

THE GOBLIN QUEEN

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“And the trees are all kept equal,
Under hatchet, axe and saw.”

The redheaded elf continued to skip through the arboreal forest after she finished the song. She tried to think of what to sing next, but the only songs she could remember all the words to were ‘Fifty Mission Cap’ and ‘Locked in The Trunk of a Car’. She didn’t think that a song about a serial killer or another about some hockey player disappearing in the wilderness were too well suited for singing while alone in the forest. She also did not think they were the types of songs that an elf should sing.

She slowed to a walk, her soft-soled boots leaving no footprints in the earth. Something caught her attention and she whirled about suddenly, spotting a raven in the distance.

The faerie clapped her hands triumphantly. “I’m getting so much better at sensing living things!” She giggled and resumed her walk southwards, confident that no animal would harm her and that she could find food whenever she was hungry. There were many benefits to being an elf.

On the other hand, she thought, there were some drawbacks. She couldn’t carry her iPod: the electronics made her ill now that she was one of the faerie. She glanced at the leaf-like dress that covered her chest, waist and hips. With a wry smile, she wondered what man would be interested in her now. She had never been big-boobed and the transformation to elf had made her half the size she had been as a human, breasts included.

She shook her head. Thinking like this was getting her nowhere, she realized. She was here alone in the Canadian North to discover herself, or so Breeleigh and the others had recommended. Even Holly and Santa had thought it was a good idea.

The redhead stopped and sat on a carpet of brown pine needles. She took a deep breath and then concentrated on extending her feelings outwards. Her eyes were closed and she struggled to ignore the scent of pine, the sound of the wind passing through the tree branches and the feel of the dried pine needles beneath her bare legs.

She remembered the first time she had tried this, up at the North Pole. She had ignored the warnings from some of the other elves and had been consumed by the errant passions emanating from the humans around Santa’s home. It had taken four elf males to satisfy her lusts.

However, that had taught her that she needed to understand much more about her transformation and what it meant to be a faerie. The others were born to it, but she and Zoe had eaten elf food and imbibed elf alcohol to become elves. Over a year had passed since her transformation and she had grown tired of the casual sex and the endless toy making. Even in her human life she had always quested to learn more; after all wasn’t that what the universe was here for?

She shook her head angrily; she was getting distracted!

Taking another deep breath, she then extended her senses out. There was a rabbit not too far away and she could feel its hunger and...passion? Oh dear, she thought. She focussed her senses elsewhere.

There was a wolverine! She had heard of them and had always wanted to see one. She entered the animal’s mind and then recoiled. Her eyes opened and she felt sweat upon her brow. The beast had been full of passions and some of them had been very aggressive. The redhead collected herself and then sent her mind out elsewhere.

She sensed the raven and entered its mind. The bird was a kindred spirit, wondering what this thing passing through the forest and dressed in leaves was. She briefly looked at herself through the raven’s eyes and then sent her mind elsewhere.

There were other animals about, each concentrating on their daily task of keeping alive and finding food. But she sensed something to the east, a mind. She thought perhaps it felt like a sentient mind, but it was diffuse and the thoughts were unfocussed.

The elf woman recalled a story by Theodore Sturgeon about a forest monster and she shivered. She forced herself to calm and concentrated on the entity to the east. There was something inhuman about it. Her eyes snapped open and she licked her red lips as her senses tasted faerie, possibly very near to the entity.

Rising to her feet gracefully, she stood and looked east. Her shadow stretched out ahead of her. She didn't remember the others at the North Pole mentioning any faerie society around here; that was the reason she'd asked to be dropped off in this region.

The redhead shrugged her shoulders and skipped off towards where she had sensed the entity. She didn't want to sing the entire Rush album again; besides she wasn't a fan of that band. For some reason, Santa had played that album — an actual record — for her a few times and something about it stuck with her, although she didn't understand why.

Rather than ponder why Hemispheres struck some chord within her, she decided to sing a different type of song as she travelled.

“Bill Barilko disappeared
that summer he was on fishing trip.”

II

The elf's shadow stretched before her further and further the longer she walked. Nightfall didn't concern her: she had come to realize that the five elf senses were far keener than her previous human senses. In fact, to her surprise she'd found that she could see in pitch black almost as well as in daylight. She'd tried to determine if she was seeing infrared or ultraviolet, but had no luck in her investigations. What had intrigued her most was that she saw proper colours even when there was no light.

The redhead sensed a bat flying towards her. It nervously veered away and then, regaining its courage, flew directly over her. It wheeled and flew over her again. She looked up and spied a cloud of flying insects, likely mosquitoes or black flies. The bat dived into the cloud again and again, satisfying its empty belly.

Were even insects going to be friendly to her now, she wondered? Then she remembered that mosquitoes followed carbon dioxide to their prey, but she couldn't remember if black flies did the same thing. She shrugged her shoulders; none of the insects had bitten her.

She'd been an elf for over a year now and she was still trying to figure everything out, she thought with exasperation. Then, she had also spent most of that first year jumping from man to man and enjoying the intoxicating effects of sexual passion that humans either took for granted or kept buried deep down.

Her passions had ruled her for too long, she had decreed. It was time to look at things from a scientific perspective. She had not been able to find any faerie who examined the world with a detached, analytical view. What discoveries might be out there for her? Could she actually publish a paper in a prestigious journal? Or perhaps write a book on what the world looked like through elf eyes?

These questions had dominated her mind; but first, the older elves had reminded her, she had to discover herself or, more exactly, she had to discover her new self.

With her mind wandering, she had lost the exact location of the strange entity that she had sensed earlier. The elf woman stopped and calmed herself. Clearing her mind, she expanded her senses.

The animals around her were either rousing for the night or preparing for sleep. She could tell the plants, especially the flowers, were also readying themselves for a rest phase, which greatly surprised her. She expanded her senses further.

What she sought was ahead of her. The taste of a being was even less precise; it was more the sense of...faerie essence? She grinned at this mystery, opened her eyes and continued skipping through the trees.

III

The elf woman cleared the tree line and stared at the mound in the centre of the clearing. She certainly didn't need a supernatural faerie sense to know that this place was different, she thought with a wry grin. The evergreens were mixed with various deciduous trees and ended in a circle with a radius of roughly six metres. Covering half the clearing was a gently sloping and symmetrical grass-covered mound which rose to a height of about two metres. A metre inside the tree line was a ring of mushrooms, or toadstools, that glowed faintly in the darkness. A similar ring encircled the mound about halfway to its top.

The elf could not sense any faeries nearby. She walked along the perimeter of the clearing searching for any holes or other entrances to an underground lair, but could find nothing of the kind.

She looked up at the brightly-starred sky and sighed. The Milky Way looked exactly as it did in astronomy books, with a glowing haze, ominous darkness, bright and pinprick stars and a surprising variety of colours. A shooting star flashed across her field of view and she laughed out loud at the remembrance that people once thought meteors were harbingers of danger or disaster.

She reached down past her skirt and idly scratched her leg above the knee.

"Well, I think this is a faerie circle," she said as she gingerly stepped over the outer ring of fungi.

Nothing happened. She had expected some faerie magic to reveal itself. The redhead frowned and looked about. The bat returned and flew through the cloud of insects over her head.

"Well, if you think it's safe..." she said to the bat and she walked up the slope.

The creature continued to wheel about in the air, devouring as much of its night time meal as it could and as fast as it could. Another bat joined it and she paused to watch the aerial acrobatics.

The elf realized she was scared. She really knew very little about faerie magic. The other elves had tried to teach her, but she kept looking for rational explanations to the manipulation of supernatural forces and never seemed to grasp even the most elemental magic.

Taking a deep breath, she carefully stepped over the inner ring of luminescent fungi and then strode to the top of the mound.

Everything seemed unchanged. The bats were still devouring insects a metre or two above her head and the same stars shone above them. The air didn't seem colder, nor did a menacing voice order her to leave. She hadn't quite expected to meet one of the terrible creatures that her friends Vicky and Jenny had encountered the previous year, but she was an elf now and faerie couldn't sense those malevolent beings.

Could there be one living in this mound, she wondered? The bats still wheeled innocently overhead and this clearing seemed much more natural than the descriptions of the homes of Set and Windigo that she had heard. The redhead decided to wait and see if anything would present itself to her.