

Changeling, Book 2

Part 3

Now:

Kendra pulled in to her parking space in the small gravel parking lot behind her walk up apartment. She gathered her grocery bags from the back of her Jeep, arranging them in her one hand so that she had the other free to unlock the back door of the building. And not incidentally, so that she could drop her keys and easily pull a knife, if she needed to.

She was just about to insert her key into the lock when she heard a slight rustling by the dumpster about ten meters away. She turned, expecting to see a feral cat or a crow or one of the wild jackrabbits that lived in the city.

Instead, emerging from behind the dumpster, was her brother, Gylan, King of Faerie. His silk and brocade court clothes were disheveled and filthy, his hair stuck up in all directions, and a bruise was beginning to darken one cheekbone. What disturbed Kendra the most, though, apart from the fact that Gylan had never, to her knowledge, set foot in the human realm, were his eyes. They were red-rimmed and looked more than a little feral, like at any sudden move from her he might run away and never be seen again, or attack with astounding fury and viciousness, with no possible way to predict which might happen.

“Gylan.” Kendra kept her voice pitched low and soothing, “you look like you could use a cold drink. Come on inside, I’ll get you a lemonade.” With slow, measured movements, Kendra unlocked the door and held it open for him, holding it casually, without looking at him, as if she just felt like standing there leaning against an open door for awhile.

When he stepped past her, slowly, warily, she followed, letting the heavy security door fall shut behind her. Without looking at her brother, she walked on up the stairs to her apartment, unlocked the door and entered. Leaving the apartment door open behind her, she went to her tiny kitchen, unpacked and put away her groceries, and fixed two glasses of lemonade.

Gylan was prowling around her large living room when she entered with the drinks in her hands. He was looking at the half-finished drawings on her drafting table, the books and sketches piled haphazardly on the tables and floor, and looking out her window at the view of the parking lot and alley, without seeming to really see any of it. Kendra set the glasses down on the table and sat down to wait for her brother to settle.

After more pacing, he finally sat down across from her, picked up one of the glasses of lemonade and downed it in a few quick swallows. He set the glass carefully on the table, then sat back and drew a few deep breaths, staring blankly at the ceiling.

"I need your help." He said eventually, still looking at the ceiling.

Kendra slowly reached for the other glass of lemonade and took a sip. "What sort of help?"

Gylan sprang restlessly to his feet and paced the apartment again a few times. Finally he stopped by the window and leaned against the frame, staring down at the parking lot.

"There was an attack. In Faerie." His voice was low and flat, as if he was mentioning that it was about to rain outside.

"An attack. A noble stirring up trouble for you again?" Kendra had had personal experience of this just a few months ago.

"No. Not Fairies. Humans."

Kendra raised her brows. Fairies had a long history of abducting humans and keeping them in the Faerie realm as slaves, entertainment, and sometimes as food. It was something both she and Liz Yellowfeather had been trying to at least curb, even if they couldn't stop it outright. Considering the treatment many of the humans received, she was a little surprised there wasn't more incidents of humans striking back against their fairy masters.

Gylan turned to her and shook his head. "I know what you're thinking, and it wasn't that. It wasn't human slaves rebelling, they had human weapons. Devastating. Like I've never seen before."

Still in the flat, emotionless voice, Gylan described what happened at the dinner party when the three men had burst in and begun shooting. Kendra listened with growing horror, not daring to interrupt.

"...then the captain of my guard activated my emergency teleport and..." Gylan's voice trailed off.

"Wait, what? Your emergency teleport?"

Gylan waved a hand impatiently. "It's a very old device with an embedded teleportation spell. It's activated by pushing a small spike into me and spilling blood, and I'm teleported to a safe room beneath the palace, locked from the inside. I waited there for someone to give me the all clear, but after

several hours when no one came...they were all dead, Kendra.” Gylan's voice was still quite flat, but Kendra could hear anger stirring underneath. Though not just anger. Rage. A deep, hot rage, and it occurred to Kendra that Gylan's flat voice and somewhat disconnected actions were not the result of shock or trauma as she had thought, but the mechanism he was using to prevent himself from burning the world down, cracking the Earth and boiling the seas in his rage.

Which he just might be able to do, if he so wished.

Kendra could think of only one reason for this depth of fury. “Liz?”

Gylan shook his head and sprang to his feet to pace furiously again for a few minutes. Finally he stopped and gripped the back of the chair he had been sitting in. The wooden frame creaked under the pressure of his fingers.

“She's alive. Barely. She's badly hurt. My guard were all killed protecting - ” He cut himself off, and swallowed hard. “I need your help, Kendra. I'm going to find whoever sent those killers. I'm going to make them pay.” The chair creaked again and Kendra half expected to see it shatter in his hands.

“You want me to do the investigation from this end, I take it.”

“They were humans, with human weapons that had to have come from here. You understand this human realm, I don't.”

“Obviously.” Kendra looked pointedly at her brother's Faerie clothing. “I'm surprised you were even able to find my place.”

Gylan waved a hand, a regal gesture both dismissive and impatient. Kendra wondered idly whether he practiced to make it so casual and imperious at the same time, or whether it came naturally from royal fairy arrogance.

“I had your...designation. Of your location. I gave it to a man driving a vehicle and told him to bring me here. He refused at first. Then he demanded currency. When I told him I didn't have any, he grew belligerent. So I placed a compulsion on him, so that he did as I wished.”

Kendra pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed. Kidnapping, in other words. There weren't laws to cover taking over a person's mind by magical means, though. “Gylan, you realize that he's not actually your subject, and doesn't owe you service.”

Another hand wave. “It was necessary.”

“Did you at least let the guy go with his mind intact?”

Gylan looked mildly offended. “Of course I did. He'll recover, in a week or so. Perhaps a month.”

Kendra sighed again. She needed to get Gylan out of the human realm and back to Faerie as soon as possible. “All right. For Liz's sake, if nothing else, I'll see what I can do to track the humans

and the weapons. You'll need to do what you can to figure out what happened from your end, what fairies were involved.”

“Of course. It is already begun.”

“Did you get anything out of the shooters?”

Gylan frowned. “Anything? What do you mean, anything?”

“Any information. Who they are, how they got to Faerie, anything like that.” She frowned back. “You did question them, didn't you?”

“No. One was killed, the other two escaped. Their weapons were too powerful, the only way to stop them was to kill them with crossbows. It took too many lives to kill even one, in the end.”

Kendra grimaced, and nodded. She should have expected that. Fairies were generally not moderate in their response to a threat.

Gylan looked at her seriously for a moment, with no trace of the hurt and angry lover or imperious royal. He was all King, intent on his duty towards his people. “I appreciate you doing this for Liz, but we need to track this down and stop it for all of us. These weapons they used – they were horrible. Devastating. We cannot allow them to remain in human hands, or accessible to fairies who have more aggression than sense.”

Kendra nodded slowly. “I understand that, Gylan.” She rose. “Come on, you can tell me anything else you know about what happened while I drive you to a place where you can cross back to Faerie.”