



Pixie Dust

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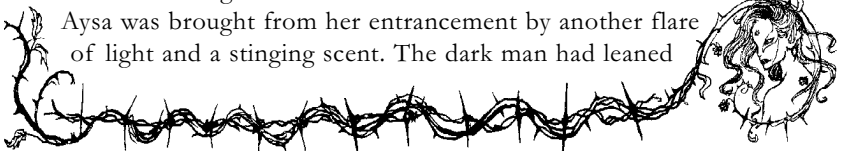
DARKNESS PERMEATED THE ROOM, BROKEN ONLY BY THE GLEAM of grinning white teeth in a narrow beam of moonlight that seemed determined to sneak its way through the black cloth covering the window. Aysa wondered again if things were *really* bad enough to seek outside help. After all, the cuts in her wings would heal... eventually. She was used to taking care of herself, having spent much of her life traveling alone. But she had never been alone against a whole gang of Fae before. She had also never backed down from a fight, and wasn't about to start now.

The flare of a match drew her from her thoughts, and Aysa's eyes adjusted slowly to the dim, flickering light as the old black man lit six white candles on the table before her.

What she saw added to the disoriented feeling Aysa had felt since walking through the door. The room was cluttered, both with things she recognized and still others she had no idea what purpose they could serve. A workbench made of a dark wood ran the length of the wall on Aysa's left in the cramped room. Scattered about it were various things often associated with Voodoo; candles, a half full bottle of rum, cigars, and countless jars of unidentifiable powders. Hanging along the wall over the table were portraits of various Loas, the gods so important to practitioners of this art. Some were crudely hand drawn, while others were almost a quality worthy of any prestigious art museum.

What really drew Aysa's attention was the back wall. End to end and top to bottom were cases of preserved insects. In the dim light many of them seemed to come alive, the flickering of the flames giving the illusion that their wings moved.

Aysa was brought from her entrancement by another flare of light and a stinging scent. The dark man had leaned



forward and used one candle to light a huge cigar. The rising smoke made patterns around his head, adding to the otherworldly feel of the room.

His name was Bosun, and he came highly recommended as the best hougan in Baton Rouge, maybe even in the entire state of Louisiana. To Aysa, he looked the part, too. Short and black as pitch; Bosun had yellow eyes and teeth that could blind, if the reflection in the moonlight were any indication of what they would be like in daylight. Bosun's hair was long, and worn in tight cornrows close to the skull. His clothing was colorful, loose-fitting and comfortable-looking, with designs drawn or sewn all over the shirt. Aysa assumed they were wards against evil spirits. Most striking, though, were the lines in his face. Some were age lines; others looked to have been carved there in some ritualistic fashion. All of them were very deep, giving Bosun a tired, but wizened appearance. He looked almost as though he carried all the knowledge of the world, and not being able to share it made each day a lifetime.

"So, *bebé*," Bosun said, leaning back and blowing a huge puff of smoke into the air, "you come here to me because you want protection." Aysa started. So far she hadn't spoken, but this man knew why she was here. She was impressed, but not convinced. A lot of people came to a hougan for protection. It could have just been an odds-on guess.

"Well...yes," Aysa slowly replied, measuring how to proceed. "But this is a special case." Aysa thought she sounded stupid. Still, she had to keep going now that she had started. "I know you probably hear that a lot, but my case is *definitely* different from your normal clients."

"I isn't blind, girl. You of de Fae," he said, pursing his lips in a disgusted way that made the lines in his face even deeper. "Any damn fool see dat!"

Aysa was shocked that the man could so readily see her for what she was. Clearly he did have power, because with few exceptions only other members of the Fae had such instant recognition. A surge of joy and hope passed through her, which she tried to suppress before continuing.

"Yes, I certainly am. Unfortunately, I don't have many friends amongst my kind, at least not here in Louisiana." Aysa bit her lip, because this was hard to talk about. "I've tried making friends here, but it just never worked. The other Fae here don't act normally. They have a real mean streak." Thinking, Aysa tried to describe her treatment. "When I wouldn't join their gang, they started picking on me, just like I was a *human*. They're the worst kind of rogues, and they're about ten to my one." She paused, and decided to tell all. "Lately it's gone beyond just taunting." Stifling back a sob, Aysa cried out, "Just look!"

From behind her, Aysa's wings appeared. Normally iridescent and beautiful, hers had been mutilated. Long cuts had been made in them, and their normal shimmering was sporadic. Instead of being things of wonder, Aysa's wings were now dull and crumpled and ugly.

Bosun sat silently for a while. If the sudden appearance of wings on this young girl had surprised him, he was hiding it so deeply that Aysa couldn't tell. Maybe he'd seen much more surprising things in his line of work.