

Chapter 1

Sickness

It was a cold breezy day in late June. It was overcast, and looked like rain. All in all, Mark thought unhappily, it was a rather miserable day. He turned away from the window with a sigh, looking at his bedroom door with an unhappy scowl. He knew his parents were on the other side, across the hall, and in his sister's room with the doctor. He wished desperately to be over there, and to hear the news that his sister would be all right. But somehow, he suspected the news will not be good.

He crept up to his store, and put his ear against it in the hopes of catching some part of the conversation. He tensed when he heard his father's deep voice speaking in the other room. As quiet as he was, he could just make out the words.

"... Doctor, is there nothing else you can do?" There was no mistaking the anguish in his voice, and the pain and agony in his mother's who spoke next.

"She has fought for so long, done so much. Isn't there anything we can do?"

"I'm sorry, but there is nothing left. The disease has ravaged her body. She is so weak that any attempt to move her might very well kill her, even with an ambulance. Also, I suspect that she has given up hope. In order for a person to get better, is often necessary for them to *want* to get better. I fear that she has fought this disease for so long, she no longer wants to fight anymore." The elderly voice of Dr. Rosenthal said heavily. Mark's knew him as a smiling man, always with a good word of hope and usually with a lollipop or two hidden somewhere in his white jacket. But now he sounded older and more tired than Mark could remember.

"But surely..." His father's voice faded as they walked down the hall. Mark stepped away from the door, pondering what he had learned. He knew that most adults overlooked him because he was only ten, but Mark had always gotten straight A's in his class. He knew something was terribly wrong, and he feared the worst. Stepping across the hall, he carefully eased open his sister's door.

The sister was visible only as a lump underneath her blankets as she slept. He could hear the soft exhalations of her breath which was ragged and thin. The sound was so frail that Mark feared it could stop at any moment. Then uncomfortable feeling, much like that of the time when a friend of his had moved

away, filled him and he could no longer stand being in that room. Shutting the door softly he returned to his room.

Mark sat on his bed and tried to think. What would make his sister want to live? His first thought was of Dwayne, the boyfriend she had brought home last summer and had chatted about incessantly before she had fallen sick. That he had left as soon as he heard word of her illness, and had not even bothered to write. Mark rejected the thought almost as quickly as it had come. He briefly wished for Dwayne to step in front of a moving bus before turning his attention back to his original question.

He thought about it for hours, barely aware of the passage of time. His mother and father walked back through the hallway, pausing only briefly at his sister's room before continuing on to theirs. Mark stayed quiet, not wanting them to come in and interrupt his thinking. He felt he was nearly onto something, if only he could see it.

He felt his eyelids grow heavy, and try to make them stay open. He pinched his arm, patted his cheek, and shook his head side to side like a dog to keep sleep at bay. Yet every time he stopped to collect his wits, his eyes began to droop. He realized he was losing the fight, and crawled under his covers. Raising his arms behind his head, he stared up at the ceiling waiting for sleep to overtake him. And yet, now that he was there, slumber eluded him. He tossed and turned, and yet it still would not come.

"Oh come on." He growled softly. "At first I could barely keep my eyes awake, and now I cannot get to sleep. What is the deal?"

Grunting in frustration, he returned to his original position, staring up and waiting for inspiration of some sort to strike. His mind or ran through all of his sister's favorite things, from Barbie dolls to weekends at the mall, and realized that none of those things would help. In desperation, cast his mind back trying to find the one thing his sister wanted more than anything.

The memory surfaced, the time when he was six and his sister was ten. They had been playing in the park, and had stopped to rest next to a running stream. A gust of wind blew dandelion seeds into the air, making it seem as if snow was dancing around them. The breeze died, the dandelions floated seemingly suspended. They watched, hushed in the face of this strange magic in front of them.

"It's almost as if fairies are out." His sister whispered in awe.

"What are fairies?" He had asked.

"Oh, just a girlish fancy." She had told him sadly. "I'd love to see a fairy, just once. That would be... Amazing." She breathed as the spectacle in front of them slowly vanished.

Mark jerked back to the present. He had found his answer, though he had no idea how to go about it. He would capture a fairy for his sister, and have it stay by her side. Then she would have something to live for, and would get better.

"Don't worry, Mary." Mark whispered to his sister. "I will get your wish."

Now, if only he could figure out where to begin. He fell asleep with that question looming in his mind.

Mark pulled over how he was to accomplish his goal. He was still thinking when his mother asked him what was wrong over his morning toast. Mark shrugged.

"Mom, if you did not know how to do something, what would you do?" He couldn't think of another question to ask.

"Well, I would look it up at the library." She told him. "There's always something there on any topic. You should be able to find what you're looking for."

The library! By hand he thought of that? No matter, he could get there after school on his bicycle. There is only a short distance away, then he could peddle home. There was nothing stopping him, with his parents so worried about Mary they would not even noticed he was at home at the usual time. And even if they did, he had his cell phone. They would call him and he would tell them he was looking something up at the library. So, he thanked his mom for the idea and set off for class.

Oddville Middle School was a large brick building set near the center of town. Mark trudged up the stairs while thinking of how he could begin the search. A shove on his backpack behind him sent him sprawling across the stairs. Pain blossomed in his knee and hands. Looking up, he saw Eric laughing at him with his friends as they nonchalantly trotted up the stairs. Mark knew better than to fight back, or report what had happened, if he did not want to run into Eric and his cronies on the street where there was often no adult protection around. So, he gritted his teeth and ignored the pain as he ascended the steps.

"Mark, did you fall down again?" Asked Mrs. Iso when he walked in to her history class. She was a matronly looking woman that often boasted about her four kids whenever she got the chance. She knew he was getting picked on, but

was helplessly shackled by his refusal to report it. She knew he feared walking home at night, and so went out of her way to make sure he left class on time.

Mark mumbled something as he sat down in his chair, and she gave up with a sigh. She knew he would not tell, and bound as she was by the school rules she could not force him to confess. The most she could do was glower at Eric and make him stay late when he tugged the pigtails of the girl sitting in front of him.

Mark was grateful that Eric would end up staying late. It would give him more free time at the library before the bully would come looking for him and try to play their favorite game, Punching Bag Mark. Fortunately, Mark was able to get away from those games because he was small and fast. He could avoid the most times, and often rode his bike. Eric did not want to bike, so it was easy to out race him. Unless of course, they waited an ambush. Fortunately, Eric wasn't as clever as he thought he was in laying in wait. Mark was often alerted by his bobbing head popping up from bushes or behind cars like a prairie dog from its hole.

Firmly pushing his tormentor from his mind, Mark concentrated on finding everything he could on his quarry. The elderly librarian nodded to him behind her desk. Mrs. Sara Gillycuddy was a good friend of his mother, as she was in her bridge club. Waving back at her, he headed for the library computer. He impatiently waited for a torment before typing in his password and logging into his account. Opening the search engine, he typed in "fairy", and hit search.

The computer symbol for busy cropped up more than a minute before dropped away and showed him the results. Some 256 hits were reported by the computer. Mark went to narrow the search before thinking that he might lose an important title if he did so. He waffled back and forth, debating on whether to go ahead and limit the field further, or start wading through the titles. *I'll go through the first few, and decide then.* He opened the list up.

The first was a disappointment. It was a grade schooler's fantasy book on the adventures of Rose the Fairy. A glance through the blurb on the bottom was enough to convince him that he was plainly barking up the wrong tree. He went on.

Book after book was easily eliminated as a story someone had written, or other such nonsense. Mark kept at it, clicking through each book and checking the blurb. He wasn't sure what exactly he was looking for, otherwise he might have typed it into the search parameters. Still he trudged on.

He was jolted by a touch on his arm, it was Mrs. Gillycuddy looking down at him from behind her fiery horn-rimmed glasses. Her green eyes looked at him with concern.

"Are you all right Marcus?" She never used Mark, only Marcus. Mark shrugged and told her no, he wasn't.

"I see. Perhaps I can help?"

Mark hesitated. Missus Gillycuddy had an encyclopedic knowledge of books, and often pointed him in the direction of the books he was looking for, but he hesitated. He knew she would think him silly for his search, also he felt a little possessive; he wanted to do it himself and make his sister's dream come true.

Stop it. You're just being silly. He scolded himself.

"I'm...uh...looking for a book for my sister."

Sara nodded, looking sympathetic. "She likes fairies, as I recall. Is that right?"

Mark nodded hopefully.

Sara smiled, a faraway look in her eyes. "I remember when she was much younger, even smaller than you, looking for books on fairies and the wee folk, nearly drove me to distraction trying to provide for her. Of course, as she got older she moved off of the fey and more into romance. Still, it's nice to see you're trying to get her something."

She sighed heavily. "Still, I'm afraid she's read everything that's here. A long time ago, in fact. You might want to check the old books section though. I don't think anyone's been there in ages. You might get lucky."

"Thanks Missus Gillycuddy." Mark tried not to show his disappointment. "I'll go there next."

"Of course. Oh, and I forgot to tell you. Your friend Eric came by looking for you."

Mark experienced a moment of panic until he noticed the twinkle in her eye. "I told him that you had already gone home, and that if he wanted a chance to read then there was plenty here to do so. I'm afraid he stormed off in a bit of a huff." Mark sighed in relief.

"Thanks." He said, and meant it.

"Of course dear. Let me know if you need anything else." She moved slowly back to the counter, settling slowly and painfully into her chair.

Mark turned off the computer and went up the stairs to the next level of the library. There he found a series of rooms, with shelves of old books. Mark took a look and suppressed a groan. It would take him weeks to search through this, dodging Eric and his cronies every step of the way.

He almost turned around right then, but the look of his sister in her bed filled his mind. Sighing, he tossed his coat and pack on the sole chair in the first room and began to work. He started looking at the titles of the books, searching for ones on fey or fairy. He had no luck at first, most of the books were on old machines, advances in medicine in the nineteenth century and such. Until at last, in one small corner of the room, he found an old leather-bound journal pushed to the back of the shelf. The gold title held fancy script, Mark took a moment to read it.

"THE STUDY OF FAIREYS AND THEIR HABITS." He read aloud. His heart beat faster. This could be it!

He hurried to the table, setting down the book carefully. Moving the provided reading lamp closer, he opened the front page. The first page provided what appeared to be an introduction. Mark read slowly and carefully, not missing any of the handwritten words:

Greetings bold reader:

*If you are reading these words,
then you have been chosen to learn
about the hidden world of the fey.
These mysterious creatures that
dominate so much of our culture and
lore.*

*This book will show you the
tricks and methods I have learned on
studying, finding, and even capturing
a fey.*

Mark looked up, breathing in excitement. This was it! The solution to his problems! And he could capture a fairy. This is awesome. He realized there was more to the passage, and he hastily resumed reading.

*And now, a word of caution. A
fairy is a powerful magic creature.*

dedicated to preserving the balance of nature itself. With the number of predators and evil creatures out there seeking to kill them, every loss is felt keenly. When you, dear reader, have finished studying your captive fairy, it is beholden on you to release that fairy so the balance is not disturbed, or disaster may befall you.

Mark chewed his bottom lip, thinking. He didn't like the words "disaster" and "balance". But his sister wanted a fairy, and that was what he would give her. Surely just one wouldn't affect the balance of power too badly, right?

The deep tolling of the wall clock reminded him that he needed to get home. Mark picked up the book and hurried to the front where the smiling Sara stood waiting for him.

Mark made sure to close the door firmly behind him. He didn't expect his mother to come and check on him, but he couldn't risk anyone finding out what he was going to do.

Taking a small book light from his drawer, he opened the book and turned to the back of the book. He hissed in disappointment when he failed to find an index.

"What kind of idiot doesn't put an index in the back of his book?" he growled in frustration.

This isn't helping me. I need to get started. Going to the front of the book, he began reading at the first page, which turned to be a basic explanation of what a fairy was.

"...the main cha...ah...cter...ist...ic of fairies is that they are very much like us in ap...pear...ance. The most notable differences, besides the very obvious wings and size, is the ears, which tend to be gracefully pointed, and their dress. Making

various cloth out of natural fibers and greenery from the world around them, they have very little use of dyes. Their clothing tends to blend into the world around them very well, making them nearly impossible to spot.” Mark read.

For several hours, he read the book, discovering the habits of various types of fairies, from the green world, to the ice and snow of the mountains, even some of the depths and ponds.

Mark learned that the secret for holding a fairy captive was learning about their True Name. Not the one they used regularly or even their private name, but the True Name. There was a potion that could be drunk that would grant the user the ability to learn a fairy’s true name. The ingredients were strange, some of which Mark had never even heard of! But he felt he stood a good chance at getting the ingredients. Of course, the mushroom paste and ginger root could be a little more difficult, but he could always get mushrooms at the store, and probably ginger root as well.

Over the next several days Mark worked hard at gathering all the supplies he would need to capture the fairy. He found an old fish bowl of his mother’s, which stood on a wide base and column that held the bowl well off the ground. The mouth flared upright in a graceful curve, which was fortunate. Using fine mesh wire, he made a cover that would secure the top so the fairy couldn’t escape. Inside he made a “floor” of small stones, fine gravel and moss. A fairy pedestal and a tiny bed added furnishings to the home.

After finishing the globe, he went and gathered all the ingredients for the potion. He followed the instructions carefully, adding each ingredient and stirring as the book told him. The glass turned various shades of purple as he added each item, until it was bubbling a nasty shade of yellow and purple.

His parents asked him what he was doing in his room so much. Mark told him he was getting ready for a big test at school, and searching for a way to make his sister better. He hated the sad looks they gave each other when he told them that, as if they believed there wasn’t anything that could be done! Well, he would show them! He would show them all!

He was almost ready. The book told him that the best time to trap fairies was in early summer, when food was still fairly scarce for them and they were out harvesting for their winter supplies by the light of the full moon. A full moon had been forecast for tomorrow night, and it was supposed to be clear out. He would have to move then.

Mark mixed his bait; a combination of molasses, sugar, and honey, in a small jar and set it carefully in his backpack. He also placed a small butterfly net, and a plastic bug jar next to it to transport the fairy back.

The time had come at last. Mark took a deep breath as he walked down his darkened hallway. Stopping at his sister's door, he peeked in. Mary seemed just visible in the gloom. Mark shut the door quietly and went to his room.

"Hold on sis." He whispered as he opened his window and slipped out. "I'll be back soon."

Without a backward glance, he trotted towards the gloomy tree line ahead.