

Fixing a Leak

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A work of fiction, meant for adults. Read something else if you are not an adult, or are offended by stories with sexual content. Then again, if all you're looking for is in-out, in-out, in-out, you should probably read something else. I welcome constructive comments. Enjoy.

Invitation

Surfing the net, not wasting time but not being really productive, either. Visiting a favorite "News of the Weird" site.

I read the first paragraph of the story and closed my eyes for a moment, taking a slow breath through my nose, exhaling through my mouth. I pulled out my notepad and dug on the desk for a pen that worked.

As I reread the first paragraph and started the second, I took some notes. A woman in a coastal community North of me had a kitchen mystery -- strange things happening to her silverware! Silverware in her dishwasher mysteriously disappearing, reappearing, rearranging, and changing patterns! She even had pictures, the article said, although they didn't show any. And it started recently, after a storm!

Command-t to open another tab and give Google some keywords. Bingo -- the online edition of the newspaper, with pictures! A very nice "before" and an obviously different "after" of the dishwasher, and a close up of a female hand holding two forks of obviously different parentage.

I felt a road trip in my near future...

Oh my -- the silverware in the dishwasher bin, in rows of six, before and after... Take the "before" shot and interpret as solid, Yang, or broken, Yin. Compare to the "after" shot for fixed or moving. Reach for a well-used reference book; don't like to go from memory on such things, even though my memory is damn good. Looked it up. Yes, a road trip... I sighed and checked cross references.

Tried a few different interpretations of the silverware. Fellowship, partnership? Treading carefully, with alertness? Sounding more and more like a personal invitation...

Time for some phone calls. The longer article identified the individual as Mary Beth Carter, who taught art and art history at the local high school and community college. More googling got me an address and phone number, and a Google Earth view of the area. A little inland, a small house off on its own, bordering an Open Space area. Nice and quiet -- up to now.

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I called and got an answering machine. Identified myself as Professor Rob Marsh, interested in talking to her seriously about her kitchenware mystery, please call, and left my phone number.

Digging through the online edition of her local paper -- bingo! A few weeks earlier, an unusual storm rolled through with plenty of lightning, one strike splitting a tree in the open space adjoining the back yard of guess who -- Mary Beth Carter!

Sure looks like a tear to me. But is it benign, or is this one going to be a problem? I shook my head -- needed more data. If I hear from her today, fine. If I don't, I'll see her tomorrow.

I packed the things I was likely to need, getting the car loaded. What do you need to plug a leak? Luck to start with, hope that's benign, and even more luck if it isn't.

Making another trip loading things in the car when the phone rang. I needed a break anyway. "Hello?"

"Good afternoon? This is Mary Carter calling for Professor Marsh?"

"Professor Carter! Thank you so much for returning my call!"

First order of business, not surprisingly, was convincing her that I didn't think she was a whacko. I'd seen the "before" and "after" pictures in the newspaper. And she had more! Yes, I was very interested in seeing them! I gave her my e-mail address; she would send them. And I was very interested in looking around. Had any other interesting or unusual things happen since the storm?

Oh yes, I thought it was tied to the storm! Anything else unusual? Like what? Oh, paper clips, coat hangers, things like that. Any cats in the neighborhood have kittens since the storm? She wasn't sure about that -- a number of the neighbors had cats. And she did seem to always be running out of her favorite size binder clips recently -- did I think that was connected? Too early to tell, I lied. Oh, any house plants suddenly bloom or die?

Well, not recently -- she'd been living in the house about seven months, and she had a hard time with plants in one location. They just didn't do well. From when she moved in, or since the storm? Oh, from when she moved in. She'd given up before the storm, as all the things she put in that spot shriveled and died, no matter what she did.

Any problems with me coming to visit tomorrow?

Not at all! She wouldn't be through at school until 4PM. I mentioned I might get there earlier and walk the grounds. That was fine -- the house abutted an Open Space preserve, with parking down the side street by the house, she was on a corner, and the tree that had been split was at the edge of a clearing on the Open Space side of things -- and was pretty easy to spot!

Okay, don't want you to freak out when you find a strange car parked next to your house!

She laughed, an easy laugh. She wasn't worried -- she was looking forward to meeting me.

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See you tomorrow then. Oh, add more garlic and basil to your diet!

Well, if a nasty has leaked through from the Other Side, it isn't bothering her -- or it's swallowed her completely. No, don't think so -- she sounded concerned, upset about the plants not doing well. A Dark One wouldn't be upset with a little death here and there... A Dark One would probably put a cage of mice in that spot and enjoy the show!

Ah well, can't do much without more data. Other than be prepared, of course.

Got a set of pics from her. As always with an Oracle, it's a matter of interpretation, starting with interpreting silverware in a dishwasher carrier. But it sure looked like an invitation to me -- six rows of utensils in pairs, neatly arranged, and a hodgepodge at the other end of the rack. Never liked dealing with Oracles... Oracles are *always* right; it's your *interpretation* that's the problem... I remembered dealing with a student, helping her accept the devastating reality of a reading -- growth, assimilation, partnership -- yes, that can apply to a metastatic tumor...

I wanted to see the positive side of this -- so many things could be interpreted that way. But I'd seen too much, seen and lived through too much, to be so rosy-eyed.

Road Trip

Very nice drive the next day, leaving early and crossing the Golden Gate bridge going North before 8AM. Smooth sailing for me, Southbound traffic already snarled. I drove North and inland a ways, then cut across to the Coast, stopping for breakfast at a diner.

Synchronicity? In this work, it means you're not paying attention! I had a tasty omelet (bacon, cheese, shallots, chilis, mushrooms) and raisin toast. In one corner of the place, they had an array of house plants for sale. Some were nice, neat, and tidy, but two called out to me.

"How about those two?" I asked, pointing to a pair of very happy *very* overgrown Spider plants. Really? Ten bucks for the pair! Sold! "I hope all of you are quite happy," I told them as I moved things around in the back of the car a few minutes later. Loads of runners on each.

I hit the coast about ten and stopped along a stretch of beach to get out and walk. The GPS said I had about 45 minutes to go.

What did we have so far? Unusual storm with a close lightning strike. Silverware moving and changing. Unfriendly spot in the house predating the storm. Yet the occupant seemed cheery enough. Yeah, does that occupant have a shadow? Oh, possible preferential transmogrification of binder clips.

A usual enough chain was paperclips - coathangers - bicycles. Paperclips seem to breed in a drawer until the population hits a critical point, at which point a mass of paperclips disappear, and nearby, a closet sprouts more wire coathangers. Same thing with coathangers and old bicycles -- the coathanger population grows until it takes a sudden dip, and another old bicycle appears in the neighborhood. Of course it goes the other way, too -- bikes changing energy levels and emitting coathangers, or in rare instances, making the transition all the way to paperclips, or a mix of paperclips and coathangers. Simple stuff, really -- Pauli and Dirac described the basic mathematics decades ago.

But the transition rules in pataphysics are more complex than those of quantum mechanics. Yes, we still have forbidden zones and permitted transitions, but the rules are either more complex or more flexible, depending on your outlook. So while the bicycle to coathanger transition is the preferred one, there's nothing to prohibit a transition involving coathangers and binder clips. The transitions usually take the flavor of the local ecology. Eating utensils could be at either energy level, the paperclip or the coathanger equivalent. Rearrangement of utensils in a dishwasher -- that's like the superposition of photons, hardly worth talking about. As long as a few broad conservation rules are maintained (on the *macro* scale, and that's an issue in and of itself), anything goes.

A *big* caveat, that's ignoring anyone(*anything*) actually stirring the pot, putting in energy, let alone forcing, preferring, or guiding certain transitions...

The other path, the troublesome one, something transitions to a pile of old rusty bolts in a dark corner of the garage -- bolts a few inches long, half an inch or more in diameter, old and rusty. You find that transition, leave the bolts alone! You might want to take a vacation for a few weeks -- not an auspicious sign. The rusty bolts? Their preferred lower-energy transition is to rusty nails and screws, usually found in feet and tires. Not friendly, if you get my drift. You don't want to know about the

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other transition, trust me.

Spontaneous feline polydactyly, not the usual autosomal dominant, is another local indicator. A run of kitties in the neighborhood with extra toes is another sign of a leak. But if you've seen piles of rusty bolts, you shouldn't go inspecting cat nests, particularly feral ones, unless you're well insured, heal quickly, and have a high tolerance for pain -- should have warned Mary Beth on that...

Ah well -- got back on the road. Drove up to the area. Drove around a bit, windows down, getting used to the place. Nice area -- everything moving at a much more relaxed pace than in Silicon Valley, which was only a few hours away.

Out to the house, a cottage-style two story place bordering the Open Space area. I parked in the Open Space lot, and went through my ritual, getting rid of the man-made stuff, down to all-natural fibers from the hand-made sandals on my feet to the cotton pants and shirt, everything except for the silver ring holding my hair back in a ponytail. That was enough to keep me on this side of things, yet let me explore without (much) risk.

I walked the area with awareness, taking it in. Something here ... as curious as I was... Didn't feel malicious, maybe a sense of humor? Keep an open mind...

Found the tree. When your number is up, it's up! Split, burned, a lot of energy! Turning, the house was maybe sixty meters away, the tree at the head of a small clearing with brush along both sides extending maybe twenty meters to the abutting edges of the Free Space and the open yard for the house. Walking out from the tree, energy flowed preferentially toward the house. Something about the house -- the house, or its occupants, past and/or present?

Pretty, peaceful area. Hope it stays that way!

I found a table and benches further into the Open Space; went back to the car and got the bag with my lunch and other goodies in it. Back to the table, ate my sandwich, some cheese, fruit, water.

Got out my notebook. Let's see what things are like... Opened the mesh bag I'd dumped my pocket contents in and pulled out a small zip-up leather pouch. It's got the coins I've used for years for casting the *I Ching*.

But when I opened the pouch and dumped out its contents, coins dropped out, along with a coin-sized very colorful little frog, which landed on the table and took a jump!

I snatched the frog out of the air with my left hand, holding it carefully but securely.

As I looked at my closed hand, feeling it move, things changed.

I peeked in, then opened my hand -- a Brazilian coin. Well of course, it had been a Brazilian frog, right? I wrote that up in my book and put the coins back in the pouch. More of a message I wasn't sure I wanted.

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A few minutes later as I'm sitting there, I noticed color fringes on things. A hallucinogenic frog? Looked at the palm of my left hand and licked it, and the fingers. Tingled! No need to waste a gift!

A few minutes later, much better color fringes, more synesthesia! Packed up my bag and started walking again, with awareness and a little extra.

Standing by the split tree, looking towards the house -- interesting aura around the house, and I could see/feel the paths in the ground, major energy paths from the tree to the house. One spot more interesting; I walked a ley toward it.

Mysteries sublime -- ground marker for a septic tank! But hey, an objective correlate to subjective observation, noted in my book.

Walked around some more, observing, noting. Moved the car from the Open Space lot to the side street by the house.

And now we wait -- half an hour or so. As I walked up the front steps to the porch, I looked to the bench off to the side.

But I turned and sat at one corner of the porch. After a few minutes of sitting there, I got the feeling of a dog sitting in that same spot, day after day, waiting patiently for his master to come home. That made it a very good spot to sit, indeed. I sat, honoring patient waiting.

After a while a car came up the road, slowing. It stopped at the corner and the occupant waved to me. Must be her. The car pulled up the side street and into the driveway. I got up and walked over.

She got out of her car laughing. A few inches shorter than me, short curly brown hair, full figured, curved and bubbly. The way she dressed told me she was proud of her curves. This could be a very good visit!

I held out a hand but she embraced me in a warm hug. "Professor Robin! So good to meet you!"

Where had she gotten that? "It's good to meet you, too," I replied, taking her in, feeling, aura, scent. Relaxed and positive.

She shook her head. "I have *got* to show you some pictures -- seeing you sitting on the porch like that! Have you been here long?"

Told her I'd been here long enough to walk the immediate area, see the tree, sit at the bench in the Open Space and unwind from the drive.

"Help with the groceries?" she asked.

Awareness open, following her into the house. Older place, nicely kept up. Walking the outside earlier, it seemed to have been updated -- double-pane windows all around, new gutters and roof. Inside, bright and airy, uncluttered, lots of art work nicely arranged. Looking from the kitchen to the

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dining room and the parlor, I felt a “sour” corner... Which correlated with the description she’d given me of the spot plants didn’t like.

She put away groceries as she spoke of her day, the students who had it, the ones who never would, the ones who tried. And she turned, looking over a shoulder, smiling, and asked if I still taught?

I hadn’t for a few years, but I knew I would, again.

Why had I stopped?

I shrugged. Difference of opinion with administrators.

She gave me a knowing nod. That’s why she was teaching at a community college and a high school -- the administrations were bright enough to keep out of her way and let her teach, unlike those in the big cities.

Rare and among the enlightened, I suggested...

She agreed with a laugh. She turned and leaned back against the kitchen counter. Open, relaxed, inviting... “Do you have things to bring in? I’ll show you to the guest room.”

I started rambling that I hadn’t decided where to stay, but she cut me off -- I was staying in the guest room!

I bowed to a higher power.

“Good! I can give you the tour as well. Shall we?”

At my car, I gave her my carpetbag; it should stay downstairs, as it had my computer and reference materials. I took the basket of clothes, and she took my overnight bag.

Back in through the kitchen, through the dining room and the parlor, the front door opening to the porch. Behind us a hallway leading to a half bath, and the downstairs bedroom she used as an office; we’d peek in there after. “This is the corner?” I asked, gesturing with my head to the sour corner I’d detected earlier. She agreed; she’d tried plants there, but they didn’t last. I had some in the car we could place later. Up the stairs, two bedrooms and a shared bath. Airy, light, pleasant.

Going into the guest room, with its double bed...

“What on Earth is *that*?” she said, looking at the bed. She put my bag down and stepped closer.

I dropped the basket and went to it. “Allow me,” I offered, trying to be polite as I all but cut her off. “You didn’t make this, put it here?” I inquired, knowing full well she hadn’t, as I cast protective wards and then picked it up.

“No, and it certainly wasn’t here when I checked the room this morning before I left for class!

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What is it?"

I held it out, turning it, smiling. Very nicely made... "It's called a *thyrsus* -- the stem is traditionally a ferula, the hollow stem from a giant fennel, topped with a pinecone as you see..." I sniffed the pinecone. "A traditionalist would have dipped it in local honey, but that would have made a mess, so I'm glad they were thoughtful rather than traditional..."

She had a complex look on her face, a curious smile. "What does it mean?"

I nodded, setting it down on the desk, well away from her. "It has many meanings in antiquity. Of the more famous, Prometheus smuggled fire to Man by hiding it in a ferula stem," I explained, being quite deliberately misleading, neglecting to mention its most celebrated use as a fertility symbol. "Ancient Kings used it as a symbol of their power... The Romans also used the stalks as a means of encouraging servants..." I could almost hear the roar again as I'd raised it above my head...

"And your degrees are in Physics and Mathematics?" she asked.

I chuckled and sat back on the bed. "Among others. You've done your research..."

She smiled, more of a smirk, as she leaned against the doorway. "Shortly after we spoke yesterday, I received another call, from a woman who started off asking me almost exactly the same questions you did -- I finally told her I'd been through this with someone else, and she inquired who. I gave her your name, and she told me I was in very good hands."

Uh oh... "And this person is?"

"Elizabeth Miller, who sends her best."

I nodded. That's how she knew my first name, but how much more? "How is she?"

"She was quite relieved that someone was coming out, and very pleased that person was you. She said you've worked together in the past?"

"Yes, on and off over the years..." Over the centuries... What had our names been, when we first met so long ago? I sighed and shook my head. "She has very strong opinions..." Strong enough to drive us apart, even though we were otherwise so alike, or perhaps *because* we were so alike...

"Yes, she didn't mince words. And she warned me *against* investigating cats -- why didn't you? Could this be dangerous?" Her tone was more accusatory.

"My apologies; it slipped my mind. And from what I've experienced walking the grounds, I do not believe this will be trouble." I gestured to yon thyrsus. "If anything, this is indicative of a sense of humor, but as you can appreciate, some attempts at humor are more welcome than others, so we should be on our guard. Cautious, but not apprehensive, I'd say."

A more pensive look. "How do we know we're in deep doo-doo?" she asked point-blank.

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“With respect, if we have the time to pose the question, it’s not that bad...”

That got a raised eyebrow and a change of posture.

I gestured around us, smiling. “Look around us! Take a deep breath! Light! Airy! Fresh and clean! I will sleep well, and so should you!”

Uh oh -- not sure I liked the smirk on her face. “We’ll see... Can you explain it to me?” she asked.

“I can begin... But first, the tour? Then we can sit and talk.”

More relaxed, a broader smile. She led me to the bathroom. “Protocol if the door is closed is to knock twice, and if you don’t get a response reasonably quickly, open the door, as the wind sometimes blows the door closed. The shower has a fancy valve on it, so you can flush, or run water in the rest of the house without startling or scalding anyone.”

“Good to know,” I acknowledged.

Brief peek into her bedroom. Large bed, airy room once again. I hung by the door, but she urged me in, moving to a window.

Ah... Looking out the window I could see the clearing and the tree. “Did you see it happen?”

She moved closer to me, touching. “Saw, heard, smelled, felt -- I was standing here in the dark, watching and smelling the storm, the window open, when the sky split open! So bright and so loud! And the smells -- ozone, burned wood, rosemary...”

I put an arm around her; she was crouching up against me. “I saw where part of the rosemary hedge was struck; you can still smell it out there. Any electrical damage in the house?”

She sighed, putting an arm around my waist for a moment, then pulling away a bit; I let my arm drop.

“No, I don’t have a television, and I use Gregory’s wireless internet connection, since I’m supposedly too far away from something or other to get my own. He teaches Chemistry; we’re good friends. I think he lost a printer or something. I guess I was lucky; my laptop and charger were packed up in my school bag.”

“You had a wonderful front-row seat for the show!”

“I don’t need a repeat performance any time soon! You think it’s related?”

“The tour?” I insisted.

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She turned to me, almost nose to nose. I could feel her warmth next to me. She smiled and took me by the hand downstairs.

The downstairs bedroom was her office for school things. Back through the hallway, I commented on the watercolors and some of the other artwork through the house. She smiled and said her studio was in the room off the garage, our next stop.

The garage was detached, with a large room off the back. That room and half the garage space made up her studio, with easels, storage, and artworks galore. I looked in all the corners, looking and feeling for...

“What are you looking for?” she asked.

“I’m not sure -- something, anything...”

She nodded. “Elizabeth asked if I’d seen or experienced anything in the last few days that made me say, ‘That’s odd...’”

I nodded, smiling. “And?”

“She instructed me to ask you what it means, what you teach...”

Elizabeth, I’m going to get you for this... “I teach, *we* teach, when you experience something and say, ‘That’s odd...’ it means you weren’t paying attention.”

She nodded, a thoughtful look.

“Any basements, root cellars, storage areas?” I asked. “Dark and damp places?”

She shook her head. “No, this is it. The crawl space under the house is really well ventilated, insulated, and secured. Otherwise so close to the preserve, it would be occupied. I lost some quite nice parchment to mice just after I moved in... But we found and repaired a small hole in a screen, and I borrowed one of Julie’s cats for a few days.”

I nodded. “This is a wonderful creative space.”

“Thank you! Back to the kitchen for iced tea and talk?”

“Sounds good.”

As we left the studio area, she secured the door. “The colder it gets, the more inviting this area becomes.”

Back in the kitchen, she poured us iced tea.

“Pictures?” I asked as we sat at a well-used kitchen table.

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“Oh! Thanks for reminding me! I’ll be right back!”

“The ones of the dishwasher!” I called out.

“Oh, those too!” she replied.

She returned with an old album, and a much more modern manila folder. “When I saw you sitting on the porch...” she chuckled as she sat down, opening the album and turning the pages.

Old black-and-white prints, four by six, five by seven, the house, family members...

“There...” she said, opening to a page.

The pages were about eight by eight, heavy brown paper, large enough for two prints to a page. But this page had one picture on it, more or less centered. A black-and-white of the front porch, and a dog sitting right where I’d been. I took a breath, feeling it.

“Mack,” I said quietly.

“What?” she whispered.

“His name is Mack,” I told her quietly, smiling, my eyes filling up.

“Why yes,” she said just as quietly, “How did you know?”

I shook my head. “I know that’s where he sat, day after day, waiting for his master.”

“That’s right... Bill and Ella, the ones who built the house... I bought it from their grandkids. Bill worked as a butcher at the grocery store in town. Mack was *his* dog. During the day when Bill was at work, Mack would follow the kids, lay in his basket in the corner, follow Ella around, but in the afternoon he’d go sit on the front porch to wait. They told me, once he went to the front porch, a squirrel could run right over him and he wouldn’t move -- he was waiting for Bill to come home.”

I nodded, teary. I’d felt it -- the incredible strength of simple, unconditional, patient love.

“Bill would come home, wash up, and then he and Mack would take a walk before dinner, rain or shine,” she finished the story.

She put a hand on mine. I wiped my eyes with the other hand and sighed, smiling.

“How did you know?” she asked with a look of wonder.

I sat back and held both her hands. Might as well start. “Mary Beth, there is a Veil which separates the Worlds.”

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Her look changed a little.

“There is a Veil which separates the Worlds,” I repeated, “and during the storm, that lightning strike tore a hole in the Veil, a small hole, creating a leak between the Worlds. We have a leak from the other side, and the energy is drawn *here*, to this house -- as you were, as I was drawn to that spot on the porch, drawn by such powerful yet simple feelings.”

One of her eyebrows lifted as I spoke.

“You’re supposed to say, ‘Do you expect me to believe that?’ ” I offered, switching to a gruff unbelieving tone.

She smiled a bit and nodded.

I opened the manila folder. As I’d expected, it had prints of the dishwasher pictures, nicely done two to a page, marked “before” and “after.” I pointed to them. “Do you expect me to believe this?” I asked with a smile.

She furrowed her brow a bit. I almost leaned over and kissed her forehead to stop.

“Yet this happened! You witnessed it, and we have pictures! *We* may imagine things, but the camera wasn’t fooled! And that thing upstairs on the bed -- looked pretty real to me!”

She sighed, nodding slowly. “What do we do now?”

“We should have dinner. Can I help? Do you have things to do for school tomorrow? I’ll be happy to go over these pictures with you -- oh, I haven’t seen *these* before! These are good! What’s going to happen is later tonight when the moon is out, I’m going to walk the area looking for the leak. I expect I’ll find it, if not tonight then tomorrow night. I’ll study it, and tomorrow night or the night after that, I’ll close it. And while I’m doing that, *you*, my dear, will remain safe in this house.”

“Is it dangerous?” she asked, holding my hands.

I shrugged. “Getting out of bed in the morning is dangerous; so is staying in bed in the morning. Everything I’m experiencing about this tells me I am not in danger. But *you* need to keep safely out of things -- because you are *not* experienced in these matters. Just as you wouldn’t hand a razor-sharp mat knife to a child, or leave a glass full of poisonous brush cleaner in the open. Seriously now, interference, however well intentioned, could be dangerous to us *both*. Understood?”

She nodded. “Elizabeth told me to trust you and do as you say, even if I didn’t understand.”

Thank you, Elizabeth... “When this is over, I’ll explain as best I can, and answer any questions you have, as best I can. I promise.”

She smiled and nodded. “Lamb chops and new potatoes?”

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“Sounds delicious. What can I help with?”

I got more of the back story as we prepared dinner. She'd been renting on the other side of town for a year or so, deciding if the area, the schools, were right for her. Something kept bringing her back to this Open Space area, and every time she visited, she walked around the outside of the house. She hadn't really been looking for a place to buy when she visited the Open Space one weekend, and saw people working on the house. She liked it before; fell in love with it once she looked inside. Bill and Ella's grandkids, his grandson John and his wife Denise, were cleaning it. They weren't sure what to do; they lived in Santa Rosa an hour or so away, and with their own kids, didn't get out as often as they'd like. Yet it had so many memories of growing up. Developers didn't want the place, because the Open Space agreements prohibited development. But they didn't want it to be torn down, and they didn't want it to sit empty, it had so many memories and still had so much love in it...

She helped them clean, working up her courage, finally telling them how much she loved the place, how the light in the back room of the garage was so good, how quiet it was... She stayed for dinner and they talked, John telling stories about Christmas at the house, how Grandpa always gave a home to a poor little tree, about the home-made decorations including the cloth reindeer antlers they forced Mack to wear...

They worked out a deal with the Open Space people -- the land went to the Open Space, but the house and garage would stay as long as they were unchanged. She didn't understand everything about the deal, a 99 year lease, but she moved in a few weeks later, to what was now her house.

I wanted to grab her, shake her, and shout! Instead I took her hands and said quietly, “Love fills and protects this house and all in it -- generations of love and care.”

She smiled and nodded. And I saw that chin wobble as she turned away from me quickly.

We had a nice dinner; I helped with dishes afterwards, rinsing and loading the mystic dishwasher. Watching her load silverware, I *almost* asked her why she loaded things in that way -- six pairs of utensils in this section so orderly, and the rest in such a hodgepodge...

When she asked me to explain the pictures, and what was in them... I told her I would when it was over, but it was too early now. Trust me, please.

She nodded. She did have things to get ready for school.

We brought in the spider plants. I put one in the sour spot, and the other in her office. We'd see.

About ten she gave me a sly smile and said she was going up to shower and to bed; she had to leave around eight thirty in the morning if I was up by then. Help myself to whatever in the house, and she'd be back around four.

I thanked her; I'd be out for a few hours probably, and undoubtedly take a shower when I got back, unless that would be to bothersome. No, she'd have clean towels out for me.

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I thanked her again for her hospitality and trust. I might be up early, it all depended on how late I was out.

I took a chance. I got up and walked to her. “This is to protect you,” I told her, and kissed her on the forehead.

Yes, it was protective, but best intentions notwithstanding, both of us knew that kiss had its side effects...

“Sleep well,” I offered.

“I will,” she whispered, then turned and went upstairs with a sigh.

I sat at the table, not really thinking, waiting for her to finish in the bathroom. When she did, I headed upstairs, did my cleanup, and started getting ready.

Invocation

Stepping out the back door and off the back porch, wearing only my dark green robe and sandals. The clearing and the tree were illuminated in moonlight. My final step was to pull the silver ring off my ponytail and put it on the porch. I was now free of objects tainted by the Sin of Prometheus.

I stood in the moonshadow of the house, letting my eyes adapt. I could step into the moonlight -- they'd adapt far quicker. My feelings were positive. Tonight, if I'm lucky, would be the prelude, the invocation. The resolution would come tomorrow, or the next night, or the next.

Of course I'd had a positive feeling about another one, and I'd been greeted by the growling cry, "φρέσκο κρέας," fresh meat -- I survived, barely. That had been a *long* time ago, and I'd learned; thus the two bone knives inside my robe.

Too much thinking! I stepped into the moonlight, raising my arms parallel to the ground, feeling the tingle as moonlight struck my skin. I pulled back the hood and turned, face into the moonlight.

Eyes closed, breathing deep through my nose, accepting, willing, feeling the change... Feeling the change spread from my feet to my head... I turned and stepped carefully along the walkway while I could still stay in the sandals; not many more steps for those! I left the sandals behind as I left human feet behind; I turned to the moonlight once more, lifting the front of my robe to let moonlight accelerate the process, shifting my weight as my body changed, muscles, bones, and skin.

I took the Old form once more, becoming the Satyr, goat from hooves to haunches, man from the waist up, with goat tail and goat horns. My senses and my hungers changed as well, the night air alive with scent and sound. Looking up to her bedroom -- those senses told me she was asleep.

I turned to the tree, approaching carefully, respectfully, focusing with those other senses, the old ones, as I made my way, searching.

There!

Fifteen meters or so from the tree, the leys converged where an arc from the sky had touched ground. There, I sensed it bubbling and babbling, a small tear in the Veil, a minor leak. I danced around it, greeting it, wishing it well, protecting it from those who might stumble upon it from this side, and as well protecting us from those who might fall through from the *other* side.

Stepping back a few paces, I gathered myself and started the more complex dance, spiraling outward, dancing to protect us all, to help those from the other side find their way home, to keep more from entering, and keep those on our plane from falling in. I danced it out and around, out and around in the moonlight, until my spiral dance filled the clearing. I brought my dance to a close.

Down on one knee, panting, the feeling of a task accomplished; the dance had gone well. I pulled the hood of my robe back and loosened the tie so it fell open; I was sweaty from the exertion.

I looked up to the house. Sensation stirred within me. Sensation, emotion, so much. Damn you,

Fixing a Leak

Elizabeth -- how much did you tell this innocent? I knew, the state I was in; if I entered her room, one whiff of me would be all it would take -- she would be overcome with desire, and I could take her until the rosy petals of dawn changed me back.

But those are the old ways... Maybe I should go visit Elizabeth for a while, say for a century or so; it took us that long last time to really get under each other's skin...

Maybe, but that's not the path tonight. Cooled off, I made my way back to the porch, picking up my sandals along the way, trying not to leave hoof marks.

Standing on the walkway, I leaned over and reached for the metal ring for my hair.

I closed my eyes and breathed slowly, *willing* the change, rapid change, not like collapsing in bed and waking up to the dawn, changing back gradually. I made the rapid change, knowing it would drain me of energy. Safer for us all that way!

I put slippers back on human feet and went into the house. Upstairs I put the knives in their leather scabbard, and went to the bathroom. I showered, then washed my robe, pulling it over the metal towel rod in the back of the tub/shower. I dried and brushed out my hair, pulling it back through the ring. Left the windows open so it would be safe for her to enter.

Three in the morning -- I could go crawl into bed with her... Or I could call Elizabeth.

To bed. Just before I fell asleep, I glanced across the room and saw the thyrsus standing upright. Who? *That* was personal... I knew I was going to find out -- whether I liked the answers or not.

*

I got up a little after eleven, cleaned up, and got dressed. My robe was hanging on the clothesline outside. I was puttering, following my nose around the house, when I heard a car pull into the driveway.

"You're up!" Mary Beth called out, coming in the back door. It was eleven thirty.

"About half an hour," I told her.

"Like something to eat?" she offered.

"That was next on my list," I admitted.

"Grilled ham and cheese?"

"Delightful!"

"Have a seat, then. Some times I come home for lunch -- mornings I'm at the high school, and afternoons at City College. I know better than to try and schedule morning classes at City..."

Fixing a Leak

“Nothing early in the morning, or late on Friday afternoon,” I agreed.

“That’s the truth! I’ve got Fridays free this semester, and the kids like it as much as me!”

After puttering at the stove for a bit, she turned to me and asked, “Did you find it?”

I smiled.

Before I could say anything more she said, “Don’t tell me! I wouldn’t be able to stay away!”

I laughed. “Mary Beth, you are as intelligent as you are beautiful.”

She blushed.

“You are beautiful, and you know it,” I told her.

She smiled and turned back to the stove, more color in her cheeks.

We had lunch. She had two classes in the afternoon, but lucked out tomorrow -- with the block schedule at the high school, she didn’t have any classes, and just one section in the afternoon at City.

I told her I was most likely going to take a nap, as I expected to have a late night, even though I didn’t expect anything to happen tonight -- I expected tomorrow night to be the fun one. I couldn’t tell if she believed me or not. I certainly didn’t believe me...

I told her I’d clean up. She laughed and told me I was nice to have around; she’d see me later. She gave me a peck on the cheek! She was chuckling as she left.

I did the dishes, loading the dishwasher, putting the utensils we’d used in the hodgepodge area.

What do the legends teach? Quest first, damsel second! I need to stay focused on the quest, *then* the damsel

The Dance

Standing on the back porch again, pulling the ring out of my hair and putting it on the porch. I had the feeling -- *the* feeling. As much as I'd reiterated at dinner that it would be tomorrow night, I think we both knew I was blowing smoke. I stood on the porch with my robe, both bone blades slip sheathed inside, and the thyrsus in my right hand, the end of the shaft resting on my right foot.

When had it been, when I stood like this? How many centuries? Closing my eyes, I could feel it again, feeling unsure, standing before my kin, holding the thyrsus and wearing a crown of laurel, standing in front of them as their leader, their king, taking the place of my father, fallen in battle. Raising it and hearing them roar...

As it once was, so it is again. I sighed as I opened my eyes and stepped into the moonlight.

The pinecone at the end of the thyrsus *glowed*. As it glowed, I felt the Change. I pulled back my hood and turned, facing the moon, letting my robe fall open. I welcomed and willed it; breathing deep.

Glancing down at my parted robe, I was indeed the complete Satyr!

When I turned again...

The area I'd danced the night before was filled with fairy lights! A cloud of them twinkled and danced in the air!

I approached, and as I did, I sensed a presence. I also sensed that the boundary had indeed been re-made, from her side.

Standing at the boundary, I called, "Hail, Mistress Eilna!"

A cluster of fairy lights in the middle of the area swirled and flared; she appeared through them and answered, "Hail, Master Robyn!"

The fairies parted, showing her curvy, voluptuous form. Her wings unfurled, dragonfly-like, catching and refracting the fairies' light. She moved to the inside of the boundary, hovering a few inches off the ground.

"You are more beautiful than ever, Mistress," I suggested, with a growl and a bow.

"The better to please you, Master," she replied, bowing as well.

"I am so happy it's you, Eilna," I told her honestly.

"It's my pleasure, Robyn -- join me?" she offered, extending a hand.

I slipped off my robe and placed my thyrsus on it. Joining hands, she drew me into the world we had made, the world between.

Fixing a Leak

In that world between, we danced, healing the tear in the Veil. We danced, the fairies supporting us, teasing and caressing us as we teased, caressed, and pleased against each other.

Eilna used her voluptuous form to tease and torment me, and more. We floated on a bed of fairies, with Eilna impaled on me, smothering me to her breasts as she thrummed her wings, thrumming waves of ecstasy through us both.

Through the cloud of pleasure a thought intruded. I grasped her waist and pulled her closer as I filled her once more, driven on and on by the thrumming of her wings vibrating our bodies together. “She’s watching -- you’re doing this to drive her on,” I accused.

Eilna laughed and smothered me to a breast. “Would I do such a thing?” she teased.

I pulled back gasping, “With Elizabeth’s help, yes!”

She pouted and swirled her hips, making me gasp more. “I’d do it on my own, darling...”

Later in our dance, she was face-down on a bed of fairies as I plowed her from behind, grasping her hips, pulling them to me. “Elizabeth is behind this!” I accused.

“I love you behind me!” Eilna moaned.

We eventually brought our dance to a close. The tear in the Veil was no more. Eilna assured me all their denizens were safely home, and none from my side had fallen through. The fairies remained to complete their work.

We parted.

“Call me in the night and I will come for you,” Eilna promised, taunted.

“As you command, Mistress,” I replied, bowing.

She held out her hands. I held hers. “Robyn, thank you.”

“Eilna, thank you. It’s been too long.”

Her smile changed. I recognized that twinkle in her eyes. “We know -- and that is why...”

Capture

Before I had a chance to act, I was swarmed by fairies! A cloud of them took off and went straight in Mary Beth's open bedroom window. The swarm around me picked me up and we flew to the back door -- I guess they opened it; I closed my eyes! They flew me upstairs to her bedroom!

Mary Beth floated by her bed, enveloped in fairies. I could smell her, smell her sex. And I'm sure she could smell me, smell the Satyr. And the Satyr was ready; the Satyr is *always* ready!

The fairies around her lifted her as the group around me lifted me. The sensations -- they swarmed my cock and balls, so intense. Through pleasure-filled eyes I saw them exaggerating her breasts and her sacred cleft, bringing us together, joining us.

Deep into her, but as we slid together I was drawn to a breast. Something about her scent, the fullness of her breast, the feeling of her nipple in my mouth -- I was so hungry for her, sucking as we thrust together.

I didn't feel it until it was too late -- her hand at the back of my head, holding me to her, so good, but then, my hair pulled back and the touch of something! I cried out as I started to change back. As quickly as it started, it stopped, but the die had been cast. I was no longer Satyr, but I wasn't mortal Man either -- I was someplace in between. She tied something around my hair -- I was trapped! But she held and suckled me as the fairies thrust us together. She took her pleasure, oh and filled me with pleasure, but I was at the edge, a strange, incredible edge, so hungry, so lost, needing her so much.

She reached the precipice once again, moaning, telling me how wonderful it was, kissing my head.

Her lips touched the nub of one of my horns. The sensation was incredible; I shook and moaned in her arms. She latched on to my horn, sucking and tonguing, moaning and trembling as she squeezed me, coming yet again. I held on, trying to take her nipple more, to be deeper inside her, as I came like never before.

Heart still pounding, basking in her, holding on and being held. She pulled away, sitting up on me, still connected at the hips. I sighed and she moaned as she rolled her hips; I was still semi-hard deep inside her, still at least part Satyr. She cooed and ran her hands over my chest, up my neck and head.

Oh when she touched the nubs of my horns! They were still connected to my cock and hips! She touched them and I was so hard again, my hips moving strongly, flooding both of us with pleasure. She caressed my horns and I arched my back, moving my hips, wanting, needing more. She moved her hips against me, swirling me around inside her.

But she stopped, moving her hands to cradle my head as she leaned forward and kissed my forehead, once, twice, so many times. Her hands wandered over my chest and neck again as she sat up, her hips only moving slightly, enough to keep the sparks flying.

Fixing a Leak

A new sensation on my neck -- my eyes flew open and I gasped as I felt something tighten around my neck, binding me! Her fingers on my neck, tying as she smiled down on me.

“What have you done?” I cried, my hands touching the cloth around my neck.

She put her hands on mine, her head going back with a wanton cry as she circled her hips once again.

Looking into my eyes again, her hands on mine at my neck. She'd tied something around my neck, and I felt it deep within me, binding me to her. Her eyes, such a complex look on her face.

“Did it work?” she asked innocently.

I cried out, unable to resist her.

She smiled and held me close again, holding my head against her full bosom, filling me with softness and the beating of her heart.

She whispered, “It’s a piece of my oldest, favorite cotton nightie, the one I wear the most, and almost never wash... They told me in a dream, something of mine, a piece of cloth from something I loved and wore, something I felt was me -- tie it around your hair and you can’t change; tie it around your neck and you’ll be mine...” She kissed my head again, her lips touching my forehead and I wanted them on my horns again, setting me on fire... “Were they right?” she asked.

“Yes,” I cried, holding her. As a Man, it would have no effect -- I would laugh. As a Satyr, I would fight to the death to keep from being collared. But as both, as neither, as something in between, I had been helpless in her arms and taken so easily. I had been collared and bound. “Do you know what you are doing?” I whispered, holding on, in tears.

“Shhh, it’s all right -- I’ve got you,” she whispered, moving me to a nipple and urging me closer, the additional cradling that increases the pleasure so much. We started rocking, gently. She held me, whispering, “I’ve got you -- let go and relax. I’ve got you.” Bound to her, even partially, I had to obey... Rocking, being held, letting go.

Over time, the rocking changed. At first, we moved together, rocking so gently. It started slowly, at the ends of each swing, her hips moving a little more, or was it my hips moving a little more... At the end of each swing, our hips moving apart a bit, and as the next swing started, moving together, and at the end, moving apart a bit again. Just a little, but enough to start building the heat, the passion. Building slowly at first, building underneath that thin layer of civilization, of refinement, building at such a low level until the fairies were rocking us back and forth against each other as I tried to devour a nipple and she tongued and sucked wantonly on my horns as we ground together, reaching the peak, and crashing over it.

Collapsing together afterwards, suckling gently, slowly, as she held me, kissing my forehead, being rocked gently once more.

Fixing a Leak

She held me to her bosom, filling me with softness and the music of her beating heart.

“What are you?” she whispered, kissing me on the forehead.

I couldn’t help it -- even being held, I laughed.

She squeezed me gently to a sigh, then asked, “What’s so funny?”

I kissed the side of a breast. “A question I’ve been asked before, but never this way,” I whispered. “Usually it is asked by a man holding a sword in one hand and a crucifix in the other, screaming ‘What in the Name of God are you?’ or something like that.”

She chuckled, jiggling me in her embrace. “Yes, I can see that... And what about the women? What do *they* say?” Another kiss on the forehead.

I sighed, snuggling in. “Not a lot of conversation, especially if they smell me before they see me...”

She held me closer. “Mmm... I understand that, too... Last night, I thought it was a dream, floating above my bed in a cloud of light, and I thought I heard the door, the back door, and a while later the bathroom door, and I smelled something...” She took a deep breath through her nose. “I smelled something and it set my breasts on fire, made me so wet and so hungry...” She moaned as the fairies swarmed over her breasts, moving me back a little; I felt them swarm my balls and all around us where we were still joined. The way they swarmed her breasts, I was so hungry for her again. The way they swarmed my balls, I was so hard and ready for her again. She reached out, pulling me closer, through that buzzing cloud of light, latching me on to where I wanted to be as we were pressed together again, another delirious ride.

When we’d recovered, her sighing question as she held me to her bosom was, “What *are* those things!”

I chuckled. “Fairies is as good a term as any. They ... they respond to feelings, emotion, the subconscious. They can be directed, unconsciously as well as consciously.”

She sighed and rocked me in her arms. “I get the idea... They’re from the ... other side?”

I smiled more. “No, they cause just as much trouble on the other side. We’re not sure where they’re from.”

“When the two of you were screwing out there,” she started.

“Dancing,” I interrupted, insisted.

She gave me a squeeze. “Some dance... They were swarming all around you -- holding, helping some times, like with us?”

Fixing a Leak

“Yes...” I nuzzled.

“When you two were done, a bunch of them shot up here! They surrounded me! I was in the dream again! But... But they helped me, guided me.” She held me, her arms wrapped around my head holding me to her bosom.

“An adept was directing them, or had given them direction. Eilna most likely -- she was the one I was dancing with. Elizabeth might have a hand in this, though.” I whispered.

“Elizabeth is one of you?” she asked.

“More or less -- another of the Fallen. She is from a different path.”

“What does that mean? What are you?”

“More than a Man, yet far, far less than a God,” I sighed.

“But when we first met -- you seemed so *normal*!” another kiss on the forehead.

I kissed the side of a breast. “In that form, I am.”

“That first evening, when you kissed me on the forehead,” she kissed my forehead again, “I was ready to invite you to my bed right then.”

I snuggled closer.

“Oh! How long do we have our little helpers?” she asked.

“Until they think their job is done, or sunlight hits them directly -- reflections don’t count.”

“I remember!” she called out. I felt one of her arms moving. I opened my eyes a little, and then more, looking at the room. Groups of fairies were hanging drapes over the windows! She pulled me back to where I wanted to be and whispered, “I’m supposed to keep sunlight from hitting you, too!”

That sent a chill through me. “Mary Beth, do you know what you are doing?” I asked again.

“With the tie around your hair, you can’t change. With the tie around your neck, you’re bound to me. If I keep you that way until the moon rises again...”

“No,” I sobbed. She didn’t understand; she couldn’t.

She kissed my head. “You’ll be mine forever...”

“You don’t understand...” I whispered, holding her.

Fixing a Leak

“Eilna, and Elizabeth, both of them say you need someone...” she kissed my forehead again.

“But not this way!” I pleaded.

She pulled back a bit. “Why? Why not?” She touched my face. “You’re crying! Why?”

“If you do this, I will be bound to you, in this form, forever!” I told her. “Mary Beth, know that bound as I am now, I cannot lie to you, and I cannot disobey you! But you must understand what your actions will mean!”

She didn’t look as sure now. “Explain it to me, please,” she asked, her voice troubled.

“The tie around my hair keeps me in my present form -- and in this form I can’t walk! I have neither feet nor hooves, but something in between, and that’s the way I would be! Forever! Could I be seen outdoors? Could I be seen at all? How would the world outside respond? How would I move around?”

She nodded, slowly.

“And the tie around my neck -- binding me to you. Keep it on me through the day and let the moon shine on me bound to you -- yes, I’ll be yours forever. *My* forever. I will be bound to you, to love and cherish *only you*, for the rest of *my* life.”

Her eyes started filling with tears.

“You see it, don’t you? You understand what it means?” Now I picked up the cloth and wiped her tears.

She sat up, such energy, such strength and decision in her! She slashed the air with her hands -- fairies swarmed the windows, removing the covers and letting moonlight stream in.

“Please forgive me,” she whispered as she quickly took the collar from my neck, and then the binding from my hair.

I pulled her down and into a kiss. “Hold me and don’t let me go,” I pleaded, and we kissed again.

Her head on my shoulder, she whispered, “I don’t understand...”

I held her, letting the fairies rock us gently. “I think I do -- you got most of that from the fairies, binding me to this form, and binding me to you. Yes?”

“I... I’m not sure! Eilna, in the dream last night, whenever that was, told me something about binding, using only natural cloth, something personal of mine...”

I nodded. “But tying it around a wrist or ankle -- that would bind me through the night. I’m not

Fixing a Leak

sure Eilna knows the full binding, and Elizabeth would not tell you. That leaves our little friends.” I kissed her forehead.

“Yes! Eilna suggested tying it around an ankle or a wrist, distracting you with a nipple, and doing it...”

“They respond to desires, to emotions, to feelings. What brought them here... Then Eilna got you so hot and bothered last night, and they’d already been around you, here in the house -- they gave you the information, but not the understanding. That’s one of their signatures -- responding, but not knowingly or intelligently.”

“That could be a problem...”

I nodded, enjoying where I was. “Imagine them being drawn to a teenager having a wet dream... Magnifying, drawing it out, making it so intense...”

“Mmm... That could be fun...”

“Or that teen having a nightmare?” I suggested.

“Now that’s scary!”

“You don’t want to know...”

She shivered; I held her more. An idea -- “There’s something else they’re good at,” I suggested.

“Oh?”

I thought for a moment, and the fairies clustered around us, holding us and rocking us gently.

She helped incredibly by pulling me to a nipple. The fairies liked that, too, rocking us, rocking us to sleep.

Dawn

I woke with a beautiful young woman at my side, her head on my shoulder. I woke in the form of a human. She stirred and I held her. I didn't cry; I have learned there is always time for tears later.

She sighed and whispered, "Will you forgive me?"

I kissed her forehead. "If you hold me, yes," I replied.

She held me deliciously. Eventually we had to get up, though.

"Shower with me?" she asked.

"Of course!"

Standing by the side of the bed, naked, she was so pretty...

And the way she looked at me -- "You are something else," she growled.

What that something was, I'm not too sure some times...

"Ah, Robin," she called, stopping a few feet from the door. "You need to move this."

I looked -- the thyrsus, laying on the floor in front of the door. "Have you touched it?" I asked.

She backed up another few steps. "No, not at all! I asked one of the classics people -- she told me it was the preeminent fertility symbol of the age!"

"Indeed," I told her, casting the wards once more and picking it up. I opened the door and took it to the small bedroom, propping it up in the far corner of the room. Even with the wards, I could feel its potency.

Meeting her in the bathroom, I suggested, "Not something you should handle, or even stay in the room with!" I chuckled. "Maybe a friend, though?"

"What?" she asked, getting off the toilet and flushing.

I pulled her to a kiss.

We showered, dried, and dressed. Showering and washing is one of those things that's best done together. We stripped and remade the bed, making the room presentable once more.

Downstairs, she started fixing breakfast as I started a load of laundry.

I stepped to the dark corner. It was a sad corner -- I could feel that better. And the plant we'd put there wasn't doing well. I looked upstairs -- time to call in help!

Fixing a Leak

I reached out and called to them -- a small swarm of fairies came down. I sat down on the floor, drawing them to me, asking for their assistance.

My eyes filled with tears; I understood. After Bill died, Mack refused to go upstairs. He'd spend the nights in his basket here, at the bottom of the stairs, waiting for Bill, waiting for his one and only master to come home. Part of him was *still* waiting, such was his devotion. I tried to reframe that, reframe it to something happy, to reward such devotion. But the fairies did it -- what they did, I don't know, but the feelings changed and I knew Mack was happy again, the dark cloud lifting from the spot. Mack was still here, protective and loving. And I knew he was with his master once more.

I stood and wiped my eyes. It felt better now. I started to thank the fairies, but they were already swarming back upstairs.

"What was it about the thyrsus and a friend?" she asked, glancing at me momentarily over a shoulder.

"Mary Beth, if you were to hold it, any female who holds it, is going to have twins."

She turned and gave me a longer look. "Really?"

I nodded. "If you know a couple that's having trouble getting pregnant, send them up there and have hubby pick it up and present it to his wife. I hope the first woman he runs into is his wife..."

She chuckled, then turned to me again. "Actually, I think I know just the couple... And what if I handled it?" she asked with a smile.

I shook my head. "You would have twins -- we would have twins -- curly hair, healthy and happy, with a penchant for the arts, headstrong, never comfortable in big cities but thriving in an environment like this..."

"Just like my mother, and just like me," she said so innocently.

If I hadn't been sitting down, I would have fallen down! I shed my clothes in a flash, and managed to turn off the burner on the stove before I picked her up, pulling the ring out of my hair and changing as I took her to the living room, pulling up her dress. On her back on the couch, pulling her panties off, I pressed my Satyr nose into her folds, inhaling deeply, following with my Satyr tongue, receiving glorious confirmation of my suspicions. She moaned, holding my head, using my horns to guide me as I brought her quickly to a thundering climax.

I let myself change back as she recovered; I retrieved my clothes from the kitchen. Luckily I hadn't torn anything... I put the ring back in my ponytail, binding myself once more to the human form.

She was in the doorway, leaning against it as she straightened her dress, her face aglow. She stepped to me and we shared a deep kiss.

Fixing a Leak

“Well, not quite burned eggs -- care to tell me what that was all about?” she asked, turning to the stove once again.

“When you talked to Elizabeth, did she refer to you as ‘pink’ by any chance?”

Holding a wooden spoon in one hand she turned, a look of concentration. “She may have? I think possibly so -- she laughed at something I said, and told me I was pink? What does that mean?”

I sighed and looked up. The Gods, they move in mysterious ways some times. “It means I found you,” I told her.

The spoon clattered to the floor. She turned off the stove and sat in my lap. She looked at me, smiling. She moved from sitting sideways in my lap to straddling me. We kissed again, slowly. I ran my hands up her back, feeling her, holding her gently.

I held her close. “Oh, I have been blessed once more!” I whispered, letting the tears flow.

“Can you explain?” she asked, sitting back a bit, hands on my shoulders.

“One of your ancestors was one of us, one of the Fallen,” I told her.

She tilted her head a bit to the side, as if the concept weighed more heavily on one side than the other. “A Satyr like you?”

I smiled. “In your case, a woodland elf. Your great-grandmother, or farther back.”

She smiled a bit. “You can tell?”

I nodded. “Yes.”

“What does it mean?”

I sighed. “When one of ... us, one of the Fallen, mates with a Mortal ... ‘pink’ is the shorthand for the offspring. Mortal, but capable of much longer life. Also the characteristics I mentioned, and you agreed, and some things I should have noticed -- the way you commanded the fairies is a good example. A mortal couldn’t do that. Yet I saw you do it -- multiple times, with ease.”

She sighed. “And what do we do now?”

“Have breakfast?” I suggested.

She laughed and kissed me on the nose. Then she gave me a lusty look. “I love those horns of yours -- holding them. And I love it when they’re nubs, and what it does to both of us when I get my lips and tongue on them...”

I pressed my face into her bosom and sighed.

Fixing a Leak

She kissed me on the forehead and stood up. "But if you want to be practical..." She stepped to the stove, but gave me a lusty glance over her shoulder.

"I owe Elizabeth a call," I managed to say.

"I think she expects you to call this afternoon, or she might call you on your cell?"

I got it out of my bag and turned it on. "Thanks."

"She's who we have to thank for the thyrsus?"

"Don't think so -- more like Eilna and the fairies. Elizabeth knows how dangerous they are."

"They're dangerous?"

"Very! Think of it as a sex bomb, ready to go off. That couple you know -- as I said, invite them over, tell hubby to go into the room and pick it up, and when his wife comes in give it to her. Believe me, he'll give it to her! We won't see them for days!"

She smirked. "They've tried so hard, so many things..."

"Well, they won't need to try *anything* after that!"

She nodded. "How long will it keep?"

I shrugged. "Until the New Moon; two weeks or so."

"I'll talk to her this afternoon -- maybe this weekend."

"Neither of us should touch it -- you *especially* shouldn't touch it!" I reminded her.

Her eyes went wide. "Don't you worry!" Then she smiled. "Not yet," she added softly.

"Make the toast?" she asked a bit later. "The way Elizabeth talked, it sounds like you've known each other a long time? How did you meet?"

The Traveler

I nodded, "I decided to go North for a while. I'd spent most of my life within sight of the Mediterranean. Oh, I went to Germania with Varus, and managed to come back, but decided to go North when Constantine started causing trouble..."

"You were alive the same time as Constantine?" she asked, turning around.

"I was one of his tutors: Latin, Greek, Philosophy. His mother was Greek, and not at all of 'noble' birth. He was bright, ambitious, but also superstitious -- he started hanging out with the wrong crowd. When he had an oak grove cleared, tore down a beautiful temple to Aphrodite, and had a church put up, I knew it was time to leave... I did the 'traveling minstrel' thing and headed North."

"How old are you?" she asked, looking at me intently.

"Old. Can we get back to that later?"

She smiled a bit. "Okay... But you tutored Constantine?"

I nodded. "Tutor is a good racket. Teach a kid, a family, for a decade or so and then move on to another location. Room, board, the opportunity to influence the next generation if you pick well. The hard part is avoiding bad politics. Tutor to the Borgias, or one of their enemies, not such a good deal!"

She managed a chuckle. "That's how you met Elizabeth?"

I sighed. "No, I was doing one of the other rackets -- traveling minstrel. You move quicker, don't stay put as long."

If I closed my eyes, I could see her again for the first time, see the terror in her... "It wasn't pretty -- I remember the terror in her eyes, the way she clutched the wooden cage she was in, the scratches, the bruises, torn clothing... She'd been caught by a bright one -- a pink bastard who knew enough to know that the moonlight will change us, if we let it, if we're too weak to prevent it. Had her locked in a cage, no food or water, waiting for her to change when the moon rose. And the bastard had picked up another trick -- giving her a broth made with hallucinogenic mushrooms."

"That's horrible!" Mary Beth cried.

"Makes for an intense show, even with a mortal. I met her in the afternoon. I talked to her enough, convinced her. I'd been through it before -- I gave her a silver coin and told her to put it up her ... It would keep her from changing. I managed to switch some of the mushrooms around as well, so she didn't get the worst of it. I got her out of the cage before dawn, and we got away."

"That sounds simpler than it probably was..."

I sighed and nodded. "It was intense. That first day, we hid in nearby caves. That night I convinced her to change by changing myself, showing her. Once she changed, we were able to cover a

lot more distance before dawn than a mortal could.”

“She’s a satyr like you?”

“No, a troll, from the region now called Norway. She’d gone South to find Adventure...”

“And found it...”

“Be careful what you wish for...”

“What did you do?”

“We wandered Europe, Northern Africa, Near East, India, Asia, and back. Funny how that period some called ‘The Flowering of the Church’ is called ‘The Dark Ages...’ by others.”

She laughed. “That kind of remark will get you into trouble...”

I chuckled. “Oh, it did... One of those signs it’s time to move, when the fanatics get power.”

“When did you come to over here?”

“Early 1600’s? I think she came over in the late 1700’s. She’s gone back and forth to Europe; I’ve stayed pretty much here.”

“How old are you?”

I sighed, paused, and took her hands. “One answer: old. Another answer: not sure. Calendars are so local, and when I was born, where I was born, in the hills of what’s now Greece, we didn’t keep track. I know as a young man I heard Plato and Aristotle speak, and they influenced me greatly. How old was I then? Young.” I smiled. “But what does that mean? Sixteen? Sixty? When you spend your days, your seasons in the hills tending sheep and goats, time is a very slippery thing.”

The look in her face... How many times have I had this conversation? Not that many, four? By this point in the conversation I usually know if I’ve chosen well. I knew I had this time.

“You *listened to*, you *saw*, Plato, and Aristotle?” she asked in awe.

I smiled. “Damn good speakers, both of them. Of course everyone at that school was a damn good speaker.” I’d taught there for a while...

Such statements are difficult to internalize, to digest. She worked at it in silence.

We finished breakfast and cleaned up.

Sitting at the kitchen table holding hands...

Fixing a Leak

“What next?” she asked.

I nodded. “You have a class? You should talk to your friend. Oh, is your school by any chance looking for an adjunct to teach physics, math, Latin, Greek? I can start any time.”

She smiled, sighing. “I’ll check. But what...”

I squeezed her hands. “Tell your friends you need them to house sit this weekend, as a favor -- starting Friday afternoon. You need to come South with me so I can pick up some things. We can return on Sunday.”

She nodded. “I don’t want to be away from you.”

I sighed. I felt it -- now, in a month, it didn’t matter. “Now, sitting here, I am not bound to you,” I told her.

She nodded, frowning a bit.

I took a breath. This would be the fifth time... I could wait, we could talk a lot more, but why? “Mary Beth Carter, will you marry me?”

She jumped from her chair and held me, sobbing. I wrapped my arms around her, holding her close, breathing in her scent. How long would we be given together?

She sat in my lap, arms around my neck after she wiped her eyes. “But eventually, won’t you... I mean, I’ll...”

I looked in her eyes. She had an inkling, but I knew. “I promise to be with you for all of your days.”

She shook her head slowly, a frown forming. “But... Doesn’t it ... hurt?”

I took her hands and kissed them. “Yes, it does. But it is worth it -- you are worth it.” We held each other again. She was the first to figure it out so early... “Oh, it will hurt, and I know that, I can feel it now -- but if I let you get away, if I pass up the opportunity, that will hurt so much more,” I whispered to her, kissing her as I held her.

We puttered for a while -- I could tell her mind was going at least a mile a minute. I listened as she made a phone call, inviting a friend/colleague and her husband over to watch the place for the weekend -- give them the chance to unwind in a nice, quiet place, to get away from things for a few days. That sounded like it was all set. Good! Only one safe way to get rid of those things!

Mary Beth fixed us a light lunch, and left for her afternoon class -- but was back within a minute as she’d forgotten her bag. I held her close and looked in her eyes. “Relax -- focus, and don’t worry.” I kissed her forehead. I could do that now, without concern. She sighed and we held each other. I rocked her in my arms with her head on my shoulder.

Fixing a Leak

About half an hour later, my cell phone rang. “You knew,” I accused, answering it.

Elizabeth’s laughter at the other end. “How could I know? Is she?”

“Wood elf, at least two generations ago,” I told her.

“That is wonderful! And did you take care of the problem?”

“Problems -- Eilna, and fairies, but the tear is sealed. Is the thyrus your doing?” I accused.

“Ooh, no! Did ... She didn’t touch it, did she?”

“No, it’s safe -- and she knows a couple who need its help. But it was here when I arrived.”

We talked for a while. I told her the location had a strong pull, very positive. She asked about the problem spot, and I explained, even that was based on love. We both figured the fairies had taken hints from Eilna and Mary Beth to conjure up the thyrus. I asked pointedly about how she was doing. She told me she was doing well, but she might come visit -- it might be time for a change. I understood, letting her know I’d be moving, maybe making some small changes, and she was welcome, as always.

“So, are you ... ?” she asked.

I sighed. “Yes. And I would like to give her an old silver ring, one I have saved for a long, long time...”

“You kept that?” she cried in surprise.

After she’d thrown it at me... Thrown the ring, and quite a few other things much larger, all while screaming at me... “Of course I kept it,” I replied. “And given everything else that’s happened, I’d be surprised if it wasn’t a perfect fit.”

She giggled. “Yes, that is the way these things work,” she agreed. “When?”

“Oh, I just asked her; we’ll see, but some time soon. She ... I’ll tell you when we get together next.”

“Something interesting?”

“Fairies again -- it could have been very, very ugly, but worked out well, and showed me her heart is in the right place.”

“Oh, that makes me so happy,” she sighed.

That sigh said so much... We both knew how these things *had* to end. We’d both been through it, helped each other through it, and helped others. Didn’t make it any easier.

Fixing a Leak

"I know," I acknowledged softly. A few years of joy, of harmony, followed by decades ruing the loss? Damn our memories! More burdens of the Fallen.

"Has she discovered any of your secrets?" she asked with a lilt in her voice.

I chuckled. "Yes, and I'm sure she will discover more *on her own*," I half-threatened.

"I was only thinking of you, darling," she laughed.

"She received substantial assistance from the fairies," I informed her.

She sighed once more. "That could be good..."

"Yes, but we managed... Keep in touch?"

"Oh, I will -- I don't know if I'm envious, or not."

"I'll need you soon enough, even though she is pink," I sighed. Even seventy or eighty years -- not that long to us. Such a short time to share the joy, and a seeming eternity to recall the pain.

"Savor every moment, then. And I'm here -- maybe it's time I change; we could leapfrog."

"Yes; it's only going to get more difficult," I agreed. It used to be so easy; move to a different town, a different country, a different continent, and adopt a new identity, a new age. But now, as societies and their structures evolved, that was becoming more difficult. One of the things we'd done in the past, others had done, was to pair up and leapfrog -- one helping the other establish that younger identity, and forty or fifty years later, switching roles.

"Take care, my brother," she whispered in one of the Old Tongues.

"Take care, my sister -- I will always shelter you," I replied.

Hung up the phone and stood there, raising my head, taking a slow, deep breath. Exhale and let it go.

"Mack, protect this house," I said out loud. My eyes were filling with tears. Too early to contemplate children. That's *her* decision, more than mine.

My phone rang. A local number? "Hello?"

"Oh, I miss you!" Mary Beth said. "Get packed up -- we're leaving this afternoon, with my friends coming over in about forty five minutes -- I'll be home in thirty. Love you!"

"And I love you," I told her as the connection ended.

Fixing a Leak

I headed upstairs; I needed to pack, and set out the thyrus.

Passing Mack's corner, I knew we would need, and find, the right dog. That would be the start.

Looking up the stairs, I knew I shouldn't focus on how many years will we be given. Instead, I should focus on savoring every moment we have.

FIN

Rev 2011/02/19

Fixing a Leak

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