

The Promise

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Nom de plume- Andaleigh Archer

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To Andy & Patrick

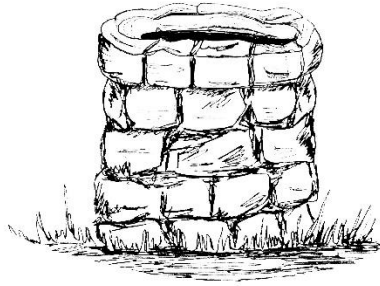
*O I forbid you,
Maidens a',
That wear gowd on
your hair,
To come or gae by
Carterhaugh,
For young Tam Lin is there.*

Opening verse of Tam Lin

The Promise

A Faerie's Tale

By Andaleigh Archer



~The Well~

"I'm telling you, Ash, we should leave it alone!"

"It's not going to bite you, Ivy. Besides, I think it's kind of pretty. It's warm. Touch it."

Ivy looked down at the glowing green stone. It was pretty, but that was beside the point. What the hell was it? They had been to the well dozens of times, and neither had ever

noticed it before. It was as though it sprouted out of the ground, like a Snowdrop bursting through the ice. "I'm not going to touch it, and neither should you," she finally said.

"What? Do we have to ask permission?"

Ivy looked at him in irritation. "I can't believe you're not spooked by it. I mean, it's weird.

"Maybe it's a gift from the Faeries," Ash cackled.

"Is that your attempt at creepy?"

"You never know; they might have left it here," he replied.

Ivy raised an eyebrow.

"Maybe it's their way of blessing our union," he said, his voice rising and falling in a singsong way that drove her crazy.

"You can't be serious?" she asked. But she knew he was. Ash loved everything fantastical. It was cool and she did appreciate it. She even attended fantasy festivals with him. She took a more practical and grounded approach to Ash's interests. It was fun but not real.

Ivy looked up to see a brown curl fall over his left eye. The right side of his mouth curled into a grin. A feeling of heat rushed to her face, and she looked away, thankful the darkness hid the sudden color in her cheeks.

"Maybe the Faeries did leave it," she whispered.

"Well, that's the first practical thing I've ever heard you say," Ash replied.

Ivy shrugged her shoulders. "Practical? I don't know if I would call it that."

"So, you do believe?" Ash asked

"I don't know," she replied.

"You believe in angels, right?"

"Yeah, but-

"God?"

"Are we having a theological conversation, Ash?"

"Well, what is so hard about believing in faeries? That old crow you hang around with does. If I haven't rubbed off on you, maybe she has."

"She's not an old crow, and you shouldn't talk about her that way."

Ash let out another sinister laugh and caressed the green stone seductively, "My precioussss," he hissed.

Ivy ignored him and continued with her rant. "This isn't about what I believe in. It's about a stone appearing out of nowhere, which is weird!"

"It's just a stone." Ash began to dig around its green light. "Hey, maybe it's an emerald," he said brightly. "It could make us rich."

"I've never heard of emeralds glowing with that kind of light. Come on, let's go. It

gives me the creeps," she said, looking over her shoulder. "I want to go home."

"I thought you wanted to do it?" He grinned sheepishly.

Ivy looked away from him, feeling slightly annoyed. Even though everyone she knew had already done it, she was still a virgin. And although Ash wasn't and never once pressured her to have sex, she still felt guilty, making him wait until her sixteenth birthday. For whatever reason, she thought the age sounded right. Still, she did feel like she was the world's last virgin, and she didn't want him to think she was making excuses. They decided months ago the well would be the perfect spot to have sex for the first time. They planned to profess their love to each other by tossing two roses into the water. That was Ash's idea. It was going to be unique and romantic.

"I'm not making excuses if that is what you mean," Ivy replied. She knew her voice contradicted every word.

"Right," Ash sighed heavily.

"Now you're just pissing me off. Are you trying to make me feel guilty?"

"I'm not. I-." Ash stopped his words, caught by a strange gurgling sound rising in the back of his throat.

"Stop it, Ash! You're not funny!" Ivy snapped.

Ash looked up at her; his eyes were large and black. The expression on his face was one of sheer terror. Before she could utter a word, the ground moaned with a tremor. The stones glowing light illuminated to blinding proportions causing her to stumble backward. Another temblor shook the ground, and Ivy fell hard on her bottom. When she looked up, Ash hung several feet above the ground, like a marionette on invisible strings. She watched helplessly as he dangled like a rag doll, moving to hover over the mouth of the well. For a moment, everything became still and silent. Ash reached his hand outward toward her, but before she could do anything, like strings being cut, he fell into the mouth of the well. The ominous green light extinguished and sank deep into the ground.



~ Two Years Later ~

Ivy looked out her bedroom window toward a distant double row of trees arcing toward each other, forming a circle of interconnecting hands. Beneath them was a well-worn path edge of her parent's property. The flickering flame from a white candle caught her eye, and she picked up a small framed picture of Ash sitting next to it. It was the kind you have taken at one of those mall photo booths. Ivy ran her finger over Ash's image. He had the same sideways grin she loved so much, and his furrowed brow made his eyes look particularly intense. He always looked like he knew something others did not. She thought she

looked like a dork, with her pixie haircut, dyed three shades of red, and thick black glasses, sitting slightly askew. It was the year before she got contacts. He didn't want her to, saying the glasses made her look sexy. She never knew what he saw in her. He was so outgoing, and she was bookish and introverted. He always managed to keep her grounded when everything else seemed out of control.

A hot tear fell and splashed on his mouth in the picture. She wiped it away with her thumb. "I miss you," she whispered. Though she was sad, the picture reminded her of happier times. It was the return of her memory, which brought back those special moments they shared, but also the horror of the night he disappeared. Ivy looked out toward the trees again. This night marked the second anniversary of his disappearance.

The Grandfather clock in the hall struck, marking it a half an hour until six. Her parents would be leaving shortly to have dinner with another couple, and when they did, she would put her plan in motion. For now, she was alone with only her thoughts to keep her company.



~ The Carter Witch ~

Miss Christina lived in a creepy, Victorian, and rumor had it she was a blind witch. Ivy assumed this was started by a few high school kids with nothing better to do. Like all kids, Ivy's curiosity eventually got the best of her, and she made a point of walking past the old Victorian each day after school. For the longest time, she saw nothing and wondered if

anyone actually lived in the old house. But on one occasion, Ivy caught sight of the famed Carter Witch sitting in a rocker on her front porch. She stared at her trying to figure out what all the fuss was about. Yes, she was old, probably ancient. She was dressed in an old black gown, and her hair sat in a loose bun upon her head. Two cats lay near her feet, not the rumored twenty. She did appear blind, but otherwise, she looked harmless.

Ivy was just about to leave when the woman turned, looked at her squarely, and waved her forward. Ivy jumped, heart pounding in her chest. She looked around to see if anyone else had seen the old woman's beckoning invitation, and thought to run. However, the woman shook her finger back and forth and said, "You must never be rude, Ivy."

"How do you know my name?" Ivy gasped.

"When you are as old as I am, child, you know everyone," she replied with a cackle.

"Then you would know I am not a child," Ivy said before she could stop.

The woman smiled. "Quite. But when you are as old as I, everyone is a child. Come closer. Despite what you may have heard, I do not bite."

Ivy hesitated but then began to move forward.

"Not hard anyway," she cackled again, stopping Ivy in her tracks. That comment would have been enough to make any teenager turn and run. However, the one thing Ivy always had was an innate sense of good versus evil. Besides, the woman's kindhearted smile gave her away. She was just like Ivy, a little left from center and very misunderstood.

From that moment forward, they were friends. Ivy stopped by Miss Christina's house every day on her way home from school for tea. Every day that is, until Ash's disappearance. That was when she forgot about her friend and, subsequently, many of the details surrounding that night.

She still continued to pass her house each day, and periodically, she would spot the woman rocking on her porch, but neither acknowledged each other. For the longest time, she couldn't remember anything. But now everything, including Miss Christina and their special bond, came back in a flood of pictures and colors.

Despite the pouring rain and the lapse in their friendship, Ivy knew she had to see her old friend. She immediately called her friend Sukie.

"Can I tell my parents I'm spending the night at your house?" Ivy begged.

"Sure, but why? What are you going to do? You sound upset," Sukie fished.

"I can't tell you right now."

"Oh, hell, no, Ivy. First of all, I know it has to be big because you never lie, and you want to lie to your parents."

"You are lying for me."

"You're still telling it first. I'm only covering for your ass. Are you going to the well? Your parents will freak if you go there."

"No, I am not going to the well."

"Then what? Tell me what is going on, or I won't agree."

"I'm going to see Miss Christina. I need to talk to her."

"That old bat."

"Don't call her that," Ivy snapped.

"Sorry, but what the hell do you have to talk with her about?"

"I just need to is all. Will you do it? Will you say I'm spending the night at your house?"

Ivy could hear Sukie breathing heavily on the other end of the phone. The silence was killing her. Finally, Sukie spoke. "Yeah, but call me, okay."

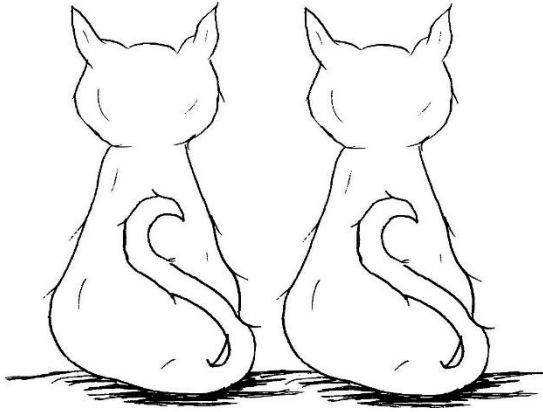
"Okay. I will. Thanks." Ivy hung up the phone, told her lie, and felt a knot form in her stomach.

"So, you do believe?"

The memory of Ash's voice pounded to the rhythm of her footsteps. She was so overwhelmed with emotion she forgot her

umbrella. By the time she reached Miss Christina's house, she was soaked to her skin. Ivy ran up to the door and stopped. Before she had a chance to knock, Miss Christina opened the door and looked at Ivy with her blue-coated eyes.

"You could use some tea, child," Miss Christina smiled, holding her hand out to Ivy. Ivy reached out a trembling hand and placed it into that of her friend, allowing Miss Christina's feather-light touch to guide her over the threshold and into her home.



~The Visit~

Ivy had not said a word since she entered the warm confines of the old Victorian home. Instead, she stood dripping on an old rug in the entryway, eyeing her surroundings. Everything was just as she remembered.

The aroma of spiced fruit and flowers infused her senses. Miss Christina always had bowls of fresh fruit on hand. Quinces, oranges, cherries, apricots, and various unidentifiable berries, black, purple, blue, and red, overflowed in milky white bowls throughout the house.

The inside of the home still looked like a child's dollhouse, with everything being either lacy or floral. The stained-glass windows, aglow with the flickering candlelight of faerie

lamps, reflected vibrant hues of green, gold, and yellow. Hundreds of books filled dark stained ornate bookshelves that ran one wall's length in the sitting room. Various knick-knacks, depicting animals both great and small, sat neatly throughout the house. The first time Ivy entered Miss Christina's home, she felt overwhelmed by the visual stimulus of it all.

Now, looking upon its familiarity filled her with a sense of security. She looked down at the puddle she had created and quickly removed her shoes.

"I knew you were coming, child," Miss Christina called from the sitting room. "Come and sit by the fire; it will dry you off," she instructed.

Ivy wiped her nose with the back of her hand and looked over at Miss Christina, who sat quietly in her high-back chair. Two cups of hot chamomile and lavender tea sat on a lace-covered Queen Anne coffee table.

"Drink. It will warm your insides," she said. "Help yourself to the fruit. I just acquired it from the nicest men at the market today. It's particularly pleasant and fresh."

Ivy declined the fruit but picked up a small teacup covered with tiny pink roses. The steam from the hot tea rose high in the air, separated into diaphanous fingers, and curled toward her in a seductive dance. She took a welcoming sip of the warm liquid, recalling its

sweet flavor. After a moment, the pad-footed sounds of Laura and Lizzie's little paws entered the sitting room, breaking the silence with soft meows of greetings. Lizzy hopped onto Ivy's lap while Laura jumped up onto Miss Christina's.

Ivy looked up at Miss Christina. "I'm sorry I have not come to visit sooner. I couldn't-"

"Remember me," Miss Christina said, finishing Ivy's sentence with a knowing grin. "Well, of course, you couldn't. You suffered a tragic event. Your love was stolen by the Fae."

The teacup slipped from Ivy's hand, but she caught it, making a loud clatter. Lizzie casually licked up a few remnants of sweet liquid that slipped over the rim of the cup and landed on her tiny black nose. Ivy placed the cup gingerly on the doily-covered serving tray. Like Ash, Miss Christina believed in faeries. Ash's connection always felt childish, but Miss Christina's connection seemed otherworldly, maybe even a bit scary.

"Would you like more tea, dear?"

Ivy shook her head as though Miss Christina could see.

"Well then, would you mind refilling my cup?" she asked, scratching Laura gently behind her ears.

Ivy nodded and tried to steady her trembling hand by holding her wrist as she refilled the cup with tea. Her mind was a whirl

of confusion, and she was having difficulty forming the words she needed to say.

Miss Christina sat quietly for some time but eventually looked above the rim of her cup. "Now that you are warm and dry, tell me about that night."

"It seems you could tell me more about it than I could," Ivy replied.

"Perhaps. But I wish to hear your story first."

Ivy opened her mouth in a flurry of words and emotions, recalling everything she could remember about the last time she saw Ash. She wasn't sure she made any sense and tried to remain calm. She often found it difficult to express herself when overwhelmed by emotions. It was as though her brain had trouble putting together into words what she was feeling. It often worked faster than her mouth, and usually, it only made sense to her. Luckily, Miss Christina was always patient and seemed to put the pieces of the puzzle together better than most.

"We went to the farthest point on my parents' property. There is an old stone wishing well."

"I am familiar with the one you speak of," Miss Christina nodded.

Ivy was about to ask how she knew of the well, but Miss Christina interrupted. "I know everything about this town, dear. Go on."

"We were at the well, and this stone appeared out of nowhere. It was just sticking out of the ground and glowing with a weird green light."

"What shape was it?"

"I don't really know; it was pointed."

"Pointed, you say. Fascinating. Go on."

"Ash thought it was pretty and wanted to dig it up. I guess he thought it was some sort of emerald and was going to make us rich. I've never heard of emeralds in this area," Ivy rambled.

"So, you say he was digging it up?"

"Yeah, and then all of a sudden, he started choking. His eyes rolled back in his head, and that is when the ground opened up with a bright green light."

"What happened next?" Miss Christina asked, leaning forward.

Ivy felt her stomach constrict. She began rocking back and forth in an attempt to focus. She took a deep calming breath and started again.

"I fell backward. When I looked up, Ash was hanging over the well like a rag doll. I just froze, and before I could do anything, he fell into it. Then the ground closed, and the stone disappeared. After that, everything went black."

"Do you remember anything else?"

"No," Ivy replied.

"This is important, dear. Anything else?"

Ivy started to shake her head but then stopped. "Wait! Yes, I didn't then, but I do now. I heard the sound of laughter. It was small but dark and rich. I heard the sound of leaves crunching around me, like the sound of a hundred feet approaching."

Miss Christina sat back slowly. "Small, dark, and rich. What a lovely choice of words. Hundreds of feet, you say. Very curious. Go on."

"The sound wasn't quiet, it was thunderous and then-"

"What?" Miss Christina's filmy eyes grew wide with anticipation.

"I felt something poke me, and then I fell asleep. When I awoke- No, when my parents found me, I was covered in a blanket of leaves. It was as though someone placed the leaves over me as a cover, almost as if they were trying to hide me."

"Yes, that sounds like the Fae to me."

"What do you mean?"

"The good people," she replied simply.

"They don't sound all that good to me," Ivy snorted.

"From where I come from, it's a term. Many referred to the Fae as good people as a sign of respect. They still do in many parts of the world. In my day, it was customary to speak courteously of them, even those who were not

so nice, to avoid their wrath or perhaps, receive their gifts."

Ivy took another sip of tea. "They don't sound anything like the faeries from Disney."

"True. And not all cats are evil," she replied, stroking the sleeping cat on her lap. "The faeries you encountered are nothing like the Disney faeries you grew up seeing in movies."

"We used to talk about faeries, didn't we? I remember asking you about them because Ash was into all that stuff."

"Yes, we spoke about many things," Miss Christina replied.

Ivy suddenly felt a twinge of guilt. "I'm sorry. I know I should have come sooner. It's hard for me to remember much before the well."

"Well then, we shall start anew," Miss Christina smiled.

"That would be nice."

Ivy poured herself more tea and took a generous sip.

"Do you really believe Ash was captured by faeries?" Ivy asked. Her practical nature prevented her from believing everything Miss Christina said, even though her experience with Ash defied rational reasoning.

"Stolen is more likely. You and your love stumbled upon a faerie stone. I dare say you may have entered a faerie ring. Had you moved

on and not touched the stone, I believe your Ash would still be with us.

"Why didn't they take me?"

"It's very possible they did want you and not him. The stone did appear on your families' property. Perhaps they wanted you both, just him or neither of you. However, if you were the one meant to fall, I can assure you there will be hell to pay.

"Why would they want either of us?"

Miss Christina took a deep breath and then another sip of her tea. "It's difficult to say. The Fae may have taken your Ash for any number of reasons. It could have been because he violated sacred ground, and they wanted him to pay for his insolence. It may have had nothing to do with that at all. He was a talented musician, was he not?"

"Yes," Ivy replied. "Ash could play many instruments. He could play by ear, something she envied. "He could fence, too," she added.

"A real renaissance man," Miss Christina said with a smile. She then raised a finger as if a thought had suddenly occurred to her. "It could be they took him to ensure the survival of their race."

Ivy shifted uncomfortably. "You mean to fight in some sort of war?"

"No dear, taken to help procreate faerie offspring."

This was outlandish, even for Miss Christina. Still, a knot formed in Ivy's stomach. "Can't they mate with their own?" Ivy asked, trying not to sound upset.

"Certainly. Often," she giggled girlishly.

Miss Christina's response was not making Ivy feel any better, but she continued, seemingly unaware of her discomfort.

"You see, the Fae have difficulty conceiving faerie children, so they will seek mortal men for their seed. Conception with their own kind is rare, and sometimes the offspring are sickly and weak. Sometimes, they will steal mortal babies, leaving the weaker faerie babe in the mortal child's place. They are called Changelings."

"I guess the faeries didn't feel I had anything special to contribute," Ivy replied. She didn't know why, but she felt hurt by the revelation.

"You have your own special gifts, my child."

"I have no special gifts."

Miss Christina turned up her nose. "Oh, but you do. I should know."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Ivy's response bordered on rude, but sometimes she said things without thinking of how they sounded.

"That is for another discussion," Miss Christina cautioned.