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CHAPTER I

THE THUNDER OF THE BUTTERFLIES

The thunder of the butterflies' wings awoke her.

Princess Marigale ran to the castle window. She could see the migratory horde vanishing in the distance, a dark cloud that seconds ago was a fabulous, fluttering carnival of color. Had she missed the final flight? A tear formed in her eye as she contemplated months of long silences and drabness of sky and field. The Season for Flight lasted for around a month and a half- but the fairies had to be alert for the magical moment, when the butterflies actually passed over the Castle. The flight always occurred during the course of Season, but you never knew exactly when it was going to take place.

Immediately after the event and perhaps for as much as three months after the Season, the fairies seemed to breathe a kind of euphoria. After that, all that was left was a kind of inexplicable longing for those few moments in the year when the fluttering of butterflies roared through the skies.

Is that why her Uncle Sascha had built the castle in the midst of the migratory path of these fabulous beings? His brother and Marigale's father, the King, Bogard II, now lost for several decades, had sanctioned his brother's choice of location for the Castle's location, only a few years after he had married Ronella, Marigale's mother.

The noise during the Season of Flight was deafening and somewhat unpredictable. You could take a pillow and pile it on top of your head and there would be no diminishment

of the noise. And despite the strange, ineffable euphoria that seemed to follow the Flight, why would the Royal Architect subject his brother and her new bride to this crazy cacophony of sound? And why would the King let it happen?

Although the fairies' relationship to the domesticated butterflies who lived and worked in the Royal Castle was generally distant and cold- as fit for their designated role as pets, the Castle fairies actually loved the wild ones. They wrote poems about them and drew them in pictures, showing them at times to their pet butterflies, who were actually their servants and vassals. Perhaps Castle residence's obsession with the wild butterflies was because they seemed to embody a kind of freedom that even they, the fairies didn't enjoy.

So, in a sense, the answer seemed simple. Uncle Sascha knew of the fairies' delight in the presence of these amazing creatures and knew this event would over-ride any sense of inconvenience. In fact, those who became jaded or complained about the butterflies' rumble usually found themselves removed to the outskirts of the village, behind the Fairy Mountain, gaining the peace they sought at the price of royal favor. Yes, there were some fairies that were so repelled by that sound- that they would risk everything to remove it from their life.

Still, despite everything she knew, Marigale still thought the butterflies' route over the Castle each year- was still something of a mystery. Why would fairies who disagreed be treated so harshly? Why were they so publicly singled out? One more piece of many missing pieces about the FairyWorld ruled so elegantly and sometimes so tyrannically by Ronella, her mother.

Generally, Queen Ronella was held in high regard by the citizens of FairyWorld, despite her severity. Still, there was that rumor, that had been passed somewhat secretly to Marigale, that King Bogart's disappearance was not because of some accident in the faraway Gust Valley, where he had supposedly gone to hike on his favorite trails so long ago- but rather because he had run away from Ronella. The rumor suggested that it was Ronella's dominating ways that destroyed the casual pleasantness of his preferred protocol for ruling the Kingdom. Although Bogart I, his father and Marigale's grandfather, was a King through marriage, his was the first generation of the Bogart's reign, whereas Ronella's family had ruled for countless generations. And by virtue of fairy traditions, the King had the preferred power in making decisions that affected FairyWorld. Although rumor had it, that Ronella was made very unhappy by that tradition and challenged His Majesty continually during his reign. Sometimes, Marigale thought about these rumors from the past and the conflicts she felt frequently in the present. And now, again, she was burying herself in these disturbing conflicts.

Caught in her seemingly unstoppable reflections, Marigale barely noticed when her mentor and friend, Gillie McDhun, walked into her room, unannounced.

“Are you up, dear girl?”

“Very much so. Did you manage to get up early enough to see some of it, Gillie- or did the butterflies wake you as well?”

“Heavens, no, I was up hours before even the first butterfly passed over the Castle. I have never missed the complete flight in all my years in FairyWorld. To me, missing the

beginning is like missing the opening of a wonderful symphony.”

“I fear I **just** missed it- a few minutes ago. They were miles away before I got to the window.”

The tears that had been forming in Marigale’s opulent, gold-flaked eyes now fell down on her quilt, a tapestry of color, speckled with quaintly-shaped patterns of lilacs, daffodils and wild mulberry leaves. Not knowing exactly why, the little Princess looked forward to the yearly flight with an unexplained passion similar to so many of her brethren. How could anyone sleep through these long awaited moments of the Season for Flight?

Gillie saw the tears but pretended not to see it. How could she miss it? Were her pixie chimes asleep? Did she not know the Royal obsession with the flights? What if her mother found out?

“Ah, what a pity!” he exclaimed mutedly. “There weren’t as many as in earlier Times, but there were still many robust butterflies amidst the flock. One this year, I swear, was five times as large as the others - but he got lost in the all the clamoring to reach cloud level before I could look a bit closer.

“Why should they be getting bigger? In my entire life, I never saw one that big. Even in the days when butterflies were seen everywhere in the Kingdom- before so many fled in fear of servitude, they were mostly very similar in size, about the same as your pet butterfly, Mirth.”

“I don’t know,” Marigale replied. “Everything now would to argue against their successful growth, Gillie. Here, like everywhere else, their food is supposedly quite less

nourishing those times when they first crossed over during the Great Migration.”

“As far as we know, Marigale, that’s very true. Life is so full of mysteries.”

He had barely finished his observation when a loud flapping sound was heard beyond the antechamber of Marigale’s bedroom. In a moment, more than two dozen of her cousins tumbled into the room. They had all stopped together in such a rush, they crashed into each other, each rolling into ten different directions as a cloud of fairy dust filled the air.

“Strike a fairy and you can powder your face for a week,” Marigale’s Auntie Beatrice used to say, in jest, of course. But there was truth in it.

The bright powder so coveted by humankind did, indeed, - at least in fairytales- have all kinds of semi-miraculous uses - like charming animals and calming fevers - but it did so much to get all over the place if you let yourself be **jostled** around. Fairy dust could be a burden.

So, in the midst of this powdery dust cloud, little Katrina, Marigale’s third cousin and her best friend Vanella’s sister, coughed out, “There’s bad news, Marigale. Our Vanella - is very sick. She has asked you specifically and the rest of us as well- to come and see her.”

“Oh, no! What’s wrong?”

“She drank from too much from Farmer Millwood’s pail, after she had milked that overgrown bovine, Greenwater.”

“But Mother had told all of you, never to go near **those** Millwood cows,” Marigale said crossly. “They’re all such

brooding monstrosities these days and there's poison in the pails. She cautioned you - again and again. There was even a warning, in the form of a casual, but seriously intended, royal decree.””

“I know, but unfortunately, there's a strong attachment between Millwood's farm and our fairy kingdom, going back generations.” Bellwood, one of her older cousins, said, his deep voice echoing throughout the antechamber.

“Not only do we know all the humans in Millwood's family - his wife, children and grandparents,” he continued,” but we also have known his cows, like Greenwater, who you are calling a monster - and the other cows, Tamara, Abby and Dauphin for many years. Those four cow-beings fed our entire fairy kingdom for generations.”

“When changes started to be made on the farm,” Bellwood continued, “ even when our favorite cows began to grow unnaturally and when the Millwood family became ill, many of your mother's family refused to believe anything serious was afoot. But since there was like you said, no formal prohibition from the Royal Family, but officially just a luke-warm casual warning – many of us kept returning to the farm. Even your mother acknowledged the debt we had to these fine people and we were allowed to keep up our visits to them.”

Marigale nodded at Bellwood. He then continued, “After all, although Farmer Millwood and his family have never actually seen us, their belief in us runs deep - and, for many of us, this has always been heartwarming and flattering. There is not a fairy in this kingdom who has not tasted at least a small bit of food from the tiny, fairy platters they would leave out day in or day out or the milk

can they reserved exclusively for us. That was before the changes began to occur, of course.”

“Vanella’s parents were specifically the appointed fairy guardians over the Millwood children,” Katrina added, “and perhaps they were somewhat blinded to the changes in the farm. So, they probably did not really warn Vanella strongly enough about the problems with their food and milk offerings.”

Marigale hoped that Katrina would not defend Vanella too much because she may become a bad example through her bad judgment. Vanella and her brothers and sisters were often there as silent guardians to look over and protect the Millwood children.

Katrina saw Marigale glance at her and went on, nonetheless, to somewhat defend her sister.

“So Vanella was there with no official prohibition when she saw Millwood going to town with his giant pails right beside his fresh bales of hay. One of the pails spilled over and it was so white and so creamy - so much more delightful and fresh than the average fare we dine on these days - that she felt an urge to sample it and followed the farmer home, as we did in the old days.”

Marigale then spoke sharply, “But it was not supposed to happen. She should never have-”

“Of course we know you are right now. But you can’t always change the past just by bringing it up. Besides, Marigale, what does it really matter? We had all better go. Your cousin calls for us now and she is fading fast. You can barely see her flesh tones anymore. Her bed seems only half- occupied.”

“Oh, no-” said Marigale, rising on her, compact, golden wings and then looked at Gillie. Accordingly, her mentor ponderously flapped his heavier, older wings - and they prepared to join with the throng.



Like most fairy castles, the architecture was considerably different from human or dwarf architecture. Humans and dwarfs were sadly earth-bound. They had only two legs to get them from one place or another. Otherwise, they needed a mechanical contrivance or an animal. Fairy castles, therefore, did not place an emphasis on staircases or steps, but rather created room for fairies to fly in small groups along tubular corridors, great pipe-like affairs carved out of the same sturdy stone that governed the entire architecture of the castle.

So, as fairies are wont to do – Marigale, her cousins and Gillie McDhun all went together in a storm of fairy dust - down the stony corridors of the palace.

When Marigale and Gillie reached Vanella’s room, they were surprised to see a small crowd had assembled. Queen Ronella, Marigale’s mother, was kneeling by Vanella’s small bed. The Queen’s hair was unusually disheveled, her robe obviously hastily put on and probably one worn just prior to entering into sleep. It was unusual for her mother to be the least bit untidy, but it was a tribute to her concern for her young niece. When Marigale came in, Ronella nodded and slightly smiled. She was obviously preoccupied, but her projection of a powerful, positive warmth filled Marigale with confidence that the best would be done for her cousin.

It was true that Ronella usually did anything but project warmth and kindness- as she generally specialized in strictness and severity towards citizens and even her own family- but when she did, on unusual occasions, the effect was so powerful it was remembered and, despite its rarity, was added to her reputation as a powerful, but benevolent monarchy.

Noting her mother's focused, but nurturing attention to Vanella, Marigale suddenly became worried. "Is this a Transition Ceremony?" Marigale whispered to Gillis.

"I don't know, my dear," Gillis said. "But it may very well be."

Marigale wished now to be anywhere but here- watching poor Vanella fade out of the fairy world - into the Great Unknown. There was quite a crowd of Vanella's substantial little family of friends and relatives jumbled together in the tiny room when Prince Seymour made his entrance.

Seymour was a handsome young fairy, rather what you would think a prince might look like- tall, slender with dark, flashing eyes. He always dressed in dark shades of green and purples and his princely attire was always trimmed with gold. And although he appeared more to be the sensitive, poetic type rather than having a robust, physical presence, like a Corinthian wrestler or a rugged mountain fairy type, his strength was legendary. No one would ever forget when he had saved so many lives when one of the tall parapets of the Castle had suddenly crashed. and many of the Castle guards had been trapped under heavy stone. The stories of his ease and speed in rescuing the guardians were legendary. It was uncanny

how dexterously and easily handled the giant sculpted granite boulders.

So when he walked into a room, out of respect and awe, there usually was a respectful silence as befitting a fairy who was frankly regarded as somewhat regarded as a miracle worker. Very few realized the source of the Prince's enormous power at that dangerous moment in recent history.

