

PIXIE



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PIXIE



***To save her dwindling clan, a three-inch fairy
must find and return with a childhood playmate
who's now a human man all grown up!***

PixAndra Rimfast Longingheart has a very big problem – a human one. To save her clan from extinction, she challenges the ‘no boys’ rule and must find and return David Ringgold, a half-human, half-pixie childhood playmate, to Fairyland before the next full moon.

Trouble is, he’s no longer the sweet and charming ‘Boy’ she fondly remembers. Now he’s a man all grown up, and not a very friendly one at that. What’s worse, he’s got a devious fiancée who may be a real wicked witch plotting to do him and her whole clan terrible harm!

With the help of Boy’s cantankerous father, Pixie must convince him to shrink to fairy size and return with her to Fairyland. And if he does, will he agree to stay as her mate?



Author Acknowledgement

The magic of love is a theme I never tire of. This particular story started as a tiny seed of imagination and grew to a full-sized novel over a span of several years, after many, many revisions. Basically sweet in flavor with a lot of innocence sprinkled on top, it is one of my favorite stories and holds a special place in my heart.

I'd like to thank all the writers who, over the years, have contributed advice regarding the story's content and format, and to offer special thanks to friends and family who have supported me in the process of bringing this book to publication. Any and all errors are mine alone.

I hope you enjoy reading *PIXIE* as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Willa Kaye Danes

PIXIE



A Magical Romance

by

Willa Kaye Danes



PROLOGUE

The dark basement warmed with the odors of smoldering incense and burning wax. Two fat cylindrical white candles flickered on ornate brass plates perched on the small table covered in red velvet. She began the recitation slowly, carefully...

*“Ancient Magic of the Earth,
Spirit, Force, and Power...
Guarded, Tended, Nurtured by
Mother, Sister, Daughter–
Woman...”*

She lifted the heavy, continuous chain necklace up over her head and held the attached amulet in her hands as she spoke the next verse...

*“The Well of Will and Wisdom,
An Untapped Source of Strength,
The Cradle of Love and Life,
Dwelling as a Conquest–
Woman...”*

She placed the amulet face-down on the cover of the ancient book. The ornate embossed design of serpents entwined around the

face of a sleeping woman fit perfectly into the depression branded into the book's thick, scaly dragonskin cover. A curving indentation in the cover held the chain that suspended the amulet around her neck. She continued reciting...

*“As Seeker of All Secrets
And Teller of All Truths,
You are the Queen of Mysteries
And Ruler of All Realms—
Woman...”*

The amulet had been forged especially for the book and was the only key that unlocked the secrets inside. One without the other meant nothing, but together... She smiled as she spoke the last verse.

*“From Now Unto Forever,
As Keeper of the Key,
And Guardian of the Gate
You Unlock and Command—
The Verses of Magic.”*

Reverently she lifted the cover. The book lay open before her, a work of art, one of a kind, the rarest of rare finds. *Priceless.*

She stroked the stiff, yellowed first page of pressed dragonskin with its natural tattered edges. The calligraphic manifesto she had just recited, tattooed in blood ink and illuminated with gold-leaf overlays depicting female figures garbed in flowing gowns, declared what she had always known. Men might exercise dominion over the things of this world, but the real power of Earth resided in women. The truth was there, written in secret, millennia ago. It stood as a testament to the pain and suffering and hope of womankind, promising that someday, some woman – *she* – would rule as destiny dictated and Earth desired.

She moved her palm over the aged page with its fantastical drawings, and the pictures glowed with inner light, responding to her

delicate touch. The book recognized and acknowledged her as its pupil, keeper, and chosen one. Others before her had wielded the book's power, but now this treasure – this resource, tool, *weapon* – was all hers.

Another smile flirted with her lips when she recalled the fateful day that forever changed her miserable, regrettable life. On the run with little money, she'd fled Texas across the border to Louisiana, and ended up in a rundown, little known quarter of New Orleans. A series of seemingly random circumstances had come together as if by design to lead her to that particular street and that particular shop of a purveyor of antiquities and magical novelties. The modest storefront caught her eye, and she stopped to browse. Something inside the shop called to her, silently beckoning her to enter with the proprietor mysteriously away and the door unlocked.

The book, well hidden inside the seedy little shop, lay waiting to be found – by *her*. Fate had brought her to that place at that moment, to open her eyes and show her secrets she had no idea existed, but knew deep down should and did exist.

Breathing in the heady scent of incense, she let the memory pass and carefully closed the book. Magically the amulet and attached chain emerged and separated from the depression in the cover. The depression itself filled in with a fluidity that defied explanation, leaving the cover hard and flat as before, with only a faint outline remaining to hint at the connection to the amulet.

She lifted the amulet and hung the chain around her neck. Lightly grazing her fingertips over the metal disk lying warm and heavy against her chest, she sighed with the contentment of reassurance that all would come to pass as promised.

Glancing at the astral diagrams lying next to the book, she mentally re-charted the constellations' approaching positions as foretold in the book. With the book's help, this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity let her witness the eleventh hour of reckoning. As the lucky chosen one born in the right time and the right sign, she would soon have whatever she wished, and no one could stop her.

The world had ignored her and cast her aside, but now it was a

rich, juicy fruit ripening at her fingertips, almost ready for the plucking. At this very moment her accursed progeny and her silent partners, Greed and Envy, worked to deliver the fey blood she needed to cast the last and greatest spell detailed in the *The Verses of Magic*. With that blood and that spell, she would open the gate to the other realm that held the source of power she sought and needed. With that power at her command, she would rule both realms, and all things would become hers to do with as she wished. Those of the Earth, in their self-important insignificance, would deny her no longer. The Earth and all the souls dwelling upon it would become a mere jewel of adornment to wear as she fancied – or to crush into powder and whisk away.

“Queen of the Realms,” she purred to herself. “Soon, very soon.”



CHAPTER 1

Come, come, come all and be one. Sing, sing, join hands in the Ring.

The summons, silent to the ear but compelling to the heart, floated like a song riding the cool summer night breeze. The breeze caressed the trees standing tall and strong, touching the starlit sky. The night's dark envelope protected the secrets of the forest and those dwelling within. Crickets chirped a comforting welcome to all who belonged, and owl sentries hooted reassurance that everything was safe.

A ground squirrel stirred leaves as it scurried away; a whitetail buck broke twigs as it moved off in the darkness. The forest was alive, from its deep, loamy floor to its dense, leafy canopy that glowed with gathering blinking lights. The luminous points hovered and twinkled magically, like signals of blue fireflies. One by one and two by two, the lights convened in the cloistered clearing at the center of the woods.

PixAndra Rimfast Longingheart flew toward the meadow, dipping low to dodge a tree branch in her path. As she came closer, she heard a shrill, whirring buzz like a shellbug fallen on its back, struggling to flip itself upright. As she came closer, Andra knew it was no bug when she recognized PixiTrixa Lostwish Farreacher's familiar rallying refrain, "Throw the boys away! Throw the boys away! We must stay straight on our chosen path. We must hold strong to our longtime rules. We must defeat the demands for change.

Change is danger. Change is bad. Throw the boys away! Throw the boys away! *Throw the boys away!*”

Andra fluttered her wings faster and stopped abruptly amid the forming Fairy Ring. With her hands on her hips, she flitted up and down in front of Trixa Farreacher. “No one may invoke decisions about clan rules until the Ring is complete.”

Trixa Farreacher’s aura flashed a rainbow assortment of shimmering reds and greens that contrasted oddly with her thin bluish tendrils of hair writhing like serpents about her sharp-featured face. “Discussion before the Ring joins is not against clan rules.”

“Discussion is one thing,” Andra challenged, nearly nose-to-nose with the older fairy. “Attempting to influence votes is quite another. Keep your opinions to yourself, Trixa, until all who are summoned have joined in the Ring. Then, and only then, may you speak of issues to be considered by the Ring.”

“You are not the head of this clan, Longingheart, and Highseat Rovingwind will thank you to remember that.” Trixa’s wings fluttered madly as she floated before Andra.

“Heed your own advice, Farreacher. Neither are you the head of this clan, no matter how badly you yearn for the position.” Andra knew Trixa’s middlemagic name was Lostwish for good reason, and her pixie clan name Farreacher suited her well. Throughout her stingy and miserable fairy life, Trixa had envied and yearned for many things she had no right to want, and the Highseat position was the one thing she wanted most. Trixa wore her ambition like a cloak of pride, using it to lure others to her with the promise that they too would rise above their tame fairy anonymity if they supported her.

Andra shook her head in distress. Pride, lust for power – those were not healthy pursuits for fairyfolk, whose sole reason for being was the gentle adoration and joy of life. Trixa Farreacher seemed determined to ignore that simple truth as her small face screwed up in a scowl. “Jealousy does not become you, Longingheart. The position of Honored Highseat Herald of the Pixie Clan Seacrossers was to have been your mother’s role, and we all agree she would have been a kind and just leader. But she faded many seasons ago, and the

privilege to guide this clan does not fall to you unless you are chosen by the current Highseat and are accepted by the Ring. As long as Highseat Rovingwind continues to summon us, her rights and duties are not yours. As for me, never you mind! Just watch your tongue, Longingheart.”

Andra batted her wings, hovering steadily before Trixa. “Don’t say you weren’t warned, Farreacher. Gathering supporters in your bid for leadership when it’s not declared available makes you – and your followers – look bad. Very bad.” She glared accusingly at the other pixies near Trixa, and they moved back to distance themselves from the older fairy.

Dismissing her opponent with a toss of her head, Andra whirled around to find her place in the Ring. As she took position among the others hovering to form a large circle of shimmering blue light glowing in the darkness, she watched Trixa approach with her entourage loosely in tow. Andra frowned. That Farreacher creature was getting ever bolder and perilously close to banishment. Highseat Rovingwind, though ancient and long-suffering, was not blind and deaf. She had to know what Trixa was up to. By swaying others to support her bid for the Highseat position, Farreacher was trying to bully Rovingwind into choosing her as the next Highseat.

Of course Highseat Rovingwind would heed advice from her council regarding her eventual replacement, but she alone would name her successor for approval by the Ring. Andra hoped Rovingwind realized Farreacher’s unfriendly attitude and highhanded actions divided the clan and made difficult Ring decisions almost impossible. A pixie like Farreacher had no business being Highseat to the Clan Seacrossers. Why Highseat Rovingwind had not dealt with Farreacher before now puzzled Andra, but she knew it was not her place to question. The Highseat would decide what to do when she felt the time was right.

Andra let out a sigh, hoping Rovingwind would decide soon. Tonight Andra had business to bring before the Ring and couldn’t afford to be distracted by Farreacher’s antics. This business affected the very future of their clan, and if she failed to sway the others, the

Pixie Clan Seacrossers would be doomed to extinction.

Andra shook away that fear and concentrated on the fully formed Fairy Ring shimmering with the magical blue light created by the humming and joining of hands of all forty-eight pixies of the Clan Seacrossers. The circle of pixies hovered several heights above the ground. From her position in the Ring, Andra looked up at Highseat PixiCalla Morejoy Rovingwind, who sat in the air over the center of the Ring. With the Honored Staff of Clan Leadership propped on her crossed legs, the shimmering pale fairy with meandering wisps of long silvery hair leaned forward and spun slowly in place to survey the Ring.

“Pixie Clan Seacrossers,” Highseat Rovingwind said, her soft billowing voice betraying her many seasons, “we gather here tonight in the dark of the moon to celebrate our wondrous uniqueness as magical beings who have survived through the ages to form this great Ring of Fairies.”

Following tradition, Andra disengaged her hands from her sister pixies and settled into a crossed-leg position. Participation in the great Ring was an honored heritage, and the Highseat’s opening comments always addressed the history of their clan, lest they forget.

“Over two hundred seasons ago, a new pixie clan formed and departed from the old Highforest Clan, to find free woods with hope of better survival. The Highforest Clan may be no more, for it was fast approaching ruin when we few pixies slipped aboard the great ships of the humanfolk to journey across the high sea. We landed here on this rugged and wild new land, and renamed our clan Seacrossers. Now forty-eight strong, to this day we are still the Pixie Clan Seacrossers, and so it has been for all the seasons of our existence.”

All the pixies in the Ring nodded their heads in agreement with these statements made by Highseat Rovingwind. “We are gathered here tonight,” she continued, “to decide the fate of a newby lightbrightened this past moon by our clan sister PixiNettra Fairsmile Knowingway. Since our clan rules state—”

“Throw the boys away! Throw the boys away! Throw the boys away!” chanted a faction of twelve pixies seated in the Ring across

from Andra, with Trixa Farreacher hovering right in the middle of them. Immediately the outburst broke the Ring. Dismayed pixies flitted erratically, many bluish lights darting about in surprise and disfavor at this affront to their leader and their accepted rules of behavior.

Instead of raising her feeble voice to demand order, Highseat Rovingwind held up her leadership staff in silence and waited patiently for the commotion to die down. Soon the Ring rejoined, and the members hovered quietly in position, anticipating how Highseat Rovingwind would handle this offense from Farreacher and her loose-knit group of followers.

If Rovingwind called out Farreacher, the clever opposing fairy would take the opportunity to voice her opinions and possibly win more supporters. If Rovingwind glossed over Farreacher's display and failed to address the challenge, many members of the Ring would interpret that as a sign of Rovingwind's weakness, heralding her imminent departure from Highseat. Either way, Rovingwind faced a difficult prospect, and Andra felt sorry for the old fairy.

Finally Highseat Rovingwind spun to face Trixa Farreacher, who looked up defiantly at her. Rovingwind pointed her staff directly down at Farreacher and said, "Another outburst like that, and you and those with you will be banished from the Ring permanently." Trixa Farreacher's pert mouth fell open in amazement. The twelve other pixies seated near her moved away without breaking the tenuous blue glow of the Ring.

Andra smiled. Highseat Rovingwind had handled the situation admirably, showing patient restraint but stating the ultimatum when it was due. Trixa would not dare make another challenge, or she would forever lose her place in the Ring and thereby destroy her chance of becoming Highseat of the Seacrossers. But as Andra watched her from afar, she knew the ambitious fairy had not been beaten. Farreacher would have to act more subtly to accomplish her goal of ruling their pixie clan, but she would not give up on that dream.

Andra looked up at Highseat Rovingwind again, wondering if she realized what she was up against. With her flowing silvery hair

wispy like smoke, and her light gray eyes the color of soft dove feathers, she betrayed a gentleness Trixa would eagerly take advantage of. While Highseat Rovingwind's aura was pale and pure, Trixa Farreacher's was shadowy and tainted with the lust for power, a thing unbecoming to fairies. Farreacher's inner light seemed dim, close to going out – or being swallowed up by the darkness within her. It was if she'd been lightbriighted with a piece of Dark World lodged in her craw. And that piece seemed to grow larger and blacker until it nearly eclipsed her fairy light.

For Trixa, for all of them, that was very bad. The light of a fairy was her essence, a beacon for the magic she drew upon and held inside herself. The fairy's light was inconsistent with feelings of envy and hatred, which tended to dull it. The fairy's light belied the material yearnings of magic-ignorant humanfolk, who'd forgotten the importance of living in a pure and simple way, who'd failed to respect and revere the magic of life itself. Humanfolk spent their energies foolishly, waging war and pursuing things that had no good magic thread. Andra wished the Pixie Clan Seacrossers would turn away from the dark sordidness emanating from Trixa, before they met the same end as elves, dwarves, and other changelings – nearly all the magicfolk of old.

That dark thought was interrupted by Highseat Rovingwind's quavering voice. "PixiNettra Fairsmile Knowingway followed clan rules in assuming human form to go among humanfolk and choose a mate. She found and joined with a human man bearing traces of ancient fey heritage. But, be it elfin blood, sprite, dwarf, or the blood of any other kind of fairy, makes no difference. Pixie Knowingway's union with the human has produced a *male* newby."

Andra glanced around the Ring and saw sadness fall over the faces of her clan sisters. They all knew the rule about male children.

"Nevertheless," Rovingwind said, "Pixie Knowingway has petitioned for a vote of the Ring to allow her male newby to be named and accepted into the Pixie Clan Seacrossers."

Gasps of surprise and disgust issued forth from various pixies of the Ring. Undaunted, Highseat Rovingwind raised her staff. "Hear

me, Sisters. Since coming to New Land, the Seacrossers have ruled that no male may remain in the clan. The reasons for this are obvious to us all. But, as is our way, I will state those reasons aloud so that any who wish to challenge their prudence may do so with proper evidence and discussion. This is Pixie Knowingway's right as a Ring member to challenge and be heard."

Andra looked at Nettra Knowingway, who sat some distance away in another part of the Ring. In her arms she cradled a tiny bundle of light wrapped in a tender maple leaflet – her unnamed male newby. Andra felt ashamed that she had not gone to see Nettra to congratulate her on the lightbrighting, but congratulations were never in order when the newby was a male. And so, out of cowardice, Andra had stayed away. It was only when Nettra came to Andra's treehome several days after lightbrighting, and brought the boy child with her, that Andra learned of Nettra's plan to challenge the rule demanding she abandon her babe to the realm of humans. Andra sympathized with Nettra and promised to do what she could to support her argument in the next Ring. But she truly didn't know how she could help. The majority of clan members steadfastly opposed allowing male pixies to remain in the clan more than a moon after lightbrighting.

When Andra looked across the Ring, she found that despicable Farreacher smiling craftily. The sly little fairy was up to something, biding her time quietly. What would she say when her turn came to speak? Andra was sure she knew, but she had her own remarks prepared in Nettra Knowingway's defense. This silliness of 'throw the boys away' had to be stopped before any more damage was done to the Clan Seacrossers.

"First reason for the no-boys rule," announced Highseat Rovingwind, "is the very nature of males. They act impetuously and rarely think beforehand. They are vain and proud and tend to show off. They prize competition and will test their prowess regardless of possible harm to themselves or others. They are uncontrollable, as our history bears out.

"Reason two. Male pixies possess magical abilities that are

often strong but uncontrollable. With their impulsive nature and uncontrolled magic, males present a danger to other pixies through threat of personal harm, and danger to our entire clan by risking exposure to human detection. It matters not whether this behavior is deliberate; the potential for trouble still exists.” Highseat Rovingwind looked around the Ring, then offered, “Comments?”

Immediately the new mother Nettra Knowingway stood up, somehow managing not to disturb the bundle of light resting quietly in her arms as her wings beat furiously to maintain her position. “We still recite stories of pixie *kings* in the Old World fairytales. In other pixie clans, boys were not banished, despite the faults pointed out. Our own parent clan, Highforest, had a pixie king at the time the Clan Seacrossers formed and left for New Land. Why was the rule banishing boys adopted by our clan but by no other in our recited history?”

Pixie looked at pixie sitting in the Ring, but none spoke up. Fairies didn’t write their own history; theirs was an oral tradition of recollection and review. From mother to daughter, and during public summoned Rings to celebrate recurring events and to recount the past, traditional tales of the fairies were passed down and memorized. If anyone recited with mistakes, others hearing would gently but firmly correct the errors until all were in agreement. But no one offered to speak up about this.

In all her seasons since being lightbrighted, Andra had heard only vague mumblings about the history behind the rule, ‘throw the boys away.’ Her mother had never volunteered information about it, and by the time Andra was old enough to wonder seriously enough to ask, her mother was gone, faded from a mysterious illness that the strongest pixie magic in the clan could not cure.

The day her mother faded, Andra was still very young by pixie standards, but she had been left on her own and thereby won her right to sit in the clan Ring before her time. Soon after, kindly older fairies took Andra under their wings and taught her the basics of adult pixie life and rules of order. She was instructed regarding the rule of no boys, but when she asked for further explanation, her fairy mentors

did not elaborate. Andra had attended every summoned Ring for over twenty seasons, yet no one had ever revealed the detailed history of the rule demanding pixie males be banished from the clan. Andra knew it had been in place long before her mother's time, since the Seacrossers Clan was first forged. The rule was still carried out to this day, and Andra had seen what terrible sadness resulted from it.

She glanced sidelong at PixElva Lovelost Cominghome, the most tragic example of what the no-boys rule could do to a pixie. Once known as PixElva Strongheart Lovesinger, the regal redheaded pixie had challenged the rule by giving up her pixie magic and clan names to stay in the world of humans with her chosen mate and their son. PixElva Lovesinger went by her private pixie name Elva while living among the humans, and had adopted the surname of her human mate, Ringgold.

By Elva's own admission, Richard Ringgold was a man who didn't believe in magical beings, even though he was unknowingly the byproduct of the mating of a part-elfin human man with a part-sprite human female – as close to full-blooded fey as any human could be judged these days. Knowing her son would have even stronger magic in his blood, Elva had chosen to forsake her pixie heritage and stay with her human offspring rather than abandon him and possibly never see him again.

Andra studied the beautiful older fairy Elva, and admired her still splendid bearing and long, thick, curly reddish hair. Her aura had always been kindly and pure. Remembering Elva in her human form those many seasons ago, Andra compared the two images in her mind. The present Elva seemed somehow smaller than she'd been before she adopted human form. Her light seemed dimmer too. Had she lost something of herself in the transformation from pixie to human and back to pixie again? Or was the loss due to something other than the transformation itself?

Andra had been a waif of just five seasons when she'd begun making a habit of slipping to the edge of the woods very quickly, before her attentive mother could contain her – thus her middlemagic name, Rimfast. It was on one of those excursions to the rim of the

forest that Andra had gone to the Ringgold home and spied Elva, unbelievably huge in human form, but still a beauty beyond compare.

When Andra first saw Elva living in the human way, in a house built from the remains of felled trees, she wondered if Elva could hear the spirits of the slaughtered trees calling out to her, or if her human ears were deaf to the cries. Drawn to the strangeness of the thing Elva had done – leaving her clan to live among humans – Andra approached the house. That’s when she saw him, Elva’s son, one of many young pixies the Seacrossers had rejected because of gender.

His yellow hair was thick and wavy, his blue eyes large with wonder and dancing with laughter. Although he looked human enough, there was definitely a magical quality about him that drew Andra. She had sneaked to the edge of his yard with its manicured grass and trimmed shade trees and neatly planted flowers, and she had dared to speak to him. When he asked who she was, she identified herself only as ‘a pixie.’ As young as she was then, she still knew better than to reveal her true and secret clan names. Whoever possessed that knowledge would have power over her by speaking her names to summon her at will.

Elva’s son couldn’t see her, and could barely hear her. He followed the sound of her laughter, giggling and calling out with his infectious bubbly boy voice, “Where are you, Pixie? Let me see you!” She so wanted him to see her. She knew it was a dangerous and foolish thing to do, but she came out from hiding among the trees and revealed her light to him. Gently awed, he asked, “Are you a butterfly?”

“No, a fairy” she had said. “I am small, but look closely and you will see that I have hands and feet and a face like you do.”

“And wings! Pretty see-through wings!” He giggled with glee. “Why are you so little, Pixie?”

“Why are you so large, Boy?”

He laughed and laughed and laughed. He rolled on the grass and laughed some more. Andra loved the sound of his laughter and joined him with her tinkling titter until his mother Elva Ringgold came running out to see what was the matter.

“A pixie, Mommy, a pixie!” Her son pointed, and Elva Ringgold searched anxiously, but Andra had already retreated to the edge of the forest. Elva Ringgold grabbed her son’s hand and escorted him forcefully into the house, scolding him for making up foolish stories about imaginary creatures.

Elva’s reaction puzzled Andra until she told her mother about it later. After her mother patiently explained that the former Elva Lovesinger would not betray her people by admitting their existence, she reprimanded Andra for doing that very thing herself. But that didn’t stop Andra from visiting Boy again often – and eventually appearing to him in similar human size.

Andra surfaced from her reminiscing to find the former human-size Elva Ringgold, once known as PixElva Strongheart Lovesinger, and now known as PixElva Lovelost Cominghome, staring at her. There was no malice, only sadness in her lovely green eyes. Was she too remembering the many times Andra had come to her human-built house to play with her young son, innocently luring him to the pixie way? Elva had not discouraged Andra from visiting, but she had been very careful not to reinforce her son’s fantasies about the fairy girl, his ‘imaginary’ playmate he called Pixie.

Imaginary. Andra smiled and then noticed tiny tears glistening in Elva’s eyes. Glancing away, she was startled back to the present when Trixa Farreacher stood up to speak. “Since no one else feels brave enough to recite the history of the rule, ‘throw the boys away,’ I will do so. Please,” Farreacher said with a sickening sweet smile as she flitted into the center of the ring and twirled around, “feel free to correct me if I speak in error.”

Lambasting herself for letting Farreacher grasp the opportunity to hold the Ring’s attention, Andra vowed to listen closely to what the nasty-spirited fairy said, so that she could discount it effectively when her turn came.

Farreacher fluttered her wings, then smoothed her slender hands over her glimmering grayish-green shift with its sharply angled hem. Sparkling fairy dust billowed about her as her wings worked to keep her afloat. The overall effect was one of concealment, so that

only her shrill voice carried forth amidst her shimmering cloud. “The Seacrossers Clan formed as a result of abuses within the Highforest Clan. Pixie clans then had kings, as Pixie Knowingway correctly pointed out.”

Farreacher’s dust settled a bit, revealing her face and hands aglitter from the tiny light-reflecting magic particles. Andra frowned at the obvious tactic. Farreacher deliberately stirred her own fairy dust to make herself appear more powerful. Did she actually believe that would influence her clan sisters and make them accept her words more readily?

“The kings of olden clans,” said Farreacher, “took for themselves many mates and neglected them even as they hoarded them. The kings waged war between their clans for possession of territory. This caused the violent fading of many fairies. The kings coveted the material things treasured by walkingfolk, especially that of elves and humans, and betrayed secrets of our kind to gain these riches. The kings, in their thoughtless male ways, diminished their people and brought harm to everyone.

“A group within the Highforest Clan objected to this and vowed to leave for New Land to escape the treachery of their king. This group eventually became known as the Clan Seacrossers and consisted entirely of female fairies who vowed never to allow males into their new clan. That is why they decreed that all lightbrighted males must be banished from the clan before they have a chance to learn fairy ways and possibly betray them to magic-lacking humans who, as we all know, were long ago proclaimed enemies of the clan, by the clan, for the clan’s own protection.”

Farreacher took a breath to give herself dramatic pause, and that’s when Andra lunged forward to be recognized. Before Farreacher could object, Highseat Rovingwind nodded approval for Andra to speak. “The tale of the pixie kings of old may be true, but also may be flawed. I don’t know, and I don’t hear anyone objecting to it. But that was hundreds of seasons ago, and we all know our situation has changed. ‘Throw the boys away’ ... what utter nonsense that is!”

Andra shook her head and tried for eye contact with many fairies in the Ring. Most of them looked down as if in shame or cowardice. “Anyone with half a thought in their head should realize that without boys to grow and mature to become adult pixies, there will be no males to perpetuate our clan. But to this day, since crossing the high seas and becoming the Pixie Class Seacrossers, this clan has upheld the no-boys rule. Our pixie sisters are forced to follow the dangerous practice of assuming human form to mate with humanfolk – our sworn enemies, as Pixie Farreacher has pointed out – and then return home alone to lightbright and increase our numbers. But instead of increasing, our numbers continue dwindling. We number less than half the original clan when they crossed the high seas over two hundred seasons ago. The no-boys rule isn’t working, and we all know why. Humans are everywhere. They rule the earth, and only by the grace of their governance’s forestry protection do we of the Clan Seacrossers still keep our home – a situation that could change as quickly as we beat our wings to stay afloat in the air. With our current dependence on humans for reproduction and survival, the Pixie Clan Seacrossers could come to an end within this generation or sooner, if we don’t change our ways!”

Andra sighed uneasily, trying to tone down her rising desperation. “True, we seek out human males with fey blood, but as humans multiply among themselves, their fey blood becomes more and more diluted – thus diluting our own magic. And from the stories brought back by our pixie sisters, I know it is a chore and a danger to adopt human form and human ways in order to attract a male for mating. This practice presents a much greater danger to all pixies than allowing our own males to grow up and be trained by us to accept and respect our pixie ways.”

Farreacher started to object, but Andra charged on. “Ask any of those here who have done it, and they will tell you of the difficulty and emotional turmoil involved in living among humans. To avoid abandoning the one they choose as a mate – one they may grow to love – many of our pixie sisters have resorted to trickery to take a mate and then leave without emotional attachment. And there is more

hardship when our sisters return to us, knowing there's a strong chance they will have to give up their children if they are male.

"This is all too much to ask of a pixie. How can this abuse be any worse than that of the ancient pixie kings? We deserve better. We deserve to make our own choices while still preserving the good of our clan. The Clan Seacrossers was formed to allow choice, whereas the rule of kings was the only law known before. Can we not re-examine our own rules with an open mind toward the good of all our members?"

Farreacher lunged toward Andra. "Who among us, besides Knowingway, has a desire to see the boy-banishment rule changed? The rule affects no one else! How can her single interest be of more importance than the needs of all the rest?"

"Nettra Knowingway's single interest," Andra replied, "has become the interest of nearly all the pixies who desire to reproduce. Just because you, Farreacher, are too old to care about it doesn't mean this issue won't affect you and others who are past the desire to mate. Nettra Knowingway paves the way for every other pixie of this clan who might lightbright a boy. And every boy that stays with the clan is an extra member to add to our strength. Our numbers are dwindling, due in part to the difficulty imposed on all pixies expected to mate. Who among us relishes the idea of taking on human form to do it?"

"Why, I assumed *you* would, Longingheart," Farreacher retorted slyly. "After all, weren't you doing that when you were but five seasons – chasing after a pixie-human half-breed as if you were much older? And what of the little half-breed's mother, Elva Cominghome?"

Farreacher turned to Elva, who looked startled to have all pixie eyes focus on her. "What of it, Cominghome? Did you not give up your pixie names and magic ways to live with your human mate, only to find the lifestyle unbearable? What advice do you give on this subject? Would your half-breed son have been able to maintain his pixie form and abide the pixie way without betraying us all?"

Maintaining her position in the Ring, Elva Cominghome slowly assumed a standing position and took the Highseat's nod as

her cue to speak. She looked strong and sure, not frightened by Trixa Farreacher's taunts. "The thought of leaving my mate and my son behind was too much for me to bear – too much that I gave up the pixie way as you say, Trixa. But the strain of trying to keep my true self concealed and denying that I was indeed a pixie, created problems in my relationship with my husband ... my mate. Reluctantly I left my mate and son behind because I knew my son was not welcome here – not because I didn't think he could fit in. If I had been given the choice, I would have asked him – and my mate who was part fey – to return here with me."

That admission seemed to shock most everyone, even Trixa Farreacher. The Ring fell silent as both Andra and Trixa retreated to their places.

The Highseat sat brooding in silence for so long, Andra wondered if she had fallen asleep. Finally she spoke lightly but forcefully. "I will entertain a challenge to the boy-banishment rule if one of you will come forward and swear to prove that bringing a fey boy back into the clan can be done successfully."

Andra watched Nettra Knowingway bravely stand up again to speak. "Why bring an unfamiliar fey boy back into the clan when one newly lightbrihted is already here?" Nettra looked down at her son in her arms, who had not made a peep since the Ring convened.

"Your boy babe can stay in the clan," Highseat Rovingwind said, "only until I decide whether the idea is workable for others. Again, one of the Ring must volunteer to locate and bring back a son of this clan who was banished, or the challenge will be revoked, and the no-boys rule will stand."

Nettra Knowingway looked desperately at Andra, as if expecting her to do something. Andra couldn't imagine why Nettra turned to her. True, it was common knowledge among the clan that Andra had frequently adopted human form to cavort in innocent play with Elva Cominghome's fey-human son, but that was many seasons ago. How could she be expected to find a male descended from the Seacrossers – especially *that* boy – and bring him back now? A more likely candidate to locate and retrieve him would be Elva

Cominghome herself. After all, she was his mother.

“I’ll ask one last time for a volunteer,” repeated Highseat Rovingwind. “If I get no response, the challenge to the rule will be revoked, and Knowingway’s newby will be banished.”

Nettra flitted forward with her son in her arms and nearly broke the Ring. The other pixies beside her quickly closed the magic gap to keep the Ring energy in equilibrium. Facing Andra, Nettra whispered, “You must help me. You are the only one I trust who can do what is needed.”

Instead of agreeing to grant the impossible favor, Andra lunged from her place in the Ring as Nettra had a moment before, causing another ripple in the energy that neighboring pixies had to work hard to control. Andra came face-to-face with Elva Cominghome, with Nettra hot on her trail. “You must find your son, Elva,” Andra said. “Convince him to come back with you to Fairyland.”

Elva’s eyes filled with tears, and she shook her head. “I cannot. I left my human husband and son with no word of my going, and surely over the years they have formed other attachments, while harboring a great hatred for me. For me to return now would disrupt their lives even more cruelly. I cannot do it.”

“Then *you* must go, Andra,” Nettra insisted, insinuating herself between Andra and Elva. “You knew Elva’s son when he was a boy. You and he were friends, were you not? He will have fond memories of you. Go out and find him. Bring him back to us so that my son may stay here with me if he chooses.”

Andra opened her mouth to object, but then Highseat Rovingwind spoke. “So be it. Since no one has—”

“Wait!” Nettra cried. “Andra Longingheart will seek out Elva Cominghome’s son. He has strong fey blood. If she can convince him to return with her, my son will be welcome in this clan. Agreed?”

“No!” Trixa Farreacher screamed. “I will not have males lording over us. We will rule ourselves!”

“Enough, Farreacher!” Highseat Rovingwind pointed her staff at her. “I gave you fair warning before. Don’t make me carry

through.” From her perch above the center of the Ring, Rovingwind turned to look down on Nettra holding her son. “Pixie Knowingway, if Pixie Longingheart agrees to do this and can convince the fey son of Pixie Cominghome to return, your son will be granted conditional permission to join the Clan Seacrossers.”

Trixa Farreacher swallowed a garbled yelp, then interjected, “A time limit, Highseat Rovingwind! We must have a time limit in place, or Longingheart will simply postpone the inevitable forever.”

“Very well.” Highseat Rovingwind turned to Andra and raised her staff. “You have until the approaching full moon to find and return with Pixie Cominghome’s son. At the bright of the moon at midnight, I will convene the Ring again, and you will satisfy this arrangement, or Pixie Knowingway’s newby will be forfeit.”

Andra gasped. “But it’s been more than twenty seasons since I last saw Pixie Cominghome’s son. He will be a man – a human male all grown up and not inclined to magic ways. What if he is no longer close by? What if he has taken a human mate and already has a family? How can I possibly convince him to—”

“Do what you must,” Highseat Rovingwind commanded. “He will return with you by the next full moon, or the agreement is null.” She waved her staff in the air with finality. “The decision is made.”

Andra glanced at Nettra Knowingway and Elva Cominghome in distress. Why had this monumentally impossible task fallen upon *her*?