Spring 2009

Fell and Wrath

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It all came down to deniability. He had no alibi, and even if he had, this was the sort of thing that had his name all over it. Though there probably weren’t too many, even knowing his reputation, who’d have thought he’d have the balls to pull something like this on her.

As Robin Goodfellow’s jaw met the dove-colored stones before the queen’s throne, he tried to imagine exactly what it was that might have persuaded Oberon to think Titania would find any sort of humor in the donkey episode, and suspected the king must have been drunk.

“Well met, Puck.” Her voice was a bell in a soft rain, and it made his spine twitch beneath his skin. He pushed himself to his knees, a task made interesting by the fact that his hands were still bound behind him, and lifted his gaze to meet hers.

The Queen of All Faerie smiled down at him, petal pink lips parting. He wondered how she managed to show quite so many teeth and still keep the smile from coming anywhere near her eyes, black as a new moon night. She sat tall but easy in her throne, like a willow when there was no wind, and to one who did not know better, she might have looked serene.

He swallowed to moisten his throat and smiled back at her. “Your Majesty is looking particularly effulgent tonight, if I may say.”

The smile grew, and a silvery little laugh spilled out. “Oh, stars,” she breathed. “You are a singular creature, Puck. I see why my husband enjoys your company so.”

“He does fancy my foolishness now and again,” Goodfellow noted agreeably, the muscles of his face beginning to ache from holding their geniality. “Though His Majesty has a talent for jesting, himself, as I’m... certain Your Bright Ladyship knows.”

“Indeed I do. No doubt my Oberon has taught you a trick or two, hobgoblin.”

Sweat crawled along the skin of his wrists beneath his bindings. “Now and then, Your Ladyship,” he said, his own voice sounding thin in his ears. “Now and then.”

Something over Puck’s shoulder suddenly caught the queen’s attention. “Ah, here he is,” she observed mildly, and for the first time, Goodfellow’s awareness, which had thus far only had eyes for Titania’s presence, made abrupt and ominous note of Oberon’s absence. “You’ll have to forgive his tardiness this evening, Puck. But I’m afraid my poor husband suffered a most unfortunate accident today.”

There was movement beside Goodfellow, though he dared not turn towards it, dared not look away from Titania’s dark eyes, which held his until the figure being led towards her throne came between them.

The two faerie women guiding the king drew his hands from their shoulders and let him sink to his knees at Titania’s feet. The queen combed her fingers gently through the black waves of Oberon’s hair, and he lifted his head.

“We were walking in my garden,” Titania went on, “and he fell into my roses.”

Goodfellow felt his insides twist. “My lord...” he managed, and then wished he hadn’t, when the sound of his voice turned Oberon’s face more fully towards him.
“They were dreadfully cross with him for the intrusion.” Titania stroked him like a cat. “My faeries have brought the Puck to join us, dearheart,” she told him. “I thought his company might lift your spirits.”

“Titania…” Oberon choked out. There was something wrong with his tongue. “Tania, please…please…” He coughed, speckling his chin with scarlet.

“Shushh,” Titania murmured, catching up a bit of the blue silk of her skirt and wiping the blood away with it. “Just sit quietly, my love. Your hobgoblin is going to amuse us.”

Oberon’s dark lashes fluttered on his cheeks, and the dizzying realization that there was nothing beneath the lacerated, purpled lids gripped Goodfellow. “Titania…don’t…”

Titania stood, and Oberon slid down her legs as she rose, crumpling to his belly on the floor, clutching at her as she stepped past him, his hand sliding off her ankle as if his grip were no more than water.

“That is why you’ve come to join us, Puck,” she said, coming to stand over him. She reached out to him with one slender hand, tipped now with claws like rose-hued scythes, and ran the backs of her fingers down Goodfellow’s cheek. Her touch was like spider silk; soft, and light, and full of the promise of fangs. Goodfellow shuddered underneath it. “You are going to entertain us tonight. And since my dear husband cannot see the night’s amusements,” she murmured sweetly, tracing the tips of her claws across his cheek and back to the nape of his neck, “we must make certain he can hear you.” She leaned close, putting her mouth beside his ear. “Do you understand?”

He did. Oh, he did. Goodfellow stared at the stones beneath him, and wondered, perversely, who would be cleaning them come morning. If he was very, very lucky, it might be him.

“Of course, m’lady.”