

FANTASY

Chrysalis

Amy Lynch

The girl raced through the rain, paper-thin shoes soaked and hand-stitched dress ragged and fraying. Her legs ached, but scars old and new on both mind and body drove her onward still toward the edge of the wood. This wood had always been her solace from the rest of her life, standing silent vigil and awaiting her return. Her family had never approved of anything she did; their indignation spared neither who she was, nor her frolicking in the wood. The old stories spoke of dangerous spirits and creatures within the wood, but she never found any of the sort, only comfort and friendship.

It was that friend she sought now, for the sharp words and the hurt could no longer be soothed; it had to be escaped. Her father's words still rang in her mind, calling out the name that wasn't hers—reprimanding her for not being someone she wasn't nor could ever be. She had tried, but she was not that and could never be. But still, her father, mother, and others berated her endlessly. Her only respite was the wood and her friend within.

As the girl neared the wood, her breath heaved—the tears mixing with the rain, her vision blurring as she took those last few steps towards the wood's edge. Finally, that last step came. She stumbled across the threshold and collapsed to her knees with a thump.

Within the wood, no rain fell but that from her own eyes, and even the sound of the rainstorm became distant and near-silent. The only sound that echoed out into the dense wood was the girl's cries.

Crumpled on the forest floor, the girl's sobbing went on, never ceasing for more than a moment. But in the midst of that dark, ancient wood, a hand cupped her chin, and a familiar oaken voice graced her pained ears.

“There you are. This one had missed you—what upsets you so?”

The girl’s sadness faded as she looked up at the towering, feminine form of her sylvan friend. She knelt down, pulling the girl into her warm embrace. The girl melted into the hug; a touch of compassion was all it took for her walls to fall away.

“I’m ready now... please, take me away...”

Her friend narrowed her eyes, the irises a soft, earthen green that ignited slightly. “Are you certain? There is no going back once you follow me under the hills. And you know the cost...”

The girl nodded her head, burying her nose into her friend’s chest. Painfully, she whispered. “Take it. This name is not mine, might as well make it official.”

Her friend nodded, raising one hand from the embrace, to snap her oaken fingers.



The rising scent of fresh bread was the first thing to hit the girl’s nose, and she lifted her head from the embrace to take in the sights now surrounding her. Rather than the dense forest, she found herself and her friend in a great field of bountiful green with a great tower woven from leaf and wood before them.

Her friend stood, holding her hand. “If you truly want this... follow me.”

The girl followed without hesitation. For her, it had been a long time coming.

As the pair ascended the tower, fluttering sprites and wisps of light danced around the tower, swarming the newcomer curiously. At first, the girl flinched at their approach, but a quick reassuring grip assuaged her hesitancy. She examined the inner sections of the tower as they ascended the flowing staircase; it was painted with shimmering and vibrant pigments, as if flower petals covered nearly every surface. She squinted at their brightness, her bruised feet and ragged shoes anathema on such graceful steps. The girl then caught a glimpse of the grand double doors that awaited at the head of the staircase.

As the two passed through the gate, the girl was awestruck by the visage of the one they were to meet. Sitting atop a throne of interlaced living wood and vibrant petals was a woman who measured at least twice that of even her towering friend. She sat with bare legs crossed, as she evaluated the girl before her.

Her light, commanding voice echoed out. "And what have you brought me this time, Citana?"

Citana knelt on instinct and urged the girl to do the same. She followed, but with far less precision than her friend.

Citana spoke up. "My queen Titania, I bring before you a mortal girl seeking renewal and rebirth amongst us."

Titania raised a delicate eyebrow, standing and stepping forward from her throne toward the kneeling human girl. "Is that so, girl?"

The girl nodded, sweat beading across her brow as she felt the Queen's gaze upon her. "I—yes, yes, that's right. I know—"

"Ah-ah-ah, speak only when told to, dear," Titania corrected.

"Ah, my apologies." The girl stammered, causing a light smirk to form on the queen's emerald lips.

“Then you know the cost? I am to have your name, and your service, until I deem it otherwise. Speak.”

The girl took a steadying breath, calling back to rehearsed lines. “My name is not my own, but you may have it nonetheless, along with my service, my queen.”

Titania reached down and plucked at thin air close to the girl. A string of faerie runes peeled out of the girl’s neck and wrapped around Titania’s finger. “If your name is not your own, then it is of no use to me. But... I shall take your service. I shall give you a new name more befitting of your soul than that ill-fitting tripe.”

The girl’s stressed brow finally started to relax.

Titania bent down and placed a hand on the girl’s shoulder. “Then hear me now. I accept your pledge of service. In return, as is proper, you shall have a place within my court and my realm. Rise anew, Léan.”

As the girl moved to stand, she felt warmth rise inside of her—she at first thought it was joy, of which there was no short supply, but soon found it to be more literal. A radiant light enveloped her, rushing out of every pore and consuming her form.

The girl expected pain, but found only solace. The peace she had known fleetingly in the wood was now solid within herself, an enlightenment of which she could previously only dream. Soon, the light fell away, leaving only Léan, standing in her new form. Her hair was long and light, her skin soft and new, and she stood taller than ever before, now equal to her towering friend.

Tears welled up in her eyes, and she could not help but cry out in pure and utter joy. “I... I’m me!”

The newborn fae raced to embrace her old friend Citana with her own arms for the first time. “Thank you... thank you so much.”