



On Oberon's Throne

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PUCK PAUSED MID-CAREFREE-FLIT TO EYE THE EMPTY throne where the Elf King usually sat. He looked this way and that. No one in the great oak. No one flitting about the magnolia. He hovered closer. No harm just sitting on the big man's chair. After all, who would know?

He sat down and scrunched around, rubbing his bottom back and forth on the mighty chair. The seat was harder than he might have expected. He wondered why Oberon did not pad it. Who in their right mind wanted to sit on a rock? If he were king, he would order the royal maidens to strewn flower petals upon it every morning, until the petals layered so thickly that sitting upon them was like resting on dandelion fluff. No cold, hard seat for his behind! But then, if Puck were king, a lot of things would be different!

And why shouldn't he be king? After all, he was the one who did all the work, the running, the fetching, the coming up with clever stratagems. Oberon would be nothing without him! He even said so himself, once—though that had been a very long time ago. Nowadays, the king seemed to take him for granted. But, if Oberon was nothing without Puck, why did Faerieland need Oberon?

He pictured how he would look in the crown. Chicks dug crowns, especially faerie chicks. He would have his pick of the ladies every night if he were king. Oberon did.

Puck sat on the throne contemplating the highlights of his envisioned reign

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as he watched the sun set. He had finished imagining rolling about in the royal treasury and was contemplating what color he would decree the flower pixies should paint next year's violets when a loud voice boomed out behind him.

"King of the Faeries!"

A large ugly troll with a nose like a casaba melon stomped toward the throne. Dry leaves crackled beneath his feet, and the feet of the three ugly brutes that followed him. As he strode, he swung a club that was larger than Puck. Puck considered fleeing. After all, he had wings, and the lug of a troll did not. However, the idea of King Puck was growing on him. Besides, Oberon was not here. Someone had to deal with this numbskull. It wouldn't be nice to just send him away empty-handed.

Or rather, considering the amount of tribute the trolls exacted from the faeries each year, it would be *very* nice to send him away empty-handed. King Oberon would never dare, but King Puck was a pluckier fellow.

Puck lounged back in the throne and surveyed the newcomer. "Who's asking?"

"The new Jarl of the Trolls. Are you Oberon, King of Faeries?"

"Maybe I am and maybe I'm not. What's it to you?"

The troll stopped and frowned, scratching his head. "I come about the tribute."

"Nope. Not interested."

"What?" roared the troll.

"Ask some other monarch. Faeries have better stuff to do than truck with trolls."

"But . . ." The troll spit as he sputtered. "You dare violate our ancient treaty? That means war!"

Puck gave the Troll Jarl his best sneer. "Like we'd fight you!"

The Troll Jarl gave a roar and swung at the throne. Puck darted into the air just in time. The club reverberated harmlessly from the stone throne. "You will meet us tomorrow at sundown at Broken-Rock Field or we shall storm Faerieland and tear your throne apart stone by stone! Insolent faerie!"

With that, the Troll Jarl turned and stomped off into the night.

Alone in the dark, Puck rested his chin on his palm and tapped the fingers of his other hand against the arm of the throne. What would Oberon do now? Or, better yet, what could Puck do to deal with those pesky trolls that Oberon would not?



A man sat drinking, slumped against a tree surrounded by ravens.

"Orlando Crowe?" Puck flitted above him.

The man on the ground raised his glass. He was garbed in a black turtleneck and black jeans, over which he wore a long, red leather jacket.

"What ails you?" asked Puck. "Women trouble. Same as ever."