

Wild Copper

by Samantha Henderson

Oberon had turned her into a deer from the waist down, and nothing remained of yesterday's snake-tail but the memory of leaves against her belly-plates. Megan tapped cautiously on the trail with four small hooves.

Oberon did it to amuse himself, and to annoy the Queen. Titania wouldn't hesitate to transmogrify Megan herself, but she did not appreciate Oberon's play in metamorphosing her handmaid. What chimera would present herself, dusk by dawn, to do the Fae Queen's bidding?

He was angry. So angry.

Tap, tap on the mossy path. A day to grow into a deer's grace, then perhaps he would leave her alone for a while.

Then he would look at her with thousand-year-old eyes, and she'd feel his anger take hold like a tremendous hand, and he'd twist and shape her body until the craving was appeased.

Once he changed her head into a donkey's, and laughed his black-moss laugh every time he saw her. Titania bit her lip at that, casting her eyes down, and made her bower so cold that Oberon finally went off in a huff. Megan knelt out of sight in the ferns, since the queen would not look at her. Her shoulders ached, and hot tears crept down her cheeks, under the coarse, itchy hair

Lucky, she thought, bitterly. So lucky your uncle is a Ranger. So lucky you get to visit the Fae Reserve.

Usually Titania's attendants laughed at her human clumsiness and the shapes Oberon forced her to take—but they didn't laugh at the donkey's head. They crept about her, silently, until she slept. Later she woke with a crick in her neck and her own face and a crust of dried tears.

She scrubbed them away and stretched, feeling the rustle of the fairies around her in the weak green light before dawn. The Fae slept through the darkest part of the night and the middle of the day. Dawn and morning, dusk and twilight they woke. She must too, since she had given herself to them of her own free will.

Free will. Not really. Was I supposed to watch Casey die?

Well, was I?

Most nights and afternoons she nested at the foot of a huge, lightning-twisted cedar. For some reason the Fae didn't like it, and left her alone while she slept. Before she found her tree she'd wake to find her hair tied in elaborate knots, and the laces of her worn sneakers twisted in a way that took her hours to undo.

Megan scabbled at the roots for the little hollow where she kept her comb—a gift from Titania in a generous mood—and dragged it through her hair. She gritted her teeth as she worked at the knots. This last summer she had left them, let Peaceblossom and Moth weave her hair high and wild, let them dress her in acorns and ferns, shed her sneakers and danced like a dervish on the moonlit paths that wound through green pillars and velvet moss and the jet-black, diamond sprinkled waters of Puget Sound. She knew it pleased the Queen, and Oberon too as he watched from under a canopy of boughs under the star-pricked sky.

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