

Changeling, Book 2

Part 13

Now:

The humans gathered around Kendra were watching her closely, and so knew immediately that something was wrong when she paused, her knife halfway to her hand. They all tensed, raising their improvised weapons, except they were looking at her, instead of behind them where the threat was truly coming.

The human closest to the hall leading to the study, a sandy-haired young man with a long scar puckering his face so that he always seemed to be sneering slightly, fell before he even knew there was a threat. Nomi spun, pulling the fairy with her, so that Vyncis took the blade that was meant for her and fell out of her grip, the hilt protruding from his ribs.

Nomi fired the pistol, the report deafening in the small space. The bullet hit the fairy who had just knifed her hostage, and tore through his chest, just below his collar bone. He recovered his balance and came at her again, a snarl on his face. Nomi shot him twice more.

The fairy stopped and crumpled, a puzzled look on his face, but he had become a cloud of red mist before he had fully hit the floor. Nomi had by then begun shooting at the fairy who was using long, sharp claws to disembowel the middle aged woman who had been next to the sandy haired young man.

More fairies rushed in, some carrying knives or swords, some armed with their own teeth and claws. The humans pushed back, despite the fact that Nomi's pistol was the only weapon they had that could truly hurt the fairies. They swung clubs and candlesticks and fell dying.

Kendra couldn't just stand there, but she couldn't fight for either side. "Stop!" she yelled.

No one heard her, no one responded. The violence continued around her, unabated.

Kendra reached deep inside for the magic of her Royal Blood, and poured it into her shout.

"STOP!" Her voice rang through the whole house, louder than the crack of Nomi's pistol, vibrating walls, humans and fairies with her authority.

They all stopped, humans and fairies, as if they had been turned to stone.

Kendra stalked over to Nomi and held out her hand. Nomi slowly and reluctantly placed her pistol on the outstretched palm.

The magic was still vibrating through Kendra, she felt it buzzing through her bones and out to her skin, making everything clear and sharp edged, like broken glass. She turned to look at Nomi fully, and Nomi flinched from her gaze.

“Gather your people.” Even speaking normally instead of shouting, Kendra's voice echoed strangely and no one would look at her. “Take them out of here, take care of them.”

“Highness!” Said one of the fairies in a strangled voice.

She turned to him. “Did you have an objection?”

“Highness,” the fairy looked at her and then flinched away as if slapped. “Highness, these humans were involved in the shooting at your Royal brother's palace. We tracked them here, they have a hostage.”

“You mean him?” Kendra nudged Vyncis with her foot where he lay on the floor. He moaned at the movement, but otherwise stayed still.

“Highness, you can't let them go, they know too much!”

“I can't?” The walls shivered with the question, even asked softly. The fairy cowered.

Through the magic humming in her blood and bones, Kendra forced herself to think. The magic whispered in her mind, telling her that she could flay this cowering wretch before her, she could incinerate the humans in the room in an instant, she could make the entire world obey her every whim.

She shook her head slightly, trying to clear a space. She didn't want to kill anyone. Or the world at her feet.

Nomi and the other humans were edging towards the door, but couldn't bring themselves to leave just yet. Kendra turned to them.

“Go live your lives well. Take care of each other. Tell no one about fairies or where you've been. Understood?”

The humans all nodded, eyes wide and dilated.

“Nomi...” There was something Kendra wanted to say to her. Something about a mother...?

“Highness?” Nomi's voice was only a hoarse whisper.

It didn't matter, the magic murmured to her. She was only a human.

“No.” Said Kendra. Her mother was more than just another human...wasn't she?

Nomi was still waiting, still looking at her, her brow creased with a puzzled frown. And something resembling fear.

Kendra focused on her again, and her little band of humans. There was hope in their faces, desperate hope, and the fear that their hopes would be dashed yet again.

Something occurred to her. "Is one of you named Megan?"

One of the young women stirred. "I am." She was around twenty and pretty. Blood dripped down her face and she cradled one arm in the other, but was walking on her own power and likely would be fine.

"There's a truck outside, meant for you, I think. Someone gave his life to get you out."

Megan swallowed and turned away. She obviously had a good idea who that someone had been.

"Go," Kendra said. "Now. Remember your instructions."

They all hurried out. Kendra heard the front door close behind them.

"Are you sure that was wise, sister?"

Kendra turned to find Gylan standing at the end of the hall leading to the study. She hadn't even felt the magic of the portal when he came through.

"Let them have their chance at freedom, Gylan."

"They assisted in the shooting, helped get the men into the palace."

"They may have helped things along, may have taken advantage, but they were not the instigators or masterminds. That honour belongs to this one." Kendra nudged Nomi's former hostage where he lay semi-conscious on the floor. He moaned softly. Gylan stepped forward a few paces to see his face clearly, and the fairy hunting party shrank back from their king.

"Hmm. Baron Vyncis. I should have known."

Kendra was surprised by the mildness of Gylan's response until she looked in his eyes and saw the rage still lurking underneath. The fate of the Baron would not be a pleasant one.

"He's a great-nephew of the late Duke Rione." Gylan remarked casually. "Evidently he didn't like how I disposed of his great-aunt's estate."

How like Rione, to still be manipulating events, even after she was gone.

Gylan turned to the fairy hunting party. "Take him." He said, gesturing at Vyncis. "Take him back to my palace. Tell my guards to put him in the silent room."

"Sire." A couple fairies hauled Vyncis upright and dragged him back towards the study.

Gylan looked around, as if seeing the place for the first time. Which, now that Kendra thought about it, he probably was.

"This place shouldn't stand empty." He said. "It's a beautiful place that shouldn't be allowed to fall into ruin. And that portal in the back, Rione made it powerful enough it shouldn't be left unattended. You never know who might use it."

He strolled around the room, admiring the view out the large picture windows.

“It's yours, sister. I'm sure you can use a quiet country retreat to work on your art.”

When Kendra opened her mouth to object, Gylan raised a hand to stop her.

“I insist, Kendra. And this place will come with a stipend to help you maintain it. And give you more time for your art. And the portal will give you a convenient way to come visit me, now and then. Or I you.”

“This isn't what I wanted, Gylan.”

He nodded. “I know it isn't. But you called on your Royal Blood, you used its power to impose your will on a situation. The consequences you created – they weren't what I would have done, but they might have been much worse, especially if you had done nothing. You did what you did, however, and those humans are free now – even I can't call them back any more. But there's also no going back for you. You'll find many things different, now. Subtly, perhaps, but different.”

Gylan strolled in the direction of the study. “I'm sorry, sister. You know where I am, if you need any advice on how to deal with this.”

“It won't be different, Gylan. I've done without magic so far, I can continue that way.” Kendra called after him.

“Huh. We'll see.”