

Chapter 9: The Land of the Fairies

They spent the next 4 days travelling through the forest uneventfully. They soon ate up all of the food that the Elf King had given them, and then once again had to find their food in the forest. Robert always knew which plants were healthy to eat, so they could survive. Although the herbs and roots tasted bitter to Henry, Grace and John, and they longed for the food they had grown up with in the palace.

Henry, Grace and John noticed that the further they travelled into the forest, the less familiar Robert was with the animals. More and more, he was encountering animals that he did not know by name. And more and more, they were meeting animals who did not greet him as “Son of Midor”.

Eventually Grace asked about it. “Do these animals not know you?” she asked.

“I still know some of them,” said Robert. “But the deeper we get into the forest, the more unfamiliar it is for me. Of course, all the creatures here still know my father. So if I tell them who I am, they will recognize my father. But most of them have never seen me.”

They continued walking. The forest led them down into a valley between two steep hillsides. They walked along the valley, alongside a babbling stream, and made their camp there for the night.

Then, the valley path came to an end, and they had to climb up one of the hills. They continued going for another day, until they came to an edge of a cliff. And there, they saw the most magnificent site that they had seen yet.

Below the cliff was a huge clearing. It wasn’t a forest, but a huge grassy meadow that they could see laid out for miles beneath them. The meadow was criss-crossed with rivers, and waterfalls. At the waterfalls, water rose up in mist, and rainbows formed over the mist.

“It’s beautiful,” said Grace.

“It’s like something out of a story book,” said Henry.

John understood. “This must be the land of the fairies,” he said.

“This is,” said Robert.

“Have we left the forest now?” asked Grace. She indicated the grassy meadows that were sprawling out for miles in front of them.

“The land of the fairies is inside the Great Forest, and surrounded by the Great Forest,” Robert answered. “And so it is usually considered part of the Great Forest. Even though, as you can see, it is more properly grassland.”

“How do we get down from here?” asked Henry.

“There’s a path this way,” said Robert. He led them along the edge of the cliff until eventually they came to an area where the hill sloped down, and in the middle of this hill was a path that zig-zagged down the hill at an incline that was easy to walk.

The path was actually lined with a wooden fence, that they could use as a hand-railing when they walked down. The wooden fence was wreathed with green vines that sprouted flowers. It was beautiful, but it seemed a bit too neat--unlike the wild and sprawling vines they

had seen all over the forest. John said what they were all thinking. "This can't be natural," he said.

"Everything in this land is natural in the sense that the fairies work with nature," said Robert. "But everything here is cultivated by the fairies, who exert great influence on how nature shapes itself. Especially in their lands."

When they reached the bottom of the path, there was a small stream at the bottom. Fish swam in it happily. A group of horses, ponies, and unicorns were frolicking in the grass nearby, and ran up to greet them. "Welcome," they said. "And who are you?"

Robert knelt down on the ground, "I am Robert," he said, "the son of Midor."

This provoked a reaction of awe among the various equines. "Welcome, son of Midor," they said. "Your father was a frequent visitor to this land. You are welcome any time."

After having greeted the horses, ponies, and unicorns, they continued walking along the green meadow. They went over streams on lovely wooden bridges, and listened to the sound of the water babbling. The air was heavy with the sweet scent of flowers, and the buzz of honey bees was everywhere. The bees were always busy, going from flower to flower, but they were also friendly, and called out their greetings. Although it was noticeable that, unlike the bees from their first few days in the forest, these bees did not recognize Robert.

There was a small clump of trees and bushes in the middle of the meadow which Robert led them to. Here there were several small houses that were built in the middle of a tree or in a bush. There was some activity here, as Henry, Grace and John could see little fairies darting from house to house.

Some of the fairies stopped in mid-flight when they saw the humans approach, and stared at them inquisitively. Robert knelt down on his knees. "Forgive me," he said, "for intruding on your land. My name is Robert. My father is Midor. I come with 3 humans from the land of Mora, who I am bringing across the forest."

The fairies squealed with excitement. "Robert!" they called out. It was the first time Henry, John and Grace remembered anyone in the forest actually calling Robert by his name. "Oh, welcome, welcome," they called out.

"We remember you," said one of them. "You've grown so much since you were last here. We didn't recognize you at first."

"How long has it been since you were last here?" asked another Fairy. "Why, it must have been five years already. See how much you've grown in five years!"

"You must stay the night with us," said another one of the fairies. "We would be delighted to host you."

Henry, Grace and John were very much intrigued at the prospect of being hosted by the fairies, and Robert agreed.

It was still daylight out, so one of the fairies took them on a tour of the land. They walked through the green meadow, and stopped by streams. There were some trees in the meadow, and especially beautiful weeping willow trees lined the edges of the stream. As they

walked along the stream, frogs were jumping into the stream to play. They croaked out their greetings. Dragonflies flew along and also greeted them.

"I see that it's not only fairies who live in the land of fairies," said John.

"It is anyone we permit," said the fairy. "All peaceful creatures of goodwill are welcomed here."

As they walked along the stream, they came to a small thatched cottage by one of the weeping willow trees. "Oh Mr. Frog," the fairy called out, "Come out and meet our guests."

The door opened, and the strangest thing came out. It was a frog, sure enough, but not one of the ordinary frogs that swam in the stream. It was a frog the same size as a human. And it walked upright on its hindlegs, just like a human would walk. And it was wearing human clothing--pants, and a shirt, and a waistcoat. Henry, John, and Grace were so surprised. Robert, of course, was already familiar with the creature. "Hello Mr. Frog," he said.

"Robert, is that you?" asked the frog. "Just look how much you've grown!"

"I don't understand," said John. "How can you be a frog?"

The question took the creature off-guard. "Why, what do you mean?"

"You're much too big to be a frog," said Henry. "And you're walking just like a person walks."

"He is one of the animal people," said Robert. "They live in the land of fairies?"

"Animal people?" asked John.

"You've heard about us before in stories," said Robert. "The story of the frog who rode into battle on a horse? Or the story of the rabbit who was a famous knight?"

"Yes," said John. "But those are children's stories."

"Those are real stories," said Mr. Frog. "Once, long ago, the animal people lived among the humans, and the tales of our deeds still live on in many of your stories--stories that you think are only legends and folktales, but stories which actually did happen. But after a while, we found life among the humans was too quarrelsome. So many needless wars, and too much suffering. So now, we live here in the land of the fairies."

"There are hundreds," said Robert. "Of course not all of them live here in the land of the fairies. Some of them live in other parts of the forest. But in the land of the forest there are Mr. Toad, and Mr. Rabbit, and Ms. Fox, and Mr. Rat, and Ms. Badger, and many more. They all walk on two legs, just like a human, and they are all the size of a human. And they wear clothes and live in houses just like humans."

"And yet, we are part animal as well," said Mr. Frog. "These frog legs can jump much better than any human legs can."

"Would you like to meet some of the others?" asked the Fairy.

Henry, John and Grace said that they would. And so they spent the afternoon walking along the stream, and visiting the various houses of the animal people. They met Mr. Mole, and Mr. Cat, and Ms. Raccoon.

After having spent the afternoon exploring the beautiful green meadows, they watched the sunset, and went back to the fairy houses. There was a big party, and lots of the animal people came as well to eat and drink.

There was plenty of food prepared by the fairies. And it wasn't just the fruits and vegetables of the forest, but proper bread and cakes. John thought that maybe the fairies had created everything by magic, but Robert said that it was unusual for the fairies to create something completely out of nothing. Most likely, said Robert, the ingredients had all been around somewhere, and the fairies had just magicked them together into cooking.

That night, they all slept in soft beds at Mr. Frog's house. And in the morning, they continued on their journey.