

BELLA SANTINI

In The Land of Everlasting Change



BELLA SANTINI
CHRONICLES

Angela Legh

Praise for Bella Santini in the Land of Everlasting Change

“As an adult who has loved fantasy since I first discovered the Chronicles of Narnia at age 10, I really loved this book. Bella’s story is magical, but also grounded in the realities we all face as we journey towards acceptance of ourselves and our special gifts. Highly recommend for all age groups, and can’t wait for the next book in the series!!!” — Terry Attwood

“My wife and I shared this with my 8 year old niece and she loved the story and it’s characters. The plus is that it also helps kids deal with emotional intelligence. Can’t wait for the next one.” — Kate Westlake

“My daughter is 10 years old and absolutely loves this story! We enjoyed our storytime together with Bella Santini and she drifted off to sleep with thoughts of magical adventures. The adventures are exciting but not scary, making them perfect for this age group. My daughter has decided our entire family (including the dogs) will each dress up as a fairy from the story for Halloween this year-she was definitely inspired! We have purchased copies for gifts and are looking forward to the rest of the series.” — Jennifer Azevedo

from the beginning and felt like I was on the adventure with young Bella as she goes into “the land of everlasting change.” Angela takes us on a colorful journey that has many life lessons and it is a book that I will be sharing with my grandkids. I am already looking forward to Book #2!” — Cindy W.

“My wife and I shared this with my 8 year old niece and she loved the story and it’s characters. The plus is that it also helps kids deal with emotional intelligence. Can’t wait for the next one.” — Simon Hodges

“Bella Santini is a book written for all ages. I was mesmerized

“I’m only half way through, but I’m already loving this book! Will definitely be recommending to friends.” — Kate Westlake

“As an adult who has loved fantasy since I first discovered the Chronicles of Narnia at age 10, I really loved this book. Bella’s story is magical, but also grounded in the realities we all face as we journey towards acceptance of ourselves and our special gifts. Highly recommend for all age groups, and can’t wait for the next book in the series!!!” — LTP

“I love the journey the author takes us on. So much speak truth and I love that we get to tap into more truth through this sharing. I look forward to seeing this book in every child’s hands and see them blossom as individuals through the adventures of Bella.” — Lisseth Wertz

BELLA SANTINI

*In the Land of
Everlasting Change*

BY

Angela Legh

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my children, Vanessa, Janice, and Steven, who let me read children's fantasy stories to them each night. The time I spent with them in this intimate endeavor was an act of pure love. And their listening and engaging was their pure love. I appreciate them more than they know, for words cannot encompass how much I love them.

I also must mention young Isabella Perez, who inspired me to begin writing a short story for her, that grew and grew and morphed and grew, even more, to become this book. Her lively imagination fueled mine, and I thank her.

My initial editor Rusti Leahy was an integral participant in this book's crafting; I relied on her sharp wit and deep understanding of the art of book crafting, and I thank her for all she has done. Also, my beloved friend Carol Benson provided many insights that made this a better book. Lastly, I was blessed to find Ruby Fink, who performs the final edit on all of my fairytales, adding magic beyond my abilities.

I thank the illustrator for the chapter headings, the talented and beautiful Hricha Parth Toplewar, and the lovely and talented Whitnee Nixon of Tall Tales Studios, who provided the mid-chapter illustrations. My final proofreader, the magnificent Dr. Richard Kaye, has been indispensable, thank you. I am deeply appreciative of my friend and

typesetter, the very gifted Teena Clipston, who, in addition to typesetting, is the publisher of Saving Earth Magazine.

How can I avoid thanking the inspirational JB Owen, the powerhouse of a woman who took a chance on me and provided me with my first opportunity to be a published author! My continued association with JB and her innovative projects will bring more excitement into my life!

Several influential people have been my teachers of consciousness; this book would not have been possible without them. Thank you, Lisseth Wertz, Daria Voldopianova, Sébastien Nunez, Jim Self, Roxanne Burnett, Tia Harrison Holmes, Rion Kati, and Lisa Erickson. I also thank my oversoul, my angels, and my guides, who whispered in my ears to give me direction.

I appreciate my pre-readers; my son Steven Avery, my nieces Alyssa Barkley and Jessica Stone, my fabulous Aunt Terry Attwood, and my friends Melissa O. Withers, Cheryl Langbein, Kathryn Snyder, Aimee Mason, Kat Khalid, Jim Deitrich, Jon Griffiths, Lisa Erickson. Your input and insights are very much appreciated.

I must also acknowledge the County of Gloucestershire, South West England, and the Town of Cheltenham. These environs fueled my imagination. The Cotswold walks were magical; I know my friends and I passed fairy realms while we meandered through the countryside. Yelimoan School is loosely modeled after the Cheltenham

College building on Bath Road, a lovely Georgian construction which could inspire many different stories. The castle in Thessaeria is loosely modeled after Sudeley Castle, an architectural gem located in the Cotswolds' Winchcombe area.





North Cedilla

UnSeelie Lands

Sandeep

Plains of Ohlstroi

River Shimmerlit

Forest of Trouveil

Somilga And Tenigal

Briajnal Woodland



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A child's promise to your parents

I will love you unconditionally; and I will love me unconditionally.

I will honor your feelings.

I will allow my feelings to flow without grabbing onto the feelings and making them my identity.

I will choose to honor my feelings and seek help if I am overwhelmed or unable to cope with them.

I will choose to embody balance and emotional wellness through feeling my feelings.

I will love you unconditionally.

A parent's promise to your child

I will love you unconditionally.

I will listen to you and respect your opinion.

I will respect you as an individual and allow you to follow your path.

I will allow you to make your own mistakes, knowing you will learn from the experience.

I will remind you you are loveable when you are feeling mad or sad; that you are worthwhile when you make mistakes; that you are a valuable human being, a gift to the world.

I will love you unconditionally.



CHAPTER ONE

Mesmerized

"Stupid camping trip," Bella Santini muttered as she left the campfire to go to sleep. "Stupid parents for making me go on this camping trip." She stubbed her toe on a rock and let out a small yelp.

"Bella?" Her mother called from the fire where she was sitting with Bella's Dad. "Are you all right?"

"Fine, Mom." Bella lied, hobbling slightly as she made her way to her little, private tent. "Stupid rock on this stupid camping trip." She continued under her breath.

At fourteen, Bella was an ordinary-looking girl with long wavy brown hair with a red woven hint. Her smile was quick and bright like a ray of sunshine, her skin always pale and never tanned. Bella's most noticeable thing were her eyes, an

unusual shade of sea green, the lightest color in the curl of an ocean wave at the exact moment when the wave crests and the sun shines through.

She lived in an ordinary house with her parents and went to an ordinary school with other ordinary children. Even her school life was ordinary, she never got in trouble, but she was never the star pupil, bringing home average, ordinary grades. But there was one subject in which Bella excelled: art class. There, it didn't matter if the teacher asked the class to paint a bowl of fruit or a still portrait; Bella could capture the subject in a way that made it seem like you could reach into the painting itself and touch it.

Now, with classes over, Bella had been looking forward to spending the summer inside, happily painting all day without interruptions. But on the first day of summer, her parents had loaded her up in their car without warning, ignoring her protests, telling her they were taking a fun family trip into the wilderness.

"But I wanted to spend this time painting!" Bella protested from the backseat of the car.

"Oh, Bella," said her mother. "There will be plenty of time for that when you get back."

It wasn't fair that they were making her go on this trip. She was old enough to take care of herself! She just wanted to stay home, paint, and be with her friends. Bella thought with a sigh, remembering how upset she had been.

Her father had smiled at her from the driver's

seat.

"Sweetie, I know you had plans. But this weekend is family time, and I want you to come with an open mind—you just might like it!"

Bella rolled her eyes; she was sure this trip would be a waste of her time. Unfortunately, it was clear; she had no choice in the matter.

Opening her tent flap, Bella crawled in, leaving her dress on, feeling too agitated to switch to pajamas. She snuggled into her sleeping bag, laying her head on the pillow. Closing her eyes, her mind whirled, thinking about all the lovely things she saw today, mixed with the irritation her parents forced her to come on this stupid camping trip. On the one hand, the trees and flowers she noticed during the car ride here had been beautiful, and she couldn't wait to paint them all. On the other hand, Bella would have to wait until she got home to paint anything since her stupid parents had neglected to pack any of her art supplies.

"Not like they listened to what I wanted to do anyway," she muttered as she fell asleep.

She was awakened in the middle of the night by a curious sound, tinkling like bells, though it sounded slightly muffled as if a soft fabric padded the bells. Putting it out of her mind, she attempted to fall back to sleep. Several minutes later, the sound repeated. Bella ignored it, once again trying to fall back asleep. She tossed and turned, but after another repetition of the sound, Bella decided to investigate. Bells are not a usual noise

expected in a forest, she thought. Silently, she opened her tent flap, peering into the darkness. The campfire had been put out, and Bella could hear her Dad snoring like a giant bear in the next tent.

Her eyes swept the forest, not seeing anything. Then out of the corner of her eye, Bella spied a flitting light, softly dancing like a leaf on the warm breeze, weaving into the row of trees to her left. A firefly! she thought as she stepped into the soft carpet of pine needles, releasing the fresh scent of pine into the air. Following the darting light, she passed through trees, weaving along on the path established by the firefly. Twisting and turning, the firefly's path wound through the dense undergrowth of the forest. The moon softly illuminated the way, suddenly darkening when clouds shifted in the sky, opening again to a soft radiance that lit her path.

Without warning, the clouds covered the moon, the firefly flitted around a turn and seemed to disappear. Bella looked around in the darkness but could not find evidence of the firefly nor landmarks to guide her back to her tent. The night around her was suddenly much more frightening. How was she going to find her way back to the camp?

"Mom? Dad? Anyone?" She called out. "Help me! I'm lost!"

She waited, listening. But there was no response. Either she was too far away, or her par-

ents were too sound asleep to hear her.

Bella's stomach dropped, her breathing became shallow, as fear crept into her senses. Panicking slightly, she twirled around, looking in vain for an easy way back. Bella had no idea from which direction she had come, but seeing one path slightly lit by moonlight, she followed it, hoping it was the way back to her tent. Once or twice, she stubbed her toes on protruding roots and rocks, but still, she stumbled on, hoping this path would return her to her campsite. After a long time, the trail finally opened into a meadow, and the moon reappeared from behind the clouds. And as the soft, gentle rays revealed the space before her, Bella halted and took a breath, momentarily stunned by the ethereal scene.

Under the soft moonlight, the meadow was filled with what seemed like millions of fireflies, gently dancing, weaving a web of twinkling illumination that stretched into the distance. The far-away firefly lights were dulled by a mist, twinkling like Christmas lights seen through the rain. The soft sheen of the moon glow enhanced the lights of the fireflies. Struggling to breathe, Bella tried to memorize the scene—a meadow filled with dancing lights—it would make a stunningly beautiful, ethereal painting. Excitement filled her as her creativity sparked. She couldn't wait to get home and paint, but she was entranced; she had to stay to watch what happened next.

Bella watched as each firefly settled onto the

ground, almost hidden, as they slowly lowered into the thick tufts of grass, though their lights softly glowed. How could insects make such a perfect circle? She wondered. Is this something they do instinctually? Like salmon or turtles returning to where they were born? She took a careful step forward to get a better look. Something was not right with the fireflies.

For one thing, fireflies didn't have delicate little hands, or faces . . . or human-like bodies. Bella gasped, rubbing her eyes in disbelief. That wasn't a firefly; it couldn't be—fireflies didn't wear dresses and have large iridescent multi-colored wings! Nor could they dance and sing the way these creatures could! They were fairies! A whole circle of tiny, delicate fairies, moving gracefully to a song that sounded like it was played on a dozen flutes.

The fairy closest to her was visible; a tiny heart-shaped face, green eyes that seemed to be lit from within, tumbled curls of strawberry blond that did not entirely hide her pointed ears. The fairy's iridescent wings glowed with soft colors in the moonlight as it danced with the others. Bella watched it closely, trying to memorize every beautiful feature for her canvas.

Intent on watching the beautiful creatures before her, Bella took another step forward in the grass and unintentionally broke a stick under her foot. There was a sharp CRACK as it snapped, the sound echoing like thunder around the meadow. The fairy song instantly ceased, replaced with the

high-pitched screams of fear from the crowd of fairies on the ground.

One fairy, a beautiful woman with long, golden hair, deep green eyes, wearing a stunning dress of glittering green that made her eyes glow even more, stepped forward out of the circle of fairies. As she did, she seemed to grow taller and taller and TALLER until she loomed over Bella, the size of an adult, seizing Bella's wrist.

"Human child!" She said, in a voice musical and terrible at the same time. "You have witnessed our dance and heard our song without permission! Leave now or . . ." she frowned, looking at her hand gripping Bella's wrist.

Bella looked too. To her astonishment, it seemed as if her skin was lit from within. That portion of her arm looked just like the woman standing in front of her; it exuded a warm glow. The fairy released her, and the light immediately faded.

The fairies in the meadow were still in a panic. Turning away from Bella, the full-sized fairy raised her arm in an imperious fashion.

"Silence!" The noise immediately ceased. "The human child is not an ordinary trespasser; I will deal with her as I see fit." Turning again, she faced Bella, reaching her hand up to gently trail her finger down Bella's cheek, stepping back in surprise when Bella's skin became luminous wherever the fairy touched. "Can it be?" she asked—"Who . . . who are your parents?"



Bella could barely speak.

"Mmmom and Dddad?" she squeaked. Fear gripped Bella as the fairy continued to scrutinize her. "Wwwhy do you ask?"

"Your skin; it glows when I touch it; you have fairy blood in you. Yet you are unknown to us. Are you from a faraway kingdom?"

"No, I live here; I mean—we—live in the city, like 100 kilometers south of this forest," Bella said, as she wondered what this line of questioning was about.

As if sensing her nervousness, the fairy smiled, suddenly seeming much more friendly, and released her grip on Bella's wrist.

"I have been remiss. I have not introduced myself. I am Cintarra; high priestess of the Seelie Court and trusted advisor to Queen Tatiana." Then her eyes went steely as she continued, "Who are you, and why are you intruding on our ceremony?"

"Bella Santini," Bella replied. She felt as if she should curtsy, then decided against it. "I wasn't trying to be rude; I followed a firefly, it disappeared, and I found this meadow as I was trying to get back to camp. I was watching; because I was like, this is so beautiful! The lights were dancing! I'm gonna paint this when I get back home. I wasn't trying to spy on you or anything!"

"You were drawn to and inspired by beauty; your skin becomes luminous when touched with magic. You are a puzzle to me; one that I must unravel," Turning to the gathered fairies, Cintarra

commanded, “bind her, and bring her to our size with a shrinking spell—we are taking her with us.”

Before Bella could react, she was surrounded by fairies, flying circles around her as they chanted a rippling staccato intonation that morphed into a sweet melody, wrapping her in sound. Bella tried to swat them away, but her body could not move. Her skin began tingling, and Bella noticed she grew smaller with each breath, shrinking steadily until she was the height of a blade of freshly mown grass. Her hands were tied behind her back by two fairies, whose drably colored outfits and old-fashioned armor seemed to indicate they were there to protect the other fairies rather than dance with them. One of them reached up and closed Bella’s eyelids while muttering another spell. Flanking her on both sides, the fairies grabbed Bella’s elbows and flew off, with Bella suspended between them.

Time has a way of changing its flow—when frightened, minutes seem to stretch; when happy, minutes seem to compress. To Bella, it seemed like they spent hours flying before landing lightly on a solid surface. Pushed forward from behind, Bella took three steps, stumbling as she moved. She felt a strange coldness as she tried to regain her balance. Bella then heard a voice emitting softly sparkling tones, sounding almost like a xylophone playing, though she still could not see anything. Chanting another lyrical spell, her jailers caused her arms to unbind and her eyes to open. Bella’s

heart started beating erratically as she began to panic—she was locked inside a jail cell; she was subject to the whims of these strange beings!

The room was stark, with stone walls made of weathered brown blocks fitted together with crumbling mortar. The front of the room was equipped with thick metal bars. There were no windows or doors and nothing in the room to make the occupant comfortable. The only light came from a single lamp in the ceiling that flickered like a firefly. She rubbed her arms to bring back her circulation, fearfully eyeing her jailers on the outside of her cell.

“You are a prisoner of the Seelie Court, held for trial in the city of Thessaeria,” intoned one of the jailers, “Behave, answer questions with the truth, and you will have a fair chance of returning to your world. If you choose to fight or deceive us, you will never leave.”

One of her captors waved his hand as he spoke a short spell that sounded more guttural than lyrical, changing her attire into the same drab grey fairy outfits her jailors wore. Turning away, the jailers flew off down the corridor, leaving Bella utterly alone in her dark, cold cell.

Bella was stunned. She had no idea how or why she ended up here. She never really believed in fairies—they were just characters in stories, weren't they? To have one accuse her of having fairy blood, of being bound and carted off to jail for no reason—it was too much to believe!

How can she get out of here, be restored to her full size, and find her way home? Would she ever see her parents again?

"There must be a way to get out," Bella thought, resolving that nothing would stop her. Her breath heaving, she frantically searched her cell for any way to escape. Her fingers became chafed as she desperately probed the grooves between the stones, searching for a slight crack, indicating an entrance to a secret passage. Finding none, Bella slumped in a corner, wrapping her arms around her knees. It could only have been a few hours since she'd left the campsite, she thought as she huddled in the darkness, but it seemed like years. Bella remembered what the fairy jailers had said. If she behaved, answered questions with the truth, she would have a fair chance of returning to her world. But what if they wouldn't take her back? What if she was stuck in this cell forever? Bella bit her lip as tears threatened to spill over. A few hours ago I was angry that Mom and Dad dragged me on this trip, she thought miserably, but now all I want to do is find them and be with them again.

She closed her eyes, remembering the car trip to their campsite.

The drive north seemed to last forever, with her parents chatting away in the front seat, every so often directing questions or comments her way, to include her in the camaraderie. Bella answered in monosyllables, never giving an inch, staying true to her feelings. As the car made its

way out of the city into the wilderness, Bella became aware of the landscape. Sure, the camping trip was lame, but she had to admit, the colors of the trees, a riotous blend of red, yellow, orange, and purple leaves, all evenly distributed between the trees, piqued her interest. As their car continued north, the view of vibrant trees gave way to a peaceful forest of evergreen.

Pulling into the campsite, Bella looked on in awe of the vistas surrounding her. In the backdrop, mountains stood tall and imposing, stretching into the distance as far as the eye could see. The nearby mountains appeared to be a navy color, so deep they were almost black, fading into softer hues with each successive row of mountains until they blended perfectly into the grey mist. Carpeting the foreground hills was a deep, intense emerald-green forest composed mainly of pine trees. The forest gave off a fresh, clean scent of earth and pine. The ground beneath the trees, padded with a thick mat of spent needles, in burnt umber and yellow ochre colors, appeared softly cushioned. Small clearings were interspersed throughout the campgrounds, allowing space to set up tents. The scene vibrated peace and tranquility.

Bella smiled inside, amused that she thought in the art world's language, equating the beautiful colors of nature that surrounded her with the watercolor hues she loved to use when painting. But she kept the feeling inside and did not share it with her parents.

Her parents spent the next hour or so setting up camp, first a tent for Bella, planted next to the forest's edge, then a tent for them, situated within 15 meters of Bella's tent. After getting things organized, the adults decided to go for a hike, seeking the trail that led to a waterfall. They insisted Bella join them. Rolling her eyes yet again, Bella started on the path, trying to create space between herself and her parents. She did not want anyone to think she wanted to spend time with them.

The trail was relatively flat, covered with pine needles and outlined with rocks; it bordered a small creek as it meandered through the woods. The twitter and flutter of birds in the trees charmed them as they walked the path. The family stopped every so often to admire the view of the trees and the mountains. After a kilometer or two, Bella paused, hearing a waterfall. It's just up ahead, she thought, as she ran over to stand on the rocks, hoping to see the view. What she saw took her breath away. A pristine waterfall set against a backdrop of boulders stacked high; part of a ridgeline that probably eons ago had crumbled down into pieces of a broken promise. The precariously placed boulders had trees growing in-between and out of them, clinging tenuously to the rocks in a never-ending battle for life. "I wish I could come back and sketch this tomorrow; I want to paint this; it is so pretty!" Bella had thought to herself.

After returning to the campgrounds, her par-

ents cooked an evening meal over the campfire. Her mom had tried to get her involved in the conversation, talking about when Bella was three; she ran away wanting to play with the bunnies in the field near their house. Bella got her little foot stuck in a rut in the ground. She couldn't move, so the bunnies came to her. Bella's mom had found her after frantically searching the neighborhood. Bunnies surrounded her; one even lifted up on his hind legs to rub noses with Bella. The bunnies scurried off when her mom arrived. Her mom described how Bella was upset that her "friends" left. Bella rolled her eyes, unimpressed by her mother's effort to include her in the conversation.

After an hour or so of her parents laughing and talking by the campfire, Bella was tired of listening. She abruptly stood up and stalked off to her tent, mumbling a barely audible "goodnight" toward her parents.

Remembering the day and evening that led up to her current situation, Bella groaned. She wouldn't have treated her parents that way if she had known she would lose them.

Taking off her jacket, she rolled it into a ball, laid down, and placed it under her head as a pillow. Despite her situation, she was exhausted, and sleepiness descended over Bella, a heaviness borne of distress caused her eyes to close and her head to droop. Before despair overtook her, she was slightly warmed by a pleasant thought—maybe this is all just a dream, and she would wake up

back at her tent in the morning.

* * *

In a remote part of the castle, in the early morning darkness, the weak light of the waning moon barely illuminated two heads bowed close together over a bowl of water showing the image of Bella as she slept.

"You know who she is," said the one. "Find out who summoned her. This is a terrible turn of events! She was not supposed to return until I called her back when all is prepared. No one must know she is in the kingdom. Keep the illusions in place. Her life depends on it."

"I am sorry I did not see her true identity until now. It is my fault she is here, though I did not summon her. She will be put in a safe place, one that would not be expected. I will bind her in a cloaking spell to hide her identity. You have my word on it." The figure wrapped herself up in a cape and swooped out of the room, leaving a faint trail of lights in her wake.



CHAPTER TWO

In Jail!

Bella awoke with a start; the sound of singing was filtering down from the halls above. Blinking her eyes, she realized, based on the soft glow of the flickering torches in the hallway, it must still be nighttime. She pinched herself on the arm. This was not a dream; she was still stuck in the fairy world. The singing continued, several voices blending into a melodious tune. One voice carried further, or maybe it was merely louder. The singer appeared to be approaching her cell. The song was light-hearted, and under any other circumstances, it would have been a welcome intrusion into the dreary surroundings. Despite hearing the lyrical melody, Bella cowered in the corner, fearful of another confrontation. She has no idea how

she offended these beings, and she did not want to get into any more trouble. The singing grew louder, closer, more lyrical. Trying to be invisible, Bella shrank into herself, face and eyes focused on the hard, cold stone floor.

"Pathetic creature, what ails you?" queried a deep voice. "Sit up and hear me!" The singer commanded. "Have you lost your magic little fairy? No worries, I can help!"

Bella looked up hesitantly.

The fairy, a young male with sandy blond hair and piercing turquoise blue eyes, was standing outside her cell, a small smile on his face. Stop staring! He's going to think you're pathetic and weird! Bella ordered herself. But she couldn't help looking; he was so . . . gorgeous. Tall and slender, he was dressed in soft garments the color of green leaves. His hair glowed slightly in the light from the torches, framing a narrow, intelligent face, with eyes the color of a blue lagoon. His smile was kind, but impish giving him a rakish look. Bella sighed in frustration. She itched to capture his perfect, straight features on a canvas and wished again for her art supplies.

"Let's get a better look at you, shall we?" The strange fairy began to twirl and swoop, uttering nonsense words as he moved. A flash of light and Bella was looking down on him as she floated in the air. "There, that's better," he laughed, "Now I can see you. And what am I seeing? A human, but one who flies without wings, based on min-

imal spells. Curious . . .” Taking two steps back, he bowed. “Pleased to make your acquaintance; I am Matteus, initiate level three, son of Freddie Silvano. Who are you?”

Bella tried not to whimper as she floated above her cell floor. How was this possible? What was his purpose? Was he going to harm her? She had no idea what or why this was happening.

“My name is Bella. I was arrested and brought here. I didn’t do anything!” She added, then yelped as her head bumped the top of the cell.

“Oh, so you are a prisoner—well, no fraternizing with the enemy, they say; I must be off!” Matteus skittered away, leaving a trail of sapphire blue shimmering fairy dust in his wake.

“Hey—don’t leave!” Bella yelled, “How am I supposed to get down?” She felt like crying. What had she done to deserve this treatment? Kicking her legs frantically, Bella floated toward the cell bars, hoping to see if one of her jailers could help her. Seeing the sparkling blue trail of fairy dust, Bella had an idea—maybe she could use his fairy dust to reverse his magic! Bella stretched her hand outside of the cell, reaching as far as she could. Then, cupping her hand, Bella scooped up as much of the glittering dust as possible. Bringing it back inside the cell, she closed her eyes and imagined she was very heavy, while she sprinkled her handful of dust over her head. The sensation of falling overcame her. “Ouch!” she cried as she crashed to the floor.



"I knew it!" Matteus came flying around the corner at breakneck speed. "You passed my test—you used magic to your benefit. You must have fairy blood in you!" Matteus danced in a circle, strangely proud of this little human/fairy. "You have earned one gift—I will give you a bed because you need some sleep. Tomorrow the questioning begins." Matteus pointed to the corner of her cell, weaving an eclectic combination of sounds into a beautiful, melodious spell. Dust began swirling, picking up matter as the song continued. At the end of the song a comfortable bed occupied the corner of the cell. "Off to bed, little fairy wanna-be; I will see you tomorrow." Laughing, Matteus once again flew off.

Darkness descended, and feeling out of sorts, Bella crawled into the magical bed. She wasn't sure how she felt about Matteus; he had been sort of helpful in a devious kind of way. Yet, he was one of them. And that Cintarra, or whatever her name was, just had them shrink her, bind her, take and arrest her; throwing her in this cell, without even a bed. Was there anyone she could trust in this strange world?

Wrapping herself in the thin blanket, Bella wished she had the comfort of having her parents nearby, the enjoyment of having her friends around.

"Will I ever see them again?" Bella sobbed. Tears freely running down her cheeks, she burrowed into the blankets and cried for her predica-

ment, for missing her parents and her friends, for having no one to trust.

* * *

In a ghostly forest of blackened trees, her skeletal limbs twisting eerily into the mist, a lone figure flew, cloaked in shadows. She was on a mission, one of much importance to the kingdom. The balance of power was in question; she was intent on tipping it out of control.

She arrived at a stump of a fallen tree that had filled with water. Standing in front of the stump, she reached down and brushed the surface of the water. It began bubbling, sending tendrils of mist up into the air. As the surface calmed, an image appeared. It was Bella, curled up in her cell. The figure cackled with glee as she rubbed her hands together.

"She is perfect for my plan!" She chuckled gleefully. "Who would think that by using this slip of a girl and a conceited male human as pawns, I could wrest control of this kingdom? My sister will not know what will soon overtake her!"

* * *

Morning came with little fanfare. Bella cracked open her eyes, feeling confused, not sure where she was. Sitting up, the gravity of her situation fell upon her, causing her eyes to tear up. No, I

won't think about them now, Bella vowed, trying to surmount her sense of loss over her friends. If I answer their questions, I might be able to go home, she reminded herself. Trying to keep her head from dwelling on her problems, she got up and paced back and forth in her jail cell, wondering what might happen next.

Bella noticed a soft, warm smell of cinnamon and spice wafting up the corridor. It reminded her of her Mom making cinnamon waffles. Memories pummeled her; memories of school days when her Mom yelled up the stairs, "Hurry up, Bella, breakfast is ready!" Bella could picture her Mom in her mind's eye—slightly stressed, one hand on the banister, the other pushing her hair out of her eyes. Bella saw memories of her Mom reading fairy tales to her, memories of her Mom bathing her and brushing her hair, memories of her Mom holding her hand as she gleefully stomped in rain puddles as a small child. Bella's heart dropped; she missed her Mom! Would she ever share a simple breakfast with her again? Swallowing her sorrow, Bella approached her cell bars, staring into the empty hallway, longing for home.

Bella heard a rhythmic tinkling, reminding her of the sound of young children's laughter blended with crystal chimes blowing in the soft summer breeze. Despite her circumstances, Bella was enchanted by the sound. A group of young fairies flew up the corridor, seemingly intent on getting somewhere. They stopped and stared at Bella,

then breathlessly fell into the sharp buzz of excited conversation. Some pointed, others laughed—a beautiful sound! Before she could blink her eyes, they were gone. Why was she the object of curiosity? Shaking her head, she thought, what just happened?

Not long after they were gone, Matteus flew toward her from the end of the corridor.

“Little one, you are up! I was asked to guide you through the day. Here, take my hand, and we will fly to the gathering place.” He shoved a slender hand through the bars of the cell, clearly waiting for her to take it.

Bella took a wary step back. She still hadn’t forgotten how he made her float yesterday.

“I don’t know or trust you.” She said. “How can I be sure you aren’t going to put another spell on me or something?”

Matteus laughed, a sparkling sound that filled the corridor, ringing off the walls. He liked the spirit in this creature. “Little one, you have no choice here.” He chuckled, his blue eyes twinkling. “I have been assigned the duty of guiding you; your duty is to let me. Now take my hand.”

Stomping her foot, Bella rebelled. “No, I won’t go!”

The twinkle in Matteus’ eye was replaced with ice.

“Do not think you have the power to say no.” He warned her. “I have power and magic, so much more than you can conceive. Must I force this sit-

uation, or will you come along willingly?"

Fearful of the consequences if she continued to argue, Bella reluctantly took Matteus' hand. The bars of her cell shimmered, then became incandescent before fading into the void. Matteus pulled her out of the cell, then flew quietly up the corridor, dragging her behind him. They rounded the corner at the end of the hallway, and came into a great room, lined with tables, enough to seat hundreds of fairies. The Fae were scattered amongst the tables, some here, some there. Gesturing to a table, Matteus suggested they sit down.

"We will eat first," Matteus said, "What kind of food do you eat?"

"For breakfast, my Mom makes me cinnamon waffles. Can you make them here?" Bella queried.

"Hmmm," Matteus said thoughtfully, "cinnamon, I know, but I do not know what waffles are—we only eat natural things here. Can I get you cinnamon grains?" With an impish smile, Matteus swept off to another room before she could answer. Bella took that moment alone to take a deep breath; she knew she was on a strange adventure, and she wondered how all this strangeness was possible. Could she really be in another world, or was this some elaborate dream? Bella looked around the great hall and sighed. Another place that she would have to wait to paint. She caught a few fairies looking curiously in her direction and quickly returned her gaze to the table in front of her, not wanting to attract attention.

Matteus soon returned with steaming bowls of what he called cinnamon grains. The breakfast was delicious! Slightly nutty in flavor, with the sweet taste of cinnamon. They ate silently, each sinking into their own thoughts.

Matteus eyed the strange girl in front of him curiously as she dug hungrily into her food. He'd only seen pictures of humans in his textbooks, and while she was pretty and delicate like the princesses he'd seen in history class, she had a fiery spirit that he found himself admiring. She looked like she was only a few years younger than he, with hair that was a warm, reddish color, and eyes like clear water. She was a puzzle, he decided. A human, but with weak fairy powers, a prisoner, but now released to appear before the Tribunal. Something was up, but Matteus could not quite figure it out. He would likely know more through attending the trial, he mused, as he continued to eat.

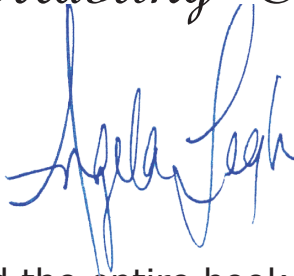
Bella was curious, but in a different way. She wondered why Matteus chose to let her out of her cage. Weren't they worried she might try and escape? Then Bella remembered the person across from her could suspend her in the air the second she decided to run. She eyed the high ceiling glumly. If I floated up there, I'd never get down, she realized. She took another bite of her cinnamon grains, but she'd lost her appetite. Hopefully, if the trial goes well, I'll be able to go home. Bella sighed, suddenly homesick, and pushed her bowl

away from her. They're probably awake by now, she guessed. I hope they're not too worried about me. If I get sent back, I'll never take my parents for granted ever again, she promised herself.

I trust you enjoyed the first two chapters of

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