

# Queen of the Leaf

A “Dark Wonderland” story

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Behold the Dark Wonderland, a place where humanity is thrust into contact with people, places and things of the supernatural variety. This tale is one of many accounts of men and women coming face to face with agents of the paranormal world. We hope you enjoy this story. And remember, it can happen to you, if you believe it.

Event Date: 2016

## Chapter One

Pikapoko was the name of the fairy kingdom located in New Hampshire. It was a place surrounded by thickly huddled trees, and it consisted of several small huts all connected by wooden bridges across the canopy. The huts, the homes of the fairies, had flowers planted along their sides, and thick, braided vines that wrapped around the trees atop which the buildings lay.

In one of such huts, a young fairy named Pocho eagerly stood in line behind other members of his kin. Ornately woven green and brown vines ran along the walls of the building like the others, and evenly spaced hollows were filled with all sorts of trinkets. Like all fairies of the pixie tribe, Pocho stood at around ten inches tall. He had nut colored skin, and pale pink hair with the texture of cotton candy. He wore a vest of matted leaves painted in black, and long with green shorts made of tiny plant fibers. He had a small pouch on his waist, and wore simple slippers woven from hay.

In this particular instance, Pocho was planning on making his debut. He, like the other pixies in line before a table of older pixies in robes, was about to sign up to join the elite aerial force of Pikapoko fighters known as the Skydust Warriors.

Pocho was the fifth person in line, and eagerly awaited his turn. He smiled with himself. *This is it, Pocho*, he thought. *Today you'll make it big. And make mom and dad proud!* When the last applicant, a female, went to the table, Pocho jittered impatiently. He even garnered the attention of the applicants behind him. And after five minutes, when the woman was finished, Pocho quickly skidded his way to the table.

Before Pocho was a man with a series of papers before him on the table. The recruiter had greying hair and a few wrinkles under his eyes, telling Pocho this man was well beyond a hundred years old.

The recruiter looked up at Pocho with an incredulous expression, and then frowned. "Pocho..." he said.

"Yes," the boy responded.

The man sighed. He put down his inked-feather and folded his arms. "How many times have we done this now, Pocho?"

Pocho heard sniggers behind him, but he ignored them and said, "Come on, Mr. Leafenson! I can do this. Just give me a chance to join Skydust."

Mr. Leafenson said, “Skydust is a military force that deals with aerial battles. You do know this, right?”

Pocho nodded. “Yeah, so?” he said.

“And our soldiers need to be able to take flight using their own wings,” said Mr. Leafenson, “I still don’t get the point that you’re trying to make,” said Pocho.

Mr. Leafenson rose up and pointed at Pocho. “But you don’t have any wings lad!” he said.

The room erupted in giggles. Pocho frowned and stiffened. He tried to shake off the embarrassment, but the continuous laughter made it difficult. Pocho’s discomfort soon turned to anger, but he clenched his fist to suppress them.

Unlike Pocho, the pixies around him had membranous, tinted wings stemming from their back through their clothes from either a cutout portion or flaps. Unfortunately, Pocho was a rarity. He was born without wings. It was often seen as a curse for such as a thing to happen. The usually notion was that a pixie might have done something terrible in the past life, or they might have sold their soul to a human.

Regardless, Pocho was a wingless pixie, and a wingless pixie wasn’t a pixie at all.

Pocho leaned on the table and said, “But I’m a pixie just like everyone else! Even if I don’t have wings, I’m good with riding birds.”

Mr. Leafenson saw the burning passion in Pocho’s eyes, and simply replied, “But you can’t fly, son...”

There weren’t as much laughs as before, as now the others could sense the tension in the air as Pocho and the older pixie stared at each other.

Finally, Pocho left the table and made his way to a rectangular patch of light on the other side of the room. Pocho walked outside onto the bridge that surrounded the treehouse. He rested his arms on the railings and stared at the sky. In the air Pocho watched as birds and pixies darted about, tending to their daily business without having to use their legs much. Pocho sighed as he thought about his situation. He loved his parents, for though he was wingless, they always made him feel special. But there were times when Pocho resented his mother and father for bringing him into this world without an advantage.

As a few other pixies walked by him on the bridge, Pocho closed his eyes and hung his head, contemplating his next step in life. He opened his eyes and glanced around the kingdom. All

the eight treehouses were situated in a circular fashion in the trees, with a huge space of earth in between. To Pocho's eyes it seemed like they were miles apart, but it was only around fifty meters.

Each building served its own purpose. The one Pocho currently stood outside of was the ceremonial hall; used for special occasions such as meetings and a recruitment center. The other buildings served as the temple of worship, the nursery, the courthouse, the house of records, the latrine, the living quarters and the queen's castle. The living quarters was the largest building, which was a set of ringed platforms that housed homes the size of dog houses. Over two hundred of these houses were on the tree from the very top to the lowest platform that was just four meters off the ground.

However, a few of these homes were under repair from the vandalism of a particular group that as of recent became a scourge to Pikapoko.

But it wasn't the living quarters alone that was damaged. Many of the buildings at this very moment had undergone recent renovation or were currently in the process of getting new parts added. In pixie construction, the parts of the building were held together using bagworm silk or tiny nails.

Then Pocho turned his eyes to the building where the queen slept—where she once used to.

The queen's chamber was the second largest construct. But now, half of its scorched remains were missing. Torn and ripped off by the human who came and took her.

Besides his own issue of his missing wings, this was the only debacle that Pocho often contemplated. The queen was taken by a human intruder for her own use. And as a result, the shroogs constantly took the opportunity to attack the kingdom, raping and violating the sanctity of their home.

It was one of the reasons Pocho so desperately wanted to join the Skydust Warriors. He couldn't just sit idly by and not try to contribute to helping his kingdom. Especially seeing as how he lacked wings, most didn't consider him whole. Pocho needed a means of proving his worth to the kingdom.

And most of all, they all needed their queen back. Just three months ago the shroogs had taken several prisoners and killed an equal amount.

Now Pocho's moment of grief was gone. He clenched his fists not with anger, but excitement. Any moment now, the shroogs could come flying into their land. And the cycle would continue; kill, steal, destroy, rinse and repeat.

*Are they dumb?* Pocho thought. *We need all the help we can get. Even if I can't fly, I can still fight on the ground.*

Pocho sighed. He pulled out his knife and inspected it, trying to pass the time until another plan to join the ranks of their military could hatch in his head. His knife was two inches long, with the blade made from the sharpened fang of a bear and the hilt wrappings of tree bark and dried honey.

“One day I’ll make a shroog taste this,” Pocho murmured.

And then Pocho heard it; the scream and shouts of the people around him. The flurried movements of individuals running to the edge of the bridge next to him caught Pocho’s eye. He looked around and saw everyone pointing to something in the sky. Pocho looked as well, and he saw what the ruckus was all about.

A gang of birds were furiously kicking and pecking at something between them in the air. The figure vaguely resembled something humanoid, and she was screaming in terror as she counterattacked with kicks and punches.

Pocho lowered his weapon and stared starkly at the scene. “What in the heck?”

But around Pocho, he suddenly realized there were cheers at the conflict. Mostly those of people backing the assault of the pigeons. Suddenly, the person the pigeons were attacking lost her strength, and plummeted to the ground.

The cheers and shouts suddenly spiked intensity. Pocho instinctively ran across the bridge to the nearest staircase some meters away. The stairs spiraled all the way to the ground, but Pocho didn’t have the time. On the back of his vest what would have been his wings he had replaced with a special contraption. Pocho leaped over the railing of the staircase. He spread his arms and legs to create more drag and slow him just a little. Before Pocho the winged individual spun until she landed in the grass.

“Dammit!” Pocho said. Now there was the possibility that the individual could’ve died. Not to mention, the squirrels were already gathering.

When he had cleared half the distance, Pocho pulled a string on the contraption on his back. On both side an assortment of beetle wings popped out. He held onto handles in the center of them and directed the trajectory of his descent as he slowly glided down. Pocho made a continuous turn into a spiral so he could time where he landed. When he made contact with the ground Pocho pulled on the string again and his gliders folded away. Ironically, the victim of the attack had

landed close to the ceremonial ring of pink and red mushrooms, but Pocho ignored that and ran towards the squirrels that surrounded her.

“Hey!” said Pocho, getting the attention of the animals.

There were six of the rodents, wearing different colored sashes. They all stood on their hind legs and turned to the fairy approaching them. Like all animals who had been enchanted by the presence of the queen, the squirrels were capable of speech, and a male squirrel with piece of his left ear gnawed off said, “What is it, pixie boy?”

Pocho stopped before them, taking deep breathes. “Kagos...” said Pocho. “That...that person. Let me see who it is?”

Kagos, wearing a green sash, said, “Why are you interested? It’s just a mutant.”

Pocho was a few inches taller than Kagos, but he didn’t underestimate the ferocity of the squirrels. Kagos had a sleeker face than the others around him, but he had sharper incisors. Being a leader of the ground-patrol of Pikapoko, Kagos had seen his fair share of fights. Tales of his exploits even told he once faced off with a cayote.

Kagos said, “It’s a mutant. Nothing to see here. We’ll dispose of it.”

Pocho knew of only one person in the kingdom to have that title. Pocho calmed himself to not sound confrontational with Kagos, and he said, “Is it her? Is it Pechino?”

And suddenly a scream was heard behind the squirrels. They quickly retreated and turned around to face the source of the sound.

Kagos reached for the blade of a pencil sharpener he’d tied to a stick, and said, “Stay back everyone!”

Pocho did as he was told and took a few steps behind him. However, he could see between two of the squirrels, and he sotted her.

Pechino was humanoid, just as the pixies. However, there were notable differences in her appearance. She had burgundy skin, and a tightly muscled frame. Her feet were large talons, as were her hands. And on her back were bat-like wings. Pechino’s dark-blue hair was braided into a short pony tail, and beneath her bright brown eyes she had a pig’s nose and a wide mouth. Her privates were covered by the skin of what looked like a squirrel—and Pocho probably suspected that was why Kagos and the others were unwilling to let her go.

“Stay down!” said one of the squirrels, a square-faced male wearing a brown sash named Pakut.

Pechino, who was well twice the size of a Pixie, flapped her wings and snarled. “All of you get away from me! I didn’t do anything!”

“Oh yeah?” said another squirrel. “I don’t trust the shroog blood in you!”

Pechino took a few steps back, and the squirrels crept closer. She was already covered in cuts and bruises, and there was a small tear in her wing. Her eyes frantically switched from each individual, then she spun, leaped and took off.

But the squirrels were faster, and two of them leaped on Pechino and brought her back down. They ganged upon her just as the birds had just done. But Pocho would have none of it.

The Pixie immediately leaped into the fray headstrong, and Pocho viciously shoved everyone away. “Back off!” he said. “Everyone! Leave her alone.”

Eventually the squirrels heeded his words, and they retreated from Pechino.

“What the hell are you doing?” said Kagos. “Do you want us to kill you as well?”

Pocho turned around and spotted Pechino on her hands and knees. There were droplets of blood beneath her, and one of her eyes were puffy. Pocho met her timid stare before she lowered her head. Pocho’s fist tightened until they hurt. He turned to the squirrels and stunned them with a murderous stare.

Pocho said, “We don’t kill members of our community! That’s the rule here!”

“She’s not one of us,” said Pakut. “She’s half shroog.”

“And half pixie,” said Pocho. “She has a right to live here too, just like everyone else.” Pocho approached them. “You’re really going to kill her, and not even know what the reason for that fight was? That’s not justice! If the queen was here, she wouldn’t allow it.”

“But she’s not,” said Kagos, “and we have to keep our kingdom safe. Anything thing that’s shroog has to go.”

Pocho said, “Well you’ll have to kill me to get to her...”

There was silence as the fairy and the squirrels stood against each other. Behind Pocho, Pechino stared in bewilderment at the wingless young man.

However, it was Kagos who finally said, “Fine, boy. Have it your way.” He sheathed his blade. “I hope when her shroog blood takes over and she kills someone, you can explain to the leaders why you allowed her to live...”

Pocho nodded curtly, and said, “I’ll take full responsibility for it, Kagos.”

Kagos grunted. He said, “Let’s leave him,” and he and the other squirrels hurried away into the bushes.

Pocho sighed loudly, and the weight in his stomach disappeared. “Man,” he said, “I really thought he was going to kill me!”

Pechino unsteadily rose to her feet, and said, “...Thank you...for helping me...”

Pocho smiled at her and nodded. “I just didn’t want see someone get treated like that.”

Pechino grimaced and groaned. She placed a hand at her side and gingerly touched a bruise there. “Those bastards,” she said. “All I was trying to do was pick some berries, and those birds thought I was taking their food and attacked me...”

Pocho said, “All the food in the kingdom belongs to everyone.”

Pechino offered him a faint smile before she frowned once more. “Well...” she said, “I have to get going now...”

Pechino walked pass Pocho. She looked to the skies and Pechino leaped, however her wings flapped briefly before the pain in her body ravaged her muscles and Pechino squealed and fell. Pocho hurried over to her and helped her into a seated position.

“Are you okay?” he said.

“...Yeah...” she said. “I still need some time to recover.”

Pocho looked up, the pixies still stared down at them. Pocho could feel the weight of judgment form their eyes, a similar feeling he usually felt walking among them. He looked away and stared at Pechino. Besides the bitter smell of her blood, he could smell the faint trace of cinnamon and nutmeg on her—an unexpected sweetness.

Pocho said, “I don’t think it’s a good idea to try and fly yet. Oh, wait, I know a place we can go!”

Pechino looked over her shoulder at him. “What are you talking about? I have to get home.”

“Well...uh...where do you live?” said Pocho.

Pechino looked away and scowled. “None of your business...” Pechino shrugged his hands off her, and she got up and walked away.

But Pocho was still persistent, and cautiously followed her. Pechino walked all the way pass bugs scurrying through the dirt and leaves, and made her way towards an oak tree outside of the kingdom. And as she made to climb it, she suddenly spun around, startling Pocho.

“Stop following me!” she said.

“S-sorry...” said Pocho. “I’m just trying to make sure you’re alright.”

Pechino said, “The less I’m around people, the better off I am.”

And with that, Pechino climbed the tree. As she did, Pocho walked under the tree and looked up. At the very top he could see a large ball of hay. He looked at Pechino feverishly ascending the tree trunk, and he suddenly hatched a plan. Pocho rubbed his hands together and walked away.

A few hours later as the sun began to set, Pocho returned to the oak tree. This time however, he had a large knapsack next to his glider. He walked to the base of the tree and rubbed his hands contemplatively as he sought the perfect starting point. Pocho found a spot, and said, “Okay. Let’s go.” He was a dexterous individual, and the young man was able to ascend with the speed of a squirrel in less than a minute.

Pocho came to a stop on top of the branch. Just above him was the large, nest-like structure, and Pocho found a suitable branch and leaped on top of it. He reached and pulled himself up, and was now in line with the large nest. Pocho saw a single large hollow in the face of it, and an assortment of hardened tree bark placed before it, stuck to the surface with tree sap. He saw the shape of someone inside, and Pocho took a few cautious steps forward.

“Pechino?” he said. “Pechino are you there...?”

Suddenly her head popped out, making Pocho flinch. Pechino glowered at him and said, “You don’t listen, do you?”

Pocho smiled and said, “Yeah, I get that a lot.” He took the knapsack and opened it a little. He gestured it to her and exposed the top of a container covered in matted leaves. “I brought you some cake. My mother made it.”

Pechino said, “Go away,” and retracted her head back into her home.

Pocho walked towards the door and said, “Pechino, I’m not going anywhere. I’m not leaving here until I know that you’re okay and your stomach is full.”

After four minutes, Pocho contemplated turning away, until he heard from the nest, “Come in...”

The voice was low, but nonetheless Pocho merrily walked inside. Pechino’s dwelling was impressively decorated with trinkets ranging from bottle caps on the walls to colorful strips of plastic hanging from the ceiling. There were jars on one side, and a basket of seeds and berries in

another. Pechino, however, sat in the center of the nest. She had a miniature chest board before her. There were several colorful stones on the board, and Pechino looked up from them at Pocho.

Pechino had bandages all over her, and next to her was a wooden cup of some pungent liquid as well as a basket filled with bloody pieces of cloth.

Pocho smiled as he sat and folded his legs. He took out the container and removed the cover. Instantly a mouthwatering aroma and steam rose from the fluffy pink pastry.

Pechino said, "Is that cherry-bread?" she said.

Pocho nodded. "Yeah," he said. "How do you know?"

Against Pechino's brutish face, a soft smile appeared that caught Pocho off guard. "My mother used to bake them for me."

"Oh, that's nice," said Pocho. He contemplated asking her more about her mother, but then he decided against it. If he intended to get close to her, baby steps were needed. Pocho took out his knife and cut off a slice of the bread, he wrapped it in a special leaf and gave it to Pechino

She took it and bit off piece, savoring the taste. She smiled and said, "...Thank you..."

"No problem," said Pocho. He looked around the nest once more before saying, "So...you live here all by yourself?"

"Do I have a choice?" said Pechino. "The less people I deal with, the better."

"I reported what happened," said Pocho, "about the attack. If the birds had no good reason to assault you, then they'll have to pay for it."

Pechino swallowed her second mouthful and said, "Why are you doing this?"

"What?" said Pocho.

"Helping me," said Pechino. "No one has ever done this. Why do you care?"

Pocho, after eating piece of the bread, said, "As you've realized by now, I don't have any wings. The other pixies thought I was a freak. They didn't treat me nice either. I kind of know how it feels to be discriminated against just because you look different."

Pechino said, "My mother...she was raped by a shroog. But she decided to keep me as her child. It's funny how the rest of the kingdom resented her for it, but they didn't even try to rescue her. She had to escape herself after she poisoned my fa...the shroog who raped her."

Pocho saw the sudden gloomy shadows over Pechino's eyes. He made his hand to touch hers, but quickly lowered it. He sighed and said, "I'm sorry that happened."

Pechino lifted her eyes at him and shook her head. “I don’t think about it,” she said. “I don’t give power to it. I moved into this tree from my mother’s house, so people would leave her alone.” Pechino ate her last piece of bread and said, “Now I’m trying to find a good strategy here. Do you know how to play?”

Pocho said, “Are you kidding? I’m a genius when it comes to chess!”

Two hours and six games later, Pocho pounded his thighs and said, “Blast!”

Pechino giggled, quickly covering her mouth to hide her embarrassingly huge smile.

Pocho looked at the board where more than half of his stones were gone, piled at the side of the board as was the last matches. It was night now, and the two had lit a small lamp next to them. Outside they could hear the songs of various insects and amphibians orchestrating an enchanting tune.

Pocho scratched his head. “I don’t get it. I’ve beaten three players in a row before. How comes you’re so good?”

Pechino playfully clicked her tongue and played with two stones in her hand. “When you’re by yourself, you tend to think up a whole a lot of things,” she said. “When playing against someone, I try to plan at least three steps ahead of them.”

Pocho smirked and said, “Whoa...that’s sneaky.”

“It’s skill,” Pechino said. “Get some...”

They both chuckled. Then Pocho said as he reshuffled the board, “Okay. I’ll definitely get you this time...”

“In your dreams,” Pechino said as she opened the container. “I think you should’ve brought some more cake.”

Pocho said, “I did bring a lot. You’re just so big you ate all of it.” He got up. “Hey, I’ll go get some more. I’ll be right back.” As Pocho went to the front of the nest, he immediately saw it and hurried back inside. “By the queen’s tail!” he said.

Pechino got up, her curiosity greatly aroused. “What is it?”

As she approached Pocho, the young pixie unsheathed his blade and stood cautiously at the door. “They’re here,” he turned to her, “...the shroogs!”

Pechino immediately went to the door and peered outside. And as Pocho had said, there they were.

Over their heads they saw dozens of dark things flying upon wings reminiscent of Pechino's, silhouetted against the glaring moon. As they went, Pocho counted their numbers to be fifty or sixty. Boisterous chatter and snarls could be heard from the flock of flying fiends, and from them the winds carried their stench of bloodlust.

All of which was heading for the kingdom.

Pocho mustered the miniscule amount of courage within him and said, "I have to protect my parents!" He ran outside and was immediately held back by Pechino.

"Wait, Pocho!" she said.

He spun around with a perplexed look and said, "What?"

"You can't make it there on foot or your gliders!" Pechino said.

Pocho looked at the swarm now nearing the kingdom, and already he could hear horrid screams. He turned to Pechino. "Then what am I supposed to do?"

Pechino took a deep breath. She clenched her fist, and hesitantly said, "I...you can ride on my back."

Pocho gawked. "What? Umm...are you sure? I mean you're still injured."

She quickly replied, "I'm not soft like you pixies." Pechino stooped. "Hop on."

Pocho quickly went behind Pechino and climbed onto her back. He wrapped his legs around her waist and held onto her shoulder.

Pechino ran towards the tip of the branch with a speed that seemed to speak against her injuries. "Hold on, Pocho!" she said.

Pocho tightened his grip on her firm body. Pechino leapt upon reaching the very end of the branch, and with one powerful flap of her wings she ascended with Pocho.

With expert precision Pechino wove between the branches as she headed towards the city, and all the while Pocho smiled at the exhilarating sensation of him traversing the air with ease. And despite the smoke and light of the flames bellowing from the buildings, Pocho smiled at his accomplishment.

## Chapter Two

Shroogs, small sentient beings from the origins of caves dating back to the dawn of man. It is said that they were related to the raiks, but whereas the raiks were human-sized, wiry critters, the shroogs resembled lanky, furless rodents with heads of bristly blue or brown hair and a rat's tail. They had a flat face with beady grey eyes and a pig's nose above a wide, toothy mouth.

On their bodies were belts that held pockets and whatever weapons they used to administer pain and death upon their victims. But the most cherished item in their arsenal were firecrackers.

The patrolling guards of the kingdom alerted the population to the arrival of the enemy with trumpets, but the shroogs were already at work.

As the pixies, birds and squirrels hurried into their homes, the shroogs lit the fire crackers, swooped by the buildings and began to unload the explosives. To regular humans the bursts were nothing but loud pops, but to the smaller being, it was the equivalent of grenades going off. They shook the foundation of the architecture of the city. The civilians trembled inside, and the shroogs continued to gleefully unleash more firecrackers upon the kingdom. Soon the sulfuric properties in their weapons had already set alight some of the building whose dry texture unfortunately aided the spread of the flames.

One shroog wore a belt of chicken bones and his brown hair was styled in the manner of spines atop his head. He flew around cackling, waving a rusty nail tied to a pencil. He hovered in the air and shouted, "That's right boys! Make this place a little more fun!"

"You got it Shreegzee!" said another shroog as he flew near one of the homes of the living quarters. He tossed a concoction of three firecrackers tied together into the window and a quickly flew away. Then it exploded upon the family inside.

The shroogs then perched on the railing of the living compound and footed it to the houses. They smashed the windows with their weapons and tried to make their way inside. Some families counter attacked with their household items, stabbing and slapping the arms of the shroogs.

Shreegzee continued to fly around as the choking smell of burnt wood and sulfur saturated the air. "Make sure to take the women whole! We don't want any half-dead breeders!"

And a stone pellet struck Shreegzee right in his chest. He yelped and almost fell, but his wings quickly brought him back up. "What the devil?" he said as she looked around for the source of the attack. And when Shreegzee spotted them, his eyes flew wide open.

A second set of horns blew, coming from over fifty fairies standing at the mouth of one of the buildings. They all wore armor constructed of fragments of snail shells and insect exoskeletons held together by silk, and their helmets were the dugouts of acorns and larger snail shells.

One of the three leading commanders of the Skydust Warriors lowered his leaf-whistle. His name was Captain Pilsonti, and next to him were his sub-commanders Chesno and Petallin.

Pilsonti said, "Skydust, ready..." the warriors behind him opened their wings and buzzed them with blinding speed. They raised their weapons which consisted of spears tipped with bee-stingers and swords and axes carved from the mandibles of carnivorous beetles and bear claws. "Take flight!"

The Skydust Warriors took to the air.

Seeing none of his comrades around him to use as shield Shreegzee panicked. He quickly flew away and said, "Boys, get them off my tail!"

And immediately shroogs flew towards the pixies, igniting the battle. Both sides hacked and slashed into each other. The pixies had more speed and maneuverability, but being almost twice their size, the shroogs were much stronger. It was a bloody festivity as both shroogs and pixies had their wings clipped, limbs hacked off and their torsos slashed open.

Beneath them Kagos and his group of twenty squirrels watched as the leftovers from the battle above fell to the ground.

"Here they come," Kagos said, revealing his blade.

Shroogs and pixies hit the ground.

One shroog miserably flipped on his feet. One wing and leg broken. He limped towards a legless pixie crawling away on his back, and as the fairy raised his hands and pleaded, the shroog chopped him in the head with an axe. Another shroog who lost his arm and tail leaped upon a pixie, ripping out his throat and began stripping the flesh off his neck. A pixie with a missing wing and broken leg ran the stinger of his spear into the chest of a shroog, yanked out the weapon and watched as the shroog collapsed in a heap. But another shroog whacked him upside the head with his tail.

But as the shroog went to finish the pixie, Kagos sprinted towards the invader.

The shroog noticed the squirrel too late, and Kagos swung his blade through his neck, separated the head of the frightened shroog from his shoulders.

Now the squirrel took their turn at slaying the intruders. But the shroogs were relentless in their onslaught, and already they had killed three squirrels before succumbing to the weapons of the other rodents.

Pechino flew over the kingdom, circling three times to allow Pocho to survey the scene. Both of their hearts felt a heavy thump at the sight of the carnage taking place; shroogs, birds, squirrels and pixies being slaughtered, and civilians being dragged out of their homes.

Pocho pointed to the shroogs at the living quarters and said, “Bring me down there!”

“On it,” said Pechino, folding her wings into a dive towards the building.

When Pechino was close enough to the mid-level bridges Pocho drew his sword and leaped off her. He fell and plunged his blade into the back of a shroog. The lanky intruder squealed and fell, ending his assault on a helpless fairy. The woman got up and ran towards her fallen husband. But another shroog landed next to the house. He spotted Pocho and headed towards him—and that was when Pechino landed behind the shroog. As he spun around Pechino took her small dagger and stabbed him in his gut. The shroog yelped and quickly leaped back, but Pechino immediately followed up and ran her knife into his chest. The shroog uttered a tight squeal before falling.

Pechino turned to Pocho and said, “Are you all right?”

Pocho nodded.

The pixie woman saw Pechino and said, “What’s she doing here!”

Pechino turned to the pixie cradling her husband’s head, and she stooped over her and snarled, “I’m here to save your ungratefully little asses.”

Pechino’s word hit with the quality of a hot knife slowly being ran through flesh, and the woman went quiet.

Pocho took Pechino by the hand and said, “Come on! We have to find my parents’ house!”

Pocho and Pechino made their way up the living complex, all the time trying to evade the onslaught of the shroogs and only fighting when they needed to. More than once they saw shroogs ascending from the homes with pixies, squirrels and birds struggling in their clutches, but the pair focused on finding their intended targets first. Eventually they reached the bridge where Pocho’s parents dwelled, and they raced to their abode. There they saw a shroog above Pocho’s father, repeatedly pounding him while two shroogs began to undress his mother.

Pocho screamed. “No!” He bolted towards the fracas with Pechino diligently keeping up.

The shroogs were alerted to Pocho's voice and one of them switched his attention from his mother to Pocho. He took up his weapon and said, "Oh? This little one wants to die too, eh?"

Pocho swung his weapon, but the shroog easily parried the blow. He kicked Pocho in his gut and onto his back. Pocho quickly rolled out of the way and instead of his head the shroog struck the ground. The shroog tried to lift his weapon but it got stuck, giving Pocho the chance to leap and stab the shroog in his throat.

Meanwhile Pechino attended the shroog attacking Pocho's father—in the fashion of a stab to the back of the shroog's head. Pechino quickly switched to the other shroog above Pocho's mother.

"You little maggot!" the shroog said as he and Pechino parried and dodges each other's attack. Suddenly Pechino timed her feint correctly, twisting her body out of the way as the shroog struck at nothing. She hit him with her wing and sent him off balance, then leaped on his back and plunged her weapon into his throat. Pechino leaped off him and left her opponent suffocating in his own blood on the floor.

Pechino went over to Pocho's father and helped him into a seated position, while Pocho attended to his mother. "Pocho!" she said, embracing him.

Then there was a horrendous sound, like a cat choking. In the sky Shreegzee blew forcefully in a crude looking flute. Immediately the shroogs were gathering around Shreegzee. And with them were their captives.

"Quick!" said Shreegzee. "Retreat with what you have!"

Shreegzee had cuts and bruises on him, and when he saw Captain Pilsonti coming to finish the job, he flailed his limbs frantically and flew away with the other shroogs.

With the threat gone, the Skydust sounded the horn to signal the retreat of the enemy. Minutes after the onslaught upon the kingdom, its inhabitants came out of their homes to quickly salvage what they could of the aftermath.

Pocho and his mother surrounded Pechino as she gently rocked Pocho's father in her arms. His curly pink hair and face was extremely bloodied. Pocho and his mother tried calling out to him as Pechino stroke his face.

"Pancho!" his wife said. "Pancho please wake up!"

But there was no response. And soon, Pancho's rasping breath stopped. He went quiet.

"...Father..." said Pocho, wide-eyed and in disbelief.

Pancho's wife laid on top of him and wept profusely. Tears began rolling down Pocho's face. He dropped his weapon and held his eyes to the floor aimlessly.

Pechino saw the weeping family's despair, and thought to herself, *I how lucky I am to not have anyone to weep for.*

The next day the kingdom was at working repairing the damage. The wounded were carried to the infirmary, and the dead were wrapped up in specially colored leaves and laid in the open on the ground. The squirrels stood guard over the corpses until they could be identified and buried.

In the ceremonial hall however, there was a big commotion as a group of civilians stood before the Skydust Warriors and the council of leaders hurling insults at them. Members of the council tried to satiate their concern with reassuring words of "finding the queen" and "bringing her back," but the crowd wasn't buying it.

However, all attention was soon directed to the entrance as Pocho walked inside—with Pechino behind him. As Pocho cleared a path to the front they screamed and shouted at Pechino. Some even threw objects at her, and Pechino had to raise her wings around her to shield herself.

"I don't want to be here, Pocho," she said.

"Don't worry," said Pocho as he stood at the front of the civilians and stared at the warriors and the council. "I'll make this quick! Everyone, quiet!"

The audience, stunned by the sudden base in the wingless pixie's voice, all went silent.

Pocho faced the Skydust commanders and the council, and said, "Last night," he pointed to Pechino, "that woman helped to save my mother." Pocho pointed directly at the warriors. "Helped *you*, fight off the shroogs and rescue civilians. But just earlier that morning she was attacked by our own people just for picking berries near the birds' nests."

Captain Pilsonti, with his square face and cropped brown hair, said, "And what's the point you're trying to make, lad?"

Mr. Leafenson, a member of the council, said, "He obviously intends to fight for her right." He glowered at Pocho, who returned a stare of equal quality. "Pocho, your argument has no place here. These people have lost their homes and loved ones thanks to people who look like her."

“That’s the bloody point!” Pocho said. “You people are so stupid! Squirrels don’t look like us, the birds don’t look like us, but we still accept them! Pechino fought for us, and you still won’t accept her!”

“To hell with that mutant!” said a pixie man.

“Send her back to her own kind!” a man said.

The audience burst in an uproar. Pocho turned to them with a flabbergasted look, in disbelief that everyone’s mind was on this track. He looked at Pechino, who offered him a wan smile before saying, “At least you tried, Pocho...”

*No, I’m not gonna end like this, Pocho thought, I’m gonna prove to them all.*

Pocho turned to his leader with a reassured smile and said, “Fine. If you all don’t want to accept her, then I’m leaving!”

Not many people replied how Pocho wanted. Some people even giggled and sneered at him. But then Pocho uttered the words, “And I’ll go find the queen and bring her back myself!”

Gasped ripped through the room.

“Are you stupid, boy?” said Pilsonti. “Your mother just lost her husband. Do you think she wants to lose her son too?”

Pocho said, “Unless we get the queen back, the next time the shroogs attack, we’ll lose everyone...” Pocho turned and walked away. “Come on, Pechino.” Pechino gave them all a perplexed look before hurrying behind Pocho out of the hall.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” said Pocho’s mother.

“Definitely mother,” Pocho said as he packaged his few items into his knapsack. “I’ll show them not to estimate me.”

“Oh...” his mother came over and held him by the cheeks. “You’re just like your father; brave and strong.”

Pechino, seated in the corner of the room, rolled her eyes and sighed.

Pocho packed the last of his gear and hefted the backpack on his back and tied it just beneath his glider. He turned to Pechino with contemplative eyes. “Are you sure you want to come with me?”

Pechino said, "Positive. I prefer to be around the one person I can trust instead of a whole group of people who hate me. And you will also need to reach there fast...unless you plan on walking there."

Pocho nodded. "Yeah, you have a point." Then he scratched his head. "Speaking of which...where is the queen being held anyway?"

Pechino looked at Pocho long and hard before doing a face-palm.

There was a knock on the door and Pocho gestured for his mother to stay put while he went to the door. Pocho barely opened the door to a creak and peeped through it. Once he saw who it was he relaxed and opened the door. "Captain Pilsonti?" he said.

Captain Pilsonti said, "May I come in...?"

"Um..." Pocho turned to his mother. "It's the Skydust commander..."

"Oh, let him in," said Pocho's mother. "I'll go make us some tea."

Pocho opened the door and the captain stepped inside. His eyes were immediately held by Pechino in the room. He stared at her for a brief moment before forcefully looking away. Pechino cut her eyes from him as well, and she went back to eating her berries from a bowl in her lap.

The captain looked at Pocho and said, "You made quite the scene in there this morning."

Pocho shrugged and said with a semi-stern face, "I was just speaking the truth." He gestured to Pechino. "Her mother raised her as a member of the kingdom, not a shroog."

"Don't bother, Pocho," said Pechino. She took the plate out of her lap and stood. "It's no use convincing these people to accept me. Let's just try and get the queen back. At least she'll stop them from trying to kill me."

"That's why I'm here," said Pilsonti. He folded his arms behind him. "I spoke to a few people in the audience who confirmed that you and your friend were indeed fighting the shroogs. As a military man, I can't ignore such service." He looked at Pechino. "...I've decided to assist you two in locating the queen..."

"R-really?" said Pechino.

"That's great!" said Pocho. "Wait...You mean just the three of us?"

Pilsonti turned to the front door and opened it. He exposed to Pocho and Pechino three other Skydust warriors, three squirrels and a barn owl.

Pocho and Pechino exchanged surprised looks.

Pilsonti smiled and said, "Pocho Nuttardson, say hello to your fellow members of operation *Queen of the Leaf*."

Pocho and Pechino both said, "Cooooooooool..."

Pocho's mother walked into the living room with a tray containing three mugs. She spotted the other visitor's outside and halted. "Oh my," she said. "They're more of you. Oh well." She spun around and made for the kitchen again. "I better put on some more water."

That next night after the success of the raid on Pikapoko, the shroogs celebrated the one ways shroogs knew best.

All this took place in a chicken coop on an abandoned farm. They had candles lit in the corners, and groups of them played drums and sang heartily. They had bowls of raw meat and human-sized mugs of liquor they had found in the house. And while they ate and sang gleefully, there was also screams of horror.

Females of species ranging from pixies, squirrels, owls, rats, cats and pigeons were all in the clutches of the male shroogs. Whether on their backs with legs open, pressed down on their stomachs or pressed against the walls, all had the manhood of a shroog ravaging between their legs. The shroogs in the act foamed at the mouth and grinned in ecstasy. Their victims tried to fight them off, and as a result some were badly wounded whether with bites, scratches or broken limbs.

A shroog viciously pounded a squirrel from behind. She tried scurrying away, but he had her pinned. Her thrashing tail kept annoying him, so the shroog bit at the base of it and ripped it off, extracting a horrid squeal from the rodent. Another shroog had a pigeon's wings pinned under his hands. She closed her eyes and whimpered as the shroog's member stretched her open. In the process the shroog got a little hungry, so he reached for his axe lying next to him on the ledge and chopped off one of the pigeon's legs. As she shrieked in agony the shroog casually bit into her limb and ate.

The remains of shroogs' meals and sexual fluids had littered the floor of the coop, which were being cleaned up by the younger shroogs. These younglings had mixed features of birds, rodents or pixies, however their wings were smaller. They were the offspring of the handy work of the shroogs currently being done on the females above. Once these younglings matured and could go on raids, then they could join in the fun, but for now, they had to settle for the leftovers they could get.

And overseeing all of this was the shroog in charge, Groogus.

He was a little larger than the other shroogs and muscular, traits which helped him to overpower other shroogs in battle, and was a deciding factor when it came to select a leader. Groogus wore a belt made from the dried intestines of fairies, as well as a kilt-like clothing made from pixie wings and feathers. He had a rat's tail, but the wings of a dove. His hair was tied into a shaggy ponytail, and around his neck was a necklace adorned with the dried ears of pixies, squirrels and rats.

Groogus sat on the skeletons of various dead critters molded into a throne. At his feet were three pixie women. All were disoriented with Groogus' semen drenched between their thighs and abdomen.

Behind Groogus laid his trusted steed; a wolverine with only one ear and a massive wound it sustained on its shoulder when Groogus subdued it. As Groogus sat thoughtfully, another shroog flew next to him at his feet where his semen covered trophies lay. It was one of his two military commanders, Skinus.

Skinus wore a jacket made from a skinned cat. He had half a tail because of him trying to kill the feline, and he had a long face which told of his stronger rodent heritage.

"Boss," Skinus said, "Our forces took a huge blow, but we were sufficiently able to do considerable damage as well to the fairies. Besides the younglings, our fighting force is just over seventy of us."

Groogus made a throaty sound, and said, "It doesn't matter. With the queen of the fairies gone, the kingdom doesn't have anyone to use their enchanted power to fight back. So long as we keep attacking them, slowly but surely...they'll crumble..."

The wolverine behind Groogus yawned, exposing its menacing teeth.

"Boss, there's one more thing," said Skinus. "We managed to capture one of the soldiers."

"Hmmm," said Groogus, He sat forward. "Really...? Bring him here..."

Skinus gestured to a few shroogs standing several feet behind him. She came forward before their leader with a battered and naked pixie man before them. He looked up at the boss defiantly.

Groogus smiled. "You seem to have gotten lost..."

The pixie spat blood at Groogus' feet. "Go to hell you oversized cockroach!" A shroog smacked the pixie across the face.

Groogus said, "Where are your people hiding it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" the pixie said, snarling.

Groogus said, "The magic that your people use. Where...is...it?"

The pixie smiled at Groogus with bloody teeth, mocking him. "Only the queen can use magic. A specially ceremony has to be done with those of fairy blood. You might be a mix of creatures, but I don't smell any pixie in you. You'll never get it."

The pixie laughed. Groogus' tiny smile had vanished. He stood up, his eyes fuming with rage. "Regardless, your kingdom will fall. I'll demolished your homes to rubble, and rebuild my own empire atop your remains. And when I do find your queen, I'll make her have my sons."

"Curse you, you bastard!" said the fairy.

Groogus looked at Skinus. His commander got the message, and Skinus unsheathed his blade and went to work.

Skinus began cutting around the head of the pixie. His nerve-wrecking screams filled the coop, and half of the populace were alerted to Skinus severing the flesh from the pixie's skull. After three minutes Skinus ripped the man's face off. The pixie fell on his back, twitching uncontrollably and gargling as the sheer pain sent his mind in disarray. His bare eyeballs stared aimlessly at the ceiling.

Groogus reached for a massive axe and chopped the pixie in his chest, stilling all of his movements. Groogus hefted him with one arm and turned to his stead. The wolverine rose to its feet, stuck its head out and snatched the corpse off its master's weapon in its jaws. As it chewed the pixie, Groogus walked to the edge and raised his weapon. "Quiet!"

At the sound of the boss' voice, all the extracurricular activities ceased. They all gave Groogus their attention. Once satisfied, Groogus lowered his weapon. "I see you're all enjoying yourselves," he said, "but that's going change tomorrow. We'll launch our final attack on Pikapoko and conquer those fairies once and for all. We'll have our own kingdom!" The shroogs responded with hearty cheers of approval. Groogus continued, "We'll gather the rats, the bats and the younglings, and have the most wonderful night of our lives!"

Groogus threw back his head, closing his eyes and absorbing the ecstasy of the pledged allegiance of his followers. *It's good to be king*, he thought.

## Chapter Three

Pocho, riding on Pechino's back, flew over acres of woodland along with his squad-mates. In the distance, just a several yards away, they came upon a bare patch of land evenly bordered, where they saw a rather large cottage.

From Pechino's immediate right flew Captain Pilsonti and a female pixie named Berriris, both holding squirrels by the collar of their vests in their clutches. Pilsonti held a male squirrel named Peabean, while Berriris carried a female named Quelt. To Pechino's left flew the other pixies; Sapito and Soroto, and at the end was the other squirrel, Pakut, riding on the female owl named Jayfeather.

"We're closing in on the target," said Pilsonti. "Make sure you're all on your guard. This is human territory."

"Copy that, Captain," said everyone.

Pocho leaned close to Pechino's ear and said, "Here we go."

Pechino said, "Hold on tight."

The party of small militants decreased their altitude as they neared the property. They found equipment such as truck wheels and mechanical parts scattered across the yard, and also a shaggy brown dog that looked up at them and barked frantically.

The group landed on the roof feet away from the chimney. Jayfeather had carried in the grasp of her feet a wooden box filled with the teams' equipment.

As they gathered around Captain Pilsonti, he said, "Now here's the plan. We'll first each go to the windows to see what's inside. We need to ascertain how many humans we will be dealing with. We did this a few days ago, but we have to make sure no matter what. Once the coast is clear and we have an opening, we'll make the queen drink the tree sap. That will give her enough strength to escape."

After Pilsonti explained the plan, Pechino, Sapito and Soroto were tasked with the brief reconnaissance. They made their way around the house to the windows, all the while keeping clear of the vicious hound below them.

Through the window Soroto peered into he saw a modest looking living room with strange animal figurines on the table and cabinets, and furry peach-colored spread over the furniture. On

Sapito's side he was looking into the bathroom painted in white. Sapito looked beneath him and saw the dog leaping up to try and bite him.

Pechino perched on the window ledge and peered into the room, where she saw a lavishly decorated room of glass figurines of fairies of all designed. There were butterfly sculptures in the ceiling and on the pink walls as well, and a small wardrobe sat on one side across from a mirror.

And a woman stood before it.

Pechino leaned against the glass with her hands, keenly looking at the naked human female. The woman seemed to be admiring her physique, slowly rubbing her hands over her breasts, hips and buttocks. She had long, curly black hair cascading down her back, and from Pechino's angle, she looked into the mirror to see her face. The human female was a quite beautiful, but she had a few wrinkles under her eyes and lips.

Then the dog ran beneath Pechino and started backing at her. She turned to the dog and said, "Shut up, stupid mutt!"

Then the woman slid her hands down to her crotch. Pechino grimaced as the woman fingered herself while squeezing her breast. She took her hand from between her thighs and tasted what was on her fingers.

Pechino made a guttural sound and cringed. "Ewwww..."

The woman's head snapped around at the window. Pechino leaped off the edge of the window and quickly flew in an arc onto the roof. The woman walked towards the window over her bed and opened it. She peered outside. Her cold blue eyes darted around for the sound of the voice she just heard.

She looked at the dog and said, "Shut up, Frank!"

The dog went silent and sat before the window. The woman looked up at the edge of the roof, expecting to see something, but nothing was there. But her nose didn't lie. She frowned, then remembered that it would amplify her wrinkles more, and stopped. "Rats..." she said before closing the window.

Pechino hurried back the others, who stood alert by Pechino's expression. "I saw her," she said. "The woman who has the queen."

Captain Pilsonti said, "That's Marylynn. She stole the queen from our kingdom three months ago. She's a fairy fanatic."

"Yeah, I realized," said Pechino. "I saw a bunch of fairy statues in her room..."

The pixies gave each other knowing looks, but were suspicious to Pocho, prompting the youngest of the pixies to say, “What’s the matter?”

Soroto said to Pocho, “Those aren’t statues.”

Then Jayfeather said, “Those are pixies she’d captured and turned into ornaments.”

Pocho recoiled in terror. “No shit!?”

“She uses magic,” said Quelt. The squirrel visibly shuddered as if she could feel the presence of the woman next to her. “We once tried a ground-assault with us squirrels, but the dog got most of us and we had to retreat.”

“This may be our last chance at rescuing the queen,” said the captain. He now spoke specifically to Pechino. “She has magic that can subdue pixies. But I doubt she has anything for shroogs.”

Pechino suddenly felt uneasy at the eyes all laid upon her, as if she owed them gold. “Wait,” she said, “you mean *me*?”

Captain Pilsonti gently laid his hands on her shoulder. “You’re our trump-card, Pechino. We’ll conduct the raid tonight when we know she’s gone to sleep. This all depends on you getting by her.”

Pechino looked at everyone long and hard, weighing the gravity of the task bequeathed to her. Pechino folded her fists and nodded. “You can count on me...”

The basement was cold, and what little warmth the lamp in the corner could spare, Queen Urazel couldn’t feel it.

Urazel sat on a cushion, hugging her knees against her small breasts. She wore a simple white dress that was stained with dirt and other bodily fluids from her previous encounter with her captor. Her usually vibrant, mint-green hair was tied into a dull ponytail. Urazel’s pale pink skin was covered in cuts and bruises. These injuries would have usually healed overtime, but the silver bands around her wrists and ankles suppressed her natural healing factor. There was a collar around her neck that was tied to a chain that affixed her to the wall.

There was a bucket next to Urazel that her master spared for her to excrete in, but Urazel had begged and pleaded to use the bathroom, finding it too much of an insult to be one with her own filth.

There was nothing else in the basement besides a staircase leading up to the door, as her captor wanted there to be no objects that could assist the fairy in escaping.

The lock on the door clicked, and immediately Urazel's nerves went array and she rose to her feet. Her heart rate increased upon the door opening. Light flooded the steps, and it was soon replaced by the silhouette of a woman who descended the stairs. Each step she took had Urazel's nipples and crotch quivering.

The woman walked into the light of the lamp. Marylynn Harrison.

"P-please..." said Urazel. "Leave me alone...please..."

Marylynn, wearing a ceremonial black robe of a glossy texture, smiled brightly at the fairy. "Oh, don't look so worried," she said. At her side Marylynn had a duffle bag that she abruptly dropped. Urazel flinched.

Marylynn said as she unloaded her tools out of the bag, "Oh come on, Urazel. You're acting like you don't enjoy it."

Urazel saw Marylynn place the vibrating dildo on the floor and shuddered. Marylynn zipped up her bag and tossed it aside. Now she had sex toys, markers, bowls, jars of pickled fruits and bottles of water.

The woman then took the chalk and went to the center of the room. The floor here had smudged of all colors as if drawings were once there. Marylynn knelt and began drawing something. After two minutes, she stood up and rested her hands on her hips, looking at the symbol on the floor and nodded her approval. A circle of white chalk with blue and red runes inside it laid before her feet.

Marylynn faced Urazel, rubbing her hands in a diabolical manner, that coupled with her staring beneath her brows would make any fictional villain jealous. Urazel stepped away as if she could imagine an exit behind her and disappear through it, but Marylynn gripped her by the collar of her blouse and pulled her into a tight kiss.

At first Urazel resisted, but eventually she gave into the tingling sensation of their tongues wrapping around each other. Marylynn slid her hands down Urazel's back and squeezed one of her soft, warm cheeks. Urazel tried pulling away, but Marylynn held her tight, running her other hand up her dress and tweaking one of her nipples.

A soft moan escaped Urazel's throat.

"Having fun...?" Marylynn whispered.

Urazel frowned and said, "This...this isn't right. I'm a queen..."

Marylynn said, "*I'm* your queen now..."

Marylynn took a key out of her pocket and twisted it in the chain around Urazel's neck, freeing her from the wall. Marylynn undressed Urazel, a process that would've been easier hadn't Urazel's limbs stiffen in reluctance. The fairy queen's privates were exposed, dark pink nipples and green pubic hair. Marylynn's mouth salivated in anticipation of tasting the sweetness between her legs.

Urazel laid on her back. Not as an act of willingness, but rather wanting to get it over with as soon as possible.

Marylynn reached for the vibrator, and gently opened Urazel's legs. She laid on top of the fairy with their erect nipples poking each other. Marylynn said, "Get ready..."

Urazel tensed and bit her lip, feeling every inch of the dildo entering inside. Marylynn pushed until almost all of it was in her, and Urazel grunted as her sensitive cervix felt the touch of the plastic.

Then Marylynn turned on the machine and Urazel made a soft moan. The continuous ripples of pleasure consumed Urazel, increasing as Marylynn thrust it in and out of her. The witch increased the power of her thrusts, making Urazel moan louder and gyrate her body as she rode the waves. Marylynn wrapped her lips around her nipple and pulled. She stuck her fingers in Urazel's mouth, cuddling her tongue.

And then Urazel felt it; the feeling of unrestrained euphoria swelling within her pelvis. "I...I'm coming!" she said.

Marylynn fetched the bowl next to her. Urazel thrust her pelvis against the muscular contraction, and Marylynn placed the bowl beneath her. Creamy fluids split into the container, filling the air with an exotic fragrance that assailed Marylynn's nostrils. Urazel stopped shaking and took slow, deep breaths.

Marylynn got up with the bowl in the center of the arcane circle. She knelt at the edge of it, rested her hands on her knees, and closed her eyes. She began chanting undecipherable words, turning the air chilly, making Urazel uncomfortable.

Soon Marylynn opened her eyes, which were now glowing orbs inside her skull. She said, "Eochi'tesasa!" and light zapped from her hand towards the bowl of vaginal fluid. Like a pot of bubbling soup, the liquid inside mimicked the same state, until becoming still seconds later.

Marylynn got up and went over to the bowl. She took it up and drank the fluid. It was a warm, sweet and bitter feeling that flowed smoothly down her gullet. Immediately she felt the effects of the spell, grimaced and held her throbbing stomach. Marylynn moaned in discomfort, and a thin white vapor to envelope her. But it quickly disappeared, and Marylynn knelt to relieve the slight headache. She reached for the mirror she laid next to her items and checked herself. The wrinkles on her face were now gone. A result of the anti-aging spell's effects.

Marylynn smiled joyously, now feeling fifteen years younger. She leaped around gleefully, having not to worry about the joint pains that would once afflict her for doing something as simple as this.

Urazel trembled in terror at Marylynn's new appearance. She laid back and silently whimpered, wallowing in the despair of her powerlessness.

Then Marylynn turned to Urazel and said, "Okay, queen, time to get your tummy filled and clean you up." Then she paused and said, "I might even do a second round."

Marylynn then whispered something in a hallowing manner, and when she pressed against her clitoris, it swelled to a length of five inches. "Oh yeah," said Marylynn, then eyed Urazel, "I know this will make you scream!"

Urazel saw the makeshift phallus and suddenly felt sick. "Not again..."

Dusk approached. The last essence of the sun sunk below the horizon, and shadows eagerly raced to fill where the light once was.

Groogus, atop the chicken coop, observed as his army organized on the ground. Over twenty shroogs, both seasoned veterans and rookies, oversaw the rats and kept them in check with whips. Some rodents even had firecrackers strapped to their backs. Groogus looked to the sky and saw more shroogs herding the bats into submission with firesticks.

The rest of Groogus' army stood with him on top of the building, and once Groogus saw everything to his liking, he lifted his weapon.

At Groogus' side, his commanders, Skinus and Shreegzee, called for everyone's attention. When Groogus had the gaze of his audience, he said, "My brothers and sons, today is the day we reap victory. Today...we grasped our dreams from the enemy. Today...we get our kingdom!"

The gathering of vile beings shrieked and hooted in approval.

“Our kind has suffered our loss of females for centuries, thanks to that cunt fairy king Soslund! But now, we’ll turn the tables. And after we capture Pikapoko, we’ll each take turns breeding the queen!” His last statement garnered even more cheers. “The night is young! Let us seize it and make ourselves immortal. Go! Reap, rape, and destroy!”

And with that, they departed.

Groogus flew down to his carnivorous steed waiting below. He mounted the wolverine and held its reigns. Groogus nudged with his foot once and it sped off. The ground-assault shroogs took off, flying just a few feet off the ground with the rats scurrying beneath them behind their leader. Skinus and Shreegzee took to the sky, leading the bats and other shroogs.

Their journey took them over fifty acres through the forest, and now the moon stood above them to watch what would unfold amongst the small beings.

In times of war, when one side faced an attack, it was usually the smart thing to prepare for a possible second assault from the enemy. The inhabitants of Pikapoko took this tactic in practice, and after the last unfriendly visit the shroogs paid them, they had put certain precautions in place.

In the trees surrounding the kingdom warriors were stationed on lookout duty, armed with swords, spears, axes and bows. There were also soldiers on the ground, and both divisions had large gores next to them that emitted a faint buzzing sound. It wasn’t long before they caught wind of the approach of the shroogs. The noise of the bats gave away their direction, but shroogs were never noted for being silent about their business.

A soldier on patrol spotted the vicious swarm in the sky, and turned to his partner across the tree said. “The shroogs are here!”

The other pixie stopped for a brief moment; partly due to fear at the sound of the name, then he unfroze and quickly took up his horn. He put it to his lips and blew it in spasmodic bursts.

Alerted to the signal, a second horn let the entire kingdom know what was about to go down.

Unlike the previous visit, the citizens of Pikapoko had now armed themselves. The windows of the homes were battened up, and most of the population has retreated to the lower housing structure to lessen the bombing casualties. The Skydust Warriors, buzzing in the air, took a dome formatting atop the entire area.

On the ground Kagos lead the over one hundred squirrels behind him. He saw the huge frame of the wolverine approaching, and he unsheathed his blade.

“On guard!” Kagos said, and his troops took a defensive stance as the onrush of vicious rats rattled the bushes around the wolverine.

Above, Shreegzee pointed his spear at the pixies, and said, “Get ‘em, boys!”

The bats were the first to initiate contact, rushing between the trees with deafening squeaks and clicks. The pixies, led by Vice-Captain Chesno and Petallin, readied their bows. Chesno brought down his sword and said, “Fire!”

There were multiple *thwacking* sounds echoing through the air as the arrows launched towards the avian killers. The bats shrieked as stone-tipped arrow punctured their flesh. Dead bats rain upon the forest as the arrows robbed them of their last breath.

But the flying mammals had numbers. And their sacrifice allowed their remainder and the shroogs to reach the pixies on the outskirts in the trees.

The bats caught the pixies in their feet, bringing the screaming fairies to their awaiting fangs to deliver the finishing blow. The pixies who resisted managed to slay a few of the bats before the shroogs joined in the assault, and soon the kingdom’s first line of defense was quickly slaughtered. But not before using their second means of attack.

Before they died, the soldiers had removed the top of the gores, and the buzzing sound exploded. Swarms of dragonflies ascended into the ranks of the bats. The insects latched on the flying mammals in gangs. They sunk their jaws into their furry flesh and immediately began to eat them alive. The insects effectively downed over thirty bats before they themselves were eaten.

Vice-Captain Petallin screamed, “Attack!” The remaining pixies engaged the shroogs in the air.

And when the rats were juts mere feet away, Kagos was the first to run towards them to meet them. “Charge!”

The squirrels swung their weapons into the hides of the rats, and the other rodents sunk their fangs into the flesh of the kingdom’s ground-assault force. With their superior weapons, the squirrels were quickly lessoning the rodents. Kagos chopped a rat in the head, hacked a second in the neck that saw blood spray from the dying rat, and ran his blade through another rat’s eyes.

However, the shroogs’ trump card came into play. Those hovering over the rats lit the fuses of the explosives on them, and as the ravenous creatures ran into the ranks of the squirrels the explosions went off.

Squirrels and rats alike were torn to shreds as parts of the forest floor became a small-scale fireworks display. The smell of sulfur and raw flesh began to fill the air, clogging the lungs of those around with the scent of death.

Kagos narrowly leaped out of the way of a rat as it ran into two squirrels. The squirrels slew the rat but its explosives went off, taking the lives of the squirrels from beyond the grave.

But within the smoke that blanketed his vision, Kagos could make out the shape of the wolverine running towards the kingdom. It was then Kagos understood; the explosions served as a means of distraction with the added byproduct of death, allowing for their leader to reach the kingdom unopposed.

“Oh no you don’t...” Kagos said. He sheathed his sword and ran towards the wolverine, bringing himself on all fours to increase his speed. In no time Kagos reached the wolverine and leaped on its back.

Groogus was immediately alerted to the presence of the squirrel.

“You won’t set foot in the kingdom,” Kagos said, bearing his huge incisors.

Groogus said in his beast’s ear, “Etoka, flip!” and the wolverine suddenly rolled onto its back, throwing off Kagos. Both the squirrel and the wolverine quickly got back on their feet. Kagos sustained a few bruises, but nonetheless he pursued Groogus.

The wolverine knocked aside those in its way, friend or foe, until it entered the grounds of the city. But there it was met with arrows from the civilians that riddled its body with pain. The wolverine reared and thrashed, killing those unfortunate to be close to it. Groogus flew off his mount and ascended to the buildings above.

Groogus cut down the pixies in way. His strength so great that most if not all of his victims were beheaded, de-limbed or severed in half with one stroke. He slowed to a hover in the center of the battlefield. Pixies, shroogs, birds and bats all fell around him, but Groogus focused his attention on the buildings. “Now,” he said, “where did you hide it?”

## Chapter Four

Pocho laid on his back with his arms folded behind his head. With their current location being free from the obscuring trees, his eyes relaxed under the abundant stars. Even out here, he could hear the many creatures of the night.

Pocho thought upon the good days he used to have with his father and began to feel the onset of grief. He tried replacing them with better memories, anything that wouldn't poison his focus on the mission.

Then Pocho sensed the presence of someone approaching and turned to see Pechino coming to his side.

"Do you mind if I join you?" she said.

Pocho sat up expectantly. "No, sure. Go ahead..."

Pechino sat next to the young man, and gazed at the stars as well. "I used to like watching these with my mother..."

"They're beautiful," said Pocho solemnly. After a while, Pocho said, "What made you decide to join me?"

Pechino said, "The same reason you decided to help me. Because I like you." She gave him a wry grin. "Or do you only see me as some fetish?"

Pocho slowly reached over and held Pechino's hand. "No. You're more than that. I always liked you, even years ago. I used to have to walk around by myself, and I would see you flying around."

"...By myself, too." Pechino said, a bit glumly.

"At least now, people respect you," said Pocho,

"But they aren't my people." And when Pocho heard that, he sat up with a startled expression. "I don't feel comfortable here with these people, Pocho. I want my own place."

"So you're leaving?" Pocho said.

Pechino smiled and replied, "Only if you'd come with me."

"Everyone, saddle-up," said Captain Pilsonti. They all gathered around the captain. "Pechino, Pakut just did a recon of the chimney's entrance. It has silver power around it. As you know, it weakens fairies. We need you and him to open it."

"Right," said Pechino.

“Roger,” said Pakut.

“Once that’s done,” Captain Pilsonti went on to say, “the pixies and squirrels will have to distract Marylynn. Pechino and Jayfeather will free the queen. Once you both do give her the oak sap to drink, and she’ll be all set. Copy that?” Everyone responded in acknowledgement. “Good, now, gear-up and let’s do this.”

Everyone took their tools and made their way towards the chimney. The squirrels crawled down the walls first, with the pixies close behind and Jayfeather and Pechino at the top. The squirrels managed to pull the screws out of the frame, and with a collective effort they slowly laid down the piece of metal on the floor.

The inside was dimly lit by a light spilling from another room. The air had a peculiar smell, and when Pechino and Jayfeather flew down, they all silently walked into the house.

Then Captain Pilsonti turned to the bird and the half-shroog and said, “Wait here. We’ll draw her attention, then you can search the house.”

Pechino and Jayfeather nodded in agreement.

Captain Pilsonti led Pakut, Pocho, Quelt, Soroto, Sapito, Quelt, Peabean and Berriris through the living room, carefully scouring the area.

“I don’t feel so well...” Quelt said, shivering.

“It’s the magic in the air,” said Pakut. “I can feel it too. It’s designed to repel squirrels and pixies.”

They all heard what sounded like a TV, and the group followed the sound to a shallow film of light spilling from between the doors in a room. They gently pushed open the door a few inches more and entered the kitchen.

They first looked around for anything sign of the woman, but they found nothing. They spotted the flickering lights above them, and saw a small television on the kitchen counter. The small beings were momentarily entranced by the image-box, a few even impressed by the ingenuity of the humans. But Captain Pilsonti quickly gathered their attention and said, “Focus on finding the human female.”

And as Captain Pilsonti spoke, they all heard a loud creak behind them. The door was open, and in frame stood Marylynn, glaring down at them with a staff in her hand.

“Hi, you little shits,” she said.

Pechino and Jayfeather retreated against the chimney walls upon seeing the terror that was Marylynn walking across the corridor into the other room, where their team had gone.

Pechino made to open her mouth to warn the others, but Jayfeather placed her wing to her mouth and said silently, “No. We can’t give away our position!”

They watched in horror as Marylynn pushed open the door. She must have seen them, as her eyes lit up and the light glinted off her teeth. Marylynn lifted the staff that held a strange green stone in the center, pointed it towards the floor, and said, “Hi, you little shits,” and tapped the floor.

Light sparked from the stone and an electrical wave surged outward. Pechino and Jayfeather quickly flew up the chimney. Captain Pilsonti quickly leapt off the floor and avoided the crackling wave of death.

As the squirrels and pixies scattered on the tables and counter Marylynn reached into her pocket for a mixture of silver, clay and sugar and blew it at the small creatures.

“Quick, dodge it!” said Berriris as she ascended to the ceiling to avoid the deadly mixture of powders.

“Mechant’tedo!” Marylynn said.

The powder glittered in the air. Everyone managed to get away—except Quelt. She frantically brushed the substance off her, but it was too late. The spell took effect, and Quelt’s body slowly fossilized. She turned to polished stone. Under the table Pocho witnessed the horror as Quelt was petrified before his eyes, her expression fixed into a horrific scream.

Pocho shook in his slippers. “My goodness!”

Pakut, upon seeing the loss of Quelt, flew into a fit of rage. With his weapon in hand he leaped off the table at the witch. Marylynn screamed and swatted him aside, but Pakut quickly bounced off the wall and landed on Marylynn’s shoulder.

“Die!” Pakut said as he stabbed her.

“Yeeouch!” Marylynn grabbed Pakut and threw him into the wall again. This time stunning him.

Peabean and Berriris leapt on Marylynn and viciously hacked into her thigh. The woman slapped them away. Captain Pilsonti, Soroto and Sapito dove upon Marylynn, but the woman swung her staff into the three of them, dispersing them.

“That’s it!” she said. “I’ve had it with you little fuckers!” Marylynn channeled her spiritual energy into her staff once more, cloaking the end in electricity. With the energy of a rabid wolf Marylynn swung the staff around her, striking anywhere she glimpsed the small beings.

The electricity scattering across the room caught Sapito. He stiffened as ten thousand volts ran through his body, and he fell.

Pocho saw his comrade fall, and quickly ran out of his hiding place to rescue him. I’ve got you! Pocho thought. Then Marylynn’s foot landed upon Sapito.

The moment Marylynn had entered the kitchen and commenced her attack, Jayfeather said to Pechino, “Now’s our chance!”

Both females flew out of the chimney. Jayfeather had their tools strapped to her back, while Pechino held a short sword ready in defense. They flew into the hall and entered the room Marylynn had exited. They found that it was her bedroom. They separated and began looking around the space.

“Check to see if you can find any kind of small door where she might be hiding the queen,” said Jayfeather as she scurried under the bed.

Pechino flew towards the wardrobe and opened it, finding mostly jars of strange objects and other peculiar things stacked on top for each other and hung in the back. From dried animal parts, pickled insects and medallions.

Pechino, momentarily intrigued by her findings, quickly shook the feeling away and flew towards the dresser.

“That witch might have a key here...” Pechino murmured. And then she saw them. The statues.

Up close Pechino could see the faces of the petrified pixies and squirrels. All wore terror and dread, their eyes wide open as if they could still see. The screams across the hall from the confrontation of witch, squirrels and pixies echoed into the room. And with her eyes fixed on the gaping mouths of the statues, Pechino could almost believe it were them still screaming.

Pechino shuddered, and she held one of her hands to stop it from shaking. Jayfeather perched next to her. “Pechino there’s nothing here...” Jayfeather saw the statues, and chilling tentacles wrapped themselves around her as well.

Jayfeather quickly shook them off and nudged Pechino. “We have to go!” Pechino eventually heeded, and both females flew off the dresser and out the door. Back in the hall they spotted the bathroom and entered it.

Then Pechino spotted something back in the hallway, in front of the back door, and hurried back outside on the floor. She walked around to the front of it, and suddenly said, “Jayfeather, out here!”

The owl scurried outside, slipping twice on the polished floors. She spotted what had stirred excitement in Pechino’s voice. A lock on the floor, and a defined square shape that spoke of a door. Both Pechino and Jayfeather looked at each other and smiled. A sudden loud crash from inside the kitchen and tongues of lightning lashing out the door snapped them out of it, and Pechino hurriedly took her equipment out of Jayfeather’s backpack.

It was gunpower the fairies had bought from the southern fairy kingdom of Crokotako. Once Pechino poured it in the hole in the lock she tied a string to it. She took a match and lit it. She put the flame to the fuse and watch it catch fire.

Jayfeather and Pechino retreated, and the explosion went off in a loud pop and puff of smoke. Pechino quickly went to the lock and checked it. The mechanism was destroyed sufficiently enough for the lock to be removed. Once Pechino did so she fitted her fingers under the door and began to lift it.

An ordinary squirrel or pixie wouldn’t have the strength to accomplish the feat. The birds had not limbs whatsoever fitted for the task. But thanks to Pechino’s shroog-enhanced strength, she was able to lift it, albeit with effort. Jayfeather slid under the door and Pechino followed, dropping the door once inside. They immediately spotted Urazel standing in the back. The light of the lamp revealing her rigid frame. Apparently, the commotion outside had reached her sensitive ears.

“Who are you?” said Urazel, folding her fists.

“My queen!” said Jayfeather. “We’ve come to rescue you!”

“...You’re from the kingdom?” said Urazel, and Jayfeather perched at her feet.

Jayfeather lifted her right wing, and said, “Captain Pilsonti is outside with a few of us fighting to rescue you!”

Urazel suddenly uttered a deep sigh and fell on her knees. She held her face in her hands and wept. After a few seconds she wiped her eyes and looked up. “Thank you all so much...”

Jayfeather said, “You should thank Pechino.” She gestured to the young woman behind her. “We wouldn’t be able to enter down here if it wasn’t for her.”

Urazel Pechino standing a few feet away, as if she feared something. Pechino hardly met her eyes with the larger woman.

Urazel smiled at her. “Shroogs are known for being very strong. It was a blessing you inherited their strength.”

Pechino looked long and hard at the queen, and suddenly felt a warm feeling racing up to her face. Before her eyes produced any excess moisture, Pechino quickly reached into her backpack and took out a three-inch jar. “I brought you this...queen—my queen...”

Pechino approached her and handed the jar to her. Urazel took it in her hand and uncorked it. She immediately realized the smell, and it alone brought back some strength to her resolve.

Urazel said to the two before her, “Here it goes...”

As they retreated, Urazel drank the contents of the jar. She closed her eyes and channeled her miniscule spiritual energy into her stomach, activating the tree sap, awakening the spell. Light seeped from Urazel’s flesh, consuming her eyes and mouth. The expulsion of her aura stirred a small storm in the room, but it possessed a warm soothing quality that sent Pechino and Jayfeather in a chasm of ecstasy.

“...Amazing...” Pechino said.

The luminance around Urazel vanished. She placed her dainty feet on the floor, and the bold dirt that had once dared to approach the queen now scurried back to the depths it came from. Urazel’s skin was absolved of her cuts and bruises, and her hair now twitched as if the excess of her lifeforce branched into it as well.

Urazel spoke with a renewed vitality, “You might all want to stay back...” And Urazel walked to the door, with a pulsating light in her hands.

When Marylynn’s foot crushed Sapito, and his bodily fluids instantly spurted from her foot and showered Pocho. The young pixie froze as the warmth of the sticky mess seeped into his nerves. Marylynn lifted her foot and exposed a pulpy mess that filled the air with an acrid, raw smell.

Pocho tried to piece together the situation. At this rate, the human female with her size and massive arsenal would eventually slaughter them all. As much as he wanted to be able to escape

with Pechino and go back to her nest together, rescuing the queen was priority. Pocho wasn't chivalrous, he didn't want to die just for the glory of the queen. But he wasn't selfish either.

*That's why you befriended Pechino, isn't it?* Pocho thought. *You're just an average do-gooder. Nothing complex about that.* Pocho ran from underneath the table, this time screaming at the top of his lungs. He leapt on Marylynn's leg and stabbed her, scoring bloody wounds on her. Marylynn grabbed Pocho and tossed him on the floor. She made to step on Pocho but he quickly got up and stuck out his knife. The blade pierced Marylynn's flesh and as she hollered and hopped out of the kitchen.

Pilsonti, Soroto, Peabean, Pakut, Berriris and Pocho followed her out of the room and continued their assault.

Marylynn charged her staff with electricity, this time with a greater dosage that lit the entire room. She lifted it in the air and a tsunami of lightning surged everywhere, busting out the windows and fling the door open.

Those on the floor managed to scurry under the furniture to avoid the attack, but those in the air weren't so fortunate. Berriris and Captain Pilsonti instantly got fried in the attack and plummeted to the floor. In his mad haste to escape, Soroto had crashed into the wall.

"This is madness!" Pakut said, with Pocho and Peabean at his side. "At this rate we'll all die!"

"No!" said Pocho. "We've got to have faith!"

Pakut snarled and grabbed Pocho his collar. "She's like a god! No matter how many times were strike her down she'll still stand! We're done for!"

Soroto shook off his disorientation and immediately spotted Marylynn approaching him once his vision steadied. He attempted to fly away on his broken wings, but only managed to get a few feet into the air before Marylynn snatched him. She brought Soroto to her jaws and bit his head off, silencing his screams. Marylynn spat out Soroto's head and tossed the rest of him aside.

Marylynn wiped her mouth. "Now, for the rest of you!"

The room was covered in scorched streaks and patches from which plumes of smoke ascended, tainting the air with stink of burnt wood, plastic, and even the hint of flesh.

Marylynn looked on the ground and saw the scorched remains and Pilsonti and Berriris. however, Pilsonti was still moving. The captain made feeble attempts to get up, but his damaged body spoke otherwise.

Marylynn then looked under the sofa and noticed three pairs of eyes peeping at her. She smiled and walked towards them.

Suddenly light exploded from the hallway. Marylynn flinched and froze. She pivoted on her heel and turned to the illuminated corridor. Marylynn wasn't ignorant. She knew of where the source of that power came. "Impossible!" she said, watching in stark disbelief as Urazel walked into the living room with an ethereal radiance. She glowered at Marylynn, and Pechino and Jayfeather flew from behind her and over their heads.

"Hell yeah!" said Pocho.

"The queen!" said Peabean.

Pakut, grinning uncontrollably, said, "I always knew she would make it!"

"How the hell did you escape?" said Marylynn.

Urazel heard a soft voice next to her, and upon seeing Captain Pilsonti, she knelt over him.

"My...queen..." he said.

Urazel gently cradled Pilsonti in her arms. She spotted the charred remains of Berriris, and realized the pixie was beyond saving. "Thank you for your service, Captain. Now it's time for you to rest."

Marylynn raised her weapon. "Don't ignore me, bitch!" She lunged at Urazel and prepared to deal an electrically charged blow. Urazel snapped her head in Marylynn's direction and raised her hand. Urazel tapped her palm with her pinky and triggered a shockwave of faint, white energy that knocked Marylynn through the door and outside.

Urazel turned to Pilsonti and placed her hand over him. Glowing powder fell upon the captain, and some of his burn marks vaporized. Captain Pilsonti gasped with a stronger breath and his movement became more vivid.

Urazel lowered him near the other five members of the task force and said, "All of you stay put."

Urazel hurried outside into the night. She saw Marylynn staggering to her feet, cursing profusely. She charged her staff once more, this time the stone glowed as if it were a bulb. "I see you got some balls now!" Marylynn said. "You think you're bad now, huh?"

Urazel lifted her hand with her fingers slight curved. "No. I'm a queen."

"Fuck you!" Marylynn pointed the staff at Urazel. Lightning blasted at the fairy but Urazel made a fist and a forcefield blossomed around her, deflecting the bands of electricity. Urazel used

her other hand and executed shockwave on her shield, expanding it into a larger blast that blew away Marylynn.

Frank the dog came from the back of the house, bringing his teeth and snarls as he made for Urael. But the fairy queen, having spotted the dog, raised her hand and made a pinching motion. Frank went silent and careened over.

Marylynn supported herself on her staff, panting heavily. Covered in bloody wounds and bruises, she opened her mouth. Her words didn't come out until seconds later, "I...I just wanted to be young again..."

Urael approached Marylynn and stopped just a few feet before her. "Everything eventually has to die. My time will come. Yours is now, Marylynn."

Marylynn chuckled and closed her eyes. "...I guess so..."

Urael touched Marylynn's forehead and whispered a few words. Both their bodies glowed, but the light was sucked from Marylynn. Her skin became wrinkled, soggy and discolored. Her hair became grey and thread-like. Now old, Marylynn's body couldn't hold out against her wounds anymore, and she collapsed.

Pocho and the others gathered behind the queen. Pilsonti was tied to Jayfeather's back. Urael turned to her people who, patiently waited on her. The queen briefly turned in the direction of her kingdom, sensing something foul.

"You'll all need to be ready," she said. "Our fight isn't over yet."

In the queen's chamber, the council and the guards took a stand before a strange looking, gelatinous structure. There were many items on the walls, most of which were pieces of the wings of the past queens hung on plaques, as well as paintings of them.

The door in front of them was slowly being stripped away with each strike of the axes on the other side. Soon the effort of the enemy was successful, and the doors to the chamber blasted inward. The cowardly hearts of the council members made a few of them shriek, and the twelve guards huddled in front of them. Groogus and four other shroogs marched on the purple carpet towards them.

"Leave this place now!" said one of the members, a woman. "This is the sacred chamber of the queen!"

Groogus took his eyes from the structure behind the pixies. “You all seem to be the ones crowding inside here.”

One of the guards said, “Halt! One more step, and we will end you!”

Groogus stopped before them, and his shroogs followed. “Your tenacity is admirable. But enough games. Hand over the source, and I’ll all allow you to leave the kingdom I one piece.”

“Only those of fairy blood can use the source,” said Leafenson.

“You’re wasting your time,” another council member said.

Groogus, in a long while, made a genuine angered expression. “You’re right. I am wasting my time. Kill them all—”

There was a suddenly uproar of glorious cheers and hoots, mixed with screams of terror. But to Groogus’ ears it wasn’t that of his army shouting in triumph; it were cries of renewed resolve coming from the fairies.

“What the hell...?” Groogus marched to the door and onto the bridge. He looked over it, and to his horror, was staring the queen right in the face.

The queen had awoken the dog and mounted it as her stead. Peabean and Pakut rode on her shoulders, while Pocho took to the skies on Pechino, and Jayfeather transported the unconscious Captain Pilsonti.

Within under thirty minutes, they managed to reach the kingdom, and they all gaped in horror at the building cloaked in flames.

“Dammit!” said Pakut. “We’re too late!”

Pocho said to Pechino, “As soon as we go inside, the first thing we’ll do is split up and search for our parents.”

“Got it!” said Pechino.

“She’s right,” said Urazel. “All of you secure your loved one. Leave the shroogs to me...”

“Understood, your majesty,” said Jayfeather.

The path to the kingdom was littered with the corpses of pixies, squirrels, shroogs, rats and birds and bats. But Urazel ignored all of it to reach the courtyard. Inside the battle still ensued. Soldiers and civilians, men and women, young and old, all took part in combating the onslaught of the shroogs and their minions.

Then Urazel spotted the largest combatant amongst them. The wolverine unleashed its carnage upon her people—anything in its way for that matter.

Urazel frowned and said, “Frank, bring down that beast!” Urazel leaped off Frank dog and Frank ran towards the wolverine. As the two animals looked in a flurry of claws and teeth, Urazel inhaled deeply, then exhaled and raised her hands. She whispered, “Mother of the wind and skies, lend me your strength...”

Within seconds an eerie wind enveloped Urazel, and out of her back sprouted shiny, membranous wings.

Vice-Captain Petallin was the first to see the queen, and she said, “The queen—the queen is back! The queen is here!”

Hers word spread like wildfire through the ranks of Pikapoko’s militants and the shroogs. They spotted the beautiful woman in the air, and all gaped in awe at Urazel; taking her rightful place in the kingdom once more as the center of everything.

Urazel flapped her wings, scattering millions of tiny scales. They landed on everyone, and on contact with the shroogs’ weapons they turned to dust. However, the weapons of the pixies and squirrels became cloaked in fire and ice. With this wondrous augmentation the tide turned immensely. Now the kingdom’s warriors chopped down the shroogs, rats and bats, inflicting severe frostbite and burns upon them.

The wolverine had overpowered Frank and stood atop the dog. The wolverine made to saw its teeth through the dog’s neck, and that was when Kagos leaped upon it. Kagos roared and hooked his blade into the beast’s neck. He leaped off, using his weight and momentum to slice through its thick flesh and open its jugular. The wolverine shrieked and hopped around. The more blood it lost, the slower its movements got. And seizing the moment, Frank leaped upon the wolverine’s neck, bit into it and twisted. There was a loud snap and the wolverine went still.

Upon the living complex, Pocho and Pechino reached the house of her mother; a stout pixie in a green frock with deep blue hair. But when they arrived, Shreegzee suddenly landed there, startling the two of them.

“Oh, what’s this...” said Shreegzee as he brandished his spear at them, but his eyes were affixed upon Pechino. “A female shroog? This is fantastic.”

Pocho and Pechino drew their weapons. “Stay back you ugly maggot!” said Pechino.

“Sweetheart be careful!” her mother said.

“The boss’ll like you,” said Shreegzee. “After I’ve had my fun with you, that is...”

Pocho and Pechino attacked. Shreegzee easily countered them with his spear. He tripped Pocho with his tail and made to stab him, but Pechino knocked him aside. Shreegzee immediately lunged at Pechino. The tip of the spear grazed her side but Pechino continued and stabbed at Shreegzee. The shroog easily deflected the attack by knocking Pechino’s elbow.

Pocho managed to cut Shreegzee on his hip. He winced and snarled, swung his arm across his head and knocked him over. Shreegzee immediately switched to Pechino, ducked beneath her attack and punched her in the gut. Shreegzee kicked Pechino onto her back and lifted the spear.

“If I act quick enough, I can still screw your warm body!” he said.

And Pocho ran his knife into the base of Shreegzee’s spine. “Yeah,” Pocho said, twisting the knife and extracting a tight scream from the shroog. “And you were too slow.”

Shreegzee fell on his knees, uttered pained whimpers. Pechino got up, weapon in hand, and said, “No thanks. I prefer a pixie’s dick.” And with one clean swing, Pechino decapitated Shreegzee.

Urazel turned to her throne room where she saw Groogus looking at her. She glowered at him, an expression she’d mastered by her numerous interactions with Marylynn, and sure enough, Groogus visibly stiffened.

“Curses...” he said, turning back inside.

Urazel propelled herself towards the huge entrance. Upon unfolding her wings inside she was immediately ambushed by Groogus who hid in the ceiling. Urazel’s guards and the council members tried to fight through Groogus’ men to reach the queen, but their struggle ended with them flying outside. Groogus and Urazel pulled apart. Groogus roared and flew towards her. Urazel, having sustained a huge cut on her neck where Groogus attempted to slash her throat, ascended higher, prompting Groogus to follow her. Both tried to dodge and strike each other—Urazel used her bare hands and feet while Groogus relied on his weapon and tail. After sustaining a stab wound, Urazel punched Groogus in the face.

But the shroog rebounded and stabbed Urazel in the gut. Urazel grabbed Groogus’ arm, preventing the blade from going any further. Groogus leaned close and said, “Pretty soon, I’ll stick something else you.”

Urazel coughed up blood. Her strength was fading, as well as her magic, and the ice and fire of her army's weapons were gone and the shroogs began their own counter attack.

Groogus reached for the pistol off his back and aimed it at Urazel's wings. He pulled the trigger and a bullet punched a hole in the membranous matter. They both spun out of control as Urazel lost balance. Groogus forcefully turned with her on his weapon and positioned her beneath him.

"I hope you can survive this, queen!" Groogus said, laughing—then froze in terror when Urazel unexpectedly folded one of her wings into a tendril and stabbed Groogus in the gut. Groogus gaped in shock. The leader of the shroogs tried to speak, but the pain ravaging through him strangled his voice.

"I'll gladly explore that theory..." said Urazel, ripping her wing out of Groogus, letting his blood flow in droplets carried away in the wind. "But we know for sure you're dead."

Groogus' eyes lost their intensity, and his limbs slackened as he released his weapon. But Urazel continued to plummet to the ground.

Urazel twisted her body until she faced the earth below, a place littered with the corpses of the dead. Urazel tried to flap her wings, but she was too exhausted. She weighed her options and realized the most she could do is just cross her arms before her and hope for the best.

But the kingdom would have none of it.

Suddenly a swarm of pixies and birds swarmed Urazel. Everyone held on to her with their hands or feet. The squirrels below formed a massive huddle that rose several feet off the ground. The pixies and birds vigorously flapped their wings to create a resistant tug. It effectively slowed down Urazel's fall, and she landed in the heap of rodents without much damage to her body.

Urazel rolled out of the pile and slowly rose to her feet. She looked around her and saw the last remnants of the shroogs fleeing with a few warriors on their tails. The natives of the kingdom gathered around the queen, bombarding her with questions about her health. Urazel briefly ignored them, having spotted Groogus lying still on the ground.

Urazel walked over to him with a large party of individuals close by. She stood over Groogus' bloody corpse, then placed a foot on top of him. Urazel raised her chest with a renewed strength. "My people!" Urazel got everyone's attention. "Tonight, victory belongs to Pikapoko!"

Pixies, birds and squirrels all erupted in praise. A chant started that steadily resonated in the entirety of the kingdom. "Long live the queen! Long live the queen! Long live the queen!"

Urazel closed her eyes and smiled. Her ears savored the sounds of devotion. “It’s good to be home again...” she murmured.

Three days after the events of the kingdom’s war against the shroogs, a special ceremony commenced. A gathering of every able-bodied individual took place in the center of the kingdom, where the queen and her council stood in the center of the ring of mushrooms. From it led a path of stones to a wooden platform, where Pechino, Pocho, Captain Pilsonti, Pakut, Peabean and Jayfeather all knelt.

The audience in attendance was suddenly silenced by Councilman Leafenson. “My people, the queen demand’s silence!”

The cheers quickly died, and Urazel, with handful of brightly decorated necklaces, said, “Our kingdom has lasted for centuries. But it was not just due to the rule of past queens, or their aids, or our military. It was a collective effort of all those elements, and the help of the everyday people such as yourselves that maintained our civilization since its inception. These six individuals you see here, are the example of what each man and woman in our kingdom should try to live by. Their actions led to the safe return of your queen, and also thwarted the efforts of the enemy.

“In recognition of their service, these individuals will have their name etched in the annals of history; the great heroes of our kingdom.”

The crowd applauded once more. Once it subsided, Urazel approached the first recipient of the beads of honor.

She placed it around Pilsonti’s neck and said, “For exemplary display of successful leadership, I award you the bead of honor, Slos Pilsonti.” Captain Pilsonti stood and bowed before the queen.

Urazel went on to Jayfeather, Peabean and Pakut, before moving on to the final two. Pechino and Pocho

Standing before the wingless lad, Urazel said, “For outstanding bravery in the face of danger, and contributing success to the safety of the queen and kingdom, I award you the bead of honor. Pocho Nuttardson.”

Urazel placed the beads around Pocho’s neck. After standing and bowing before the queen, Urazel moved on to Pechino.

Unlike the others, Pechino was hesitant to look upon the queen. But as if sensing her apprehension, Urazel said, “Do me the honor of gracing me with your eyes, young one...”

Pechino looked up in Urazel’s face, marveling at the beautiful woman. Urazel smiled at her, and Pechino blushed and bit her lip to hide her own.

Urazel went on to say, “This young woman represents the heart of our kingdom’s belief. Those who live by the code of the founders of our civilization and way of life, regardless if they be born of the blood of the fairies or not, can be considered as kin to us. For outstanding bravery in face of danger, and contributing to the safety of the queen and the kingdom, I award you the bead of honor, Pechino Koodlepond.”

Urazel adorned Pechino with the medal. Then she took Pechino by her hands and stood her up. Urazel retreated back onto a large stone painted in warm colors, and the six decorated individuals turned and faced the audience.

Urazel said, “Children of Pikapoko, I present to you, the six champions of our kingdom!”

The gathering erupted in applause once more. Along the sides the musicians blew trumpets, pipes, flutes and beat drums in a melodic tune that added to the air of celebration. Birds and pixies flew over their heads and released many colorful petals.

Pakut and Peabean took bows and hugged each other. Jayfeather waved at everyone, while Pilsonti modestly made a salute.

Pechino and Pocho stood close together. They both offered everyone a smile, as it seemed their minds were elsewhere. Then Pocho said, “Are you still thinking about leaving?”

Pechino said, “I am. I would like to be queen of my own kingdom one day.” Pechino saw her mother and waved at her.

Pocho said, “That’s really ambitious.” Then Pocho suddenly had an amusing thought. “So...who would be your king?”

Pechino turned to Pocho and smiled. She walked off into the crowd, into the embrace of everyone. “If he plays his cards right, he might have his seat next to me...”

Pocho watched Pechino’s firm buttocks as she walked away. He smirked and nodded. “Fine,” he said. “Let’s play.”

THE END

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