

ELLORA'S CAVE XANADU

Wood-Lovin'

Nymph

Téa Trelawny

ELLORA'S CAVE *Quickies*®

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Wood nymph Ariana loves the Central Park oak tree in which she lives...but she craves Rick Ballentine's hard body more. Unfortunately the sexy NYPD detective believes she's working with a couple of muggers in the park. To avoid arrest, she must convince him of her innocence and she's willing to use her body to do it.

Rick resists his lust for Ariana. After all, it's against NYPD policy for a cop to fraternize with a suspect. But when this hot fairy seduces him, his badge suddenly seems less important than satisfying his desires with her lush body.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

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ISBN 9781419930454

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Edited by Helen Woodall

Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book publication September 2010

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WOOD-LOVIN' NYMPH

Téa Trelawny

Dedication

To those who believe in what they can't see...and then embrace it.

Chapter One

Ariana's heart throbbed as dawn approached. Pressing closer to the bark of her favorite pin oak, she peeked around the scarred trunk.

Any moment now.

Central Park remained silent. Manhattan had yet to awaken. She narrowed her eyes, peering into the gloom that hovered around the pond. A rhythmic thump sounded from the trees.

He's coming.

Through the gloom, a pale mass took shape. It moved through the mist, growing larger as it advanced along the rustic path that wound through the trees.

It's him.

She pressed her cheek against the pin oak's bark and closed her eyes.

You don't have to go through with it today, whispered her doubt. *You can melt back into the tree, hide underground, face him another day.*

But that little pulse that beat low inside her body made itself known again. It burned. It...craved. That was the true word for what she felt and her heart told her the craving was for him.

Taking a deep breath, she pushed back from her tree. Placing herself in his path, she opened her eyes and focused. Her mother had taught her to use a light hand when it came to her fae powers, and Ariana drew on those teachings now. Head slightly lowered, bare feet braced on the dirt path, she used just a trace of magic. She didn't want to influence him. She only wanted him to notice her again, to open himself to possibility and his own deepest desire. His *truest* desire.

For me.

He raised his head, locked his gaze with hers. His running shoes grew quieter against the earthen path. Lips parted, light sparking in his eyes, he stopped a few yards away and stood still.

She considered converting to her fae form – tiny as a lightning bug, gossamer wings extended, her body surrounded by a veil of concealment – or even sparking away inside her tree home. But this handsome human stole her breath away.

Ariana parted her lips, finding that small movement made it easier to breathe. His breath came with difficulty, too, his chest rising and falling as quickly as hers. His subconscious answer to her magic flowed back to her.

We're in sync. I knew it.

Rick Ballentine stood still and yet the earth seemed to move beneath his running shoes. The sensation made him dizzy and he dragged in a shuddering breath as he stared at the exotic beauty. Countless feelings shot through him, not least of which was a raging case of lust.

He'd seen her each morning this week, leaning against that old tree, watching him jog past for only a moment before she vanished into dawn's dim light. He'd searched for her but never found her. But she'd remained in his thoughts, distracting him from his work.

Now her eyes held his. Large and liquid gold, they burned with an intense light that seemed to reach out and embrace him. A delicate nose curled slightly downward above a mouth that was made for plundering.

His cock hardened at the image of that mouth going down on him. It would envelop him, lips drawing, tongue swirling and tasting...

He blinked, tried to focus before she got away again. Golden curls framed an impish face. A strange dress of muted colors draped her body, revealing more than it hid. Sleeveless and as light as cobwebs, the garment clung to her generous breasts and trim waist before falling down the curves of her hips. It ended just below her sweet

spot, and his arousal intensified as he realized the merest of breezes would lift the garment and reveal her treasure. Undergarments—he knew instinctively that she wore none.

She took a step toward him. An incredible ache grew in his loins. He wanted this woman in a way that he'd never wanted any other.

"I've been waiting for you."

Her voice was light and yet carried enough weight to turn the ache inside him from incredible to staggering. Some extraordinary connection existed between this stranger and himself. Relishing his rising attraction, he waited as she advanced.

Morning light increased. Her skin glowed as if sunlight kissed it every day of her life. She smiled and took that final step. Her fingers twined with his and her body warmth surrounded him. Her fragrance—it was like all the scents of a forest melding with the essence of woman. Earth and leaves and new spring flowers, it filled his head and made him believe she was some missing part of himself. He could not have resisted her if he'd tried. And trying was not an option.

She leaned close. Her breasts touched his chest, her nipples hard points of need protruding through her strange dress. The glow of her smile warmed his face an instant before her lips touched his.

Rick fell headlong into her kiss, forgetting about his assignment. All his being focused on her tender mouth and the timid laps of her tongue, on the soft glory of her body pressing against his. He'd fantasized about her and now fantasy turned to reality.

His hands slid around her and down over her round ass. His fingertips found the hem of her dress and tickled beneath it to find that she was indeed as bare as he'd hoped. Her flesh was as warm and soft as a leaf unfurling to the sunlight.

That strange thought whispered through his mind and then vanished as he gave himself over to sensation, hearing only her sweet moans, tasting her delicious mouth with deep plunges of his tongue, skimming his hands over her ass and into the cleft and

following it downward. She parted her legs, lifted one to skim her knee up along the outside of his thigh. His fingertips grazed slick folds.

"Not there, fool."

A strange whisper filtered through the haze of arousal that possessed Rick, but he didn't want to end the kiss or his exploration of her body. He reached farther, stroking her smooth, moist flesh, felt her shudder and press closer.

"Get it while she's distracting him."

Something plucked at a pocket of his running shorts. For a moment, he thought it was the woman, searching for his aching cock.

Yes, yes, just a little to the right.

Then he realized that one of her hands was pushing through his hair while the other slid beneath the hem of his T-shirt.

The hand in his shorts pocket did not belong to the woman in his arms.

Hearing voices, Ariana fought to surface from the bliss of kissing the man. But it proved difficult when he tasted so delicious and pressed so hard and fine against her, when his fingers were setting her body on fire. But the voices...

The kiss ended abruptly.

"Hey!" he shouted, releasing her.

She opened her eyes. Giggles rose from two slight figures that moved quickly below the man's waist level.

Pixies!

As the man twisted and searched, one of the wee ones locked gazes with Ariana. Alarm shone in his glassy blue eyes. In his hand rested the small flashlight she'd seen hanging from the man's waist.

"Oh, shite," the little fellow murmured in his high voice before grabbing his companion's arm. Both pixies stared up at her with guilty eyes.

Anger rolled through Ariana. “What do you think you’re doing?” she demanded as she reached for their collars.

Just as her fingers brushed the cloth, large hands gripped her upper arms and jerked her off her feet. The thieves dashed into the bushes.

“NYPD,” the man said, his breath hot against the side of her face as he clapped a metal bracelet around one of her wrists. “You’re under arrest.”

* * * * *

An hour later, Ariana paced a small gray room. No window, no natural light – only cold illumination fell from several glowing rods suspended from the ceiling. Their unnatural radiance weakened her, making it impossible for her to shift away or change to her fae form.

She settled into a chair at the small table that took up most of the room. But the metal and plastic intensified her unease and she immediately stood up again.

A wood nymph, Ariana was linked to natural elements. She had lived all her life near the Central Park pond, inhabiting a small cavern beneath a tree there. This concrete box that imprisoned her – and the iron frame within its walls – weakened her. Not even her magic worked here.

Detective Rick Ballentine entered the room. “Sit,” he snapped.

Ariana folded her arms over her chest and tried not to shiver at his heated expression. Although he’d removed the metal bracelets, her wrists still burned. “I prefer to stand.”

Sitting at the head of the table, Rick shoved the other chair toward her with his foot. He did not look up from the folder in his hand. “I prefer you to sit.”

Ariana stared at him. How could he treat her with such anger after the kiss they had shared? Could she have mistaken her sense of connection with him?

Reluctantly, she took the plastic seat. Immediately, her weakness intensified, leaving her barely able to sit upright. Leaning forward, she rested her forearms on the wooden table and immediately felt better. The table must be oak.

Seeking more healing from the wood, she pulled herself onto the table. Stretching her body along the top, she reclined on her left side.

Rick's head remained down as he focused on the open file. Growing stronger, Ariana studied his hair. Darker brown than hers, it glowed with vitality. Needful sensations stirred at the core of her body and pulsed out through her limbs. She'd never before experienced such powerful desire as that created by this human male.

Head still down, Rick twitched, perhaps detecting her pheromones.

Ah-ha, Ariana thought. *So he is responsive to me.*

The thought of giving herself to him here on this table caused a spasm in her pussy. He had touched her there while he kissed her. Wanting him to touch her there again, she leaned close enough to stir his hair with her breath.

Rick's head shot up. Bursting from his chair, he jumped back, eyes wide. "What are you doing?"

She pushed herself up to rest on one palm. "Isn't it obvious?" she murmured, lifting her other hand to her hip, using her fingertips to draw her short dress upward. He had seemed interested earlier in lifting her skirt.

Rick's gaze shifted to the flesh she revealed and his breath hitched in his throat. But he said, "Get off the table."

That wasn't the reaction she wanted. Unsure, Ariana scooted backward off the table and stood with her hands clasped behind her.

"Sit down," he said, returning to his own seat.

Deflated, Ariana obeyed, wondering if she was wrong. She had sensed his attraction to her in the park, but had her magic caused it? Had she used more than

she'd intended? But even that would not have caused him to enjoy her kiss if he wasn't truly drawn to her.

"You said your name is Ariana," he said gruffly. "You got a last name?"

Feeling lightheaded again, she made up a name. "Park."

He wrote it down. "You said you have no identification. How can you live in New York City without ID? How can you lease an apartment or hold a job?" When she didn't answer immediately, he pressed on. "Where *do* you live and work?"

"I...live...in the park."

Rick made more notes in his file. "You're homeless."

How could she tell him—a mortal—that she lived under a tree in the park? She sighed and lied. "Yes. I'm homeless."

Rick shifted in his chair, disturbed by his continued attraction to his beautiful mugging suspect. He'd never been drawn to a perp before but there was something different about this woman with her golden eyes and odd dress.

Could she really be involved with the muggers who had operated in the park for the past few weeks? Working undercover, trying to catch the men, he'd seen her every morning, but it never occurred to him that she might be associated with the thieves. He still couldn't quite believe it, but she *had* distracted him this morning.

And who wandered around the park dressed like... He resisted looking at her sexily strange dress. *Like that?*

"Ms. Park..." He tried to focus on questioning her. "Did you see the men who tried to mug me this morning?"

She lifted one shoulder, dragging his gaze to her breasts. Immediately he experienced a surge of heat inside his chest. He would have likened it to heartburn but he hadn't eaten anything since last night.

He shifted in his seat again. Even his damn cock grew hot. And hard. "Ms. Park, did you see those men?" he repeated gruffly, wishing that he'd been able to see them. But they'd moved too damned fast for him to get a look at them.

"I saw them."

Her voice...it was the most melodic female voice he'd ever heard. Like the finest operatic star. No—like an angel.

Get it together, Ballentine.

Frowning, he looked back at the file. "Do you know them?"

"No."

"You don't work with them?"

"Work with them?"

She sounded puzzled and he looked up to see if her face would reveal anything. All that her lovely features revealed was his own wild lust as the warmth of those golden eyes jabbed him once more.

He put his left hand in his lap, grateful for the table that hid his raging hard-on. "You know...distracting potential victims like you did with me this morning."

A smile fluttered across her lips. "I distracted you? Really?"

She looked so pleased by the idea, and the sight of her pleasure made him feel manly and strong and—

Annoyed, Rick went on, "You knew those men were waiting in the bushes."

She shook her head. Light shimmered through her hair. Rick's fingers itched as he thought about thrusting them through those golden locks.

He cleared his throat. "You had no idea they were there?"

"Not until you suddenly stopped kissing me."

He scowled at his remembered weakness even as his body threatened to betray him again. "About that. I don't know what came over me—"

"I know," she interrupted. "You want me as I want you."

His scowl deepened. "That isn't...I mean, I should never...oh, hell. You tried to distract me so they could pick my pockets."

"I would never do such a thing to *you*." She placed both hands on the table and leaned forward. The low neckline of her dress hung loose enough that he could see the shadowy cleavage between her breasts. "I swear it on my heart's blood."

He dragged his gaze back to her face. "Your—what kind of oath is that?"

"'Tis the strongest a fae—" She paused before going on more slowly. "'Tis an old family phrase."

"I see." But he didn't. He didn't understand anything, least of all his attraction to this beautiful stranger. She was right about one thing—he wanted her with a passion that nearly overwhelmed him. Nearly, hell—it *had* overwhelmed him this morning. But his attraction to her was beside the point. He had a job to do. "Can you describe the men?"

Ariana's fingers tangled together. She drew her lower lip slightly inward, nipping at it with her teeth—another sign that she was being less than honest. But Rick could hardly think of how to press her on the issue. His thoughts kept straying into fantasies about sifting that glorious hair through his fingers and nibbling at her lips with his teeth. This morning she'd tasted warm and exotic, unlike any other woman he'd kissed.

Ariana looked paler suddenly and she slumped in her chair.

"Are you all right?" He moved quickly to her side, afraid she might pass out.

Her golden eyes focused on him with what looked like gratitude. She placed a hand on his arm and her lips parted slightly. Her mouth was so close to his that he could smell the sweetness of her breath. Hunger roared inside him and then his arms went around her and he pulled her out of the chair.

Her body molded to his, her breasts soft but her nipples hard enough that he felt them through her strange dress and his T-shirt. He couldn't resist touching. One hand came up to capture one of her breasts, to rub his thumb over a stiff peak. She groaned and her head fell back so that her neck was bared to his view. Pale golden flesh, flawless

and warm, beckoned him to lower his lips and nuzzle. She smelled earthy and delicious. He eased his tongue out to taste her. Just one taste...

A shout yanked Rick to his senses. He turned as a small Asian woman rushed into the room, knocked Rick aside and threw her arms around Ariana.

"Ariana! I was so worried!"

Ariana drew back and stared at the woman in mute surprise.

The woman looked at Rick. "I am Camellia Stewart. Ariana is my niece."

"Sorry, sir." A uniformed officer dashed inside. "I don't know how she—"

Camellia Stewart waved one hand in the air and the officer shut up abruptly. "All that matters is that Ariana is safe. I will take her home now."

Rick blocked the doorway as the chagrined officer disappeared back through it. "She can't leave. Ms. Park is being questioned about illegal activities in Central Park."

"Ariana has nothing to do with illegal activities." The woman spoke with only a trace of an accent, indicating that she'd probably been born somewhere in Asia but had lived in New York City most of her life. Her black eyes were bright and her face youthful, her petite figure trim.

"Ms. Stewart, she can't just leave," Rick insisted. "Even if she isn't involved with those muggers, she needs to explain some pretty unusual behavior."

"I saw her unusual behavior. Yours, too." Camellia looked from Rick to Ariana and back again, her black eyes sharp. "Perhaps I will talk to your chief detective about how you question suspects."

Rick's mouth went dry. Had she really seen him kissing Ariana's neck? He could get in serious trouble if this woman reported him. *Serious* trouble.

"Ariana needs her special...tonic." Camellia drew Ariana from the chair. "I will take her home. You have questions—you come to my apartment." She pressed a business card into Rick's hand. "Maybe you will learn that understanding the unusual isn't as important as merely accepting its gifts."

What the hell does that mean?

His palm grew warm as she folded his fingers around the card and stared at him. Amusement seemed to shine in her eyes as she slowly withdrew her hand.

“Come, child.” Camellia tucked her arm around Ariana’s waist and hustled the young woman out of the room.

Rick stared after them. A strange sense of loss swept over him and he fell into the chair Ariana had vacated. *Unusual* didn’t begin to cover this morning’s events.

Chapter Two

Within minutes Ariana was sitting on a rustic wooden chair in a small apartment kitchen, her elbows resting on a matching table as she looked out an open window. A single oak tree grew in the center of a narrow green space, its strong branches just outside the window. The scent of the tree energized her. Relaxing, she allowed her wings to come out, extending over the low-cut back of her dress and stretching behind her.

"A cup of tea is what you need," Camellia said as she moved about the kitchen. "I have some bark from your pin oak tree here somewhere."

While the woman searched through her cabinets, Ariana continued to stretch her wings and gaze out the window. She could smell Central Park above the city scents. Inhaling deeply, she tried to filter in those more pleasant and familiar aromas but choked instead on exhaust and other rancid odors. Bile rose at the back of her throat but she managed to control it.

Moments later, Camellia pressed a delicate teacup into Ariana's hand. "Drink this. It will heal you."

Obediently, Ariana sipped the fragrant tea. Instantly, vigor flowed through her body and her mind cleared of the cobwebs woven by her strange adventure.

"There. I see more color in your face." Camellia bustled back to the kitchen counter. "You drink that now and I will find something for you to eat."

Ariana took a fuller sip of the tea and then looked at Camellia. "Thank you for helping me but who —"

"I am a wood nymph, like you." Camellia arranged cookies on a plate. "I came from Japan many years ago, with my tree. It is the False Camellia." She gestured with a nod

toward a small tree growing in a pot in a corner of the living room. Cup-shaped white flowers covered it.

"I haven't heard of that tree," Ariana said.

"There are a few in Manhattan—even in Central Park. But mine did not do well in the park." Camellia carried the plate to the table. "I was drawn to the human world anyway. I have a weakness for their pastries." She winked at Ariana and then returned to the kitchen.

"Why didn't you move to Fairyland?" Ariana picked up one of the pretty, featherlight cookies. Honeysuckle nectar drizzled over them. "The bakers there make wonderful pastries."

"True, and I do visit occasionally." Carrying her teacup to the table, Camellia sat next to Ariana. "But I have made good friends among the humans over the years. I like to stay close to them. They can be so interesting, don't you think?"

Ariana pinched off a piece of her cookie and thought about the handsome detective who had been so unexpectedly cruel to her...when he wasn't kissing her. "I avoid them as much as I can."

"Oh, you must not do that. Some of them are truly lovely."

I used to think so, too. Ariana placed the piece of cookie in her mouth and sighed. "This is delicious."

"Thank you." Camellia beamed. "I bought the cookies from the bakery of one of my friends and I added the honeysuckle glaze. Now what about that wonderful Detective Rick Ballentine?"

"I wouldn't call him wonderful."

"Wouldn't you?" One of Camellia's eyebrows arched. "From what I saw when I came into that horrible room, you found each other rather wonderful."

Ariana tried not to think about their kiss. "He thought I was a thief."

"So I surmised."

Ariana placed the rest of her cookie on a napkin. "How did you know I was at the police station?"

"Through the fae network, of course. You cannot beat it for passing gossip and other information. As soon as I heard that a wood nymph was taken from the park by a human police detective, I hurried over. I knew you would weaken quickly and end up in one of their hospitals." She clucked her tongue. "That would have been very bad for your health."

"I appreciate your assistance —"

"I know you do, dear." Camellia placed a hand over one of Ariana's. "Move in with me for a time. I will teach you to live among the humans. Then, perhaps you and Detective Ballentine can get to know each other on a more amiable basis. I sensed that the two of you are meant to be together."

Temptation teased at Ariana's heart and libido, but she shook her head. "After what happened..." She lifted one shoulder. "Anyway, if I left the park, who would protect my tree?"

Camellia drew back her hand and added a dollop of honey to her teacup from a small jar on the table. "Your tree will be fine. Central Park has an army of human gardeners who do a nice job of protecting the plants there. And it is not as if you will never see the park again. It is mere blocks away and you could visit any time."

"But what about the..." Ariana lowered her voice. "The poisonings?"

Camellia's expression shifted from peace to concern. "Many fae have perished, poisoned by the manmade buildings in which they chose to live. But a fairy who chooses carefully—and maintains a strict regimen of drinking tea brewed from her native tree or plant—can thrive in a human structure. I chose a building with minimal iron in its frame." Camellia gestured around her small apartment. "And I've surrounded myself with natural furnishings."

Ariana looked around the room. Wood floors and paneling, oak and pine furniture with cotton upholstery, plants and flowers everywhere – with the windows open, it was almost like living in the park.

“Consider it.” Camellia rose. “Rest a bit and consider how much bigger the world is than the park. Now I shall nip down to the bakery and fetch us another batch of cookies.”

Camellia shifted out of the apartment. Ariana nibbled her cookie and sipped her tea, relieved as more energy returned to her body. Perhaps she could live in the human world without succumbing to the illnesses other fairies had experienced. And living in man’s world might give her a chance at love and children. Her heart grew warm when an image of Rick Ballentine flashed through her mind.

“Maybe,” she murmured, leaning close to the window and peering at the leaves of the oak tree growing outside it. “Maybe I can.”

* * * * *

Rick stared at the open file on his desk. Although no one had been hurt, the muggers had frightened many people. At least the thieves weren’t taking big bucks off their victims. They took jewelry and coins but never hard cash. Today they’d seemed interested only in his flashlight.

He leaned back in his chair and stared at the gray ceiling. Instantly, his thoughts went to kissing Ariana. Technically, she’d kissed him but he sure hadn’t fought her off. Drawn by the taste of her, he’d eased his tongue inside her mouth, lapping at her sweetness like he was a cat and she was a bowl of cream. He could’ve stood there in the dawn light and kissed her for hours, continuing the movement of his hands under her dress and –

The forward jolt of his chair and the bang of its front legs on the tile floor yanked him out of the fantasy. He scowled and slammed his palm against the open file. A “by the book” cop, he didn’t indulge in fantasies about suspects or witnesses.

Something scratched his palm. Lifting his hand, he saw Camellia Stewart's business card. Picking it up, he saw by the address that she lived only three blocks from the station.

Remembering how ill Ariana had appeared, he considered checking on her. Common sense stopped him. Other than as a suspect or a witness, he had no reason to seek out Ariana Park. There were, after all, other cases to investigate.

* * * * *

Converting to her tiniest fae form, Ariana slipped out of Camellia's guest room window late that evening. The bed was comfortable, but Ariana's mind was too busy for rest. Longing drove her to seek the only thing that could ease her discomfort. Flitting from tree to tree to maintain her strength in the concrete canyons, she returned to the police station, arriving just as Rick exited the building.

Maintaining her veil of concealment, she followed him through the streets. He had changed from the running clothes he'd worn that morning, putting on jeans and a sports shirt. These clothes fit closer to his body in a way that made her appreciate the shape of the human male.

Finally he turned and mounted the steps of an old building. Ariana flew too far behind to follow him through the door, and she was afraid to shift into unfamiliar human dwellings. So she hovered until she saw a light turn on in one of the windows. Chancing that this was his apartment, she zipped upward and landed on the windowsill. Through a narrow gap in the curtains over the window, she saw him move across a sparsely furnished bedroom.

He stripped his shirt over his head and tossed it on his bed then stood with his back to her. Ariana pressed her palms against the window glass. His skin was darker and smoother than hers. It looked warm and the sight made her fingertips tingle. Other parts of her tingled when he stripped off his jeans to reveal a white undergarment that

formed to his backside and upper thighs. But before she could get a good look, he strode through a doorway on the inner wall of the room and a light clicked on there.

Probably his bathroom, she thought, and turned to study his neighborhood. His apartment rose high and she could see over the roofs of nearby buildings. She couldn't see any stars as she could from the top of her pin oak tree, but the reddish glow that domed the sky contained its own beauty and excitement.

The light behind her went out. Facing the window once more, she gasped. On the other side of the glass stood something she'd never seen before – a naked man.

Ariana stumbled backward and fell off the windowsill. She tumbled several yards before catching herself. Wings fluttering rapidly, she hovered a moment, catching her breath as she thought over what she'd seen. His sex organ. That was the only thing it could have been. What did the elves call it...a dick?

She frowned. She didn't like that word.

Cock!

Yes, that sounded stronger and more...manly.

Flying back to his window, she discovered that he had opened it. Rick lay down on his bed, but did not draw any covering over his body. He tucked his hands behind his head and one of his legs was bent and drawn to one side. His cock stretched upward across his lower abdomen, thick and hard.

He was her first naked human male and she had to admit he was quite a sight. Appealing and stimulating.

Slipping through the open window, she flitted low along the wall. Remaining small, she kept her veil of concealment tight around her. This building must be old because she felt no ill effects, so she moved closer to the man on the bed.

His eyes were closed, his breathing even and deep. His chest rose and fell with each breath and the muscles in his abdomen moved in a tantalizing way.

Drifting closer, allowing herself to grow to the size of a human inch mark, she flew slowly upward along his body, studying every part of him. His feet were large and well-formed, the second toe of each foot slightly longer than his big toes—and twice as big as she was currently. His ankles appeared sturdy and curls of dark hair dusted his calves and thighs.

She followed the bent leg around the inside curve of his knee and along his inner thigh. His body radiated warmth and a musky scent rose to tease her nostrils. Her body, without any thought from her, grew a bit larger. Other changes occurred as well. Her breasts grew heavy, stretching the fabric of her dress as she drifted face-down above him. Her nipples tightened and a pleasant tickle radiated inward from them, prickling throughout her body until it reached the point between her legs. Her body lengthened again, to almost three inches.

Of course she knew what was happening. As a wood nymph, sex was supposed to be a big part of her life. She'd experienced attraction before—toward an elf or two—but never like this. Never enough to make her willing to give up her virginity. But now, for the first time in her life, she experienced the libidinous nymph craving that her mother had told her would one day overcome her elfin half.

Ariana reached out one hand and brushed her fingertips along Rick's inner thigh. The tight muscle quivered under her hand and he straightened his leg. Ariana shot away before he could trap her between his thighs, but was blocked by velvety softness. Flesh enfolded her, enveloping her in his powerful male scent.

Reeling with a sensation similar to intoxication, she fluttered upward and turned. Amazing. Ballocks, she'd heard the elves say. They contained the male part of the essence of life.

Smiling with wonder, she flew upward along the shaft of his impressive cock. Her outstretched arms could not encircle it but she did flick her fingertips against him. To her delight, the whole member twitched, bouncing up against her. Giggling, she

embraced it, aware that her size had increased again so that she was as tall as his cock was long. Now her arms could reach almost all the way around it.

Moisture formed at the juncture of her thighs. A hungry sort of sensation settled deep inside her.

Feeling brazen, she wrapped her arms around him. He was like a sturdy oak branch sheathed in silk, and she felt the pulse of his life along her entire body. His scent surrounded her and the muskiness made her feel lightheaded. She closed her eyes and inhaled then, feeling wicked, eased her tongue out and tasted him.

Mmm. Delicious.

She licked upward along the throbbing vein that ran the length of his cock until she reached the mushroom-shaped top. His flesh grew smoother here and she couldn't resist nipping it with her teeth.

He groaned and one of his hands moved downward. Ariana narrowly escaped before he trapped her between his palm and his magnificent shaft. Not that he would have caught all of her—her body had abruptly grown again so that she was more than a foot tall now.

Grinning, eager to know more about the man who affected her so profoundly, she flew farther up his body. Skimming over his belly and his ribs, she found herself above his broad chest. Hair covered most of it, but didn't conceal his nipples. Expecting them to be flat, she was surprised to find them almost as erect as her own. Of course they were not nearly as large as hers—or wouldn't have been if she gained her full size.

She remembered her mother telling her that erect nipples indicated arousal in members of either gender. But if he was asleep—

She darted toward the ceiling, afraid suddenly that he had awoken. But in the dim illumination falling in from the streetlight, she saw that his eyes remained closed. He continued to breathe deeply and steadily and his hand relaxed on top of his cock and then slipped to his side.

From this vantage point, she was able to take in all his naked glory. There was definitely something beautiful about the human male form.

Or maybe it's just this particular human male, she thought, remembering other men she'd seen in the park. They seemed to come in all shapes and sizes.

I like this shape and size best.

Smiling, she fluttered downward to hover just above him. Gaining her full size—slightly shorter than him—she aligned her body with his. Her lips were inches from his and she noted that he breathed quietly through his mouth. Gently, she brushed her lips over his. His chest went still and a quiet moan sounded from somewhere deep inside him. The sound sent shivers of pleasure throughout her body. She pressed his lips apart with her own and deepened the kiss. His head tilted and his lips moved languidly with hers. Ah, but he tasted spicy and delicious.

Ariana placed her hands on his cheeks, gently stroking, enjoying the delicate rasp of short facial hairs against her palms. Her body relaxed over his, almost as if she melted over his hard muscles. His cock, caught between their abdomens, was hard and hot as it pulsed against her. Parting her legs, she straddled him and rubbed herself against that steely length. He fit perfectly between her body's sexual lower lips, and the sensation was exquisite. She closed her eyes and began to rub herself faster, feeling an ember of need grow inside her.

He gasped suddenly and jerked. Cutting off a frightened squeal, Ariana shifted out of his apartment.

Rick woke with a start. *What the hell...*

He could have sworn that a woman had been lying on him. Then she had vanished in a flash of golden light. Blinking, he sat up. He was alone in his room.

A dream?

He glanced around. Yes, he was alone. But his body tingled strangely and a wonderful taste lingered on his lips. Looking down, he saw that his cock stood at rigid attention, throbbing as if recently caressed by a woman.

Ariana Park's face sprang into his mind. In spite of the shadows that hid the dream woman's visage, he overlaid her with Ariana's face. And...were those wings he'd seen behind her?

"Man, you gotta get laid," he muttered as he fell back against his bed.

* * * * *

"Stop tugging on your clothes." Camellia linked an arm through Ariana's as they walked through Central Park the next morning. "It isn't polite to fidget."

"I can't help it." Ariana tripped on her clunky shoes. The somber black trousers and T-shirt Camellia had loaned her hung uncomfortably loose on her body. Her back tightened as the heavy cloth pressed against her retracted wings. "I want my own clothes."

"You can't go around in fairy dress in the mortal world," Camellia said. "It would draw the wrong kind of attention."

Ariana lifted her chin. "If you would let me gather my veil of concealment, it wouldn't matter."

"If you truly wish to live in the human world, you must practice moving about without hiding yourself from their view."

They arrived at the pond near Ariana's tree home. She sighed as they walked around the water. "I suppose you're right."

Camellia patted her arm. "Of course I am. Now, come. Let us gather some of your things and return to my apartment."

As they approached the tree, two men jogged along the rustic path ahead of them, so the women paused beside the pond. After the men passed, Ariana took Camellia's hand. No one could enter her home beneath the pin oak without her permission and her

touch—not even another fairy. Holding Camellia's hand, she shifted her new friend into the cavern with her.

Rick stared as the two women seemed to vanish into the bark of the tree behind them. Astonished to see them in the park, he'd experienced a surge of longing when he'd recognized Ariana.

Longing, hell. Even now he had a boner that threatened to hit his knee if it didn't stop growing. Undercover as a homeless man sleeping under the nearby bridge, he'd seen the women arrive at the tree. Now they were gone. Just like that.

Impossible.

Tossing off the tattered blanket that was part of his homeless disguise, he rose and walked along the edge of the pond until he reached the tree. Searching around it, he found no sign of Ariana or Camellia. Wondering if he'd dozed off and dreamed the two women—Ariana had certainly figured in his dreams last night—he backed away from the tree. Something similar had happened each morning when he'd seen her, but he'd assumed she'd jogged off into the brush. Not today.

A muffled laugh drew his gaze over his shoulder. Tangled shrubs filled the spaces beneath nearby trees. There was no one there. Hearing the leaves whisper above him, he looked up. There was no breeze. In fact the air hung dead still.

Someone laughed again, but so low that he couldn't tell if the laughter was male or female. He glanced back at the tree. Something strange was definitely going on.

That was his last conscious thought before pain shot through his head and blackness descended.

Chapter Three

Camellia leaned over Ariana's shoulder. "You should take him to a human hospital."

"I can heal him here," Ariana insisted, kneeling beside Rick's unconscious form. She and Camellia had been leaving the tree when they'd seen Rick. "And besides, I got a better look at his thieves. I can help him with his case."

Camellia straightened. "He'll never believe a pair of pixies knocked him out and stole the coins from his pockets."

"He'll believe me if he wakes up in my bedroom."

Footsteps sounded along the path and Camellia touched Ariana's arm. "Well, if you're going to do it, you'd better hurry before another human comes along. I'll see you at my apartment later."

Ariana slipped one arm under Rick's shoulders and closed her eyes.

* * * * *

A dwarf with a pick ax couldn't have done a better job of pounding Rick's skull if it had crawled inside his head to work from the inside. The pain was sharp, focused and relentless. He was afraid to open his eyes for fear that any trace of light would intensify the pain.

Then a delicate scent wafted around him and something cool blanketed the top of his head. Almost immediately, the pain faded and a sense of well-being flowed through him. He lay in the most comfortable bed he'd ever known—certainly not his own. He opened his eyes.

Ariana smiled down at him. "Hello."

His gaze roamed over her beautiful face and when her smile brightened, his sense of well-being intensified.

She sat beside him and reached out to touch his forehead. Her fingertips were cool, sending strange sensations through his body—a vitality that made him feel invincible and as horny as hell.

“Ariana,” he whispered.

Her smile softened and she rested her palms against his chest. “Yes?”

“I...” He held his tongue. How could he tell this stranger that he wanted to make love to her? And how could he have such feelings for someone he didn’t know

Camellia’s words drifted through his mind, *Understanding the unusual isn’t as important as merely accepting its gifts.*

“It’s all right.” Ariana’s fingers tickled through the fabric of his shirt, stroking lines of heat across his flesh.

A dream, he thought. This is just another dream.

As if to confirm his suspicion, a glance told him that the room around him couldn’t possibly be real. Gray walls that looked like rock...it was like being inside a cave, surrounded by the roots of trees. And yet it was warm and cozy.

Accept.

“I don’t care if this isn’t real.” He shifted his gaze back to her face, caught her arms and drew her down to lay upon him. “All I care about right now is kissing you.”

Ariana’s natural urges took over.

“I want to kiss you, too,” she murmured and then melted into him. Using her magic, she made their clothes disappear, and they lay naked against each other.

Rick uttered a sound of pleasure so deep and primal that it vibrated into Ariana’s core. That vibration intensified her desire and she swung one leg over him so that her lower body straddled his thighs. She stretched her torso along his. His cock, as hard as a

branch of her tree, pressed into her lower abdomen, and she felt the pulse of life within it. She rubbed her belly against it and, all the while, kept her lips on his, tasting and caressing. His hands shifted up her arms and around her back to hold her closer.

She'd never pressed her bare breasts against a man before, never felt the hard heat of a naked male beneath her, and she found the sensation beyond pleasant. Her softness and his hardness seemed sculpted to come together in just this way, her curves flowing over his planes. His hands seemed just the right size to cover her shoulder blades and then skim down her back to cup her backside. Her ass rose, encouraging him to dig his fingers into her flesh, while her pussy — how it throbbed with need.

He shifted, making another sound, more restless this time, and his hands slid down the outside of her legs and around to the front. His thumbs swept across to her inner thighs, gripping her where she straddled him, and pushed her legs farther apart. Now it was Ariana's turn to moan as the lips that nestled within the curls between her thighs parted. His hands lifted her and an alien hardness pressed against the open space between those lips. She recognized without seeing it that it was his cock. It slid along her labia, and a rush of moisture slipped from inside her to coat him. She knew that sex brought pleasure, but she'd never imagined the yearning could be so delightful. Muscles inside her deepest passage clenched and even more moisture welled from her depths.

He lifted her higher, shifted his hips again, and slid inside her.

At first she quivered with fear at the power and size of him. But her body knew what to do, generating even more wetness. There was a brief sensation of resistance, then a burst of pain followed almost instantly by a pleasure more overwhelming than anything she'd experienced in her life. It merged with the hunger burning inside her, urging her to move, to intensify the sensation.

Delight spiraled through him. A virgin. His dream woman was a virgin.

That delight merged with his physical need, intensifying both when she began to move her hips, dragging her tight passage along the length of his cock while she kissed him hungrily. If he'd given her pain, she revealed no sign of it. In fact her moans indicated she was determined to find and enjoy the pleasure of sex to its fullest.

More than willing to oblige—it was all a dream anyway—he lifted his hips, meeting her downward motions, then drawing back, sliding his cock in and out of her hot, wet sheath. She met him move for move. Exquisite—she was exquisite, her lack of sexual experience no barrier to her attempts to bring each of them the most pleasure possible. Too much pleasure, in fact. It threatened to set him off before he could take her where she needed to go.

Gripping her ass with both hands, he held her still while he slid his tongue over her soft lower lip, slipping inside to stroke the roof of her mouth. She answered with a flutter of her tongue against the underside of his. Her fingers dived into his hair and she began to breathe faster, wriggling her lush body against his. She tore her mouth free and began to nip and suck at his jaw, his neck, his throat. Desperate—she was growing desperate. So was he as she arched her back upward and her breasts skimmed over his chest. Her nipples—sharp points of need—brushed his flatter nipples, sparking a more intense need inside him. Time. It was time. He eased his grip on her backside, freeing her to move. She groaned, tucked her knees closer to his side and began to grind her body against his.

Heat. Wetness. Friction. She rode him hard and fast, with the enthusiasm of someone who has discovered a new favorite activity. Her mouth returned to devour his, her hands tangled in his hair and her flat belly slapped against his—she was like a piston driving up and down upon him.

Rick's heart pounded. One thought shot through his mind—if all dreams were like this one, he wanted to sleep forever.

The hunger inside Ariana's body continued to grow, fed by the stroke of his cock inside her passage. She'd never imagined sex could be like this. Her body seemed to know what to do, how to satiate that hunger, and yet complete satisfaction remained out of reach. In fact it seemed to grow farther away with each slide of her throbbing sheath over his pulsing rod.

She groaned with frustration and drove herself harder. Why couldn't she reach the end? That tantalizing, razor-point of achievement stretched farther and farther away as his fingers dug into her thighs and his cock drove deeper inside her. Finally, she snatched her mouth from Rick's and glared down at him. His blue eyes met hers and held.

That was enough. That locking of gazes. It was the final spark she needed to not only feed the hunger inside her but to blast it toward the stars. Releasing a shout of primal pleasure, Ariana shattered into a million fairy pieces.

* * * * *

Eyes closed, Rick drifted in a slumberous state, replaying the dream of Ariana's lovemaking. No real woman could be so accomplished, so enthusiastic...so perfect for him. He was reluctant to fully awaken. He wanted to remain in his dream forever, in her arms.

But duty called. He'd slept long enough on the job. He needed to wake up and find out what really happened. A dull ache returned to the back of his head.

Oh yeah...someone hit me.

Drawing in a deep breath, he found that something constricted his chest. Was he still lying on the ground in the park, another victim of the muggers?

Forcing his eyes open, he found himself unable to see clearly. Something that looked like semi-luminous strands tangled together above his face. He blinked and crossed his eyes to focus better.

Hair.

His gaze shifted. A scalp, a forehead, a cheek...

Suddenly he recognized what lay upon his chest. Someone—a female someone, his body told him—slumped against him. In fact—also an alert from his body—she was naked. Her head rested on his chest. One of her legs lay across his upper thigh, and the knee of that leg brushed the underside of his balls.

His balls...he was naked, too.

He blinked again and tried to focus beyond the hair. In the near distance he saw tree roots, rock walls...

What the hell? I can't still be dreaming.

He pushed himself up on his elbows. The ache in his head intensified.

Maybe I have a concussion.

Sighing, the woman snuggled against him, sliding her arms around him, and the pain immediately eased.

Rick stared as he recognized her. "Ariana?"

She lifted her head. A sleepy smile brightened her face as she peered up at him through half-open eyes. "Hello," she murmured.

It's not a dream.

Rick shoved a hand through his hair. "Where are we?"

"At my place."

Arms still around him, she hugged him, her breasts exquisitely soft against his chest. His cock, trapped between his abdomen and her thighs, sprang to life.

Ariana's eyes went wider and her smile brightened. "Again? Really?"

"Wait. Are you saying that we...that we really..." He tried to wrap his mind around the possibility...not easy with his cock demanding attention and her luscious lips so close to his own. "This...is...real?"

"It doesn't get any realer," she answered in a teasing tone as she leaned in to kiss him.

Putting his hands on her shoulders, he gently pushed her so that she slid off him while he sat up. A frown fluttered across her face. Dragging his eyes away from her gorgeous nakedness, he looked around the small room. The walls were made of rock, with tree roots growing along them. Flowers and vines sprang up everywhere. The floor, too, was rock and carpeted here and there with patches of moss.

Leaning back on her hands, Ariana gazed at him, seemingly unmindful of her nakedness.

Rick wasn't unmindful of it. Her breasts and abdomen flushed a rosy pink where they'd pressed against him. Even the flesh of her inner thighs seemed to blush, more evidence of the physical friction between them that had not been a dream. Her nipples were hard, dusky rose in color, and they seemed to strain toward him as he stared at her.

The sight of her naked beauty almost distracted him from his situation. Gathering his scattering thoughts, he forced out the question again, "Where am I?"

Her smile dimmed. "That might be difficult to explain."

"Try."

Leaning close, she pressed one of her breasts into his arm. Her hand tiptoed along his thigh. "Why don't we make love again instead?"

Just as her fingers brushed his throbbing cock, Rick caught her hand. "I need to know what's going on. Ariana, tell me where I am."

Her eyes darkened. "We're in my home under the park."

He pushed himself to the edge of the bed. "You live under the park."

"That's right." Lifting her other hand, she gestured around the room. "Isn't it lovely?"

His gaze traveled around the small space again. Wood furniture, bright rugs –

"Where's the door?" he demanded, not seeing any opening in the rock walls.

Ariana swung her legs off the far side of the bed and stood up. She paced to and fro, hands twisting in front of her. Again, Rick noticed that she seemed completely comfortable with her nudity. He, on the other hand, pulled the soft sheet over his lap.

"Ariana, where is the door?" he repeated more firmly.

She forced her hands to her sides. "We don't build doors in fairy houses. At least not as you would understand doors."

"You don't..." Breaking off, he tilted his head. "What did you say? Fairy houses?"

"That's right."

Her hands went behind her and she bounced up and down on her toes. The motion made her breasts bob in a most fascinating way. Rick suppressed a groan, determined to not be distracted.

"You live in a fairy house," he said.

"Yes."

"Under Central Park."

"That's right."

He narrowed his eyes. "Under the big tree closest to the pond."

She smiled and bounced on her toes again. "Now you understand."

"I don't understand anything!" Rising, Rick wrapped the sheet around his waist and began to search the room. But the more he searched, the more certain he became that there was no door, no window. The only source of light came from...

He whipped around, looking in one direction and then another. There was no light fixture in the ceiling or on the walls.

"Where is that light coming from?" he demanded as confusion clawed through his mind.

"It's the light of the fae."

"What the hell does that mean?" He was getting angry now. "Stop talking in riddles."

"It's no riddle." Her golden eyes gleamed as she reflected his anger back at him. "It's the light of the fae. It...it...just is!"

Rick stared at her as she settled her hands on her naked hips. Her chin—and her magnificent breasts—thrust forward. Power emanated from her.

He remembered how weak she'd become when he'd arrested her the previous day. Her Aunt Camellia had said that Ariana drank some kind of tonic. Did she mean medication? If this strength was what such medication did to her then it was great stuff—except for the pesky side effect of psychosis.

"What are you taking?" he demanded.

Her fine eyebrows drew downward. "Taking?"

"Your aunt indicated that you take some kind of medication." Alarm jolted him. "Did you slip some of it to me? Is that what this is—a psychotic hallucination?"

Ariana lowered her hands, letting them hang open at her sides. The brightness faded from her eyes.

"We should dress." Stepping to a small trunk, she reached inside and lifted out a garment of dark brown and green. She slid it over her head and it flowed down her body like the slickest silk, ending just above the middle of her thighs.

"I'll take you out," she said quietly. "But you'd better put on your pants first."

She turned her back to him and folded her arms over her chest. Guilt whispered through him. Obviously he'd hurt her feelings with his remarks. He tried to dredge his righteous anger back up but it wouldn't even bubble in his gut.

Camellia's words echoed in his mind. "*Ariana needs her special...tonic.*"

He thought about his younger cousin Rory. Afflicted with Down Syndrome, he often came up with fantastic fairy tales. And he had a special hideout that he decorated with tree branches and things he found in his backyard. Maybe that was Ariana's thing—she was a *special* person.

That possibility struck him with guilt. Walking around the bed, he gathered his homeless disguise and put it on. Once he finished dressing, he turned back toward her. "I'm ready. Where's the door?"

When she turned to face him, her eyes glittered with moisture. "I told you there is no door." She reached out and took his hand. "Close your eyes."

"Why?"

"Just do it!"

The snap of her voice made him blink in surprise. Somehow, during that blink, he found himself outside, standing in front of the oak tree.

Alone.

* * * * *

Pain racked Ariana as she landed on her rumpled bed. She had used her magic to shift them both from the cavern beneath the tree to the grassy ground above it. Then she shifted back inside before he opened his eyes. It was better that way. Especially since he would insist that she explain how she'd done it.

Her eyes stung. "I'm not going to cry," she muttered, but tears started flowing anyway.

Love was not only wonderful and energizing. It also possessed a dark side. Giving in to her tears, she threw herself onto her pillows. She was never leaving the park again.

* * * * *

Under the tree. She lives under the tree.

Mounting the station house steps a short walk later, Rick shook his head. How was that possible? How had she gotten him into that underground cavern and then how did she move him out again—in the blink of his eyes, no less?

He entered the station, barely noticing the greetings of other cops as he made his way to the locker room.

It's impossible. I thought she might be like Rory but –

He bumped a shoulder against something and heard a sharp, “Hey, Ballentine...you look like hell.”

Rick looked up to find one of his fellow detectives frowning at him. “Headache,” he muttered—true enough—and headed for his locker. He needed to get out of his homeless clothes. He needed a cool shower.

His cock twitched.

Make that a cold shower.

* * * * *

But a long cold shower, fresh clothes, two hours of trying to focus on work—finally Rick couldn’t stand it any longer. He needed to find out the truth. Grabbing Camellia Stewart’s business card, he left the station.

He covered the three blocks to her apartment in five minutes, ran up the stairs to her third-floor apartment and pounded on the door. It opened instantly, and Camellia smiled as if she’d been expecting him.

“Welcome, Detective Ballentine,” she said. “Please come in.”

Rick strode inside. “Your niece—she’s got a mental condition, right? I mean, you said she was on medication.”

“I said she needed a tonic.” Camellia closed the door and stepped around him. “What I really meant was tea. Would you care for some?”

Rick followed her into her kitchen. “Tea?”

Camellia gestured for him to sit at the table. “She isn’t really my niece and she isn’t mentally ill. I’m afraid I lied to you.” She poured two cups of tea from a small china pot. “What did Ariana tell you this morning?”

“It wasn’t what she told me as much as what happened.” He averted his gaze from Camellia as an image flashed through his mind...an image of Ariana—naked—leaning

over him, her breasts brushing his chest. With difficulty, he dragged his thoughts back in line. "I mean, where we were. It was..."

"Magical? Almost fairy-like?" Camellia pushed one of the teacups toward him. "Ariana is a fairy – a wood nymph to be precise. Wood nymphs are sexual creatures, but Ariana –"

"Wait." Rick bolted out of his chair. Shoving a hand through his hair, he strode into the living room before whirling back toward the kitchen. "You're telling me that Ariana is a fairy. I can't believe that any sensible person –"

"I am not a person, sensible or otherwise." She smiled. "You see, I'm also a wood nymph. Well...half nymph and half elf."

Rick stared at the small Asian woman. "Wha – A what?"

Camellia picked up her cup. "As is Ariana. Her mixed blood has allowed her to put off mating until she found someone she could also love. That is you, Detective."

Shoving the other hand through his hair, he turned and walked away from Camellia. The woman was as crazy as her niece!

"But don't worry that she has you under a spell," Camellia continued. "Fairies don't cast spells on humans. They use magic, of course, but cannot affect human feelings other than to draw those feelings to the fore. Your feelings for her are real."

"This is ridiculous."

"Sooner or later, you will believe." She took a sip of her tea. "Until then, you will be drawn to Ariana again and again. Your feelings for her have opened your eyes to the fae world and you will see things you've never seen before."

"I'm going to stay as far away from Ariana – and you – as I possibly can." Turning again, he strode toward the apartment door. Reaching it, he gripped the doorknob and then turned to look back at Camellia. "Just tell me one thing."

Camellia smiled again. "Did Ariana have anything to do with the muggers you are looking for? No. But she can help you find them."

A chill crawled through Rick. The woman had read his mind.

Shaking his head, he opened the door and stepped outside. This was crazy. Absolutely crazy.

* * * * *

Ariana strolled through the park. A young couple passed her, unable to see through her veil of concealment. They held hands and shared smiling whispers. Their happiness depressed her, made the space inside her that Rick had so recently filled feel empty and unsatisfied.

She was physically sore inside, too, and the flesh along her inner thighs still burned a bit. But she would give anything to have him inside her hungry body again. Somehow, although they had hardly spoken to each other, he was already inside her heart. But he didn't return her love.

She sighed and tried to concentrate on the plants growing along the path. Her life was here in the park. She would fill the hollow inside her with nature.

As she paused to pluck a dead leaf off a small bush, her gaze shifted up the path. Straightening, she stared.

Two pixies knelt behind a bench on which an elderly woman sat. The woman's purse sat on the ground, tucked under the bench, while she tossed sunflower seeds to a trio of squirrels. She was unaware of the two little thieves who were attempting to steal her purse.

Ariana must have used a stronger dose of concealment than she thought, for even the pixies seemed unaware of her presence. Frowning, Ariana flitted closer to them, staying out of their line of sight until she seized them by their collars.

They yelped simultaneously and immediately began to wriggle in an attempt to escape. But Ariana maintained a firm grip on them as she carried them away from the old woman and into the brush.

Lifting them high, she glared at the two pixies. "So you're the thieves."

One of them—a blue-eyed fellow with a wisp of a goatee—swung his arms, trying to slug Ariana's chin. But his arms were too short. The other—sporting green eyes and a red tam—clutched at her forearm and tried to swing his legs upward.

Annoyed, Ariana shook them with just enough force to make them yelp again. "You're behaving like ogres."

"Ach! Now that's an insult, to be sure." The bearded one stopped flailing his arms and glared at her.

Ariana was not intimidated. "I want your names and I want them now."

Stubborn chins and folded arms answered her demand.

"Fine," she said. "I'll take you to Fairyland and let the High Council deal with you."

More squeals preceded babbled apologies. The one in the red tam clasped his hands in an almost prayerful pose. "Please, mistress, don't send us to the High Council. We've already got two strikes against us, and a third will land us in the Fairy Queen's dungeon."

"You deserve to be locked up. Why are you stealing from humans?"

"Because they stole from us," the bearded one replied. "Our cache of coins was stolen by one of them."

"How do you know a human took it?" Ariana asked.

"I saw him. We had just arrived in the park and hadn't had time to bury it."

The younger pixie nodded eagerly. "We went to fetch some water when the evil one stole our cache."

"Why didn't you chase him down?"

"We tried, mistress, but he ran too fast. He disappeared from the park." He glanced around nervously. "We feared to follow him into the concrete canyons."

Ariana could understand that. Still, there was no excuse for stealing. "I don't want you stealing from anyone else in the park. Do you understand?"

They both nodded eagerly and she set them on the ground. As soon as she released her grip on their collars, the bearded one laughed. Rushing forward, he kicked one of her shins and then both pixies ran away.

“Hey!” Clenching her fists, Ariana bolted after them.

Chapter Four

Nerves sizzling, Rick approached the tree. He'd tried—really tried—to stay away. But Camellia was right. He was being drawn back by his memories of Ariana's charming smile and golden eyes. By the pleasure and peace he'd found in her body. All day he had tasted her sweetness inside his mouth and his cock seemed to buzz with the remembered bliss of being sheathed inside her moist heat.

But that didn't mean he believed in fairies, just that he believed in what he felt for Ariana. It was more than lust. He didn't dare call it love—yet—but he couldn't stand to be away from her. He needed to see her, to touch her—kiss her and make love to her.

Maybe she did live in a secret buried chamber—there were plenty of underground structures in Manhattan and maybe even in Central Park. If so, there must be an entrance.

Maybe she did have some kind of magic skill that allowed her to move him quickly from her cavern to the park above. Or maybe he'd still been reeling from the blow to the head he'd taken this morning.

He reached the tree. Grass grew to its base but there were signs of rock around it. Manhattan stood on granite, and boulders pushed up here and there throughout the park. Conceivably, a small cavern could exist beneath his feet.

He walked around the tree, searching for an opening. Nothing. The bark was no rougher than any other tree and its surface appeared unblemished. He pressed his hands against the trunk. It felt solid and he found no break in it.

Kneeling, he explored the ground but it, too, was solid. He sat back on his heels and stared up into the branches. Small limbs swayed gently and leaves fluttered. It almost looked as if the tree was laughing at him.

Scowling, Rick thrust to his feet. Something rustled in the bushes on the other side of the path, and Rick thought he heard a muffled laugh.

Just like this morning, he thought. Before I blacked out.

Striding forward, he reached for the bush just as something flew out of it. He stumbled back, lost his balance and fell on his backside.

Rick stared. There in front of him, rolling in the grass were two small men. Barely the height of six-year-old children, they rolled and tussled, giggling as they fought over something that caught the light.

Rick scrambled to his feet as the bush thrashed again. Ariana appeared before him. She looked magnificent, eyes blazing and hair tousled. Her cheeks flushed with anger as she ran toward the two little men.

Suddenly all three became aware of Rick's presence. Ariana stopped in her tracks. The two little men stopped wrestling and sprang to their feet. Then, in a blur of green and brown, they streaked back into the underbrush, leaving behind a coin. A second later, twin squeals erupted, followed by a deeper masculine laugh of triumph.

Stunned, Rick stared at Ariana. The anger in her eyes vanished as quickly as her two companions.

"You came back!" she exclaimed and launched herself at him. Her lips rained kisses all over his face.

Breaking free of his paralysis, he gripped her waist and set her on her feet. "Were those —" His voice broke and he paused to clear it. "Leprechauns?"

Ariana stared at him in confusion for a moment before tossing back her head and laughing with a heartiness that surprised him yet again. Her hair caught the sunlight that filtered through the trees, shooting off golden sparks.

"No, silly. There are no leprechauns in Central Park." She reached out to wrap her hands around one of his arms. "Those were pixies."

It felt good to laugh. Just moments earlier, Ariana had been trapped in doldrums that she'd feared were permanent. But seeing Rick beside her tree, knowing he would only return because he needed to see her—and that his feelings were true enough to let him actually see her through her veil—vanquished the darkness in her heart.

Ariana laughed again at the expression on Rick's face. He really was too handsome for words and that look of shocked confusion only added to his attractiveness.

"Pixies," he said.

She hugged his arm and turned him back toward her tree. "They're new to the park—at least I never saw them before yesterday. They're the muggers you've been looking for. Don't worry. A couple of elves came along to help me chase them down and I believe they've caught the little troublemakers. They won't bother anyone here again."

"Elves and pixies." He went with her without seeming to realize he was walking.

"That's right. And you can see them now because of your feelings for me." Reaching the tree, Ariana wrapped both arms around his waist. Smiling up at him, she said, "You might want to close your eyes."

She transported them both into her home beneath the tree. As they landed inside, his weight swayed in her arms. She laughed again as she looked up into his rolling eyes. "You didn't close them, did you?"

Turning him so that he could sit on her bed, she released him.

"It can be a little dizzying for humans. Or so I've heard." She pushed his knees to each side and stepped between his legs. Lifting her hands to his top shirt button, she began to work it free. "I'd never actually transported a human until you came along. But my parents warned me that if I ever did want to shift a human, I should tell him to close his eyes."

"Transported?" He lifted one hand to his temple and pressed his fingers there. "Shift?"

“Yes. From outside to in.” With the loosening of each button, more of his chest was revealed and dizziness swept her at the sight of that powerful male flesh. She couldn’t wait to see more, to touch, to taste. “You’ll be fine in a few seconds.”

As the last button came free, she pushed her hands inside the shirt to stroke his golden shoulders. He was warm and hard, and touching him made her heart beat faster. Her pulse throbbed deep inside her, where he had filled her before. Soon, she would have him there again.

He gazed into her eyes. “I don’t understand this,” he said quietly.

“It’s simple. You can see through my veil of concealment because you love me. We belong together. Here or at your apartment.” Realization struck her. “But maybe you’d be more comfortable there. Close your eyes.”

“But—”

“You’re going to want to listen to me this time, Rick.” She lifted her hands to cup his face and gazed seriously at him. “Close your eyes and don’t open them again until I say so.”

He obeyed. She tugged him to his feet, hugged his waist once more and, concentrating on his apartment, she shifted again.

* * * * *

Rick felt as if the entire earth vanished from beneath him. A sensation like falling lasted a split second and then a great rush of wind filled his head. Air brushed his body, too, and Ariana’s grip on his waist tightened. Opening his eyes, he saw a smear of blue and white. Looking down, he saw an even more astonishing blur of gray mixed with greens and browns.

Flying...we’re flying!

He clamped his eyes shut and held tight to Ariana. Unbelievable. Somehow this slight young woman was carrying him through the air above Manhattan.

Just as that thought began to gel in his mind, they stopped. Solid flooring met his feet. The sound of wind had been replaced by the familiar muffled rumble of the city through the walls of his apartment.

My apartment?

Slowly he opened his eyes and found that they were indeed in his bedroom.

"Are you okay?" Ariana stood with her arms still around him and her lush body pressed to his.

How could he possibly be okay when he'd just flown from Central Park to his apartment—without a helicopter or plane?

He looked down into Ariana's golden eyes. How could he not be okay when he stood in the arms of the most beautiful woman he'd ever beheld?

A beautiful woman with wings.

He stared as the diaphanous appendages behind her folded out of sight.

"You..." He cleared his throat again. "You carried me here. We...flew?"

She nipped at her lower lip and nodded. His gaze fixed on her full lip, caught by her bright teeth, and suddenly it didn't matter that she could fly or that she was a fairy. All that mattered was that she was here, in his arms, looking at him with hope and longing in her lovely eyes.

Understanding the unusual isn't as important as merely accepting its gifts.

He loosened his grip just enough to allow his hands to slide down to her backside. It didn't take much pressure to draw her sweet heat close to his hardness.

"Rick—"

"I already know. You're a wood nymph." There. He'd said it out loud and the world hadn't fractured.

"You know?"

"Camellia told me."

She leaned back to gaze into his eyes. "When did you see Camellia?"

"This morning. After I left you, I couldn't stop thinking about you. I honestly thought you needed medication—" Her puzzled expression reflected what he'd experienced earlier. "I went to check on you and Camellia explained that you were—are—a wood nymph. Half wood nymph. Your father was...an elf." Again no apocalyptic earthquake occurred when he said those strange words.

She tilted her head, considering him seriously. "And you believed her?"

"No, but I couldn't stay away."

Gold flecks began to glitter in her eyes. "Then you saw me with the pixies and that convinced you that Camellia was telling the truth?"

"It was the flying that finally convinced me you're something more than human."

She nipped at her lower lip again before asking quietly, "And that's all right?"

"More than all right." He tightened his grip on her waist as he backed her toward the bed. "We've just met, Ariana, but I want to be with you."

"Oh, Rick." She pushed her hands up his arms to embrace his shoulders. "I've watched you all week. Watched you and wanted you."

"And I haven't been able to think about anything but you since I first laid eyes on you a week ago."

Her eyebrows quirked downward. "But you arrested me yesterday."

He lowered her slowly, pressing her back until she lay flat upon his bed. Then he slid his hands down her sides to the hem of her short dress. "And you looked really good in my handcuffs."

"I'm not sure what that means," she said, and then gave a little sigh as he began to drag her dress up her body.

"I'll show you some time," he promised, watching the treasure being revealed by his removal of her dress. Her thighs were strong and smooth. The tangle of curls at the apex of her legs—through the golden strands he could see the pink flesh of her labia. His fingers tingled at the thought of tickling between them, dipping inside her hot, wet

passage. But for now his fingers needed to be satisfied with skimming the silken flesh of her body as he continued to lift her dress. Her lower abdomen, her bellybutton—it was an innie—and on up her flat stomach. She was half wood nymph, half elf—but she was all woman.

And she's all mine.

That realization filled him with a sensation of power and he had to fight to keep from stripping her dress completely away, from claiming her immediately and completely. Unaware of how hard he was restraining himself, she sighed again before raising her arms and letting them fall against the bed above her head.

His hands trembled slightly as, using his thumbs, he caught her strange dress and dragged it up and over her breasts. Bare, they thrust toward him, topped by diamond-hard peaks. Now it was his mouth that experienced an anxious need.

Just one taste, he thought, abandoning the dress so that it covered her face while he lowered his mouth to take a slow, languid lap at her right breast. The movement elicited a groan from his beautiful little wood nymph, and she arched her body to offer the other breast to his salivating mouth.

Okay, one more taste, he thought, shifting his attention to what she offered. One taste became a leisurely sampling that coursed from her breasts to her bellybutton and on downward. His hands followed, skimming over her breasts, pausing there to palm the lush weight of each. She made that little sound again, something that was half pleasure and half frustration. Her nipples bored into his palms as she arched into him.

Sweet heat rose from the tangle of curls over her mound, tempting him to burrow his face there and sample her deepest charms. Her labia parted at the sweep of his tongue and she moaned and writhed beneath him. She tasted delicious, sweet and yet earthy in a way he'd never known. And there was a spark to her flavor as well, as if something magical mixed with her womanly essence.

"Rick." His name was a breathless whisper as she placed her hands over his, pressing his palms into the softness of her breasts. "Rick...please..."

He knew what she begged for and he was happy to give it to her. Shifting the angle of his head, he flicked his tongue against her clit. She jolted beneath him and a rush of her sweet cream ran over his tongue.

Not quite there, he thought. Come on, baby, come on.

“Rick...Rick...”

He flicked his tongue again, at the same time drawing in his hands so that his fingers captured her nipples. Her whispers and gasps turned into a long, low groan as her body tightened around a tiny climax.

Withdrawing his tongue, he pressed a kiss to the top of her mound and then began to lick and nibble his way back up her torso. She wriggled and somehow the dress disappeared and she lay naked under him. Magic. Amazing.

What else can she do?

His chest brushed against her flat stomach as he continued his advance up her body. He lapped at the underside of first one breast and then the other before capturing one pebble-hard nipple in his mouth. His own body had gone so hard in response to her climax—to his power to take her there so easily—that he didn’t know how much longer he could hold out. His jeans were so tight he feared he might rip through them.

“Kiss me,” she whispered and captured his face between her hands. Willingly, he shifted his hungry mouth to hers. Her appetite matched his as she nibbled and lapped at his lips and teeth and tongue. He gave back, aware of every inch of her nakedness against him. Suddenly his clothes were strangling him. He wanted to be naked, too. He wanted to feel her warm flesh against his. He wanted to tangle his bare legs with hers and press himself into her.

Almost as soon as the thought entered his mind, his clothing vanished. Surprised and delighted, he lifted his mouth from hers.

“Did you just read my mind?” he asked, gazing down at her.

"I read your body," she answered with a husky voice. Her eyes glittered like gold dust. "You seemed to be having trouble catching your breath so I thought your clothes were constricting you."

He smiled. "I like that you can read my body."

"Please read mine," she said. "With your hands."

"Glad to."

Rick straddled her upper thighs and sat up. He gazed down at the feast spread before him and need surged into his cock.

"I'll start here," he said, reaching out to brush one thumb across her lower lip. Ariana responded by nipping at his thumb with her perfect little teeth.

"Your other hand is supposed to be reading, too," she said with a wicked grin.

"You're right. Can't let it get lazy now, can we?" Rick placed his other hand on the pulse point on one side of her neck. Slowly he traced his fingertips toward her collarbone. His other hand matched his movements on her other side as he finger-read her upper chest to her shoulders.

"Mmm," she moaned. "That feels good."

"How about this?" He continued to stroke down the outside of her arms to her elbows. He watched her flesh prickle up along the trail of his fingers then he caressed a path down to her wrists. Her hands, lying on the bed, opened, her fingers unfurling like the petals of a flower. He continued the gentle tickling to the center of her palms and then stroked upward along the inner flesh of her arms. The flesh of her breasts prickled, too, and her nipples hardened even more. The sight made his mouth water as she closed her eyes and arched toward him.

She made that little sound of enjoyment again. The moan intensified his own pleasure and, looking down, he saw that his cock had lengthened and lay along the crease formed where her thighs pressed together. The tip of it almost reached the

golden thatch of curls that hid her treasure. It was as if it was taking aim at what he ultimately wanted.

"More," she whispered as his hands reached her shoulders again. Her hands cupped his elbows to direct his stroking fingers down her chest to her breasts.

Her skin was softer than any he'd touched before. Was that magic, too? He didn't care as long as she continued to let him touch her.

And only me.

As his fingers read the swell of each breast and down around the sides, she arched her back farther, thrusting her breasts upward as if to say, "Take me."

"Enough reading," he said. "Time for another snack."

Opening his palms on the outsides of her breasts, he pressed them gently inward and leaned down to lap at first one peak and then the other. Ariana gasped and her thighs jerked against his as if trying instinctively to open for him. Rick realized that his forward motion had stabbed his cock into the nest of her curls and it slid with its own unerring instinct between her plump pink lips. Moisture warmed his throbbing head.

Now it was his turn to groan. He devoured one of her breasts while shifting his grip on the other to pluck at the distended nipple. Ariana responded with a shudder and a lifting of her hips. The woman definitely knew what she wanted and Rick was almost ready to oblige her.

But not yet. He wanted to draw out this joining until both of them quaked with need. Sucking at one nipple, rolling and pinching the other, he slid his free hand between their bodies. Easing his thighs apart just enough to allow hers to open a bit, he gripped his cock and ran the head up and down her crease. She rocked against him, groaning as he found her opening and circled it. More of her creamy honey pooled there. It trickled over his cock and his knuckles. When he inhaled he could smell the musky sweetness of it. Surrounded by his hand, warmed by her hot cream, his cock swelled farther and began to throb. The quake he had anticipated began to rise deep inside him.

Still greedily eating her plump nipple, he moved one of his legs so that his knee slid between hers and pushed one of them aside. Smoothly, he slid his other leg inside the open space. Swept apart, her legs opened farther and he slid along the shallow trench between her labia. Her cream smeared the underside of his shaft, making it slide more easily backward. Then he thrust forward again, skimming over her opening while he rolled his tongue around her nipple.

Ariana groaned and writhed beneath him. "Rick. Please." She seemed to be having difficulty breathing and speaking at the same time.

Rick was having a little trouble himself. Her breast, ripe with her desire, filled his mouth and overflowed to cover his nose. But he didn't care if he passed out from lack of oxygen. He didn't want this to end.

Shifting his attention to the breast that he'd not yet tasted, he found it ready and waiting, its nipple even harder. It tasted like a fresh cherry, firm and sweet.

She bucked beneath him and her fingernails dug into his back.

Now.

Rick lifted his head from her breast and gazed down into her golden eyes as he drove his cock home.

Ariana held his gaze, feeling him fill her, stretching her before drawing out again. The sensation was like that of a sword sliding in and out of the scabbard fashioned especially for it, except that there was heat and wetness and a friction so intense that it threatened to set her on fire. What he had done to her before, with his tongue, had merely primed her for something even greater.

And his mouth on her breasts...even now her nipples throbbed and tightened. His gaze dropped to them and she could see what he was thinking—he was remembering how they tasted, wanting to taste them again. He dipped his head, caught one aching peak between his teeth, gently scraping as he continued to move inside her. She groaned at the sight of her nipple trapped between his teeth and her vagina clenched

around his blade. She began to move her hips faster, thrusting upward, taking every micro-inch of his hot, thick flesh and relishing the fire building within her.

He moved his hips in time with hers, meeting each of her thrusts with his own, burying himself deeper and deeper inside her slick, tight channel. He released her nipple, locked his eyes with hers. Even their gasping breaths settled into synchronized rhythm. The apartment air filled with the sounds of their pleasure, the slapping of flesh to flesh and the increasing harshness of their breathing.

As he strained toward satisfaction, Rick became unaware of any sound but the roaring of blood through his veins, of any sight but her golden eyes. They widened, seemed to shoot off golden sparks and then she came. Her body clamped around his, going stiff and still as he continued to pound against her. She cried out and that was just the spark he needed to ignite his own climax. Releasing a primal groan, Rick rode the wave of his release until he collapsed upon her.

Ariana's clenched channel released as Rick sagged against her, but then hunger built anew. She wanted more. The heat from his seed filled her but he remained hard and her body took advantage of the fact. Wrapping her legs around his hips, she opened herself wider, drawing his cock in deeper.

Rick groaned against her neck and his hard body shuddered. "Ariana...Ariana, I—" He broke off and went rigid upon her before releasing a guttural cry that seemed to rise from the very core of his being.

I did this to him, she thought in the instant before another, brighter climax took both of them up and up and up. Magic shot through every pore in her skin, embracing them both in a golden light that pulsed with the energy from their lovemaking. And still they were carried higher, to what seemed the peak of all creation. Finally, on the needle-sharp point of pure pleasure, they cried out in completion and then began the slow, euphoric fall back to earth...and each others' arms.

About the Author

Whether it's a spirited elevator in an old Manhattan highrise or a haunted castle on a Welsh hillside, Téa Trelawny is there, waiting and watching and spinning the stories she finds. A multi-published author, she writes stories filled with sexual energy, devoted lovers and a twist of the supernatural. When she's not writing, Tea entertains herself with research into the paranormal, looking for tales of love with an edge of magic.

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