

## Chapter Six



### *Once Upon a Time...*

**T**hey are called *fairy tales* because that's how many of them began... as tales told by the fairies. Some are true, some are not. Some, like this one, started out as a true story told by the fairies and was overheard by a human at some time. In their world, Corey and Jasen know this story as the tale of 'Sleeping Beauty', although the truth of it is much different than what they know. The true story, as told by the fairies, goes like this...

Once upon a time, in a kingdom far away, there lived a kind king and a gentle queen. They tried for many years to have a child and it was the most joyous of miracles when the queen discovered one day that she was to be a mother. Soon after, the king and queen had a beautiful baby girl and they named her *Elayne*."

Bridgette looked at Elayne with a smile and Elayne seemed to blush a bit in the firelight.

“Now at most times, in most places, fairies do not get along well with humans... or each other. Fairies are all very different and mostly tend to stay with their own tribes. This was a unique and special time, though. In this kingdom, at this time, fairies lived in peace... with each other and with humans. So, to celebrate the wondrous birth of their baby girl, the king and queen decided to have a banquet and invite the fairies from all over the kingdom. Fairies of every type came... sylphs and dryads. Elves and phouka. Hobgoblins and Leprechauns. Sprites, pixies, spriggans, and mer-people. Even redcaps and boggles. In this rare time of peace, all of the fairy world came together to celebrate the birth of Princess Elayne.”

Here, Corey gave a quick, anxious look at the giant tree “Albero” behind us and the horned Dryan beside us. I think he was picturing all of those strange-looking creatures together in one place. He gulped nervously, then turned back to Bridgette as she continued.

“Now by some unfortunate accident, one of the fairies did not receive an invitation. She was an ancient fairy queen named Sidhera. Sidhera was very old and very powerful, and lived by herself away from humans and other fairies. When news of the banquet came to her and she discovered that she wasn’t invited... she took the news rather unwell.”

Here, Dryan grunted noisily. “‘Rather unwell’! Ha! That’s an understatement!”

Bridgette looked sadly down at the fire. “Yes, well. Her pride was wounded and she took the mistake as a personal insult by the humans. She decided to come to the celebration anyway, and when she arrived... she was angry.

She had chosen to come in the form of a withered old crone. She stood bent over with a black cane in hand and a dark hood covering her head. When she stepped into the banquet hall that day, a hush fell over the crowd and everyone, humans and fairies alike, watched her fearfully.

The king and queen, realizing their dreadful mistake, quickly ordered a place for Sidhera at the banquet table. While they apologized fearfully, Sidhera sat without a word. Soon the celebration continued.

During the feast, though, while everyone else laughed and celebrated, I noticed Sidhera watching the sleeping baby coldly, and I knew that she was planning something dark and terrible. When we finished eating, I decided to hide myself behind a nearby tapestry where I could watch without being seen.

After dinner, the fairies presented their gifts to the baby princess. As I said before, this day was special. On this day, fairies from every tribe in the land were there, and the baby Elayne received magical gifts from all of them. Unsurpassed beauty was but one of her gifts. Elayne was given a long list of virtuous traits and useful skills. The gift of song, the gift of grace, and even such gifts as fine horsemanship and precise archery. Some of the fairies, like the mischievous spriggans for example, chose some rather... unique gifts to bestow, but all were in good spirit. The baby was blessed again and again with a wealth of wondrous spells and enchantments.

Soon, it seemed, all of the fairies gathered there that day had given their magical gifts... until only Sidhera remained (and myself, still hidden behind the tapestry.) When she stood and everyone realized that she, too, was about to bestow a gift, the banquet hall became silent and fearful.

Everyone watched as Sidhera walked slowly up to the baby, her black cane tapping the marble floor in the silence. Before she spoke, she removed her hood to reveal her twisted, ugly face.

‘Such a beautiful young baby.’ she said to the watching crowd. ‘So blessed with so many wonderful gifts. Now it seems that she has everything she could possibly need. Beauty, eloquence, wit. I can think of nothing more to give her...’

Sidhera began to turn away and the king and queen, who had been holding their breath fearfully, sighed with relief.

Then, Sidhera stopped. Her ugly face twisted into a chilling smile. She turned back to the baby and said ‘Although...now that I think on it, perhaps I do have the perfect gift for the child, after all.’

The queen let out a small gasp and the gathered fairies watched in awful anticipation as Sidhera stepped up to the cradle once more.

Sidhera looked down at the baby girl. ‘You shall indeed have a wonderful life and enjoy all of the virtues bestowed upon you. You shall live in happiness, surrounded by those you love and those who love you in return...’ Sidhera paused here and the gathered crowd seemed to be relieved to hear such a thing coming from the withered old hag. Then, she continued. ‘You shall live happily, that is, until the day of your sixteenth birthday. On that day, before the sun sets, you shall prick your pampered, royal hand upon the spindle of a common spinning wheel... and you shall die.’

A roar arose from the crowd and the king and queen rushed forward to snatch their newborn child away from the curse. It was too late, though. The moment the terrible words were out of Sidhera’s mouth, the birth-curse was set in place. The throng of gathered fairies descended upon Sidhera, but before they reached her, she had vanished.”

Bridgette paused in her story here and looked around the campfire. Corey sat beside me, wide-eyed and on the edge of his root-woven seat. Elayne stared into the fire, a faraway look in her eyes. Tears glistened lightly on her cheeks in the firelight. Strangely, I felt the strong urge to move over beside her and hold her hand to comfort her.

Bridgette took a deep breath and continued. “There was one thing Sidhera had not counted on, though... and that was me. Because I hid there behind the tapestry, Sidhera thought that all of the fairies had already bestowed their gifts. That would have made it impossible for her terrible curse to be

undone. As the crowd milled about in chaos and confusion, I stepped out from my hiding place and approached the king and queen. They held the baby Elayne in their arms, weeping. When the other fairies saw me, the room fell silent and watched to see what I would do.

‘Good king and gentle queen,’ I said as I approached. ‘It is a terrible thing that Sidhera has done here today. A powerful and wicked curse she has set upon your family. Although the laws of the magicks prevent me from undoing her dreaded spell, I may be able to offer some light of hope.’

Upon hearing my words, the king and queen looked at me hopefully.

‘Sweet Princess Elayne,’ I said. ‘While it must be that Sidhera’s awful prophesy come to pass, my gift to you is this: when you prick your gentle hand upon the cursed spindle of the spinning wheel, you shall *not* die. Instead, you shall fall into a deep, dreamless sleep where you shall remain until the spell is broken by the kiss of true love from a royal prince.’

The queen began weeping with joy, and the king held his baby tightly and kissed her.”

At this point, Corey piped in suddenly. “So... I don’t get it. Why didn’t you just reverse the spell? You’re a queen, she’s a queen. You’re just as powerful as she is, right?”

Bridgette smiled at Corey, fluttering her wings as the flames licked her feet. “Our magicks are different, young Corey. Hers is the magic of Earth and mine of Water. Besides that, though, there are rules that all magical creatures must follow.”

Corey shrugged. “Couldn’t you just bend the rules a bit? I mean, this was an emergency, right? Are there magic police around that are gonna get you if you break the rules? What would have happened if you had just ignored the magic laws and undone Sidhera’s curse altogether?”

Bridgette looked at Corey seriously with her tiny violet eyes. “Well, then the magical threads binding the worlds

would have unraveled and the entire universe would have fallen apart.”

Corey looked shocked. “Oh. Well, okay. That would have been bad.”

Bridgette nodded, “Yes, young Corey, that would have been bad.”

Corey sat back again and thought about this silently. Bridgette continued her tale. “So, the years passed. The short-lived peace among the fairy tribes was broken again and the humans distanced themselves from our world. The king and queen raised their beautiful daughter and she did indeed grow up surrounded by people who loved her.

The king, of course, worked tirelessly to find a way to prevent Elayne’s awful destiny. Although I told him that his efforts were in vain, he insisted on burning every spinning wheel in the kingdom and devoted all of his resources to finding Sidhera. Soon, though, the sixteenth birthday of the princess was upon them.

Of course, Elayne knew about the curse. The king and queen thought that by warning her that she may be able to avoid her fate. Nothing could really stop it, though. On the day of her sixteenth birthday, Elayne wandered in a dreamlike trance up to the north tower of the castle and...”

“Wait a second.” I said, interrupting. The gathered group, broken from the spell of the story, turned to me expectantly. I ran my fingers through my hair. “She was *wandering* up to the north tower on her sixteenth birthday? Are you kidding me? Here is a curse that the whole kingdom has known about all of her life. For sixteen years, they knew the exact *day* that it would happen. Was it really so hard to keep an eye on the princess for one day? I would have locked her up in a cell the night before and had her watched by every guard in the kingdom until her birthday was over! How in the world was she *wandering* all by herself to the north tower?”

I looked at Bridgette’s tiny violet face and saw that she was smiling warmly at me. “You have a sharp mind, Jasen

Stillwell. You and the king thought alike. That is exactly what he did. But humans often fail to understand the power of magic... and Sidhera's curse was the most powerful kind of dark magic. Nothing anyone could have done would have stopped the princess from finding that spinning wheel that day. By the time the king and queen found her, the prophesy had been fulfilled. Elayne had touched the cursed spindle and had fallen into an unwakable sleep."

In the light of the campfire, Elayne rubbed the scar on her hand absently as tears streamed from her face. *I should go over there, I thought. Put my arm around her. Hold her and tell her that it was going to be okay.* I remained in my seat though, just watching her helplessly.

Bridgette turned to Elayne. "And that is the story, young princess, as you know it. The rest of it happened while you were sleeping..."

Elayne looked up at her. "Yes. The next thing I remember is waking up with my head on Jasen's shoulder, hearing his voice in my ear as I awoke." She looked at me and smiled a beautiful smile. I felt my head buzz.

*Was that one of the gifts that the fairies had given her? I wondered. The ability to make my stomach flutter when she smiled at me like that?*

I looked up to see Bridgette watching me closely with a small, mysterious smile on her tiny violet face. When she caught my eye, she turned her back to the group and took a deep breath before starting again.

"Of course, I knew the flaw in my spell the moment I spoke it. Although I had been able to avert certain death for the Princess Elayne... I still had given her almost no hope. In their joy and relief, neither the king nor the queen fully understood how impossible it would be. She would sleep, but she would most certainly never awaken."

Corey jumped in. "Sure she would! As soon as a prince came along and kissed her!"

I glanced at Corey, then looked at Bridgette carefully. “A prince never did come, did he?”

“Ha!” Dryan growled all of the sudden. “Are you kidding? Heck, yeah they came. For the first few years she was asleep, there was a parade of princes at the castle... all lined up to give the sleeping princess a smooch. The king was desperate and princes came from every corner of the world. A beautiful enchanted princess... it was the chance of a lifetime! They all took turns trying to kiss her and wake her up!”

Elayne looked a bit startled at this and she put her hand to her lips. “Oh! But... I don’t understand. I thought that the kiss of a prince would awaken me and break the spell...”

Dryan rolled his eyes. “You humans just never do listen, do you? That’s not at all what Bridgette said!”

Elayne looked to Bridgette in confusion. The tiny fairy met Elayne’s eyes sadly. “It is true, princess. What I said was that the curse would only be broken by ‘the kiss of *true love* from a royal prince.’”

“Humans!” Dryan grumbled again. “They never listen to the details. That’s what always gets them into trouble with magic...”

Elayne looked at the fire thoughtfully, still holding her hand up to her lips. Her long blonde hair flowed around her shoulders and shimmered in the firelight. “So only a kiss of true love could break the spell.” She shook her head. “But, with me asleep, how could that even be possible?”

Bridgette shook her head sadly. “You are correct, princess. It was impossible. True love is a magic that takes *two* people to conjure. The prince would have to be in love with you... and you would also have to love him back with all of your heart.”

Dryan growled, “It’s really hard to fall in love with somebody when you’re asleep!”

Elayne looked stunned. “So, in fact, the hope that my parents held on to was no hope at all. It was impossible to break the spell...”

Bridgette remained quiet.

A moment later, Elayne looked back at the empty silver vial that she held in her hand. She held it up in the firelight. “Then what is this? How did this potion awaken me?”

“*That*,” Dryan glared at the bottle. “That was plan B. Or it was part of it, anyway.”

Elayne looked at the vial. “Planbee? What’s a planbee?”

“A backup plan, princess!” Dryan growled. “You should know that fairies *always* have a backup plan.”

Elayne looked confused.

“We knew from the beginning that my spell offered you little hope.” Bridgette said. “Sidhera’s curse was too wicked and too strong. Sidhera herself couldn’t have undone it if she had wanted to. It would have taken the combined magicks of all twelve tribes to fully break the curse.”

Dryan grunted again. “Another fool’s errand *that* turned out to be!”

Bridgette ignored Dryan and continued, turning back to Corey and I. “There are four types of magic: Earth, Water, Fire, and Air. Each compliments and balances the others. Dryan and I set out that very day of the banquet to gather the magic from each of the twelve tribes. Our plan was to use these to create three potions. Each potion would have the magical essence of Earth, Fire, Water, and Air. Each vial a perfect balance. It would take the combined efforts of all of the fairy tribes to make these three special potions. Together, all three potions would be strong enough to completely break the curse upon Princess Elayne.”

I felt a jolt in my stomach as I realized what Bridgette was saying. “But I only found the one vial!” I said. “I didn’t know that there were supposed to be three. We need to go back to look for the other two.” I started to get up to run back through the invisible curtain.

Be still, honorable Jasen.” Bridgette said. “You will find no other potions. There was only the one that Elayne held in her sleeping hands.”

I was confused. "I don't get it. Where are the other two?"

"There are no other two!" Dryan said angrily, looking at me.

Bridgette looked soothingly at Dryan, then turned back to me. "We completed two of the three potions... and the last potion only needs one more fairy's magic."

"Ok..." I said slowly. "So you completed two potions. Where's the second one?"

"Stolen!" Dryan growled. "Stolen by Sidhera nearly a century ago. She sent a rabid pack of earth golems into Elayne's resting place and stole one of the vials."

"Earth golems?" I asked.

Bridgette nodded. "A golem is a vicious, mindless creature. They are lifeless, made entirely of mud and held together by magic... and controlled by Sidhera"

"That's why the place was all torn up." Corey said.

"And all of those piles of mud..." I said.

Corey's eyes got wide. "Those were from Sidhera's mud-monsters!"

"Golems." Dryan corrected. "Yeah, those were what was left of the ones we were able to stop. Still, though, it wasn't enough. One of them was able to steal the second vial and take it back to Sidhera."

The giant tree seemed to groan softly. Dryan turned around. "Don't worry, Albero... we know it wasn't your fault, buddy. You stopped as many as you could..."

"So, after that, there was only one finished bottle left." Elayne said. "The one I held in my hands." She looked at the silver vial, then back up at Bridgette. "But... it worked. Jasen gave me only the one vial and it woke me."

Bridgette answered gently. "Taken on their own, each bottle has enough magic to awaken you... for a short time only."

Elayne looked at the small fairy fearfully. "How short of a time?" she asked.

Dryan answered, looking uncomfortably down at the dirt. “Half of a moon, maybe less.”

Elayne looked stricken. She sat back down unsteadily.

I stepped forward, my heart racing. “What does that mean? How long is a moon? Do you mean a month? Are you saying she’s only got half a month? That’s like two weeks. What happens then?”

Bridgette lowered her eyes sadly. “At that time, Sidhera’s original curse will be fulfilled.”

“She’ll die?” I said loudly, feeling the heat of the campfire push against me as I stepped closer to it. “Are you saying that in two weeks she will die?”

“Yes, Jasen Stillwell. She will die.”