

Chapter 4.

First Meetings

Mark woke early, feeling haggard. His neck and back were stiff and howled at him when he stood up, cracking loudly in protest. He ignored them, stumbling to the shower to clean up. The hot water helped wash away his tiredness and he emerged feeling refreshed. A glance at the clock told him how early it was, but it did not matter. Though he was not going to school he had other things on his mind. And it would be a good time to spring the surprise on his sister before his parents woke up.

Going to the kitchen, he made soup and grabbed a box of Mary's pills. The large box was one of the weekly pillboxes, with a compartment for each day of the week. His mother kept it filled, so he did not worry about missing one. Snagging some toast for himself, he returned to his room to wake Sky.

When he walked into the room he found her already up. He set the tray on the bed, eyeing the way she stretched to work the kinks out. He found the motion somewhat interesting to watch, though he had no idea why. He wasn't at that age, after all. He pushed it from his mind.

"What would you like for breakfast?" He asked.

"Some honey, if you don't mind." She replied. She was still dressed in her forest outfit.

"All right. Give me a minute." He went to the kitchen and found the honey on the shelf and returned to his room.

Placing a dollop on a spoon, he put the spoon in the bowl on the table from last night. She sat down and ate while he consumed his toast. Mark kept an eye on the soup, watching to make sure it did not get cold.

Sky was just finishing up when Mark opened his mouth to tell her to get dressed. The words died in his throat as he saw the dress hanging on a plant. "Hey!" He cried in alarm. Sky looked up in surprise. "That's a white dress! The plant is going to stain it green!"

"It's all right." She soothed. "I've asked the plant not to, and placed a spell on the dress to prevent staining.

"Oh." He leaned back mollified. "All right. Best get ready then."

Her hands sprang to her neck, fumbling with the clasp to the top. She gaped in horror while Mark cried "no! I did not mean...!" He spun around barely in time as her top fell, giving him a momentary glimpse of pearly skin.

"Sorry, sorry," he babbled. He felt his cheeks began to sting as an embarrassed silence filled the room.

How could I do that to her? She must hate me now more than ever. Why did I ever read that spell? Mark could find no answers, but a growing sense of frustration with himself. While the spell certainly made it more convenient to keep Sky simply by giving her an order not to run away or flying it still went against everything he knew was right. *It will get better soon*, he tried to comfort himself. *After all, when Mary gets better I will let her go and she will be free of me.* He had to remain strong for that long and it would all be over.

He was interrupted by a light tap on his shoulder. When he had spun away from Sky he ended up facing the clock. The red clock showed him nine thirty. It had only taken Sky five minutes to dress. He turned back to her, going to tell her how sorry he was. His mouth never form those words. All he could say when he saw her was:

"Wow. Sky you're...beautiful."

Her face, which had been turning back to its normal shade flashed a deeper red again. He had seen the dress on the doll at the store. It had looked nice then, but now it was something else. The long white bodice clung alluringly to sky, enhancing her curves, poise, and presence. Her hair had been brushed smooth and tumbled down the back of her neck. She looked exactly like the fairy he had wanted her to be.

"Thank you." She murmured. She kept her eyes averted.

She was obviously still smarting over the order. Ashamed and he reached out with one finger to lift her chin. She gasped and resisted slightly, but Mark could barely feel the difference.

She is so delicate, how can she stand it? He marveled. The only comparison he could think of was a butterfly trapped in his hand. The slightest pressure and he would break legs, crumple wings, or crush body. But in his hands she would not have anything to fear, he vowed. Now he had to tell her that.

"Sky, I'm so sorry." He spoke slowly trying to get her to understand, to *see*. "I didn't mean to... I hadn't wanted..." His tongue fought him at every turn. He fought to keep from blushing, embarrassment and shame.

"Soup." She smiled tremulously.

Mark blinked, caught off guard. "What?" He asked cluelessly.

"This soup is getting cold, master." She pointed at the bowl.

"Don't call me that." He muttered without any heat as he looked. He thought stubbornly a moment about continuing his apology, but she was right. If he delayed too long the soup would be cold. He grabbed the bowl and pills. The soup was still very warm, but not hot. It would be perfect for eating.

"This isn't over." He warned her as they left the room.

"Of course." He rolled her eyes at her quieted acceptance. *She's as bad as I am*. He reflected.

"You had better stay on my shoulder until we get into the room. Just in case." He told her before they crossed the hall. She landed on his right shoulder.

He carried everything into Mary's room, but he felt the heaviest burden was the one riding on his shoulder.

Mary tried to hold onto her perch as they entered Mary's room. Mark's shoulder, being small for a human still do not have enough wood for her to stand on. Her wings fluttered enough to keep her up right, and by the time they made it through she practically flew with her feet just barely touching his shirt. Even then, she could feel the pressure to land, to stand obediently on his shoulder.

It's all right. It's okay. I'm not disobeying. I'm doing as he asked, just flapping my wings so I don't fall off and disobey. She told herself.

The next room seemed cave-like with its heavy curtains and lack of light. Only light came from the open door get any illumination at all, turning the furniture and other objects into featureless shapes.

"Better go to the lamp and stay out of sight until I call you." He sounded nervous, his eyes roaming the room.

She crossed half the distance without realizing she'd even left his shoulder. Having such little control over her actions caused a whole welter of emotions to flare inside her; fear, hate, pain. She felt as fragile as an egg shell, ready to fly apart at a moment's notice. She couldn't decide if Mark's concern and obvious shame of what he done made her feel better or worse.

I can't deal with that right now, she thought. *Mark wants me to meet another human, the reason for all of this.* She stood just out of sight behind the lamp, peeking around it so she could see the shape on the bed as Mark laid the bowl and box on the stand. Clicking on the light (she still marveled at the simple switch it took to turn on the sun) he reached down to wake the lump.

Sky readied herself to face anything. After all, this human was going to be a bigger addition of her brother, and one that sounded less likely to release her than Mark. No doubt she'd love owning her, making her do things to amuse her all day. She stirred and shifted while Sky felt her rage grow hotter inside her. This simpleton meant she could no longer go outside in the sun, or dance in the moonlight, or be with her friends. She must be...

Sky's thoughts chopped off. The covers had finally slid far enough that she could at last see Mary. A kind of horrified pity welled up inside her. The human looked so thin, like hide laying on a skeleton. Hints of beauty still remained, but overshadowed by the ravages of disease. Every movement seemed to cause her pain, and her voice when she asked Mark why he'd come into her room sounded reedy and faint, even to her.

By all the powers of nature. She prayed. Never had she seen anything look so bad. It had to be the grace of the gods that kept her alive.

"I've brought breakfast." Mark spoke firmly, but tenderly with a hint of pleading.

"I'll be okay. Just...leave it on the stand. I just need to rest a bit longer." Mary told him, her eyes fluttering shut.

Sky watched the agony contort Mark's face a moment before he became stern again. "Mary, don't make me get mom. You need to eat, and you need your medicine." He turned cajoling. "I've brought a surprise for you. Something you've always wanted. You'll love it, you just have to have a little soup and your medicine. Please Mary? You're really going to want to see this."

"I'll see it later Mark. I promise. Just let me sleep." She mumbled. There came a gasp as Mark plopped down on the side of the bed.

"Well, if you're too tired to sit up and eat, then I'll fluff your pillow and feed you myself." He grinned cheekily, but Sky could feel his desperation through their link, like a straining deer caught in a hunter's snare.

"All right." Mary groaned, temporarily routed. She tried to pull herself upright, and it took three tries before she succeeded, Mark helping her carefully.

Her lower body seemed to be in even worse shape than her face. Sky counted every rib in her body, the girl had to be starving, and yet she struggled against every mouthful it seemed. First complaining the soup was too hot, then too cold, he was too rough. There wasn't much energy in it, and most of it seemed aimed more at driving him away and letting her rest than anything else. Mark wasn't having any of it however, and stubbornly kept feeding her, countering her complaints and telling her of things about town and people Sky didn't know but suspected were her friends. There weren't very many.

"All right." Mary said a little while later. Sky had watched the whole ordeal with something approaching understanding. Mark loved his sister, obviously, and Mary loved him, but thought she was in too much pain to even want to stay, except for him. Sky found it painful to watch, but Mark's tenderness and willingness to put up with any abuse to help touched her in ways she hadn't expected. Now she eagerly waited for her cue.

"You've fed me and given me my meds. What do you want to show me little brother?" her voice carried an edge of exhaustion in it, but sounded more alert than a few minutes ago.

Mark breathed deep. "I've, uh, brought a new friend for you to meet." He managed.

Mary frowned, looking about her room. "Where?" she asked. "Who?"

"Her name is Sky." He told her, gesturing towards the lamp. Sky stepped out of hiding, absently brushing the skirt. Mary looked right over her head, expecting to see someone at the door. Sky flitted to Mark's hand, catching Mary's attention. She landed on Mark's hand. "And she's a fairy." Mark finished.

For an anxious moment, Sky thought the shock might have been too much. Mary's face drained of what little color she had left, and her eyes were so huge the irises seemed to become mere points.

"Hello, Mary." Sky said hesitantly.

Mary drew breath slowly. "H-how?" She managed at last.

"Well, um." Mark squirmed for a moment but caught Sky's warning glance. Mad as she was, she didn't want Mary to suffer any guilt. It would kill her, she was certain. "It's not important right now." He ad-libbed. "I'll tell you later, if you really want to know."

"I do." Mary whispered, staring at Sky in awe and wonder. "H-hello there." She extended her hand as if she were reaching to pet a strange dog.

Sky flitted gracefully onto the open palm. "Hello Mary." Sky said softly.

"Did she just speak?" Mary looked over her head at Mark.

He laughed. "Yes. She sounds like a violin, doesn't she?"

"She does, indeed." Mary returned her attention back to sky, who felt the smile on her face broaden. The palm beneath her feet, so full of weakness and pain mere moments ago, now felt stronger, the agony smothered for a time by a wonder so strong and deep, it seemed as bottomless as the sea.

"I'm glad to meet you." She inclined her head in a polite greeting.

"She says she's happy to meet you. Mark explained. Mary went on point faster than a hunting wolf.

"You can understand her?"

"Yes. I'm still learning a lot about her. I found this book and..."

"Book! Will you show me? I want to learn too!"

Sky felt her stomach plummet. Mark seemed just as ready to give her True Name as he had been to capture her. Some of her panic must have shown on her face because he smiled sadly.

“Sorry sis. Though I did not believe it at the time, I used what could only be a magic spell, and I used up all the ingredients called for. I did it so I could convince her to meet you. There is nothing left to try again.” He brightened. “But I could still look through the book and see if there is a way for us to learn Sky’s language together!”

Mary looked hopefully at her. “Did you hear that? We may yet be able to talk together! Oh!” She laughed, it sounded like the caw of a crow, but happier and more lively than she had shown all morning. “But I’m being rude. My name is Mary, it’s a pleasure to meet you Sky.” She bent her head, but nearly could not get it back up.

Sky grabbed Mary’s hand as the bed rocked. Mark had gotten up and was turning to leave.

“I’ll leave you two to talk for a bit.” He grinned. “Don’t stay up too long, you need your rest so you can ask Sky more questions later and we can look at the book.” He squirmed, a new thought had apparently occurred to him. This one apparently wasn’t going to be easy to talk about.

“In order to get sky a dress I had to buy you a fairy doll. I’m going to present it to you later this afternoon or this morning.” He explained sheepishly. He seemed more and more unsure of how to explain. Mary peered at him quizzically.

“The thing is, mom and dad aren’t going to understand about the fairy. I was hoping we could keep Sky safe by keeping her a secret between us. So perhaps you could pretend to be surprised when I deliver the doll to you? Not,” he hastened to explain, “that we have to lie to them or anything but maybe... We just don’t tell them. They could freak, or take her away, or something.” He trailed off, frustrated in his efforts to convince her.

Mary smiled at Sky. “You’ll have to forgive my little brother. He’s sweet, but can’t talk to anyone to save his life.”

“Hey!” Mark objected. Both of them dissolved into giggles at his put upon face. In a huff, he left.

Sky wiped the tears of laughter from her eyes as she turned back to Mary. The human girl held a matching grin for her and she went to sit on the palm again when Mary collapsed backwards, her

hands slumping slowly to the bed. A pained groan came from her lips as her head sank into the pillows. Sky managed to get into the air, aided by the fact that Mary held her hand up as long as she could.

"Sorry." Mary groaned apologetically. "This isn't you, I swear."

"It's okay," she soothed, turning to go. "You're tired, I'll come back later."

"Sky?" The pained edge in Mary's voice stopped her. "Will you stay here with me, please? So I know this isn't a dream?"

She hesitated, this was an order she didn't have to obey, but the obvious need on Mary's face cut at her. She made her choice.

"Of course I'll stay." She settled into a cross-legged position just above her stomach, leaning against the edge of the covers as comfortably as she could. "I'm not a dream, and I wish you understand me. I have so much to tell you, so much to explain. You have to get better, you know. Your brother has done so much for you." She admitted softly. *Mark's efforts on her behalf are quite something*, Mary realized. *To set out to catch something you didn't believe in to save someone you love takes an uncommon courage, worthy of the old days.*

Though Mary's breathing grew more ragged, she struggled to keep her eyes open and fixed on sky, as if afraid that she would vanish if they fluttered closed. Sky racked her brains, thinking of a way to calm her fears. A memory surfaced in her mind, when she had been very young and the night frightened her and made her hide her face under her petal pillow. The warm voice of her mother singing old songs chased her fears away. One such ballad came to her, and she started to sing. Mary's head relaxed and her eyes fluttered close. Sky's voice swept her away to bright lands and happier days, despite not knowing the words. This is Sky's song:

*In the early days of the world,
When heroes walked with hearts more bold,
Great deeds and works were wrought
And in leafy halls was great knowledge taught*

*There came in this age, a beautiful fey
Hair midnight, eyes stormy grey
Blessed with grace, a vision fair
She lived with nary a care.*

In the wood of her kin

*Is where she first saw him
A hero most bold,
But grave wounds he did show*

*He'd come from the East,
Fighting chaos; man and beast
Sorely hurt, burdened with worry and care
He was on his way home to western lands so fair*

*Bella watched from the branches of her mighty oak
But it was not long 'ere he spoke
"I know your there," he called to her
"What manner of creature art thou?" his speech began to slur*

*Bella could see he wouldn't last long
He would soon leave, leaving undone his song
That pierced her heart with its mournful sound both terrible and
great
She made a choice, she'd change his fate*

*She flew from her tree with its leaves of gold
And placed them on this warrior bold
Granting him her gift of grace
Life returned to his face*

*Beormin the Warrior stood up that day
From the place he thought he'd stay
He looked in his hand at the tiny fey
So fair, he thought, too beautiful to say*

*He tried to thank her for her help,
But she sank and his words died without a yelp
Bella had given all to save this man
His grief and pain so great that to tell us none can*

*He beat his breast, hot tears did flow
Like rivers pouring over chasm high to pool below
He cradled this creature innocent
And her deed he tried to repent*

*But Bella shook her raven head
And whispered her faint words of encouragement
Giving one last smile and then
Her light went out, like it'd never been.*

*Beormin vowed she would not die,
Not for his, a warrior cold and sly
He knew of tales of old
Told in stories of the Wold*

*Of a Master of Doom, cold and cruel,
A creature, it is said, that is part ghoul
And claimed mastery over death*

Giving life or doom with cold breath

*With iron resolve and determination grim,
He gathered his sword and armor to him
Bella he placed in a magic satchel round his neck
To keep her safe through his trek*

*He rode far and wide to castles most fell
In dungeons grim he had adventures to tell
But one dark master he sought above all else
The Master of Death*

*Finally, alone he dared confront
The Dark One in his own haunt
Demanding Bella be restored
To life and grace, without discord*

*The Dark Lord laughed
One puny man, against his wrath?
He summoned ghouls and beasts of dread
And cried "to the hounds this fool be fed!"*

*Beormin's strength did not falter
His sword smote alike on fur or halter
Until the Dread Lord's minions lay around him dead
All but one without a head*

*The Dark Lord felt the bit of fear,
This man had the strength of a wolf and speed of a deer
But he wouldn't bend,
This soul he'd banish to dark lands he'd send!*

*In Anger's Wrath he pulled his blade
Made of Fire and Shadow that did not fade
Beormin's steel met fiery smash
In a hall-shaking crash.*

*For untold hours they fought
But through Beormin's bravery bought
A stumble on the part of the Dark Lord
A mistake to make he could ill afford.*

*Beormin defeated his foe of dread
And offered Bella's life in exchange for his head
The Dark Lord agreed to spare her life
And return her soul with no more strife*

*He knew this man would bring him to bended knee,
His dominance would be shattered, he would have to flee,
This chance encounter would he forever rue,
He had to send him across the sea to drown this fool!*

Grace, he warned, he could not give

*She'd waste away in torment, her health an open sieve.
Only one way she'd be free,
Beormin must take her beyond the Sea*

*They must flee, he told them, to the Final Lands,
Where the immortals stand
And hope is held aloft in fiery flame
The abode of heroes, where danger is tame*

*The Dark Lord worked, Bella returned to life and limb,
Beormin had to hurry to the port of Brimb
They rode together, in joy they basked
But Bella's health was fading fast*

*In Brimb Beormin found
No boat to buy in all the town
A monster came, they say,
And stole all the boats away*

*One alone he did see,
A tiny dinghy, on the shore's lee
A boat, he was promised, tall and sleek
If on the serpent vengeance he'd wreak*

*Beormin agreed, he could feel the march of time
And rowed the dinghy amid a trail of slime
To a cave befouled with Serpent's breath,
And rotting smell of sailor's death*

*He cried his challenge to the creature, his torch shining bright
The serpent emerged, what a sight!
A hundred feet long, banded red and black, with a hard ridge
along his back.*

*He lunged at Beormin, his jaws agape,
Intending to devour him, he was too hungry to wait
Beormin saw his moment was right
The serpent gave him the opportunity to strike,
He stabbed the serpent in the brain
Becoming Beormin the Serpent's Bane*

*The Black Lord cried aloud,
His power broke, his body darkness did enshroud
In defeat, to wait on time's endless wheel
Until some other power he would steal*

*Yet this affront he could not stand
Nor allow Beormin to return to land
With last gasp of magic dying
He gave the monster strength for death defying
Feats
For Beormin he was to beat*

*The snake spasmed, the boat he shattered
Casting Beormin to the sea all bruised and battered
To those on shore who watched in horror
It seemed to be the end of Beor*

*Yet mighty beats the heart of the warrior
When a quest is undone, he does not forbore
No danger hold him nor doom lay claim
This man of men the bards proclaim*

*Calm he waded from the surf
In plain view of crowd and hearth
Overjoyed they built a boat
The finest ever to float*

*Carved with graceful trees and flowers beloved by fey
Given a serpent's head to keep danger away
A sail as white as swan's wing
A golden bell for her to sing*

*Upon this craft Beormir the Serpent's Bane and Bella the Fey
Did embark, casting off and sailing away
They braved storm and wave, great fish and monsters sway
Until they set foot on the golden land of hope
And walked, together at last, up the slope
Passing from all knowledge, by kith or kin
The lady Bella and Beormin*

At the end of her song, the only sound came from Mary's rhythmic breathing.

"Sleep well, Mary." Sky whispered. She reached up and kissed the end of her nose.

Following Mary's request not to leave her alone, Sky took the time to explore the room.

Pictures of Mary and Mark were most prevalent, showing the two at the park, on a waterslide together, or at some celebration. Occasionally, they were joined by two older additions of each other, who Sky assumed must be their parents.

How very different she looks, Sky mused, lingering near one of a smiling, fully fleshed young girl with her arm around a younger Mark. They seemed happy together. She felt a momentary pang of loss for her own friends. She wondered if she'd ever see them again. *Of course I will*, she told herself. She believed Mark could be convinced to eventually let her go.

I'm not so sure of that, a sly voice whispered. *Look how much Mary means to him. It's plain to any eye. If he thinks we can bring Mary back to him, he'll keep us here no matter the cost, and he has the power over us to do it.*

It would be the right thing to do, Sky told the voice fiercely. *No creature should suffer like this. If I can help simply by staying and talking, then I will. She will get better with care, and then I can be free.*

Keep telling yourself that when you fly to their hand, happy to be their pet and the glades of your people are beyond call or desire. The voice spoke contemptuously. *Any price would be worth it to be free.*

Sky knew the answer to that one. *No. Some prices are too high.*

The mocking voice faded amongst derisive laughter. Sky shuddered at the conversation, for it seemed to be hinting at something dark lying on her soul, which made her afraid. She slid onto the pillow next to Mary's gently snoring head, and stared at the ceiling, pondering.

She was still there when Mark came back in. He smiled at his sister's breathing, which seemed easier now, and looked around for her. He finally noticed her on the pillow and beckoned. Sky rolled slowly to her feet, discovering a flaw about dresses! They are absolutely useless when trying to roll to someone's feet! *Curse these stupid things,* she muttered. By the time she regained her feet, she felt very hot.

Mark appeared to take no notice, asking in low tones why she hadn't gone back to her bowl when Mary had gone asleep.

"She asked if I could stay," Sky told him simply, shrugging. It seemed the answer least likely to get her in trouble, and it was true. *Pet.* The voice whispered.

"Oh." He looked at Mary, then at the clock. "Do you want to try and hide in here or go back to my room? Mom and Dad are up and I'm going to present the doll soon."

She thought for a moment, eyeing the room. The small shelf above the closet caught her eye. Trophies cluttered the entire length, showcasing various athletic pursuits. Many reached nearly to the ceiling. *I could easily hide behind those,* she thought.

Mark looked down at her when she turned back. "I think I will hide." She announced.

“Okay.” Mark agreed. “Be careful.” He warned.

Sky could feel his concern and anxiety, which gave comfort to her. She smiled reassuringly. “I’ll be fine.”

Mark nodded and left. Sky landed on the pillow again. Reaching over, she pushed against Mary. There was no response. Realizing she was too small to make any headway in this way. She needed something else. *I’ll have to use my magic*, she thought. *I hope I have enough power*. The thought of making a small orb of light above Mary’s closed eyes appealed to her, it should be able to make her awaken.

Emptying her mind, she summoned all the power to her that she could, to make a light bright enough. She felt completely unprepared for the raging torrent that filled her, like a wild river that had been squeezed into a narrow canyon and found the end blocked up. Enough power filled her for ten fairies! *How is this possible?* She marveled, ignoring the sweat that dripped down her nose. She had to get rid of the power before she crisped!

Already she could hear Mark in the room across the hall, getting that doll. Releasing the magic in one bright flash above the bed, Sky staggered in surprise. The light exploded in a ball of lightning brighter than a noonday sun, though oddly she saw that it did not seem to touch the door or windows and alert the rest of the household.

Mary woke with a start. Sky shushed her quickly, not wanting to explain what had happened, until she had a clue what had. “It’s all right. It’s just me!”

The human’s wide eyes fell on her with outstretched arms and she calmed slightly. Finally, she giggled. “Golly, that’s quite a way to wake up!” Her voice sounded stronger than before, which gave her hope.

Sky nodded agreement, relieved beyond words. But a terrible feeling of danger came over her, and she darted towards the shelf aware of Mary’s gaze on her.

She made it behind a tall trophy crowned with an athletic girl in mid-leap, a ball flying from her hands. She was dressed in a two-piece that left her midriff bare and in her view, did not seem proper

even for undergarments. She crouched behind the base just in time, for the door to the room opened. Sky leaned out slightly to watch.

Mark held his breath as they walked in, one after another. His parents stopped dead in front of him, and he leaned over to see what caught their eye, deathly afraid it had been Sky. Instead, a wondrous sight greeted him. Mary sat smiling at them from the bed, leaning against her pillows without any help at all.

"Hi mom, hi dad." Her voice still sounded pained and weak, but stronger than it had been in months.

Sky is working miracles. He thought in awe.

"Hi sweetie." Her mother responded automatically, still grappling with the shock that held her in its grip.

"How are you feeling?" His father sounded much the same as he sat on the edge of the bed.

"Better." Mary hugged him weakly. "Mark gave me my meds this morning with my breakfast soup."

"Oh." Their mother came to sit on the other side. "That was nice of him."

"Yes, it was." Mary hugged her as well. "I think he wanted to show me something important, but he wouldn't tell me what." She explained. "It seemed important to him."

"Yes." Their mother's smile trembled slightly, her eyes bright with tears. "He worked hard on finding just the gift for you."

Everyone turned to Mark, who felt acutely embarrassed as he pulled the fairy doll from behind his back. It looked nothing like Sky, with its blond hair cut so very short and the fake wings stuck out the back. He had mounted it on the stand in what he suspected was a clumsy fashion as it didn't look very sturdy at all, and the red dress did not look the same on the doll as the white dress did on Sky. All in all, he thought it was a poor thing and was almost afraid of bringing it out.

You couldn't tell from the noises of delight from Mary that she had suspected it beforehand. She asked to see it closer, and Mark brought it over and handed it to her. She held it in her hands and turned

it over and over, murmuring something about the way she was dressed or how neat her wings were. Mark felt relieved that Mary was able to act that way about the doll, he had no doubt that she found it dull and uninteresting after seeing Sky, but she almost made him believe that she didn't.

At last she placed the fairy doll on the nightstand. She smiled at Mark, but he anxiously noted the utter fatigue in her eyes.

"Thanks, Mark." Exhaustion tinged her voice. "I love it."

"You're welcome, sis." Mark grinned back.

"You should sleep, honey." Their mother got up from the bed. Their father followed suit.

"Your mother's right." He rumbled. "You need to recover your strength."

Mary nodded as she slowly slumped and slid back under her covers like a rabbit going down its hole, rolling onto her side. They filed out, Mark hanging in the back. His eyes flickered towards the shelf where Sky was hiding. He didn't see her, but strangely he could *feel* her enough to point where her hiding spot was exactly.

I'm going to have to study this book a little more thoroughly, he decided. This entire thing made him very uncomfortable, and it would be best if he could see if there was a way to forget Sky's True Name, or set her free after his sister healed.