

# THE FAERY LOVER

by

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Seychelle was visiting her grandmother in Arkansas. It was her summer vacation and that meant freedom. She had arrived four days ago, but it had been raining, off and on, the entire time. This did not align with her idea of freedom. She was not one of those kids that liked to be contained whether it was physically, emotionally or mentally. The very reason she enjoyed spending her summers at her grandmother's country home, was because there were so many cool places to find and hang out in for hours.

Seychelle was not your average teenager. She would much rather run the countryside exploring than laze on the couch watching television like most of her friends liked to do. She enjoyed reading, but since she was a fast reader, she had already finished the novel she had brought, which left her little else to do but stare out the window at the drizzling rain. Last night, however, there was an exciting lightshow, with jagged shards of lightning cutting through the blackened sky.

Since the incessant rain had kept Seychelle in the house for days, her grandmother attempted to keep her busy by helping in the kitchen; shucking corn, canning sugar beans and grinding up cooked apples to make homemade apple sauce. For a city girl it was rather novel, at first, but the novelty soon wore off by the third day. By the fourth day she was itching to get out of the house and into her favorite place, nature.

After the heavy downpour last night, Seychelle was happily surprised to wake up to a beam of sunlight flooding into her room. She quickly got out of bed and ran to the window, pushing it open, she breathed deeply. The morning was bright and sparkling with glistening dewdrops strung like iridescent beads throughout the garden and on the leaves of trees. This was the first morning that Seychelle had seen the sun since she had arrived in Arkansas but even at ten in the morning, the air was warm and humid. Summers in Arkansas was typically hot and sticky, so that by midday, it was

hot enough to just want to hang out in the shade of the enclosed porch where her grandmother kept a standing fan blowing back and forth, even into the nighttime hours.

Seychelle knew if she wanted to beat the heat, she was going to have to get going, so she did not even bother to change out of her short baby doll nightgown. Instead, she pulled on some jean shorts and slipped into her sandals. She quietly tiptoed down the hall and slipped out the back door, making sure the screen did not flip back alerting her grandmother that she was leaving the house. She did not want to get caught cooking all day in the kitchen again.

She made her way stealthily through the garden and opened the garden gate. Unfortunately, the hinges were rusty and squeaked loudly before flipping back with a loud bang. "Seychelle! Is that you?" yelled her grandma. "Where you off to?" Without giving an answer, Seychelle turned around and started running as fast as she could.

She was free! Finally, she felt like she could breathe. She stretched out her arms like a bird flying across the green fields towards the woods. As a young girl she had been a wild child, but now, on the brink of adulthood she felt reticent to grow up. What if she lost the magic? What if she no longer felt the wonder of life? No adult, she knew of, cared a whit about magic. All they seemed to care about was everyday stuff like paying bills and going to work, and in truth, usually scoffed at anything that even hinted of magic. She began to slow down as she neared the trees, coming to a complete stop, she stood silently, looking into the dense woods, just as a scary thought crossed her mind. What if she became her mother? She shuddered, as a sudden cool breeze blew through the trees and across her face.

The narrow footpath that lay before her, made her want to feel the earth on her bare feet, so she quickly kicked off her shoes, abandoning her sandals at the tree line, she made her way onto the path and into the sun dappled woodland. She walked, for what felt like no more than five minutes, until she spotted a tree stump next to the narrow path. She sat down for a few minutes to enjoy her surroundings and her solitude. She began wiggling her toes, which made the corners of her mouth turn up, which made her giggle, when surprisingly, she heard another giggle. Alerted to someone else's presence, Seychelle stopped smiling and looked up, wondering where the laughter was coming from?

“Hello! Who’s there?” she asked, as she looked through the dense trees. She sat very still, listening, but all she heard was the singing of birds and the whispering wind. Maybe, she thought, it was just the wind playing tricks on her.

Just then, a tall dark shadow ran lickety-split through the dappled light. It moved so fast it was more like a blur as it disappeared behind one of the trees. Seychelle jumped up and ran over to the tree it had gone behind, but when she peeked around the trunk, there was nothing there. She walked back to where she had been sitting when she saw the shadow once more, as it darted behind yet another tree.

At this point, she was getting creeped out and decided it was probably best to get out of there. When, from behind, she felt a light tap on her shoulder. She jumped and turned around but the figure before her shone so brightly she thought a beam of sunlight had pierced her eyes. She put up her hand to shade her sight from the brightness. When her vision began to adjust, she found herself looking into two golden eyes that peered back at her, yet instead of being startled, she was strangely captivated!

“Where did you come from?” she whispered. The bright light around the figure dimmed slightly and she found herself looking at the most beautiful young man she had ever seen. He was more than beautiful. He was perfect, like he had been airbrushed, almost too perfect to be real.

He gave her another crooked smile as he bent down next to her ear. “I live on the other side,” he whispered. His breath on her ear sent chills up her spine.

She took this to mean, that he meant on the other side of the highway, which would make him their neighbor. This made her feel somewhat more comfortable with talking to a perfect stranger in the woods. “Oh! You must be the boy my grandma said that lived around here. What’s your name?”

The young man narrowed his eyes as if debating whether he wanted to tell her. “You first,” he countered. “What’s yours?”

She thought this rather cagy on his part but decided to tell him anyway. “Seychelle.”

“That’s a beautiful name. Was it a gift?” he asked.

She thought this an odd question but answered it anyway. “No. Just my birth name,” she said, giving him a funny look.

There was something about his eyes that drew her towards him and the closer she got the more intense his eyes became. They were a very unusual

shade, like burnished gold edged with a deep moss green. One eye being greener than the other. The difference in color of his two eyes was somewhat disconcerting to look at. It was at this point; she noticed the clothes he was wearing. He had on a deep green vest that he wore without a shirt. The material was very unusual, almost like leaves had been stitched together like patchwork. His pants looked to be made of doe hide as there were white speckles scattered across one leg and a rope tied at his waist to keep them up. The hem of his pants was just below his knees, but his boots looked like moccasins that came up to his calves. A blue feather was entwined in his long, silvery hair and fluttered with the breeze. Across his chest was two wavy blue lines. Seychelle could not tell if they were painted on or tattooed.

As she stood gazing at him, she began to realize that the woods had gone silent. She could no longer hear the birds, or the rustling of leaves overhead or the babbling creek in the distance. A strange feeling came over her, and even though she continued to come closer towards him, a cold shudder caused goosebumps to rise on her skin. She thought this quite odd as the day had been extremely warm. This feeling alarmed her, and she abruptly stopped coming forward. He smiled widely as he held out his hand coaxing her.

“Come,” he said, softly.

She gave him a hesitant glance but took his hand anyway. It was surprisingly cool to the touch and his long, graceful fingers closed around her warm hand as he began drawing her deeper into the woods and further from the familiar foot path. The underbrush was dense and tangled yet he moved the foliage easily for her to walk through and even though her feet were bare, strangely enough, she had no trouble traversing the woodland floor.

“Where are we going?” she asked, he did not reply but continued pulling her deeper into the dark woods.

They walked in silence for some time and just as she was about to pull her hand free from his, he stopped and pointed to a large, old oak tree that had a gapping cavity at its base. He let go of her hand as he walked over and went down on one knee and reached into the blackened hole, pulling out a small cake. It was encrusted with violet and green sugar in the form of an unusual sign that she had never seen before. She wondered how long it had been there in that hole. Oddly enough, it looked as though it had been freshly baked.

He opened her hand and placed the cake on her palm. It was warm, as though it *had* just come from the oven. The heat of it startled her and she quickly pulled her hand back dropping the pretty cake onto the dirt and leaves.

“Do you not want my gift?” he asked, looking at her sadly.

Seychelle had not meant to reject his gift but something inside her intuitively felt that something was obviously off. I mean, who just pulls cakes out of trees? He gathered the broken pieces together, making sure he got every crumb, and put it back into the hole. Even though she did not mean to drop it, and was sorry for spoiling his gift, she somehow felt strangely relieved that it was tucked away back into the tree.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to ruin it,” she said. “It just startled me that it was so hot!”

“No matter. Someday, I will make you another,” he said, rather sadly. He began to walk away which left her wondering if she should follow him. He looked back at her and extended his hand. “Come,” he said, giving her an encouraging flick of his wrist.

When she hesitated, he gave her a shrug of indifference and turned back around as he continued walking. She stood watching him not knowing what to do. She could no longer see the familiar path that she knew would lead her back home. As he walked away the normal sounds of the woods returned, so that now, she could hear the creaking branches overhead, the cries of hoot owls and the constant buzzing of cicadas in the surrounding trees. She had no idea where she was, and the atmosphere was quickly becoming dark and rather foreboding with the gathering clouds. Not wanting to be left alone, she hastened her step to catch up with him.

“Where are we going,” she finally asked, but she got nothing in reply.

After many minutes of walking through bushes and brambles they broke through the woodland trees and what lay before her was a great surprise and she let out a small gasp.

It was a beautiful, idyllic meadow of tall, sweet grass and wildflowers right in the middle of the woods. The clouds that had been there, just minutes before, had magically evaporated. The tall, green grass swayed in the warm breeze making the meadow appear like undulating pond water. The sun was now bright and scintillating causing the morning dew drops, clustered on each blade, to shimmer and shine like fire diamonds upon the surface of water. Bits of cotton fluff drifted in the air as dragonflies and bees

flew lazily through the warm morning. She stood in awe. She had walked in these woods many times but had never seen this place. It looked like a jeweled oasis that was more than inviting. It was enticing and pulled at her like a magnet, drawing her to enter.

As the young man continued walking ahead it was not lost on her that he too looked bright and shiny. His flaxen hair shimmered like strands of gold and his tan skin glittered in the sunlight. He moved smoothly through the undulating waves of the sparkling tall grass.

She followed in his footsteps as he made his way towards the center of the meadow. When suddenly, something buzzed past her head. Thinking it was an insect she brushed at her ear trying to swat at it. She continued walking but once again, something buzzed loudly, when from out of nowhere, something tugged at her hair. This was no slight tug. Her head was wrenched back making her stop dead in her tracks. What the hell was that, she thought, as she looked around frantically but there was nothing there. That was bizarre, she thought, and rather shocking. As she made a full circle, trying to figure out what could have pulled her hair, she realized that her strange companion could no longer be seen.

“Where are you?” she called. There was no reply but in the far distance she thought she could hear the tinkling of chimes. Was he hiding in the grass? She pushed aside the tall, green blades looking for him. As she made her way through the tall grass, she came upon a perfectly round indentation of flattened grass that was surrounded by large, fleshy mushrooms, and in the center of the circle, lay the young man on his back looking up into the bright blue sky. One leg was bent across the other and a blade of grass between his lips.

“There you are,” she said, sounding relieved as she stepped over the mushroom circle and sat down beside him. “Why didn’t you answer me?”

He took the blade of grass out of his mouth. “I did. I spoke to you in my mind and here you are!”

She gave him a dubious look and shook her head. “Okay,” she said, skeptically. She looked around admiring her surroundings. “This place is beautiful!”

He smiled up at her. When she smiled back, he pulled her down next to him. “Close your eyes and feel the warmth of the sun on your face.”

She did as he said and closed her eyes. The sound of chimes drifted upon the wind and the buzzing of insects grew even louder. She had never felt so

content in all her life. A tickle ran down her arm. When she opened her eyes, she realized he was using the blade of grass on her bare flesh. He gave her one of his lopsided grins. When she smiled back, he leaned forward and before she knew it, she was being kissed for the very first time. His lips tasted of greenery and honey. She closed her eyes and melted into the kiss. Everything seemed to stop in that moment and when she opened her eyes his golden eyes were looking back into hers. His gaze seemed to draw her deeper and deeper into his and like a moth to a flame she felt mesmerized. He looked at her knowingly, as if, he really was reading her mind. He gave a soft chuckle and lay back down.

“The strangest thing happened,” began Seychelle, “when I was looking for you in the meadow, it felt like someone had grabbed a piece of my hair and jerked my head back but when I looked nothing was there. It was really weird!”

He dismissed it saying, “Never mind about that. It was probably some little pesky creature trying to trick you.”

She could not imagine what kind of creature he was talking about but when she tried to pursue the subject, he took hold of her hand.

“Let’s talk of everything and nothing,” he said, as he kissed the back of her hand.

“I’ve never met anyone like you,” she said.

“Ha! And no doubt ever will again,” he said emphatically, which made her roll her eyes.

She was not sure how long they lay there talking, but it felt like little time had passed, and like he predicted, they talked of nothing much, but it felt to her as if the conversation was very deep and went on forever. The pungent earth and the green grass enveloped them like a soft cocoon and before she knew it, she had drifted fast asleep.

When her eyes opened again, day had inexplicably turned to night and the stars were twinkling high above in the indigo sky. She sat up feeling confused. When she looked beside her the young man was no longer there. Panicked, she stood up and looked frantically around. Was he hiding in the tall grass again? How could it be night, she asked herself. She could not have slept that long. It was summer, daylight savings time. If it was dark that meant it had to be, at least, nine at night. It had been late morning when they first arrived there. There is no way she could have slept for nine or ten hours, especially in the middle of the day.

The meadow was alive with shadows. The only thing that gave her any solace was the full, buttery moon rising over the treetops. As she approached the woods her heart began to race. The darkness of the woods frightened her. How in the world was she going to find her way back home? She admonished herself for even following that jerk. She even let him kiss her and he just left her out there alone. If he had to go, why didn't he wake her first? God, she was such an idiot to have trusted him.

She hesitated briefly at the edge of the wood, before stepping into the darkness. Strange and deformed shadows moved between trunks of trees. A large owl hooted once before taking flight, but instead of flying off, it dove straight towards her screeching as it missed her by only inches.

She dropped to the ground putting her hands protectively over her head, as she cried out into the darkness, "How could you leave me like this? I can't see a damn thing!" With tears streaming down her cheeks, she said under her breath, "How the hell am I going to find my way back home?"

At that precise moment and only a few yards away a small light came on casting a pale-yellow glow. Seychelle struggled to her feet and looked at it in amazement. As she came nearer to the light; she could see that it was an old-time lantern sitting on a stump. She had no idea where it came from or how it lit on its own, but she didn't want to take the time to figure it out. She picked it up and began to walk searching for the path that would lead her back home. She made her way carefully over the woodland floor, over rotted leaves, prickly ferns and knotted roots of trees. This time her bare feet did not fare so well, and she had no idea if she was going in the right direction or not, but there was nothing left to do but keep going forward.

Suddenly, the branches of the trees lit up with hundreds of tiny sparks of colored lights. Seychelle looked up at them in awe. They couldn't be fireflies, she reasoned, as they all lit up and came online at the same time, and they weren't winking on and off, as fireflies do. The colored sparks rose in unison and swarmed round about her once, before they flew off, transforming into colored orbs. What were these colored bubbles that appeared to be waiting for her? It seemed to her, when she walked forward, the orbs moved too? Could they be trying to lead her somewhere, she wondered, for as she continued to walk towards them, the orbs were always a few feet ahead.

In the distance she could hear strange, eerie sounds of giggling children weaving in and out of the moaning wind and rustling branches. The sound of tinkling bells seemed to be coming from the orbs, as if, that was how they

were interacting and communicating with her. Were they trying to show her the way out of the woods or trying to lure her deeper into it? When she stopped or hesitated an orb would fly up into her face, as if saying, do not stop. Do not hesitate. Keep moving. Keep following.

When a violet orb broke rank and flew right up into her face, for a fraction of a second, she thought she saw a tiny person inside. It hovered briefly as it looked into her eyes. Its own eyes were the deepest hue of violet like electric purple fire. She stared at the tiny creature in amazement and she just knew that its intentions were good and that she had nothing to fear. After this encounter she looked down and realized that she was standing on the foot path that would take her back to her grandmother's house. Excited and happy, she began to run, holding the lantern out to light her way. Within a short time she could see the lights within her grandmother's house and a huge surge of relief swept over her. She stepped out of the tree line and into the back pasture watching the swarm of colored orbs fly up into the moonlit night and get lost among the stars.

She ran quickly across the field and through the garden gate. As she entered the back porch, she could hear men's voices speaking and her grandmother crying. She opened the back door and stood quietly observing the scene. The sheriff was talking to an older man whom she did not know. Standing next to him was a young man maybe nineteen or twenty holding a rifle at his side. His free hand was on the shoulder of her weeping grandmother. As she entered, the young man looked up at her before bending down and whispering in her grandmother's ear.

Her grandma looked up with tear-stained cheeks. "Sweetheart! Where have you been?" she asked, gathering her granddaughter tightly into an embrace.

"I'm so sorry grandma. I got lost. I was so turned around I didn't know how to get back," she said, as she loosened herself from the old woman's hug.

For the next hour, the sheriff questioned her whereabouts, as they had been looking for her with several other neighbors throughout the fields and woods. Had she not heard them calling her name, he asked? When she said, no, he asked her to describe where she had gone to. She told them of meeting the boy that lived across the highway who had led her to a beautiful clearing in the woods encircled by the woodland trees. As she told them her tale, she could tell they looked concerned and downright worried.

“There ain’t no place like that in the woods,” said the boy with the rifle, adamantly.

“What did this young man look like?” asked the sheriff.

“He had long, blond hair and was very tan and tall and his eyes were bright gold.”

“What happened to him?” asked the sheriff.

“I... I don’t know really. He just disappeared on me.” She left out the part of falling asleep and was not about to mention the kiss.

“What was the boy's name?” asked her grandmother, as she well knew all the boys that lived in the area.

Seychelle looked at them sheepishly. “I don’t know. He wouldn’t say.”

The sheriff interjected, “Where did he say he lived again?”

“Well, he didn’t actually say he lived across the highway from here, but I just assumed he did when he said he lived on the other side. My grandma had mentioned that a young man lived there that she wanted me to meet.”

Her grandmother turned towards the young man that was holding the rifle. “This is the boy I was talking about Seychelle. This is Bobby.”

Seychelle stood there dumbfounded staring at him. He was tall but muscular, not thin and willowy, like the other boy. His skin was tan, but his hair was dark brown and short.

“Was this the young man you were with?” asked the sheriff.

Seychelle shook her head. “No.”

Bobby gave her a quick smile and looked relieved.

The older man turned to Bobby. “Do you know anyone like she described son?”

“Naw, there’s no one in these parts, that I know of, that looks like that. No guy around here would be caught dead with long hair.”

Seychelle’s mouth went dry, and she began to slightly tremble. Then, who had she been talking to? If he didn’t live around there, then where did he come from? She was just downright lucky, that nothing happened to her when she was asleep.

After a few more questions, the men finally left, and after apologizing to her grandmother again, she sought the sanctuary of her bedroom. She lay looking out the window from the safety of her bed as her thoughts turned to the stranger that she had encountered. She recalled how beautifully shiny he was and how his golden eyes had pulled her into them, his kiss still burning on her lips.

Where was this place, he had taken her? Bobby had said there was no meadow in the middle of the woods, and she had been in those woods plenty of times and had never come across it. And how could she have just fallen asleep in the middle of the day? Who was he or perhaps the question should be, what was he? He looked too beautiful, too shiny and bright to have been real. Was he only a dream? Could it all have been just a dream?

In the years that followed, the memory began to fade, as dreams usually do, and try as she might, she could not recall the details of that day but there was one image that continued to haunt her well into her adult life. She could not forget those golden green eyes staring back into hers.