

Coming Home **by** **Anna Fallon**

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The three years since Rosie felt the crispness of a frosty winter's morning passed in a flash it seemed. Moving to the tropics did provide her with year round warmth, but she realized now how much she'd missed the ice-laden pines surrounding her parent's property. As a child, Rosie imagined the sparkling ice needles to be the work of faeries. She'd picture the tiny, winged beings whizzing around with their frosty paint brushes, turning everything to magical shards.

Childhood remained a time of innocence and faith in the unknown for her. Now almost a lifetime away, but still deep inside her somewhere. Her pulse quickened a little as thoughts of her childhood games brought back the exhilaration she felt every time she'd played with her imaginary friends. Rosie scoffed to herself, now, stop being soppy and sentimental. Right now she needed to finish scrubbing these floors, and the only sparkles she had to worry about would be the windows. Now, with her mother gone, the time came to sell the homestead.

Tears stung her eyes, a product of guilt and grief. Her friends told her not to feel bad; living so far away she'd done the best she could. Rosie's family had settled far north of here. David, her husband, owned and managed a major gold mine. He travelled far inland to work for a few weeks at a time and then came home for a few weeks. The children loved the lifestyle of beaches and fresh, juicy tropical fruits, so Rosie and David chose to live on the coast. Even Rosie appreciated the fact she never needed to invest in winter woolies. But looking out of the window just now, feeling the bite of cold on her fingers and nose, called her back to a different era.

They led a fortunate, even wealthy, life. Rosie could have anything she wanted. The trouble being, the things she wanted couldn't be bought. Being a high profile family, Rosie had many formal engagements and charity events to attend and organize. Her devoted mother said she understood. Rosie still wished she could have spent more time with her. This trip Rosie planned as a surprise to her mother. A whole month to catch up on lost time. Just as her childhood, the pair of them giggling into the night during the times Rosie's father worked away. But Rosie ended up wearing the surprise when her mother suffered a massive stroke just three days before the scheduled trip.

Smashing glass sounded from the kitchen. Rosie drew in a quick breath, her muscles tightened. No one should be here. Rosie travelled alone to sort out her mother's affairs. The children all but grown and David still committed to the mine, Rosie relished the opportunity to get back to herself. The girl she used to be. David and the girls would not be joining her until the funeral in two days time. Her mind raced, wondering whether she should just march into the kitchen and look, or run out the other door in case an intruder was there. After a second of consideration, Rosie picked up her scrubbing brush, held it high, and forcefully walked toward the kitchen doorway.

She hoped she looked formidable, because her knees trembled and a hint of nausea churned within. Passing through into the kitchen, taking big careful steps, Rosie could immediately see no intruder had joined her. Hearing a tinkling, Rosie looked down toward her feet. A broken crystal wine flute lay on the blue-green tiles. A flash of color caught Rosie's eye. Almost a transparent rainbow, and if she wasn't mistaken, sparkles. Lowering the scrubbing brush to her side, Rosie couldn't believe it, the colors swirled and gathered around the broken vessel. The pieces promptly disappeared. Confused, Rosie shook her head, squatting down to run her fingers across the tiles to feel where the shattered crystal should have been.

Swirling rainbow sparkles became a small vortex seeming to spin quicker than Rosie's eye could see. The whirlpool hovered just above her hand, a slight tickle played across the back of it. Rosie blinked as if that may clear this vision from before her. She turned her hand over, exposing the palm. The spinning rainbow warmed her skin and magically the wine glass formed from the base, along the stem and flared up into the slender body of the flute. Rosie felt ready to pinch herself. She quickly gripped the base lest she smash it again. A set of tiny, musical giggles fluttered across the room. Could it be?

“Faeries? Are you there?” Rosie asked as she stood to place the wine flute back on the shelf next to the five others. Another set of giggles fluttered in her ear, and a breezy tickle ran over her neck. Rosie cringed a little and giggled. “Show me, please?”

An hourglass-shaped woman with glittering lacework wings appeared before her eyes. Only three inches high but everything Rosie's childhood books portrayed. Shining black hair, delicate features, alabaster skin, and a bright smile beamed back at Rosie. The Faerie wore a flowing cerise dress with the romantic bell shaped sleeves, styled exactly like the one Rosie wore at her wedding.

“Why are you here?” Rosie's heart beat quickly and her mind soared with possibilities. *Perhaps I have finally gone crazy.* The Faerie kept smiling and two more, on either side of the first, appeared. A blonde with sky blue wings and azure dress, and a redhead with lemon wings and deeper lemon clothing grinned back to Rosie. Both as gorgeous as the first, Rosie could do nothing but open her mouth to speak. No words came. *This cannot be happening.*

Once more she squeezed her eyes shut, the Faeries giggled. “We are here for you, Rosie. Remember when we used to play?”

“For me? But why?” Rosie opened her eyes, her little friends buzzed around in quick movements.

“You are sad and confused.”

“I can't deny that,” answered Rosie. “But I still don't understand why I am seeing Faeries.”

“We just popped in to welcome you home again,” The lemon sorbet one sweetly chimed.

“But I'm only here a short while...I'm not staying, the house is on the market.”

“We know.” The three tittered again.

“I just don't understand this. I think I need a cuppa,” Rosie remarked.

“You will Rosie. Before this day is out, you will understand.” With that they sped once around the room sprinkling dust sparkles everywhere and disappeared, after a quick tousle in Rosie's hair.

Rosie flicked on the switch to the kettle and decided she had indeed gone bonkers. Sitting at the table, her throat constricted, tears welled in her eyes, and her chin vibrated. “Damn it!” The sobs came freely. No way to hold them back.

She thought of her childhood, how her mother had nurtured her faerie games. Never telling Rosie she was silly, or imagining them. Her mother proved to be the magical one, skipping alongside Rosie spreading faerie dust glitter. Rosie just missed her so very much. She missed her from the very moment she left her side and she knew from the look in her mother's eyes, her heart broke to see her daughter go. But her mother never asked her to stay because she believed in Rosie's dreams. Rosie now, with children of her own, realized the sacrifice her mother made to let her only child move so far away.

Father lived ten years after Rosie and David married and left for north. Everyone visited everyone then, but after her father died, Rosie found herself even busier. Five years had lapsed since she'd been to visit. In a way she'd avoided on purpose, each time it became harder and harder to leave her childhood home. Trying to control her tears now, she felt quite faint. The nausea still hung around and a headache thumped dully. "Oh I'm a mess!" she chastised herself. But still the tears would not let up, she shook uncontrollably.

"Love?" Rosie felt familiar arms around her.

"David? What...are you...doing here?" She used stilted speech through her sobs.

"Rosie, I couldn't leave you to do this all on your own. Silly girl." His dark brown eyes glowed with the warmth of love and empathy.

"But I told you to come on the funeral day. Booked yours and the girls tickets, what about work?" She stammered, as practical as ever.

Kissing her forehead, squatting down in front of her, his eyes leveled hers. "I've retired."

"What! David, how could you? You love your work." Rosie could not believe her ears.

David laughed quietly, "not as much as I love you, and you haven't truly been happy up there. I know you did what you thought was best. I thank you for that. But we have plenty of money. Now it's your time. Remember when we first met and you said you wanted to make this place into a Faerie Grotto for people to visit?"

Rosie sighed, "yes, I do. It seems so long ago. Just a silly dream."

"Rosie, you don't understand. I bought the place. Well, I paid all the fees owing, and transferred it into our names, so you can keep the property. So we can keep the property. You helped me build up my dream. Now it's time we built yours." David lifted her chin and softly kissed her lips. Her stomach fluttered.

“We can keep it? Oh David, that is so wonderful. Are you sure?”

“You have given up your dreams for me. It is time I gave them back. Besides I won't mind the faerie costume.” He winked at her with a wicked glint in his eyes.

“You wouldn't?” she gasped and laughed.

“Maybe.”

“Where are the girls?” Rosie suddenly remembered their daughters.

“At my Mom and Dad's, visiting until the day of the funeral.” David pressed his lips to hers and kissed her a little more urgently. Rosie needed that kiss, needed the acknowledgement about being a woman. She sought his lips hungrily. David ran his hands over her back, Rosie shivered. Pulling out of the fervent kiss, she cupped her husband's face in her hands.

“Thank you.”

“Thank you, Rosie, for loving me.”

A chime of musical tittering sounded around the room, and flashes of rainbow caught in her peripheral vision, but she couldn't quite focus on it. David looked about the room and turned back to Rosie, his eyes searched hers. He raised his eyebrows, frowned, and he went to speak, his eyebrows now knitted in curiosity.

Rosie interrupted. “Don't ask, because you wouldn't believe me if I told you.”