in her eyes. Everyone stopped fighting and began gathering around the pile of dust. The fairies started yelling in joy. “She’s gone! She’s gone! Katie did it, she saved Atheness!” Several fairies in the crowd, yelled. James pushed his way through the crowd to Katie’s side and he threw his arms around her.

“Katie, are you all right?” he asked, squeezing her tight. He had dirt covering him, as well as cuts with dry blood, encrusted over them.

“I’m fine, everything is alright, now.” Katie said with a heavy sigh. The wind started to blow around them. The dust of Zendra was soon carried up in the air and out of Atheness, forever.

“Out of the way, down here, do you mind moving?” yelled a familiar voice. Chait suddenly appeared, still wearing his cape and sword. His cape was now tattered and had a few slashes from battle, but it still held up.

“Chait, my good friend, you made it!” Katie said with zeal.

“Yes, I did and so did all the other cats. Together, we took down ten of Zendra’s men.” He said, licking some dirt off his paw.

“That’s great to hear, Chait.” Katie said her arm still around James. The crowd parted as Simona and Varek walked up. Katie was about to bow, when Varek stopped her. He then bowed to her.

“I told you I would protect you, and you left. You could have been killed, Katie! However, you managed just fine and as a result, you saved us all. We are truly in your debt.” Katie smiled and then remembered the crown in her hand. She took it out and handed it to Simona.

“I believe this belongs to you, your Majesty.” Simona smiled and gladly took the crown and placed it on her head. Everyone cheered again.

“Your task isn’t quite finished, Katie. You must unite both keys together before they can be returned to their rightful place in Atheness.” Katie nodded and took both keys, placing the backs together. They fused like magnets touching; the blue gems began to glow like a bright star. Startled, Katie let go and the keys began to float and spin frantically in the air, faster and faster, until they finally broke apart and landed back into Katie’s hand. Katie quickly handed one of the keys back to Simona. Simona gladly took it and placed it around her neck.

“What just happened?” James asked.

“All of Zendra’s spells are now undone, everything is back to normal again.” Varek said, happily.

Not everything, Katie thought bitterly, thinking of her dear friend.

The creatures and Pixies that didn’t flee back to Rugonden were taken to the palace dungeon to be held for trial, for serving Zendra. They stayed behind because they claimed they were held captive themselves, by Zendra, and wanted nothing more than to be free to serve those they chose. Simona said their trial would be just and fair, no more shall die because of Zendra’s hatred.

That night, a great feast was served in honor of Katie and the new freedom of Atheness. The banquet was held at Queen Simona's castle and everyone in the kingdom was invited to attend. Simona sent her ladies maids to dress Katie and James in their finest. Katie wore a floor length pink dress that hung off the shoulders. A small jeweled crown was placed on her head, and matching necklace, around her neck.

James was dressed in rich burgundy silk and velvet with the emblem of the key upon his chest. His hair was brushed back and some oil was added, to hold it in place. Music could be heard in the great hall as they were led to the doors. Trumpets played and their names were announced.

The doors opened and they entered, as the crowd bowed. They walked through the crowd and stopped at the front of the hall where Queen Simona, Prince Varek and Queen Adrianna sat, waiting for them. Chait also sat at the foot of Queen Simona, wearing a blue velvet vest. Katie curtsied and James bowed. Katie removed the key from her neck and graciously handed it to Queen Adrianna. The Queen took it and put it back around her own neck.

“You have fought very bravely, Katie and James. We are very grateful to you for this. As a reward for your deed, we have made a new key that you may have. This will give you access to both your world and ours. You may pass through anytime you wish.” She signaled to one of her ladies maids to come forth. A small Fairy appeared from the crowd and hurried to Katie, holding a small pillow. The pillow held a beautiful necklace, similar to the one she had just returned, except this one had a green gem in the center, not blue. Katie picked up the necklace and placed it around her neck.

“Thank you so much, Queen Adrianna. I will treasure it, always.”

“Make sure that you take very good care of it. It is the only way back to our world. Now come, this is a celebration, so enjoy the festivities.” Queen Adrianna said, as the music began to play again. James took Katie's hand and led her to the dance floor and they began to dance happily together. Katie looked over at Varek sitting

on the chair next to Simona, watching them. He smiled at her and she nodded a smile back. She remembered what Niela had said about her interest in Varek. Katie looked up at James, who seemed bothered himself, by something. “James, there is something I must do before the party is over, do you mind if I leave you here for a few minutes?”

“No problem. I have someone I would like to meet, anyway. I will see you back here, then?”

“Yes, very soon. I have something I want to give Varek as a thank you for my protection.” She smiled again at Varek and left the hall.

James walked over to a group of warriors, some still dressed in armor. They made room for James, welcoming him into their circle. “Hello, I was a friend of Commander Durango; I was with him when he passed. I wanted to meet his successor, if you don’t mind.” James asked, feeling the pain of Durango’s death rise up in him, again.

“The honor is mine to meet you, James.” A young man said, extending his hand to James. His skin was much darker than Durango’s had been, and his midnight black hair was held up by the same head piece Durango wore. James assumed it was what the leader must wear, like a crown in some way. James took his hand and gave it a firm shake.

“The name is Cahal. Durango took me in as a boy, he found me wandering the streets. I had a choice to join the pirates or be trained to be a warrior. Sure, they both have their good points, but Durango was such a good man.” He laughed then.

“However, he wasn’t much of a man, when he took me in. He wasn’t much older than fourteen, at that time. Oh, where are my manners? This is my wife, Jocelyn.” He took the hand of a beautiful dark-haired woman who stood next to him. James remembered her at the battle field. She was one of the warriors that helped carry Durango’s body away from the battle.

“It’s a pleasure. I know now, that your men and women are in good hands. If you would excuse me, my wife has returned.” They bowed to James as he walked towards Katie and a red-haired woman standing next to her, in a glistening green dress. Varek stood at the sight of her, with a shocked expression on his face. The women smiled at Varek, with an amused look on her face. Simona looked over at this commotion and when she saw who the woman was, she began to laugh. James came to Katie’s side, as the woman began to walk quickly towards Varek, as he did, towards her.

“What’s going on? Who is that woman you were with?” James asked perplexed.

“Just watch, you’ll see.” Katie said, not taking her eyes off the two. Varek took off in a run. As he reached her, he picked her up and took her in his arms. They stared at each other for a second and then they kissed. The crowd became a little shocked at the sight, not knowing what to think.

“Okay, I still don’t get it. Who is she?” James asked again.

Katie laughed. “Her name is Niela; she is a Mermaid, or was, a few minutes ago. I changed her into a human. She wanted to be with Varek so much, she was willing to give up her life at sea for him. Chadwick gave me his magic before he passed, if that was what you were going to ask.” Katie said, looking at his expression.

“Well, that was one of them. More than that, I wanted to know why you never told me we are having a baby.” James said, putting his hands around her waist, holding her stomach. Katie sighed at his comforting touch.

“I just thought you wouldn’t want me to stay and fight. That’s all. I was going to tell you about them today. How did you know, anyway?”

“Durango told me. Wait, did you say ‘them?’ I was just hearing things, wasn’t I?” James asked, turning her around to face him.

“Nope, two of them; a girl and a boy, Queen Adrianna told me that much.”

“Gosh, they don’t like you to be surprised here, do they?” James said, kissing her on the cheek. Katie laughed at his comment.

“I want to name our son Durango.” James said, quietly looking away for a moment. “Of course we will, James, of course.” Katie said, holding him tight as the music slowed around them.

The rest of the day seemed like a blur; Katie didn’t remember much of what happened that night. Sleep came quickly to Katie and James, they couldn’t tell when they had fallen asleep, but were soon awakened by a scratching at their door.

“Wake up, you two! The memorial is about to take place; you can’t miss it.” Chait’s voice came from behind the door.

“We’ll be right out.” Katie yelled back. She pulled out a beautiful white dress that was more outlandish than her wedding dress had been. Her ladies maids laid it out the night before. They say black is never appropriate for a memorial, especially for those who were in high command. James too, wore white outlandish clothing, as well. His boots were a light tan that matched his cape.

They stepped outside to the warm morning light. Many gathered by the stones of the great ones. Every warrior, Elf, man, Fairy and many more, were laid to rest in this spot. A very old Fairy stood over the site and spoke of the great deeds of ones lost in battle. Katie heard someone sobbing next to her and realized it was Lady Solana. Katie put her arm around the poor woman; she looked at Katie and then began to bawl on her shoulder.

“He told me to tell you that he loves you.” Katie said, as tears welled up in her own eyes.

“Thank you, that means a lot, coming from you. He was a good man and I know he died, protecting you. He died doing what he loves to do,” She said, sniffing a little. A smaller plump fairy stood

before the crowd and began to sing in a fairy language that Katie never was able to pick up; the song was beautiful, none the less. After she sang, a shower of flower petals fell from the trees, decorating the grave site with vibrant pink and yellow flowers. This was the sign that the ceremony was over. One by one, the grave site emptied. Katie and James were the last to leave, and each stood over the grave of the friend that they had lost, thinking of the good times they had shared although it was short.

Katie thought about the time Chadwick carried her, after she left the castle under the sea, and the exhaustion she felt after that. James thought about the first time he saw Durango and how mysterious he seemed. Take care of your children, rang in James ear. "I will take care of them, and I'm naming my son after you. You have taught me so much in the little time I got to know you. You will truly be missed." James said, looking miserably at the memorial stone that sat on the grass. The stone read: Durango, the Commander of the free men and women of the mountain, a true warrior. James sighed and took Katie's hand as she placed a purple lily on Chadwick's grave before they went back to the castle.

Chapter Twenty

The days turned into weeks and the weeks to months. Katie and James were always preoccupied with something; whether it was

teaching a new group of archers how to shoot correctly, or several ladies maids fussing after Katie, because of the twins.

James spent a lot of time with Cahal improving on his fighting ability. James had many scars from the battle; most of them Katie was able to heal with the magic that Chadwick gave her. Some of the scars were left as a reminder of the battle where he had lost his good friend.

Katie stood on the balcony of her room, looking out at the sunset. She put a hand on her swollen belly and sighed. James entered the room and took off his sword, placing it carefully by the door. “Wow, what a day. I almost beat Cahal today; can you believe it, Katie?” James said breathlessly. He walked over to Katie, putting one arm around her waist and touched her stomach; he looked up at her in surprise. “Wow, they’re moving!” He exclaimed, excitement growing in him.

“They’re getting restless, as am I.” Katie said, still watching the sun slowly die below the mountain tops.

“What’s wrong, darling? I thought we agreed to stay here. We don’t have any worries in Atheness. We are treated like royalty; anything we ask for, we get, at a moment’s notice. We have the freedom to go where we want. No bills or a million laws to keep us down. People actually like us here. Why would you say you want to go back to a world with so much hate and sadness? Atheness is the perfect place to raise our family and we even get to live in the palace. If that doesn’t please you, they will find us a place of our own to live in.” James said, almost pleading with Katie.

“I know what you mean, James, but it was our home. I don’t want to deliver the babies in this world; it frightens me. I want to have them in a hospital where I know they will be born healthy and have the proper medical care. We will return to Atheness someday. I just want to go home to our home. Who cares if we don’t have any friends, we have each other and soon we will have the twins, as well. Isn’t that enough?”

“You are always enough for me, Katie. I love you. Does this mean I have to go back to work, again?” James asked with a groan. Katie smiled and nodded.

“Alright, first thing next week; we will go back. I sure am going to miss this place.” James said, looking around their lavishly decorated room.

“Thank you, James.” Katie said, as she threw her arms around her husband. She smiled as her children leaped inside her. “Yes children, we’re going home.” Katie said softly. “We’re going home.”

“Well, I can’t say we aren’t upset by the news of you leaving before the twins are born. But you were given the choice from the beginning, to leave. We respect your decision and will miss you greatly. There isn’t any way we can change your mind, is there?” Queen Adrianna asked, as they met in the conference room with the elders, Queen Simona, and Commander Cahal.

“I’m sorry but our decision has been made. We will return someday, and will bring the twins.” Katie said with heartfelt feeling.

“Have you decided on names for the twins, yet? Can we at least know that, so when they do return, we will know what to call them?” Queen Simona asked with an almost sad look in her eyes.

“Of course; we are going to name them Durango and Serenity.” Katie said her hand upon her belly. It was almost a habit these days, to touch her belly.

“What wonderful names you have chosen. Durango would be proud to have his name passed down.” Cahal said, wishing Durango was there to hear it.

“I thought it only appropriate.” James said, putting an arm around Katie again.

“Keep your key with you always, Katie. It is the only way back to Atheness.” Queen Adrianna reminded Katie.

“I will never take it off.” Katie said reassuringly.

“Good, we will make arrangements for your departure at the beginning of the week. For now, rest and enjoy your last few days in Atheness.”

“We will do just that,” James said, taking Katie’s hand and helping her up off the chair she sat in.

During the next few days, everyone in Atheness seemed frantic to entertain the couple. Beautiful gifts were given to them, but mostly for the children. Handmade baby clothes and toys were given as gifts. The blacksmith made the children beautifully decorated bows and arrows that he had crafted himself. Katie thanked him for the gifts, but thought it might be better to leave them behind, since it would be a long while until they were old enough to use such a wonderful gift. Two rooms were already prepared for the twins whenever they arrived in Atheness, in the future. “They will always have a place to call their own.” Queen Adrianna had said.

Katie enjoyed the time of rest in Atheness, and knew she was going to miss the beautiful dresses she was able to wear and would have to get used to wearing pants, again. Chait followed Katie everywhere, always asking if she was all right and how she was feeling. Even though at times he was annoying, he was a big help to her.

The day before it was time to leave, they visited the Pirates one last time. The Captain gave them two hats for the babies. “They be true Pirates, now.” He said with a laugh. The Mermaids came up to visit and asked how Niela was doing with Prince Varek. They were happy to hear that Prince Varek had proposed to her and they would be married before the year was out. The Mermaid’s gifts to the children were dried seaweed crushed into powder and placed in a small container. “If they ever want to visit our kingdom, they have the chance.”

The next day, Katie and James filled their bags, and a few more that were given to them, with the gifts they wished to bring with them.

They left a few things in the children's room in the palace, knowing that someday, their children may return, and this was the safest place for their possessions. A large crowd came to bid them farewell outside of Amos. Prince Varek and Niela came up first and thanked them for bringing them together. Niela hugged Katie and thanked her for all she had done. Prince Varek got on his knee and kissed Katie's hand, saying she was a true Princess to him. Queen Simona hugged them both and said they were always welcome in her palace. Commander Cahal and his wife Jocelyn were next, to say their goodbyes. James hugged them both, even though he wasn't one to hug others. Chait then walked up to them.

"Aren't you coming with us, Chait?" Katie asked sadly.

"You know I can't, once you go back into your realm, I'll be just a toy, again. I have to stay here. I'm really going to miss you, Katie. Do you really have to go?" Chait asked, looking up at her.

"Oh Chait, come here." Katie said opening up her arms. Chait jumped into them and started purring loudly. She placed Chait down as Queen Adrianna came near.

"Thank you, Katie, for everything. We will think of you often. Alright, as promised, your way home!" Queen Adrianna said, as she stepped aside to reveal a tunnel. It seemed so long ago when they first came to this wonderful place called Atheness, Katie thought. James waved goodbye to his new friends and entered the tunnel, followed by Katie, as she turned to take one last look at her friends.

When they came to the end of the tunnel, they didn't end up in the playground of the school, but the kitchen of their home. Once Katie and James stepped into the kitchen, the tunnel was gone. They looked at each other and couldn't help but laugh. The adventure they went on seemed almost like a dream, but when Katie put her hand on her belly, she knew it was all too real. Someday they would return to Atheness, but that is another story.

The End

