

Backyard Princess

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(mf, slow)

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Chapter 1

Champion of the Elder World

I sat and stared at the wall, the only thing to do in this miserable dungeon in which I had been imprisoned. All of my friends were out adventuring in far-off lands, so I had no hope of rescue. All of the exits had been enchanted with unbreakable magical locks. Now the ravages of hunger and thirst were beginning to assault me, driving me deeper and deeper into insanity.

I yawned out of sheer boredom, then got up off my bed, put on my clothes, opened the bedroom door, and headed downstairs to fix breakfast.

My mom and I had moved to this new house only a day ago, and already I hated it. All of my old friends were halfway across the continent, and with summer vacation just beginning, I had no chance to make new ones until school started again in three months. Worse still, Mom had told me not to leave the house while she was at her first day of work, and I was cooped up inside on a beautiful, sunny June day. For a thirteen-year-old boy with a head full of dragons, knights, castles, and wizards, that was pure torture. I hadn't even bothered to get up out of bed until after she had left; there was nothing to do anyway.

I wanted to be out slaying dragons or fighting barbarian hordes or rescuing fair damsels from evil wizards, not sitting inside with nothing to do.

Even her promise to find me a babysitter soon so that I wouldn't have to stay by myself didn't appeal to me. My babysitters tended to turn into ogres as soon as Mom left me with them, especially now that I was old enough to go out adventuring on my own. For some reason she couldn't understand that a brave and gallant hero like me didn't need a guardian to watch over me; I could handle any monster or devil that the world could throw in my path.

I ate breakfast unenthusiastically, then sat down in the front room to watch TV. There was nothing on but soap operas and game shows. I sighed in boredom, then turned it off and headed back upstairs to my bedroom. I had an extensive library of fantasy books, so maybe one of them could console me.

Unfortunately, I had already read them all, and none of the titles seemed to catch my attention. I picked one completely at random, then lay back on my bed and began to read.

It didn't help.

After a couple of hours inside, I couldn't stand it any more. That tree house out back was calling to me. Mom had told me not to go outside, but surely the back yard didn't count. Besides, all I needed was just a few minutes, maybe up to an hour, and that would satisfy me for the day. I would be back inside long before she came home.

I made up my mind. Opening my bedroom door, I scampered down the stairs and out the back door. The warm sun felt so nice after being cooped up inside. I breathed in the fresh air for about a minute, then made my way to that tree.

It was a moderate-sized oak, big enough to hold a decent tree house but young enough to still be strong. No doubt my tiny extra weight would be negligible. The previous owners had built a tree house in its branches, conveniently leaving it to be converted into a fortress for a brave hero like myself.

There was a knotted climbing rope hanging down from the door of the tree house. I gave it an experimental tug, then once satisfied that it would support me, I started my ascent. It took only a few seconds, then I poked my head in the door and glanced around.

It was really just a square room about fifteen feet on a side. There were no furnishings, and in fact a few rotting leaves lay in the corner. There were windows in all four sides.

I pulled myself up into the room. Yes, it would make a nice fort, easily defensible from all the villains and monsters and dragons and barbarian hordes that my mind could conjure up. Now all I needed was a sword and perhaps a bow and arrow, and I would be a great hero, battling all the foul things of the world from my fortress in the sky.

I moved to one of the windows, where I had a great view of the castle that I must defend, also known as "the house." The opposite window had a great view down the hillside, looking out over the vast plains full of enemy soldiers ready to launch their invasion, an invasion that I would single-handedly repel with my unmatched fighting prowess. A third window just looked onto the upward slope of the hill, which became in

my mind a great mountain full of untold dangers and a wondrous treasure waiting at the top. One day I would have to make a quest to the top of that mountain.

When I went to the other window, I froze, my eyes going wide with shock. It had a great view of the neighbors' back yard, complete with a patio, a swimming pool, and a naked girl.

She was relaxing in a lawn chair by the pool, her hair damp and her body glistening with moisture from her recent swim. She was a little older than me, maybe sixteen or seventeen, and she had a body more gorgeous than I had ever imagined (having never seen a girl naked before). Her hair, though probably normally blond, was darkened from the moisture and hanging limply about her shoulders. Though I couldn't quite make out any details of her face from here, from what I could see she seemed to be beautiful.

I had been gazing upon this goddess for only about ten seconds when she suddenly turned her head and spotted me in the tree house. Her eyes went wide for a second. I will never forget those first words that she spoke, in the most wonderful, sweet, melodious voice I had ever heard.

"Are you spying on me, you little pervert?" she asked.

I continued to stare, frozen to my spot. I didn't know what to do, having never been in this situation before. The girl, however, quickly grabbed a nearby towel and wrapped it around her body. It was a shame for such a creature to be covered, and I realized in dismay that she would probably hate me for peeking on her like that. She was the first person I had seen that was anywhere near my own age since moving here, and now I had made her my enemy.

As it turned out, I was wrong. She stood up, slipped her feet into a pair of sandals, and strode toward the fence separating our property.

"Come down here," she said.

I grudgingly scurried down the rope to the ground, then with trepidation made my way to the fence, where she was peeking over it.

"I'm sorry," I said as soon as I reached her. "I wasn't spying on you, honest. I didn't even know you were there."

"Oh that's okay," she shrugged. "I know that boys are all perverts."

Now that I had the chance to look at her up close, I could tell that my initial impression of her good looks was spot on. She had a gorgeous, thin, almost elf-like face with a tapering chin and big green eyes. Here was my princess, the damsel in distress that I would fight countless evil beings to rescue. Though she lived in a neighboring kingdom, I would gladly pledge my whole soul to protect her.

She stood a full head taller than me, and while some might claim that it was because of the difference in our ages, I figured she had some of the blood of the giants who inhabited this land in an age long ago.

"What's your name?" asked my princess.

"Kenny Grant," I replied. "What's yours?"

"Sarah Laurent. So is spying on naked girls a hobby of yours?"

"I'm not a spy!" I exclaimed. How could she ever suspect me of such treachery, after I had sworn an oath to keep her from harm?

She glanced over at my house. "Is that your bedroom window?" she asked, nodding toward the second floor.

"Uh huh," I said.

She pointed to a window across the way on her own house, facing my own. "That's mine," she said. "Do you peek on me at night when I'm changing my clothes too?"

"Of course not!" I exclaimed. "Besides, we only moved in yesterday. I've never even seen you before."

"I guess I'll have to keep my curtains closed from now on then, now that I know there's a pervert across the way."

"Well if you're going to be rude about it, I don't want to talk to you any more," I said, growing angry. Maybe she wasn't the princess I thought she was. At the very least, our two kingdoms weren't going to be on good terms any time soon.

"Wait a minute, Kenny," she insisted. "I'm sorry. I was only joking. You just caught me off my guard, that's all. There used to not be anyone home during the day in your house, so it surprised me to see you there. I like to sunbathe nude so that I don't get a tan line."

I was still mad at her, so I didn't say anything.

"So do you want to come over to my house and play with me?" she asked.

"I don't want to play any girl games," I told her defiantly.

"So we'll play boy games instead," she smiled. "Come on. My family just moved here a couple of weeks ago, so I don't have any friends yet. It gets lonely sometimes."

"Why would you want to be friends with me?" I asked, still sulking. "You're a girl, and I'm a boy."

She laughed. "So it's still like that for you, is it? Well, maybe I can cure you of that."

She wasn't making any sense now, but the truth was that I did feel much better about her. Maybe our kingdoms could be reconciled after all. She did seem to be sincere about wanting to make up with me, and despite the fact that she was older than me and a girl, I had been feeling kind of lonely too.

"Well, all right," I told her. "But I get to pick the game."

"Fine," she grinned. "I'm going to go inside to get dressed. Come over in about five minutes. Oh, and I don't want to disappoint you, but I really am going to keep my curtain closed while I'm changing."

She said it in such a cheerful tone that I couldn't fault her for her words, so I just laughed. She headed off to her castle, and I returned to mine.

Not surprisingly, I sat and stared at the clock for the entire five minutes, spending the whole time wondering and fantasizing about this princess that I had just met. Surely a woman of that beauty must have a touch of elven blood flowing through her veins. She seemed nice and friendly, unlike some princesses I had known in the kingdom I had moved from. Her name was plain enough, but perhaps she would allow me to bestow upon her a new name and title that she could use when we played together. If she was nice to me, I would tell her my real name: Kenneth Shadowbane, Champion of the Elder World.

When the time was up, I headed out the front door, then crossed over into Sarah's yard. I politely knocked on the door, and she opened it immediately, wearing a yellow tank top and khaki shorts.

"Come on in, Kenny," she smiled, then stepped aside to allow me passage into the castle. It was similar in layout to my new house, with the living room, kitchen, and master bedroom downstairs and two other bedrooms upstairs. One of those bedrooms was full of boxes right now; the Laurents hadn't finished unpacking. The other was Sarah's bedroom, to which she led me.

I was impressed. She had posters of unicorns and seascapes covering her walls, a very fantasy-like atmosphere, though admittedly a little feminine for my tastes. While she liked unicorns, I preferred dragons. Still, I was happy to meet *anyone* with similar interests to my own.

I peeked out the window, and saw my own bedroom window across the way. It was almost directly across, as if the builders of the two houses had meant for the occupants to be able to communicate with each other.

Sarah sat on the bed, and motioned for me to come sit down by her. I did so, and she smiled at me.

"So what kinds of games do you like to play?" she asked.

"Well... I'm kinda sorta into fantasy," I told her.

"Really? You mean like with unicorns and mermaids and fairies and stuff?"

"And don't forget dragons," I grinned.

"I see," she said with a friendly smile. "When I was a kid, my girlfriends and I would pretend to be princesses. I haven't played make-believe in years, but if you want, I'd be happy to play along. That was always the problem when I was growing up. Plenty of princesses, but no princes to rescue them."

"Then that's perfect!" I exclaimed, happy that she was willing to adopt the role.

"So do you think I'd make a good princess?"

"Of course! I thought so from the first moment I saw you."

Sarah laughed, but it was a friendly, rather than mocking, laugh. "So you like your princesses naked, do you?"

I grew red. "Um... that's not what I--"

"I'm just teasing you," she said. "When I was younger, I always called myself Princess Allura. Is that okay?"

"Allura," I repeated. "That's great. What's your kingdom called?"

"I don't know. I hadn't really thought much about it. Why don't you name it for me?"

"Well, let me think..." I said, trying to sound smart. "I'm from Elderhaven. If we assume that our two kingdoms border each other-- I mean, your property is your kingdom and my property is mine, then unless I want to redraw the maps, it would have to be Silverfen."

"You have maps?" she asked with delight.

I nodded.

"Well let's go back to your kingdom so we can look them over. I'd like to learn more about the world that we're going to explore together."

Happy for her enthusiasm, I followed her downstairs and out the door. We crossed over into my yard and went inside. We ascended the stairs to my bedroom, where she sat down on the bed while I rummaged through my things looking for the folder that contained all of my drawings and notes and maps.

I pulled out the main map and sat down next to her on the bed. Together we went over all of the lands I had come up with. Elderhaven, my kingdom, was tasked with guarding the Elder World, or the swiftly vanishing world of nature. The colonization of the land left little room for nature, though it still overlapped the colonized world and had plenty of impact on it. All magic came from the Elder World, after all.

Silverfen, Sarah's (or should I say, Allura's) kingdom, was a series of swamps, rivers, lakes, and waterways to the north of Elderhaven. It was so named because the moonlight on the mists of the swamp caused them to glow with a silver sheen. Both Elderhaven and Silverfen had long ago been inhabited by a peaceful race of giants, and I decided that the royal families of Silverfen must retain some giant ancestry. Silverfen was now populated by several human and elven clans, so it was natural that Allura should have a somewhat elf-like face, being probably at least half elf herself.

Sarah really got into the spirit of things, asking questions about the various lands and peoples and creatures from my imagination, and offering suggestions about parts that I hadn't completely fleshed out yet. I showed her my drawings of dragons and other monsters, and although they weren't very good, she nevertheless

praised my skill.

"So what about you?" she asked after we had been talking for over an hour. "Are you a prince of Elderhaven?"

"No," I replied. "I'm the Champion of the Elder World."

"A knight, then? Are you Sir Kenneth?"

"Not a knight. My name's Kenneth Shadowbane."

"Shadowbane. Enemy of Shadows."

"Exactly," I smiled, happy that she picked up on the meaning. "I'm an enemy of the shadow monsters that have been attacking Elderhaven and Silverfen and all the other kingdoms. They're the dark side of the Elder World. They've been trying to destroy it since long before mankind ever set foot in these lands."

"I see. So you're not a prince. That's going to cause problems then."

"What kinds of problems?"

"Well, I'm not sure if my father the king will approve of our marriage then."

"Marriage?" I asked, astonished.

"Yes. Any time the brave hero rescues the fair maiden, they always end up getting married. Of course, that's just in fairy tales. I'm not sure how it is in your world."

"Well... I guess I hadn't really thought about it."

"But you are going to rescue me, aren't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I plan to get myself captured by these shadow monsters you talked about. Not on purpose, of course. But then you'll have to come save me."

"Oh. I guess that makes sense."

"Of course it makes sense. It's no fun for a princess if she doesn't get to be captured by a monster or a dragon or an evil wizard or something now and then. Otherwise she'd have to sit in her castle all day, bored out of her mind."

I laughed. She really was fun to be with, I decided. I'd never known any girls who liked to play the same games I did. They always thought it was stupid to go around fighting dragons and demons and ghouls and

goblins. But Sarah seemed to have no problem with it.

"But that gives me a great idea," she continued. "When I get kidnapped by the shadow monsters, my father will offer my hand in marriage to the man who saves me."

"Um..." I said. "About the marriage..." Now she was getting all romantic and mushy, which was enough to ruin my fantasies. The last thing I wanted to do was to make believe I was the groom at a wedding.

"You don't want to marry me?" asked Sarah, with a disappointed look on her face. "What's wrong? Don't you think I'm pretty?"

"Well... yeah."

"Yeah you think I'm pretty, or yeah you don't think I'm pretty."

"Yeah I *do* think you're pretty."

"So what's wrong?"

"Well, after we get married, then I'd have to settle down and stop going out adventuring."

"It doesn't have to be that way. The Elder World would still need a Champion, and Princess Allura would never make Kenneth Shadowbane give that up."

"I don't know..."

"Oh come on, Kenny. Let's compromise. You get to fight off the shadow monsters to rescue me, and I get to marry the brave hero. Look, if we decide afterward that we don't like the way the story goes, we can always change it and pretend it never happened."

I sighed. "Oh, all right," I conceded. Actually, marrying someone like Sarah wouldn't necessarily be all that bad. It was just the whole idea of it that bothered me. Still, as long as we could change it later if it didn't work out, I could probably go along with it.

We looked over the maps and discussed the world of my imagination for the rest of the morning. At lunch time, we descended the stairs to the kitchen, and I got out some fixings for sandwiches. We ate and talked some more, and I found that she had some excellent ideas to flesh out the world that I had invented. Despite the fact that she was a girl, she actually was fun to be around.

As soon as we finished lunch, we put the dishes in the sink and headed out to the front room. I had mentioned one of my favorite fantasy movies that Sarah hadn't seen, and she wanted to watch it with me now. I retrieved it from the movie cabinet, placed it in the machine, and turned on the TV.

We watched it together, and I couldn't help but notice how nice it was to sit next to a girl like Sarah. Though I could certainly appreciate the beauty of a girl from a distance, I had never had much in common with them,

and I had certainly never had any friends of the female variety.

There were a couple of scary spots in the movie, and Sarah grabbed my hand during one of them. Normally I would have objected, but there was something about her that made me not mind so much.

When the movie ended, I turned it off and put it away, then sat down next to her again. The truth was, I was hoping she would take my hand again, but unfortunately she didn't.

"So now what do you want to do?" she asked.

I shrugged.

"Okay, if we're going to do this right, we're going to have to get used to fighting together."

"Fighting?" I asked.

"Yes. I don't plan to be the type of princess who just sits in the castle all day. I want to go out adventuring too."

"But princesses don't go adventuring. Besides, you have no training."

"I would if you teach me," she smiled. "Let's say my father the king wants his daughter to learn some self-defense in case the shadow monsters ever attack. So he's hired Kenneth Shadowbane to be my trainer."

"Hmm..." I considered the idea. It didn't really fit with my character. I was more active than that; I wouldn't stay in the castle grounds teaching a princess how to fight. On the other hand, if there was to be an alliance between our two kingdoms, a show of good faith would be in order.

"I accept your offer," I told her. "Stay here. I'll be back with weapons so we can practice."

The weapons turned out to be a couple of plastic swords. I explained that I knew they were just kids' toys, but I was saving my money to buy a real sword later. My mother had made a deal with me; while she didn't like the idea of me having a weapon like that, she also knew that since I didn't have a job, it would take me years before I could afford it. Once I was mature enough to have a job, I would be responsible enough to have the sword, so she said as long as I paid for it myself out of my own money, I could have it.

Sarah was an enthusiastic pupil. I couldn't claim to be the best teacher in the world; in fact, I wasn't particularly good with a sword, except in my mind. I planned to take fencing lessons one day, but for now I mostly just waved it around, making contact enough with Sarah's that I didn't look like a complete fool. She took to it immediately, even getting in a few good strikes. Normally I would have been humiliated to be bested by a girl like that, but she simply laughed cheerfully and kept it in good spirits.

We duelled for the better part of an hour, amazingly not breaking anything in the house. At first we made a pretense of having me show her how to fight, but eventually it just turned into a free-for-all as we battled. Only after thoroughly exhausting ourselves did we finally put an end to the game.

After it was all over and we sat together on the couch, Sarah put her arm around me. I couldn't believe how nice it felt; I had never really liked all this touchy-feely stuff, but with Sarah it was different.

"Thanks," she told me with a smile. "I'd forgotten how much fun it is to play make-believe. I wonder why it is that when we get older we stop playing like that."

I shrugged. "I don't know."

"I like you, Kenny. Even though you're thirteen, you still have the imagination of a child."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I asked. I didn't like to be called a child.

"I didn't mean it as an insult," she clarified. "There's nothing wrong with it. In fact, I think there's something wrong with the rest of the world, because they usually lose their imagination by the time they're your age. Promise me that no matter how old you get, you'll never stop playing," she insisted.

"Okay, but you have to promise me too."

She grinned. "Kenneth Shadowbane, Champion of the Elder World, I swear to you as a princess of Silverfen that I will never stop playing make-believe."

"Princess Allura of Silverfen, I swear to you on my honor as the Champion of the Elder World that I will never stop playing make-believe."

"There," she said. "Now it's settled. So let's go outside."

We left the castle and set out to explore the grounds. I showed her the tree house, and pointed out the views it afforded of the two kingdoms, the mountain, and the valley far below. We discussed our plans for fending off the barbarian hordes, and our exploration of the mysterious mountain.

We explored our two yards, turning solitary trees into great forests, the tree house into a fort at the top of a mountain pass, and her swimming pool into Lake Nightmist, the largest lake of Silverfen. Out front, the road in front of our house became the Veldrar River, which separated the civilized kingdoms of Silverfen and Elderhaven from the Land of the Shadow Monsters. Maybe one day we would cross it to take the battle back to their lands, but for now there was plenty to do in our own yards.

I was having so much fun that I lost all track of time. Afternoon was beginning to turn to evening when I saw a familiar car driving up the road. My mother pulled the car into our driveway, then parked it and stepped out. She immediately came over with a stern look. "What did I tell you about playing outside with no one home?" she asked.

I remembered then that I had planned to go back inside before she got home, so that she wouldn't know that I had disobeyed her.

"Kenny, did your mother tell you not to come outside?" asked Sarah, with a similarly stern tone of voice.

That was even worse; if my mother got after me, well, I was used to that. But I didn't want to jeopardize my new friendship with Sarah.

"I'm sorry," I told them both in as humble a tone as I could muster.

"I'm sorry too," said Sarah, then turned to my mother. "You must be Kenny's mom," she said. "I'm Sarah Laurent, your next-door neighbor. I apologize for any misunderstanding. I really didn't know that you had told him to stay indoors."

"That's quite all right," said Mom. "I'm not blaming you. Sometimes he just doesn't think. I hope he didn't bother you."

"Of course not," Sarah smiled. "He's really a great kid. We had lots of fun together today, so really, there was no harm done. I know it's not my business to tell you how to raise him, but if I were you I wouldn't be too hard on him. When I was his age I hated to be cooped up in the house on a day like this too. Still do, in fact."

"I suppose you're right. It's just that I don't want him to get into any trouble while I'm not around. I don't like to leave him alone, but I have to work all day."

"Well, my parents let me stay by myself, but then, I am quite a few years older than him."

"How old are you, Sarah?" asked Mom.

"Seventeen."

"And you said you didn't mind having him play with you?"

"Of course not. I'm an only child, so it was kind of nice to have a little brother for a change."

Mom laughed. "Well then, I suppose things worked out all right in the end." Then she stared at her for a second, as if considering something.

"Sarah, do you stay home every day?" she asked.

"Just about."

"So you don't have a job?"

"No, but I'm looking for work."

"Well, I have an idea then. If you don't mind, and if it's all right with your parents, would you like to be a permanent babysitter to Kenny? Just until school starts in the fall, at least. I'll pay you of course."

That sounded wonderful! I had never liked babysitters, though I had had my fair share. But with Sarah, it would be different. Since we were already friends, it wouldn't be like babysitting at all. It would give me

plenty of time to spend with her every day.

"I would love that!" she exclaimed with a grin. "I'm sure my parents would be more than happy with that. I'd have a job and wouldn't even have to leave the neighborhood."

"Good. I'd like to talk to them about it also, just to make sure it's okay. When are you expecting them home?"

"Any time now."

"All right. Maybe I'll stop by after dinner. If it works out, then would you mind starting tomorrow?"

"Not at all."

"Good. Come on, Kenny. Let's go home and eat supper."

"Bye Kenny," Sarah waved with a smile as Mom and I headed across the lawn to our house. I waved back, suddenly feeling very good about living here after all.

Chapter 2

Prisoner of the Shadow Monsters

That evening, Sarah stopped by and asked if we wouldn't mind coming over to meet her parents. Mom and I followed her across the way to her house. Her mom greeted us at the door and welcomed us inside. The smell of freshly baked cookies filled the house, and I spotted a plate of them on the coffee table in the living room. Her dad sat in one of the chairs.

Mom and I sat down on the couch, and Mrs. Laurent took one of the other empty seats. Sarah passed around the cookies, then disappeared into the kitchen momentarily, returning with a tray carrying five glasses of milk.

As we sat around and ate the cookies, our two families got to know each other. Mr. Laurent was a regional manager for a construction company, and Mrs. Laurent was a teller at the bank. Sarah's dad had recently been promoted to his new position, which required him to move to a new city. Fortunately the bank where her mom worked was able to arrange for her to be transferred to a different branch in the new city. That left Sarah alone during the day. Both of them had been encouraging her to look for work, and she had put in a few applications around town, but with the move from out of state, she had been a little late and most of the summertime positions were already filled.

That brought up the subject of her "babysitting" me. I didn't really consider it babysitting, but I decided not to argue the point. I was old enough to know that most parents didn't like the idea of two teenagers of the opposite sex alone together. But if we emphasized the unequal nature of the relationship-- Sarah as the authority figure and me as the child-- then her parents were much more likely to go along with it. I sat there quietly, trying to be as childlike as possible.

It must have worked, because her parents readily agreed. They were especially happy that Sarah wouldn't even have to leave the neighborhood; like all parents they were just a little overprotective and wanted to know she was somewhere safe. They haggled on a price (by haggling I mean that Mom suggested a price and they all agreed immediately), which left only the details. Every weekday morning, Sarah would come over just before Mom left for work. Mom said I was allowed to go anywhere Sarah was willing to take me, but unfortunately, although she could drive she didn't have access to a car since both of her parents needed their two vehicles to get to work. That limited our options, but I really didn't mind. There was plenty to do around here. Maybe we would go explore the mountain one day, or make our way down into the valley to battle the barbarians.

That night, as I was getting ready for bed, I noticed the light on in Sarah's bedroom window across the way. I went to my window and peeked out. Despite her earlier promise to keep the curtains closed, she had them wide open. I could see her sitting there on her bed in just her bra and panties, thumbing through a magazine.

Before I could turn away, she glanced up and saw me there. I had been caught! It wasn't that I *wanted* to see her in her underwear-- Okay, I did, but that wasn't why I had looked out my window. I wasn't trying to spy on her. If she had given me half a second longer, I would have turned away like any gentleman. Or at the very least, I would have turned out my light and taken a step back into the darkness so she couldn't see me.

I expected her to get mad, or stomp to the window and close the curtains. Instead, she simply shook her finger at me in an accusatory fashion, but to my surprise she wore a mischievous grin on her face. Then she disappeared out of my view for a second on the other side of the room. When she returned, she wore a bathrobe. She came to the window and popped her head out.

"Hi Kenny," she said cheerfully. In the silence of the night, her voice was able to carry to my house.

"Um... hi Sarah," I replied, hoping the darkness of the night would cover my red face from the embarrassment of being caught peeking on her.

"Tomorrow we'll do the rescue scene, okay?"

"The rescue scene?"

"Yeah, where I get captured by the Shadow Monsters and you come and rescue me."

"Oh. Sure."

"So make sure you dream about it tonight, so you'll have it firmly in your mind for tomorrow. You have a better imagination than me, so you have to make up the details."

"Fine," I grinned. "Good night, Princess Allura."

"Good night, Kenny. Or should I say, my dearest Kenneth Shadowbane."

"Hey, you don't have to get all mushy," I complained.

"Oh, that's right. We won't get betrothed until after you rescue me. So you won't be 'my dearest' until then. Anyway, see you tomorrow." She blew me a kiss, then stepped back, closed the curtains, and turned out the lights.

I woke up the next morning as excited as if it were Christmas. I really wanted to see Sarah again. That surprised me; in the past couple of years I had begun to recognize the beauty of the opposite sex, and even started having certain feelings toward them, but for the most part I didn't particularly like them. I had absolutely nothing in common with girls my age after all. But Sarah was different. She was the first girl I had ever met who was actually fun to be around.

I went downstairs to breakfast. Mom was in a rush, with only a few minutes to spare before she had to leave for work. She was still new on the job, so wanted to get there early to make a good impression. I have to admit, I wasn't much more patient, so anxious was I to see Sarah again and spend the day with her.

When I heard a knock at the door, I immediately hopped up and practically dashed out of the kitchen to answer it. There stood Sarah, her face brightening up with a big smile when she saw me. "Hi Kenny," she beamed. Then she peeked into the dining room and saw my mother there. "Hi Mrs. Grant!" she called.

Mom came to the door. "Hello, Sarah," she said. "Thanks for coming by."

"It's no problem, Mrs. Grant," said Sarah. "I don't mind babysitting Kenny. He and I get along really well."

"He's a good kid. Just a little over-imaginative."

"That's what I like about him. He's got a great imagination. It reminds me of myself when I was his age."

"Well then, I'll leave you two here. Do me a favor, Sarah. For now, keep him here or over at your house. Later we can talk about going on outings."

"Sure," agreed Sarah. "I was thinking of spending the day with him over at my house anyway. In fact, we can go over there right now if it's all right."

"It's all right with me," I replied. Mom agreed, so Sarah and I left my castle and ventured across the land to Silverfen Castle. The king and queen of Silverfen had already departed, I could see, leaving the whole realm

available for our adventures.

First we sat down on the couch to make plans for the capture and rescue. She asked me plenty of questions about the Shadow Monsters, and I was a little embarrassed to admit that I hadn't thought of some of the things she asked about. But she didn't seem to mind; in fact, she was more than happy to help me flesh out my ideas. It was fun to collaborate with someone else on my world. Until now, it had always just been me and my imagination. That had always been enough, until I met Sarah and discovered what I had been missing. I hadn't realized just how lonely I had been in my fantasy world, until I met this princess with whom I could share it.

Of course, it didn't hurt that she was pretty. She really did look like my idea of a princess, a beautiful damsel that would cause any man to fall at her feet or swear to protect her upon first seeing her. But she had chosen me, Kenneth Shadowbane, out of all the princes and heroes of all the realms, and that made me feel good.

As we sat and talked, my mind kept drifting back to that first time I had seen her. Yes, it was because of what she had been wearing, or *not* wearing, more precisely. I was a thirteen-year-old boy, just learning to appreciate the fairer sex, and finding mystery and excitement in their beautiful form, especially since I had no prior experience seeing a girl's body before.

But Sarah was more than just a body, or a face. Her friendliness and enthusiasm had both surprised and captivated me; I had never met a girl quite like her. I think even if she were the most hideous creature on the planet, I still would have enjoyed her company.

I was having so much fun that I didn't even realize how much time had passed until Sarah announced that it was time for lunch. We dined on such royal delicacies as microwave burritos and apple juice.

After lunch, she suggested I run next door to retrieve my sword. I was about to do battle with a bunch of monsters after all. I hurried across to my castle and then made my way back to Silverfen, where I found her upstairs in her bedroom. She patted the bed next to her as an invitation to sit down. I did so.

"So let's see..." said Sarah. "If the Shadow Monsters captured me, where would they keep me?"

"Probably underground," I replied. "That's where they live. They like it where it's dark, because the light hurts them."

"Okay, so my bedroom is the cave where they're holding me captive. You're going to come in, fight them off, then untie me and carry me off back to your kingdom."

"Untie you?"

"Yes. They'll need to tie me up to keep me from escaping. Of course, you're going to have to do it for them, since they don't really exist."

"Oh. Okay," I shrugged. Having never been a Boy Scout or a sailor, I didn't know much about tying knots,

but how hard could it be?

"I think there's some string out in the garage," suggested Sarah. We left the room and headed out to the garage to search through the shelves of tools and supplies that her dad kept out there. After about five minutes of searching, we found some twine that would serve well enough. It looked kind of rough and probably wouldn't feel too good on the skin, but Sarah said she had some handkerchiefs that she could wrap around her wrists to keep the twine from actually touching her.

We headed back to her room then, and she went over to her dresser to retrieve several handkerchiefs, then sat down on the bed. "Okay," she smiled. "Let's say they tie me onto a stone table, like they're going to try to cut out my heart or something. We'll use my bed because it's much more comfortable."

I agreed, so she lay down and spread her arms and legs out toward the bedposts. I had expected to just tie her wrists together, maybe behind her back, but apparently she had other ideas. I didn't mind; there was something particularly sexy about seeing her lying there prone, completely open and vulnerable.

I took one of the handkerchiefs and wrapped it around her wrist, then pulled out my pocket knife and cut a piece of twine and wound one end around her wrist over the top of the handkerchief. I managed a halfway decent knot, then reached over to fasten it to the bed post.

"Wait," said Sarah, and I stopped. I wondered if she had changed her mind after all. Maybe she didn't trust me yet enough to have me tie her up.

"What?" I asked.

"Something's not right," she said. "The Shadow Monsters went through all the work to capture me and bring them back to their cave, and all they're going to do is kill me? Why didn't they just do that at first?"

"I don't know," I shrugged. "You're the one who wanted to get captured."

"Okay, let's think. There are three reasons why you would kidnap a princess. The most obvious is ransom."

"The Shadow Monsters have no need of money," I told her.

"Right. So scratch that one. The second is intimidation. To make the king afraid, to show him that they can come in at any time and take what they want from him."

"But the Shadow Monsters aren't that powerful. It was just a fluke that you got captured."

"Okay, so then the only other reason I can think of is to make the king angry."

"Angry?"

"Yes. So that he'll send out his army to rescue me. The Shadow Monsters are probably planning an ambush. Once the army is destroyed, they can take over the kingdom."

I thought about it. That sounded plausible enough. I nodded, and Sarah smiled.

"Okay," she said, "then they probably wouldn't just leave me here tied up. They would want to make the king *really* mad."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"They're going to torture me."

"Torture you?"

"Yeah. Hot iron pokers, pincers, needles, the usual stuff. At least, that's their plan. But you're going to come in just in the nick of time. That way I'll be so overwhelmed by your heroism that I'll fall madly in love with you."

Normally I would have been turned off by all that sappy romantic lovey-dovey stuff, but with Sarah I didn't mind so much. I wondered if she would want to do some cuddling or snuggling later. Girls liked that sort of thing, and I realized that with her, I might actually enjoy it too.

"Okay, so they're going try to torture you," I agreed. "And I'm going to come in--"

"Just as they're about to start jabbing me all over my body with hot iron pokers."

"You know, you've got a really twisted imagination," I grinned.

Sarah laughed. "It's not me, it's the Shadow Monsters."

"Okay," I conceded, chuckling. Yes, Sarah really was fun to be around. I was really looking forward to spending every weekday with her for the rest of the summer. Maybe even when school started in the fall, we could still play together after school.

Then she did something completely unexpected. She reached down, took hold of the bottom of her shirt, then lifted it over her head and pulled it off. I stared in astonishment at her chest, now clad only in a lacy bra.

"What..." I gasped, my mouth dropping open and my eyes wide.

"The first thing the Shadow Monsters would do is strip me," she said casually. "It makes the torture that much worse if I'm completely exposed and at their mercy like that."

"I..." I stammered, still gaping.

"What's wrong?" asked Sarah.

"I..." I repeated, somehow not being able to get past that one word.

"Oh, come on. Don't be so bashful. You're not the one taking your clothes off, after all. Besides, this isn't the first time you've seen me naked."

"Well... I mean... that was different."

"Why?" she asked. "Because you were spying on me the first time?"

"I wasn't spying!"

"Okay, you weren't spying. Either way, I don't mind you seeing my body. We're going to be married soon anyway, then we'll have our wedding night."

"W... Wedding night?" I asked.

"Look, Kenny," she told me sternly. "We're doing all of this in your world. This is your game. I'm willing to go along with anything you say, and all I ask in return is just one scene. I don't even care if we act out the ceremony; it's the wedding night that I'm interested in. If you won't let me have that, then I don't want to play with you any more."

"Hey!" I exclaimed. "There's no need to be rude about it."

"I'm sorry, Kenny," she said, her voice softened. "It's just that you're acting like you don't want to do this with me. When we talked about it yesterday I got all excited about it, and now you're ruining it."

"I'm not trying to ruin it," I apologized. "I *do* want to do it with you. I just didn't realize... I mean... On the wedding night, you're supposed to..."

"Oh, we can work out the details later. Just promise me we'll at least do that scene, okay?"

"Okay," I nodded, wondering what I was getting into. What was she thinking? Did she really understand what we would be doing? Or maybe it would just end up being some snuggling. Yes, that was probably it. We would hold each other in our arms for a few minutes, and then the scene would be over. That might even feel nice, with someone like Sarah.

Her face lit up again immediately as soon as I agreed. I really liked to see her smiling at me, especially after feeling bad about making her unhappy. Sarah's smile could brighten up even the gloomiest day.

"Well then, now that that's settled..." she continued, then slid her pants down and off. I couldn't help but stare at her beautiful, long legs and her white, lacy panties. I even shuddered as I thought of the delights underneath.

Sarah giggled, then wiggled her finger at me. "I know what you're thinking," she grinned.

"Hey, you're the one stripping in front of me," I complained.

"So do you want me to stop?"

"Well... no..."

"See? You are a pervert after all."

I could have pointed out the hypocrisy of calling me a pervert even while she was taking off her clothes, but she said it in such a playful and friendly tone that I couldn't help but just laugh.

When she reached behind her back, I knew what was coming up. I knew it wasn't polite to stare, but I couldn't help it. My eyes were locked on her chest as she slipped her bra off, exposing her beautiful boobs to my eyes. I had seen them yesterday, but only at a distance. Now I had a perfect view of her perfectly formed tits, so round and soft and capped by a perfect pair of delicious-looking nipples.

Then she pulled down her panties, and I stared even harder. I don't know what I was expecting, but that beautiful V-shape covered in a neatly trimmed mat of dark hair was perhaps the most gorgeous thing I had ever seen. My god, she wasn't just a princess, she was an angel!

"When you're done ogling me," grinned Sarah, "I need you to tie me up." She lay down on the bed, spreading her arms and legs to the bedposts again and giving me an even better view of her body.

"T.. tie... you up?" I stammered.

"You know, because of the Shadow Monsters. Kenny, is your brain frozen or something?" she grinned.

"Pretty much," I answered, and she laughed.

In a daze, I grabbed the handkerchiefs and proceeded to tie her down. I managed some halfway decent knots, making sure to wrap the handkerchiefs around her wrists and ankles so as not to give her rope burns with the twin, and several minutes later I had her bound snugly but loosely. Technically, she could have slipped her wrists out of either of the knots if she wanted to, but I wasn't really trying to prevent her from escaping after all.

"Okay, now you leave the room," she said. "I'll call you when the shadow monsters are about to have their way with me."

Nodding dumbly, I stepped outside the room, and even descended the stairs. It wouldn't do to hear her calling for help from just a few feet away; I needed to hear her from a distance, or it would wreck the whole atmosphere.

Despite the fact that no one was around to see me, once I reached the bottom of the stairs, I drew my sword and slew my first Shadow Monster of the day. It only took a moment before Kenny Grant faded into the back of my mind and I became Kenneth Shadowbane once more, on a quest into the darkest caverns of Elderhaven to rescue the fair princess Allura. I prayed that I wasn't too late to save her.

Here in the darkness, where the power of the Shadow Monsters was strongest, I could feel the icy fingers of the ancient evil that had plagued the Elder World since the dawn of time. The creatures of blackness, who had long feared my blade, rose up in defiance. Those who ventured too near tasted the bite of my steel. But I wasn't here to kill monsters. Perhaps I would return one day to seek vengeance against the creatures who had kidnapped the princess, but right now my only concern was her welfare.

I had just about given up hope when I heard her voice from afar, echoing through the caverns. My heart sank as I realized that the sound came from another cave at the top of an inclined wall. It would be a struggle to climb it, especially with the demons attacking me on every side.

But I couldn't give up now. I had come too far, and I was so close to my goal. I would save her or die trying.

I sheathed my sword and leaped upon the wall, grasping at any handhold I could find as I climbed out of the reach of the monsters below me. They wailed in fury and scrambled after me, but I was too quick for them. My eyes lifted to the slope above me and I immediately saw that this would not go smoothly. A handful of Shadow Monsters gathered at the top, barring my way to the cave where they held the princess.

Despite needing to hang on with one hand, I drew my sword and slashed at the nearest creature. He fell screaming into the abyss below. Somehow I managed to move another foot up the slope toward my destination before another monster lunged at me.

Fighting my way one step at a time, I approached the ledge where they stood. I just knew if I could make it there, I would have a chance against my foes. But I was rapidly losing strength. I didn't know how long I could last.

Somehow through sheer will and a determination to save the princess, I fought the final few steps to the ledge. Now, on even footing with the creatures, I found renewed strength to challenge them. They weren't about to give up, but I could see that they feared me, and now I was free to fight my way into the alcove from where I could hear Princess Allura's terrified voice.

I entered the cave surrounded by a dozen imaginary monsters. My sword slashed through them ruthlessly as my princess looked on with admiration. The creatures didn't stand a chance against the blade of Kenneth Shadowbane.

Those that didn't die at my hand fled in terror at this enemy that had penetrated right to the heart of their lair. Soon I found myself alone with Princess Allura. As I gazed down upon her body, nude and bound and helpless, I felt an excited feeling run through me. She looked so sexy there as she gazed back up at me with wonder and gratitude.

"Are you hurt, Princess Allura?" I asked.

"No," she breathed, "but I hate to think of what the monsters would have done if you hadn't shown up. You've saved me from unknown torment."

"Let's get you out of here before they come back in greater numbers." I reached out to the string binding one of her wrists.

"Before you untie me, Kenneth Shadowbane," she said, "let me reward you with a kiss."

A kiss? She actually wanted me to kiss her? I had never kissed a girl before; I didn't know what to do. But as I gazed upon her beautiful face smiling up at me, I didn't care. It didn't matter whether I completely screwed it up. Just the possibility of sharing a kiss with this beautiful girl was worth it.

I leaned over, bringing my lips close to hers. She raised her head up and pressed her lips to mine, and I realized at that moment that there really wasn't much to it. I relaxed, allowing myself to enjoy my first kiss, no longer worried about my technique or whether she enjoyed it as much as I did. There was something completely honest and nonjudgmental in Sarah; I knew that no matter how inexperienced I was, she wouldn't laugh at me or make fun of me or judge me in any way.

As I continued to kiss her, I realized that I had slipped out of the fantasy and had begun to think of her as Sarah again, rather than Allura. It was not a kiss between the hero and the princess, but between Kenny Grant and Sarah Laurent.

Maybe it wasn't the same with her. Maybe she was still acting her role. Maybe Sarah would never even think of kissing me as herself. Right now, though, I didn't care. It felt too nice to worry about her feelings for me.

I drew back and spent a while just gazing into her eyes. She looked up at me with admiration and perhaps a little attraction. I couldn't tell for sure; having zero experience with girls, I really didn't know how to read the signs.

"Kenneth!" she suddenly exclaimed, her gaze dropping to my chest. "You're hurt!" She reached out and placed a hand on my chest. I glanced down, surprised at her words. I hadn't even realized I had been wounded in the fight.

"These scratches from the claws of the monsters are too deep to be left untreated," she continued.

"I'll be all right," I told her bravely. "I've had far worse than this before."

"Nevertheless, I must repay the kindness you've shown me. From my elven ancestry, I have inherited some healing magic, though I'm afraid it's not as strong as that of my forefathers. I know of a place not too far from here, a grove guarded by magical wards from the ancient elves of the Elder World. The shadow monsters have no power in such a grove. There we can rest, if we can make it, and there I will take care of you."

I didn't know of any magical groves near the caves of the Shadow Monsters; in fact, I didn't know of any magical groves at all. For that matter, I didn't know that elves had healing magic. But then, I really didn't mind Sarah changing the rules like that. Besides, if a naked girl offers to "take care of you," you don't argue.

"Follow me," I said. "I'll lead you back to the surface, then we can look for your grove."

I admit freely that I was hoping Sarah wouldn't put her clothes back on, and fortunately she didn't. After I untied her, she took my hand (and I discovered that holding hands with a girl was more pleasant than I had expected), then I led her back to the surface, slaying the occasional Shadow Monster along the way.

I grew weaker from loss of blood as we traveled, mostly due to "Princess Allura" reminding me that I was wounded. She eventually took my nearest arm and threw it over her shoulder, wrapping her own arm around me to help support my weight. Now I found myself quite close to her nude body, and it was every bit as enjoyable as one might imagine.

Somehow we made it out of the cave and into the sunlight (though technically we never left the house). We were temporarily safe, though if we didn't reach the grove before nightfall, the demons would pursue us with a vengeance. Sarah, or rather Princess Allura, assured me that the grove's magic would protect us all night.

Just as the last rays of sun vanished behind the distant mountains, we reached our destination. Considering that it was Sarah's bedroom again, it bore a remarkable resemblance to the cave in which she had been imprisoned. But where there had been cold, black stone before, now there was a thick wall of trees, with an undergrowth of soft ferns and grass.

"We're safe," the princess announced, and I collapsed on the ground, or rather, on her bed. She climbed in beside me, reclining next to me.

"Just in time, too," I told her. "I couldn't walk another step."

"You poor dear. You nearly died to save me. You're such a brave hero, Kenneth Shadowbane. I know you've been training me to defend myself, but perhaps when all this is over, you can visit me in Silverfen as just a friend. I would love to get to know you a little better socially instead of as my teacher in swordplay."

"Sure," I smiled, happy at the invitation.

"But now I must see to your wounds." She reached for the bottom of my shirt.

"What are you doing, Sarah?" I asked.

"Sarah? Who is this Sarah person? I'm Princess Allura," she grinned. "I must remove your shirt to get to your injuries."

I considered that for a moment. And when I say a moment, I mean that a moment was all it took for me to decide that I would love to have my shirt off, with her lying naked beside me. Maybe there would be some incidental contact.

I managed to sit up momentarily to help her remove my tunic, then lay down again, staring at her beautiful face and wondering what she would do now. She placed one arm on my chest and began to gently rub me.

It felt good. It felt *very* good. A sigh escaped my lips, and I was delighted to see Princess Allura smile when

she heard that.

"I'm glad you enjoy my touch," she said. "It's the healing magic of the elves."

"Of course," I agreed, playing along.

"You just relax and let the magic fill you. You've done your job, and now it's time for you to rest."

I closed my eyes and basked in the feeling of her hand massaging me all over the chest. I couldn't believe that I was lying here with a real live naked girl fawning all over me, especially one as beautiful as Sarah. I can honestly say that thus far, it was a high point in my life.

It was even better when she stopped, because she immediately lay down next to me, pressing her body against mine. "It can get cold in the woods at night," she said. "I hope I'm not being too forward, Kenneth, but would you put your arm around me?"

"Of course I will," I said, trying to sound more gallant than enthusiastic. I held her to me, loving the softness of her body.

I can feel her tits! I thought with excitement. No, it wasn't a particularly gallant thought, but I guess I can be excused since I was a thirteen-year-old boy.

We closed our eyes and lay there for a while, neither of us speaking. I could feel her breath on my cheek, so warm and pleasant. The only drawback to this position was that I was feeling rather tight in the pants. If I had been more confident I might have made a move, but I was still completely confused by her attention toward me and I didn't want to ruin things between us. So I suffered in silence, if one could call it suffering. I certainly didn't.

Chapter 3

Royal Union

When I awoke later that afternoon, it took me a few seconds to get my bearings. It wasn't the fact that the room was unusual; I still hadn't gotten used to my own room in my new house, so this wasn't all that different. It was the fact that I had something warm and soft pressed against my side. I glanced over and saw Sarah's face only a few inches away, so soft and beautiful with her eyes closed and a smile on her lips. At once, all of the memories of the day's events came back, and I couldn't help smiling myself.

Is this what it's like to have a girlfriend? I wondered. In fact, I wondered just what Sarah felt toward me. She

had voluntarily taken her clothes off in front of me, but maybe that wasn't such a big deal to her. I already knew she liked to sunbathe naked, so perhaps she was just a nudist at heart. And since I had already seen her without her clothes, maybe she just didn't feel like it mattered in front of me.

She had kissed me too, but how much of that had been Sarah and how much Princess Allura? For all I knew, she had kissed hundreds of boys, a thought that admittedly made me a little jealous. Maybe she just thought I was a kid, an immature little boy that was fun to play with. Maybe her feelings toward me were like a younger brother, or worse, like a pet dog.

No, I couldn't believe that. My Sarah wouldn't be so cruel. Didn't she say she wanted to marry me? Okay, maybe that was Princess Allura talking about Kenneth Shadowbane, but there had to be at least some attraction there.

However she felt about me, I decided that as far as I was concerned, she was my girlfriend. If she didn't think the same thing about me, well, we had all summer for her to change her mind.

A few minutes later, Sarah woke too. She lifted her head and gazed into my eyes for a moment, a smile on her face.

"How do you feel now, Kenneth Shadowbane?" she asked.

"Much better," I replied. "Your healing magic did the trick."

"Good. When my father the King hears about your sacrifice on my behalf, he'll wish to reward you."

"No need; it was worth it," I replied. On that, both Kenny Grant and Kenneth Shadowbane definitely agreed.

"Perhaps you could make it your full-time job to be my protector. Silverfen has many enemies, and I'm likely to get into trouble again."

I knew what she was hinting at, and I decided to play along.

"I would be honored, but I don't know how appropriate that would be. I would need to be with you twenty-four hours a day."

Her face lit up with delight as she saw that I had taken the hint. "Well, there's an easy solution to that too," she said. "Kenneth, I've been watching you for a long time. Even before you started training me to defend myself, I used to sit at my bedroom window in the castle watching the road any time I heard that you were coming to the court of Silverfen. Every time I saw the gleam of the sunlight on your armor, my heart would leap in my breast. You were always so gallant, brave, and exciting. I listened to the tales that people told of your adventures and I wished I was there by your side. And when you saved me from the Shadow Monsters, I knew that it was meant to be. *We* were meant to be. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"Uh, I think so," I replied, embarrassed by her praise.

"And how do you feel about me?" she asked.

"Um... I think you're... pretty."

"Just pretty?"

"Beautiful," I corrected. "And um..." My mind was a blank right now; I was admittedly lacking in eloquence, especially compared to Sarah. Or Princess Allura, rather.

"Have you been sneaking glances at me too?"

"Yeah."

"And does your heart leap in your chest whenever you see me too?"

"Yeah."

"Then that settles it! My father has been looking for a man to whom he will give my hand in marriage. None of the princes of any of the nearby kingdoms are strong or brave enough to be my protector, so he's given up on royalty. He says I must marry someone who is strong enough to protect me from harm yet gentle and affectionate with me. I think maybe he's already made up his mind that you're the one. That's why he asked you to train me in self-defense. He wanted to get us together to see how we got along."

"Your father's pretty sneaky," I said with a grin.

"Maybe. But it's for a good cause. What do you think?"

"I think it's a great idea."

"I was hoping you would say that," she smiled. "So now that we're sort of unofficially betrothed, would you give me another kiss?"

"You bet!" I exclaimed enthusiastically. I drew in, and once more our lips touched. It was just as passionate and beautiful as the first time, and perhaps just a little less awkward now that I was getting the hang of it. I wanted to do more, so much more, with Sarah, but had no idea how to start. For now, I just had to content myself with whatever she gave me.

I was so overwhelmed by the kiss that I almost didn't hear the front door open. Fortunately, Sarah's mom decided to call her immediately upon entering the house. Sarah's eyes grew wide at the sound, realizing that she was still naked. Footsteps on the stairs told us that her mother was coming up to check on us.

There was no time for Sarah to get dressed. She grabbed her clothes off the floor and dashed for the closet, which fortunately had a door that she could close behind her. I grabbed my shirt and threw it on a moment before Sarah's mother opened the bedroom door and peeked in.

"Oh hi, Kenny," she smiled. "Where's Sarah?"

"Um... I don't know..." I stammered.

"You don't know?"

Somehow, miraculously, my mind hit upon a suitable lie. "We're playing hide-and-seek," I said.

She laughed good-naturedly. "I'd say you're a little too old for those games, but last night Sarah went on and on about how you have the imagination of a child. I mean that in only the best of ways, of course. So I guess you like to play those kinds of games too. Sometimes I wish Sarah was still a little girl so I could play games like that with her. Maybe we all have a bit of a child in us, and it looks like you're letting yours out. I think that's wonderful. Anyway, I stopped by the store on the way home from work and I need her to help me carry in the groceries."

"Oh, I'll help, Mrs. Laurent," I offered. I normally tried to get out of doing chores, but I was happy to do anything that would get her out of the bedroom.

"Thank you, Kenny," she said graciously, and I followed her down the stairs and out to the car.

We were just finishing putting the groceries away when Sarah descended the stairs, dressed and composed and showing no sign that anything naughty had gone on a couple of minutes before.

"I guess that means you gave up on trying to find me," she told me, playing along with my earlier explanation. "So I win."

"Yep. You win," I conceded, despite the fact that we hadn't actually been playing the game that we had told her mother. And despite my concession, I certainly felt like I had won some kind of victory today.

Now that Sarah's mother had returned, we had to put the real game on hold, so for the rest of the afternoon, we just sat on the couch and discussed my world some more. Sarah wanted to try her hand at drawing maps, so she got some paper and together we redesigned Silverfen. I hadn't put nearly as much thought into that kingdom as I had put into Elderhaven, so I didn't mind making changes. I figured it was appropriate for Sarah to be the one to draw the map, considering she was part of the Silverfen royal family after all. Even Sarah's mom, amused at our imagination, gave some suggestions. That was fine too; she was the queen after all.

The king arrived home not long after, then a few minutes later my mom called to let me know that she was back. I said my goodbyes, Sarah gave me a hug, and then I journeyed across the yard to Elderhaven.

That night, I lurked in the shadows of my bedroom, the lights off. I hung back away from the window so that I couldn't be seen, but still where I had a perfect view of Sarah's room across the way. Maybe she was right; maybe I really was a pervert. But I was a thirteen-year-old boy, so at least I had an excuse. All I knew was

that if tonight were anything like last night, she would give me a nice show.

After her full nudity earlier in the day, one might imagine that I would have no need to hide in the shadows hoping for a peep show. But I had been thinking about her all day, and I'll admit that my thoughts weren't the most wholesome. I wanted to see more of her, especially stripped down to her undies or less. Maybe I would get my wish.

Sarah's bedroom light was on, but she wasn't yet in the room. I had gone to bed early just in case, but it had been almost forty-five minutes with no action, and I was beginning to regret my decision.

I was growing drowsy, and was just beginning to nod off when Sarah's bedroom door opened, and she stepped inside. I immediately sat upright, literally shivering from anticipation.

She glanced in my direction, and for a moment I thought she could see me. Then she turned and stepped out of my view. I sighed in frustration, figuring that was the end of the show.

I was wrong.

A minute later she returned to the window, this time stripped down to her bra and panties. My heart pounded in my chest and I trembled in excitement as she stood there, facing directly toward me but with her head a little to the side as if she had no idea I was watching. Maybe she knew, maybe she didn't. But she certainly didn't seem too shy about standing there in the open window. Granted, the shutters blocked the view from the street, and I knew there were no other windows on this side of my house, so the only person who could possibly see her was me, and I had already seen plenty this afternoon.

She reached behind her back, and I couldn't help but grin. A couple of seconds later, my patience paid off. Her hands dropped to her side, and her bra slipped off her body and tumbled to the floor. I found myself staring at her gorgeous bare chest. Still she casually looked in a different direction, as if the thought that I might be hiding in the dark never occurred to her.

When she yawned and stretched, shoving her chest forward in the process, my heart leaped in my chest. The sight of that sexy pose on the very beautiful and very topless Sarah Laurent would forever be burned into my memory. Then she lifted her arms and locked her fingers behind her head in an even sexier pose. Was she doing it on purpose? It was really just a relaxed position, and if she wore a shirt I would think nothing of it. But like this it showed off her chest marvelously.

When she dropped her hands to her side again, it would have been disappointing, except that she slipped her thumbs into the waistband of her panties and slipped them halfway down her thighs. Instead of bending over to take them off, she wiggled her hips so that they would fall down by themselves. I found that little hip-wiggle even sexier than either of her previous poses. By this time, my heart was pounding so hard that I was sure that if I were thirty years older I would have had a heart attack by now.

Finally, after nearly sending me into cardiac arrest, she turned away from the window. If I thought that signaled the end of the show, I was seriously mistaken. First, she strode over to her bed, which was in view

of the window, and I noticed with glee that her hips swung in a most delightful manner as she walked. Then she sort of rolled onto the bed, reclining on her side facing me with her head propped up on one of her hands. I wondered if she planned to sleep all night naked like that, with her light on and the window open. If so, I doubted I would get much sleep.

She yawned again, then scratched her hip. That scratch somehow metamorphosed into a kind of a caress, at first her fingertips just making lazy circles around the immediate area, then gradually expanding until she rubbed her whole hip. I watched in eager fascination, nearly drooling at the sight and wishing I was the one doing the rubbing. I had had a taste of her skin and knew how soft it was, but that one taste had left me craving more.

Her hand found its way down to her stomach and she rubbed herself casually there too. Maybe she liked the feel of her skin as much as I did. I knew that if I were in her body, I would spend all day just running my hands all over myself. Maybe I would start with my hips, then move on to my stomach like she did, then gradually wander up...

She wandered up. I literally had to bite down on my hand to stifle a groan as her hand slipped onto one of her breasts. She closed her eyes and sighed as she fondled herself there. At first she was content to just caress herself gently, then she deliberately sought out her nipple and began squeezing and pulling on it. I watched in awe as my princess, no, my goddess, played with her own body. It was almost too much to bear.

She kept that up for the longest time, and I could see her getting worked up over it. She had her mouth slightly open, and although I couldn't hear her from that distance, I could tell from the way her whole body moved that she was breathing heavily. Her eyes remained closed, no doubt a sign that she was lost in the ecstasy of the feeling.

Then she shifted her position. She swung her legs forward and off the bed, spreading them and giving me an awe-inspiring view of the treasure between them. The rest of her body lay back on the bed, with her head propped up on a pillow. My throat was dry and parched as I watched her move one of her hands with excruciating slowness, down her body, past her breasts, her rib cage, her stomach, and finally to her thigh. I bit my tongue to stifle a groan as she ran a single finger right down her beautiful slit. My eyes were locked on the motion as she traced that indentation up and down, back and forth, over and over again. She added a sideways movement, until she was actually making little circles around the area. She seemed to focus more on the top for some reason, and although in my inexperience I didn't know why, I correctly guessed that it was somehow more pleasurable there.

Her hand wasn't the only thing moving though. Her whole body reacted to the pleasure that she was giving herself. Her hips squirmed on the bed, falling into the rhythm that her hands set. I could see her tensing up and relaxing in time to that same rhythm. It was almost like a kind of music, but music with no sound. Different parts of her body moved in different ways but always together, blending into a kind of harmony with the melody centered between her legs. There was a sensuous energy there, a dancing, pulsating energy that I could sense even from all the way over here.

I was so engrossed in the motion of her hands between her legs that I almost missed what was happening on her face. She was mouthing something over and over again, a word or a short phrase. As soon as I noticed it, I tried my hardest to read her lips to figure out what she was saying. Of course, she wasn't making a sound; her parents were right downstairs after all, and it wouldn't do to alert them to her nocturnal activities. But at least her lips made the motions.

Then I gasped as I realized that it wasn't a word, but a name. Kenneth. She was fantasizing about me.

More specifically, she was fantasizing about my alter ego, but it amounted to the same thing. Maybe even now she was playing her role of Princess Allura. Maybe what we had done today had gotten her as excited as it had gotten me. Here was this gorgeous girl, this perfect princess, playing with herself as she thought of me! I could hardly believe it.

When she tensed up one last time and held her body suspended in that position for a few seconds, I realized what was happening. I was actually watching a girl having an orgasm! I couldn't remember ever seeing anything so wonderful in my entire life. It was especially exciting because it was someone I knew. This was Sarah, my best friend. Yes, even in just the two days that I had known her, I could honestly say that she was my best friend. Furthermore, I couldn't deny that I had a major crush on her. Seeing her like this was about the most thrilling sight imaginable.

She finally relaxed, letting out a long, contented sigh. She lay there panting for a few minutes, then climbed out of bed and strode over to the light. She turned it off, and I knew that the show had finally come to an end.

With that, I climbed into bed, both happy that I had seen it and frustrated that it was over. I did not doubt that I would dream about what I had seen all night.

I had just about drifted off to sleep when the light across the way turned on again. I heard my name being whispered loudly. It came from the window, so I knew immediately who it was. I climbed out of bed and walked over to the window, peeking out at Sarah across the way. She had dressed in a bathrobe, to my disappointment. Since she had spent so much time nude in my presence already, I had half-expected to see her wearing nothing.

"Hi Sarah," I smiled.

"Hi Kenny," she replied. She made no sign that she knew that I had been watching her, so I decided not to bring it up either.

"Tomorrow's the big day," she told me instead.

"The big day?"

"Yes. The most important day of Kenneth Shadowbane's and Princess Allura's life."

"Oh," I grinned. Of course. The wedding. In truth I was more than nervous about it; I was terrified. I didn't

know what Sarah expected of me. What if I was thinking something completely different from what she thought? What if I did something she didn't like, and ended up ruining our whole friendship over it? It wasn't the type of thing I could just come out and ask her about, either. She might call me a pervert just for thinking it. Of course, she had already called me a pervert and it hadn't hurt things between us, so maybe I was worrying over nothing.

"Tell you what," said Sarah. "I'll have to get some things ready, so don't come over right away as soon as your mom leaves in the morning. I'll call you when I'm ready for you."

"Sure," I shrugged.

"And Kenny, thanks for being willing to do this for me. I know you don't want to, but it means a lot to me."

"That's fine," I said, still wondering just what was going to happen tomorrow.

"Okay, good night Kenny," she smiled.

"Good night Sarah," I replied, then we both closed our windows and went to bed.

I woke up early the next morning, which was a shame because it meant I would have to wait a couple of hours before seeing her again. I would almost have preferred to sleep in until it was time to go over to her house. On the other hand, I wasn't sure what I was in for today; she had been adamant about acting out our wedding night, which had all kinds of implications. So I needed time to prepare myself for just about anything. It might be as innocent as dressing up in formal clothes and acting out some kind of ceremony (yuck!) or it could go as far as having sex.

Sex. Surprisingly, that thought scared me. It wasn't that I would be opposed to having sex with Sarah. The truth was that I would like nothing more. But I was still a virgin. Hell, until I met her, I didn't even get along with any girls. I didn't know what to do or how to act; my knowledge of the physical act was limited to a brief description in sex-ed and a few naughty pictures on the internet. Maybe Sarah was a little more experienced. Maybe not. I actually hoped she had done it before, so that she could show me what to do.

All that was assuming that we were going to do it. Maybe when we got to the "wedding night" she would just want to cuddle like we had done yesterday. I could be getting myself all worked up over nothing. I just couldn't get the whole idea out of my mind though. And now, in the morning with a clear head, I was starting to think that Sarah had known all along that I was watching last night when she put on her little display for me. Was there a reason why she did that? Did she want to get me excited for what would happen today?

Still thinking about that, I showered and dressed, then met my mother downstairs at the breakfast table. I ate in silence, and she knew enough not to interrupt me when I got in these pensive moods. They were usually a sign that I was designing new elements for my world, and the last thing my creative genius needed was for someone to interrupt me and break my train of thought.

She did kiss me on the cheek and say goodbye to me when it was time for her to leave, and she asked where Sarah was. I replied that Sarah said she would be a little late today, which seemed to satisfy her. She exited out the front door, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

I didn't know whether to feel anxious or excited when the phone rang. I answered it, pleased to hear Sarah's voice. She explained that both her parents were gone too, and it was time for me to come over. She told me to meet her in her bedroom. I hung up the receiver and hurried across to Silverfen.

With a tornado of emotions rushing through my heart, I ascended the stairs to her tower. I hadn't been this nervous since hunting the Necromancer of the Frozen Swamp. I still had no idea what to expect, or how to act. With trepidation, I opened Sarah's bedroom door and peered in.

There she lay on her bed, completely nude and on top of the covers. She wasn't tied up like yesterday, but she reclined in a relaxed and sexy position.

"Hello my husband," she said in a sultry voice. I couldn't believe what I was seeing or hearing! I had wondered just what she expected of me, but now that I knew, I was even more frightened. I had never done anything like this before; I had no idea what to do. What if I completely screwed it up? What if I was no good? What if--

"You must be exhausted after all of the dragon slaying and demon hunting you've been doing lately," said Sarah. "Take off your things and come to bed, my dearest Kenneth Shadowbane."

I felt my heart pounding in my chest. I gulped, which did nothing to ease my dry throat. If I wasn't careful, I was likely to start hyperventilating.

"Would you like your new bride to help you out of your raiment?" she asked. I nodded dumbly, and she beckoned me toward the bed. I slipped off my shoes and shuffled in a daze toward her and climbed onto the bed, lying down next to her.

Sarah reached for the bottom of my shirt, grabbing it by the base and lifting it upward. I raised my arms to make it easier for her, and she pulled the garment off. Then she slipped her hand onto my chest and began to rub me like she had yesterday. When she rested it on my pounding heart, she gave me a comforting smile.

"Nervous?" she asked.

"No," I denied, though it was an obvious lie.

She laughed. "Of course you aren't," she smiled. "Kenneth Shadowbane is afraid of nothing. But what if I ask that same question to Kenny Grant?"

I nodded. She leaned over and kissed me. "It's okay," she said. "Everyone's nervous the first time. And I don't expect you to be the greatest lover in the world, at least not yet. Maybe we'll work on that later. For now, just think of this as one more adventure for Kenneth Shadowbane. And remember that Princess Allura loves him

more than anything in the world."

That made me feel a lot better. Sarah wouldn't judge me. I was still in awe that this beautiful girl wanted to do this with me, but she also wanted me to feel comfortable, and right now, I did.

She moved her hands up to my biceps. "What strong arms you have, my dearest Kenneth," she said. "Your muscles are toned from years of fighting. You must be the strongest man in the realm." Then she took my own hands in hers. "But your hands are so soft," she continued. "Strange for a man who spends his days carrying a sword." She placed my hand on her breast. "Oh, be gentle with me, my brave strong hero!" she pleaded.

"I'll be very gentle with you," I replied, getting into the act. I tenderly ran my hand over her soft flesh, excited beyond belief. This was far better than just watching from the window. I was actually touching Sarah, feeling her beautiful body.

She sighed and closed her eyes, lying back. I didn't know what to do, so I just kept rubbing her. No doubt she would guide me when she wanted me to do something else. For now, though, she seemed content to just let me fondle her like that.

I watched her gorgeous face as I toyed with her body. She wore the same expression there that she had last night when playing with herself. It was a look of both lust and also happiness, a surrender to the pleasure of her body. The difference was that I was really here this time. She didn't have to fantasize. At least, she didn't have to fantasize as much. I knew that she was still thinking about Kenneth Shadowbane, not about Kenny Grant. But Kenny Grant was more than happy to step into that role for her.

After a few minutes of enjoying the feel of my hand, she took it and moved it to her other breast, the one furthest from me. Then she opened her eyes, reached up, and put her hand behind my head. She gently pulled me down, and I thought she wanted to kiss me again. But instead, she guided my head to her chest.

"Oh Kenneth!" she exclaimed. "Are you really going to put your mouth there? How I've dreamed of you doing that to me!"

I got the hint, and grinned as I realized just what she wanted. I planted a kiss right on her nearest nipple. She arched her back and let out a moan at the contact. "Oh god, that feels so good, Kenneth! Please don't stop!"

I didn't. Now that I had a new way to please her, I put my all into it. At first I was content to just kiss around the whole area, but what I really wanted was to taste it. I stuck out my tongue and ran it all over the nipple, causing her to groan even louder. It was a good thing her parents weren't home, because Sarah was being quite noisy. Fortunately, both parents worked until the late afternoon, and it was still morning.

Sarah grabbed my hand again and moved it down her body. I reveled in the feel of her skin and the anticipation of where I was headed. She kept her eyes closed, smiling the whole way.

"Oh, Kenneth, you're so manly!" she said. "I love the way you just take control like that!"

I couldn't help but chuckle, and she let out a giggle as well. She had been in complete control right from the beginning, and we both knew it. She was just teasing me, but she did it so good-naturedly that I really couldn't find any fault with her. Besides, I was having way too much fun.

When my hand reached its destination, Sarah placed her own hand on top of it and gently moved it to show me what to do. I'm glad she did, because I certainly wouldn't have been able to figure it out on my own. I knew there was probably some rubbing involved, but without her help I would have been lost.

She had fortunately warmed herself up a little before I arrived, so she was already fairly loose and quite damp. All I had to do was fondle her a little. She had me run my fingers around the bump at the top of her slit, tracing little circles around it. That had a noticeable effect on Sarah; her breathing grew immediately heavier and her body squirmed on the bed. I was surprised at how much influence that little motion of my hand could have on her body. Whatever I was doing, I was doing it right.

Eventually she took her hand away and let me do it on my own. I continued to finger her, figuring she would guide me when she wanted something else. In the mean time, I was getting a little excited myself; my pants were feeling extraordinarily cramped, and I needed to do something to relieve the pressure.

"Sarah," I said.

She opened her eyes and smiled at me. "You mean Princess Allura?" she asked.

"Yes. Princess Allura. Can I... can I take my pants off?"

She gave a friendly laugh. "Of course you may, my dear sweet husband. In fact, let me help you." She unfastened my belt, then unzipped my pants. With one quick motion, she had my pants and shorts down below my knees. I groaned in relief as my cock sprang free.

"Oh my," she said as she stared at it. "I had no idea it would be so big. But then, I should have expected nothing less from such a big, strong, brave warrior such as yourself." It wasn't true, of course; I was still only thirteen and still growing after all. But I did enjoy the compliment, fictitious as it was.

Sarah's hand reached out and wrapped around the shaft, and I groaned again. It was the first time a girl had ever touched me there, and it felt amazing. The pleasure was so intense that I almost lost it right there. Fortunately, she sensed that I was right on the edge, and waited until the moment had passed and I calmed down again. Then she started to gently stroke it.

I had paused in my own ministrations for the moment, but now I took up where I had left off, rubbing her between the legs again. Somehow during the process I managed to shuck my pants, leaving me in only my socks. Sarah gripped my cock tightly and pulled me toward her. I ended up climbing onto the bed beside her.

"Lie down," she whispered, and I reclined next to her. She released me, but only so that she could put her hand behind my head and draw me in for another kiss. This was the best one yet, mainly because of the feel of her entire body this time. It was so warm, so soft, and so intensely enjoyable.

After we broke the kiss and I dizzily lay my head down on the bed, Sarah sat up. She reached down to my feet and worked on my socks. Since we were already mostly nude it really didn't matter, but on the other hand, I realized that it symbolized the crossing of one more threshold. In a few seconds I would officially be naked with a girl for the first time in my entire life.

My socks came off, and Sarah rolled over on top of me to kiss me again. I could feel my cock pressing against her hot belly, nestled comfortably between our bodies. For a moment that was enough, but there was another place that it longed to be, and I knew that soon it would find its way there.

When Sarah drew back from the kiss, she smiled lovingly down at me. I gazed into her eyes, and at that moment I knew that I was in love with her.

"Sarah," I breathed.

She laughed. "You keep saying that name," she said. "I would think that by now you would remember my name. We're married after all."

"Allura," I corrected, playing along. "I love you."

"I love you too, Kenneth," she responded. "And now I think it's time we proved it to each other." She rolled off of me and lay back, but she kept her hand behind my head and pulled me along with her, so that I ended up on top.

"Go on," she said. "Put it inside me."

"Really?" I asked, probably about the dumbest question possible. But like she had hinted at earlier, she didn't judge me.

"Really," was all she said.

I scooted my body down a couple of inches, raised myself up, and placed my cock at the entrance to her hole. I was so excited I could barely line it up correctly. Fortunately, Sarah helped me out by spreading her outer lips with one hand while she guided my cock with the other.

"Now do it," she said. "Just push it in. Gently."

I did. Sarah gasped in pleasure as I pressed inside of her. I was overcome with pleasure too as I found myself buried inside her tight, hot tunnel. *This is it*, I realized. *I'm finally having sex.*

I couldn't claim to be the most perfect lover in the world, and I'm sure I made plenty of mistakes, but there were some things that just came by instinct. At first I moved stiffly and mechanically, but Sarah's smiling face helped me to relax, and as I did so, the pleasure took over and it became more like that musical dance that I had witnessed last night. Only this time, there were two instruments. My body and Sarah's found a rhythm, and from that point on, it all worked like magic. I thrust into her over and over again, and Sarah's

hips rose up to meet each thrust. The feeling was amazing; I had often wondered what it would feel like, but the reality was so much better than the fantasy. It was made all the more splendid by the rest of Sarah's body rubbing against my own, her arms and legs wrapped around me. She moaned out loud, and it was by far the most thrilling sound I had ever heard. *I* was causing that sound in her. *I* was giving her sexual pleasure. It was almost too much to believe.

Of course, it didn't really last all that long. Maybe with more practice I would be able to hold out much longer, but the excitement was too overwhelming for me. It seemed like we had just barely fallen into that rhythm when I felt the pleasure spiking. I let it happen, luxuriating in the intenseness of the climax as I erupted inside of her.

Sarah apparently sensed it, and that caused her to go off too, or at least I assumed that was what happened. Her moans suddenly turned to a wail as her body tensed up and I felt the walls of her pussy clamp down tightly on my cock. We held each other tightly as our respective orgasms washed through us, until the pleasure eventually ebbed. Exhaustion overtook us, and our bodies collapsed together onto the bed.

I lay next to Sarah, tired and spent but supremely happy. It was, so far, the greatest experience of my entire life. I had shared something special with Sarah, and from the look on her face, she had enjoyed it just as much as I had. For the time being, life was absolutely perfect. Sarah and I were lovers, and nothing would ever come between us.

Or so I thought.

Chapter 4

The Fall of Silverfen

As before, we napped together on her bed. Since it was so early in the day, we didn't have to worry about her parents coming home and finding us like that, so we leisurely slumbered for a long time. Whenever I awoke, I would start stroking my lover's skin, and that felt so relaxing that I would immediately fall right back to sleep again. I awoke a couple of times to Sarah doing the same thing to me. It was such a simple yet tender act, something that seemed to bring us even closer together than the sex we had just shared. I knew I wanted to be with Sarah forever, and I suspected that she wanted the same thing.

When we finally got up, Princess Allura showed me to the Falls of Fire, a waterfall naturally heated by volcanic activity in the mountains in the south of Silverfen. It also happened to be conveniently located in the bathroom right down the hall from her bedroom. We bathed in the shower, washing each other's bodies. I was growing in confidence now that I was no longer a virgin, and especially since my princess enjoyed

having me touch her like that. I was learning all kinds of things about the female body as I explored her with curiosity and delight.

She returned the favor, running her soapy hands all over me. She even got me semi-hard, although after what I had just been through, it was a wonder that she even managed to do that much. We hugged and kissed some more under the water, enjoying the time we had together to the fullest.

Strangely enough, after we left the shower and Sarah gathered up the sheets on her bed to toss them in the washer, we went right back to innocent playing. Somehow, miraculously, what we had shared had almost no effect on our friendship. True, Kenneth Shadowbane and Allura of Silverfen were now married, but there were still dragons to hunt, demons to defeat, and barbarian hordes to conquer. Allura wasn't content to just sit back and let her husband do all the fighting; she wanted to go out adventuring with me. Who was I to say no?

We didn't talk about what we had done that morning. I don't think it was out of embarrassment; rather, we just felt comfortable with it. There wasn't much that needed to be said. I hoped we could do the same thing again soon, but I didn't bring it up. If it happened, great. If not, well, I still had my memories. Besides, we still had most of the summer, so we were bound to end up in bed together again some time.

At lunchtime, Sarah suggested we eat in the fortress atop the mountain pass, where we could keep an eye on the barbarians that were gathering in the lowlands. We were safe for now, but last time I checked, it looked like they were preparing to march on Elderhaven. We would have to deal with them eventually, so we needed to make plans.

Sarah fixed a couple of sandwiches and poured some apple juice into a large thermos, then we headed out to my backyard and the tree house. Being somewhat smaller and lighter, I was more agile than her, but she still managed with only a little difficulty to scramble up after me. We surveyed the barbarian forces in the valley and determined that it would be some time before they had enough manpower to seriously challenge the Elderhaven Army, especially with the new alliance with Silverfen.

Allura was more interested in the mountain towering above us, the ancient plateau full of unknown dangers and unknown treasures. Legend had it that it had been cut off from the rest of the world for thousands, if not millions, of years, and the creatures there were like nothing anyone had ever seen before, except perhaps the lost tribe that had built a great empire there in the early days of the Elder World. No one knew if they still lived there, or if their civilization had collapsed. Princess Allura suggested we go explore that world some day soon. It would be an all-day trip, so we would have to plan it out in advance and bring provisions.

We talked more about the world of my imagination as we ate. Actually, it was beginning to feel more like the world of *our* imagination now, not that I begrudged her a bit of a claim on it. Rather, I welcomed it. For years it had existed only in my mind, but now that I had someone to share it with, that made it somehow more real. It also made me feel closer to Sarah, because in a way, we were the only two residents of that world.

We took a swim in her pool later, and unfortunately she insisted that we wear swimsuits. Apparently most of

the sea monsters of Lake Nightmist were otherwise occupied, because we only had to fight off a couple of them. Princess Allura did wrap herself around me for protection from the mythical sea beasts when they threatened us, which really felt nice, but the monsters were no match for the Champion of the Elder World, so we spent more of our time just horsing around than in actual combat.

By the time her parents came home, we were dressed and back inside the house. My mom called me home a little later, so I gave Sarah one last hug and returned to my kingdom.

That night Sarah didn't give me a show, but instead we spent nearly half an hour talking across the space between our windows. We talked about nothing in particular, letting our conversation wander wherever it wanted to go. Half the time we played our parts as Kenneth and Allura, and half the time we were content to just be Kenny and Sarah. We switched back and forth so seamlessly that most of the time it really didn't matter which we were.

That seemed to define my relationship with her. There was so much blending of fantasy and reality that the two seemed to overlap and become one. When I looked at Sarah I saw a princess, and when she looked at me she saw a hero. It didn't matter that those were just characters in a fairy tale; as far as we were concerned, that was reality and the mundane existence of two teenagers in the modern world was just a frivolous game, a way of passing the time while we waited to return to our true forms.

It didn't help that she visited me in my dreams that night. Not that that was surprising; after what we had done that day, I would have been more surprised if I *didn't* dream about her. But the dream world was so much more vivid, and in that world there was no such thing as Kenny Grant and Sarah Laurent. We truly were the characters from our imagination. I replayed the capture and rescue of Allura by the Shadow Monsters, including the kiss and our snuggling later. Only this time, instead of rectangular walls meeting at right angles and the dull colors and geometric construction of her bedroom, it was the dark and morbid caverns of my enemies. Perhaps in other circumstances it might be considered a nightmare, but Kenneth Shadowbane feared none of the creatures that haunted the dreams of boys and girls. Especially when I had such a lovely target as Princess Allura.

In the end, I saved the girl and escaped the desolate caverns, and we rested in the magical grove, just the two of us. In the dream world I fell asleep in her arms, just in time to awake in the so-called real world.

Because it was Saturday and my mom was home all day, there was no need for Sarah to babysit me. But she called up and asked if she could come over anyway. Mom was more than happy to agree; I had never been particularly social, especially around the opposite sex, and I think she wanted to encourage me in that direction. Of course, I was delighted to have Sarah come over.

We spent almost the entire day just sitting on the couch and talking, making plans for our future adventures together. We never mentioned our marriage; neither of us were sure how our parents would take it. In a way,

it was a kind of elopement. Granted, in the only world where the marriage was binding, her father the king approved and I had no parents that I knew of, but in the real world there were too many complications.

When Mom showed an interest in our discussion (she had always been supportive of me in that way), we explained that Sarah was Princess Allura, and that I was training her to defend herself against Silverfen's many enemies. That training involved going on various quests together.

That seemed to satisfy my mother, so we left it at that.

Sunday was much the same, except that we spent most of the time at Sarah's house. Her parents showed a surprising interest in our game for a couple of old people, and were particularly amused to learn that they were the King and Queen of Silverfen. I decided that I really liked them. I admit that I was looking forward to spending more time alone with Sarah, but since that wasn't possible on the weekends, I was content just to spend time with her whole family. When dinner time came around, Mrs. Laurent sent me across the yard to invite my mom to eat with them. Sarah's dad thought it was a good excuse to unpack the barbecue from the crate where they had stored it while moving into this house, so we ate grilled hamburgers out on the Laurents' back patio.

I was having a great time, and not just because Sarah sat by me the whole time. My mom seemed to get along just fine with the Laurents, which was good for me because the better friends our two families were, the more opportunities I would have to be with Sarah. I didn't relish the thought of a Romeo and Juliet type of relationship with her, and fortunately it looked like that wasn't going to happen.

On Monday, I received a pleasant surprise. I woke up with a smile on my face, knowing that I would have another chance to spend all day alone with Sarah. That would give us the opportunity to do some things that we wouldn't want to do in front of our parents. I tried not to get too excited about it; nothing was guaranteed after all. But just the possibility was enough to put me in a good mood.

Sarah met me at the door just as my mom was leaving for work. Mom gave me some last-minute advice of the "be good" and "don't do anything I wouldn't do" variety, then disappeared out the door, leaving me alone with Sarah.

I was happy to travel with her back to her kingdom again, and like before, she led me straight up to her bedroom. I was tempted to ask if we were going to have sex again, but I was still a little afraid of moving too fast. I still didn't know how to understand a woman's mind, and in my innocence I didn't realize that that was the natural state of the relationship between men and women.

Fortunately, Sarah had her own plans.

"Kenneth dearest," she said, and I was surprised to find that I really didn't mind when she used lovey-dovey terms like that. "I was wondering whether you would be willing to do something for me."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Well, you know that there are dozens of elven tribes in Silverfen."

"Sure," I replied. I hadn't really much thought about it, but I was willing to play along for now.

"And you know that some of the more remote tribes hardly have any dealings with the others. Some are very primitive, in fact, and they have all kinds of strange and unusual traditions and rituals."

I wasn't sure where she was headed with this, but so far it sounded interesting. "That's what I heard," I replied.

"Well, part of my education as Princess of Silverfen was to get to know my subjects, especially those with whom I share a common heritage. The elven blood in my veins has led to a great interest in these tribes. They are my kin, after all. I've traveled all over Silverfen, from the mountains in the south to the jungles in the north, from the shores of Lake Nightmist to the Secret Valleys of the Elder Wind. I have seen many things, many peoples, many traditions. But one sight has intrigued me more than any others. Are you familiar with the mating ritual of the Firefern Elves?"

"Um... no..." I said, although it did sound interesting.

"As I said, these are my kin, so although they are primitive, I feel a kind of bond with them. I know we were already married in a traditional royal ceremony, but I feel kind of incomplete. I would like to perform the mating ritual of the Firefern Elves with you."

"Er... it sounds complicated."

"Not for you. Your part is easy. All you have to do is lie there."

"That's it?"

"Don't worry. I guarantee you'll enjoy it. We may be with a true Firefern Elf tribe, but we can still have our own private little ceremony."

"Well, I guess that would be all right," I said. Actually, it was sounding better and better. As long as all I had to do was lie there, I was willing to give it a shot.

"Good. Now before you lie down, you need to get dressed," she said.

"I'm already dressed."

"No, you have to dress in the traditional ceremonial outfit of the Firefern elves. Come here." She took my hand and led me into the bathroom, where she handed me a towel. "Take off all your clothes and wrap this around your waist," she said.

"A towel?"

"The closest thing to a loincloth we have in the house," she laughed. "I told you the Firefern elves are primitive. Besides, I'll be wearing almost exactly the same thing."

"Okay," I agreed happily.

I had no reason to be bashful around Sarah, so I immediately began stripping out of my clothes. She left the bathroom and closed the door behind her though. I would have liked to watch her dressing in her costume, but I didn't mind; no doubt this was something like seeing the bride before the wedding.

I hurried and undressed, then wrapped the towel around me like she said, tucking in one of the edges tightly so that it wouldn't fall down. Then I opened the door.

Sarah stood in the middle of the room, wearing just her bra and panties. "I'm going to be moving around more than you, and I decided my loincloth probably won't stay on," she said, "so I'm substituting."

"I have no objections," I grinned.

She hustled me over to the bed, instructing me to lie down sideways on it facing the room, with my legs over the edge and my feet on the floor. I did so.

"Now whatever happens, you have to just lie still," she said. I watched as she walked over to her stereo and turned it on. Instantly, the room was filled with music. Primitive music. Tribal music. Full of energetic drums, an African-sounding chant, and what must have been some kind of wooden flute. I figured it was to set the mood, but I was only half right.

Sarah turned around and stood in the center of the room again. She gave me a wink, then began to dance.

What a dance it was! It followed the rhythm set by the raw, primordial song that ran through the air, swaying and jerking with the pounding beats. Half the time her body flowed with lithe grace, and half the time with jarring, almost violent motions. Her body contorted into a thousand different postures, but always emphasizing the erotic sensuality of the human body. She spun and whirled with her hands in the air, then let them slide down her body, tracing her supple curves. There was a touch of ballet, a dash of modern dance, and maybe even a hint of hula. But all were subordinate to that raw, animalistic eroticism that the dance was meant to convey.

I had no doubt that she was making up the moves on the spot, and I also had no doubt that the dance was meant to do one thing, and one thing only: to arouse me. She had said that it was a mating dance, and it certainly inspired in me the desire to mate.

It wasn't long before the physical manifestation of that desire became apparent. A lump in the front of the towel I wore started to arise. Lying mostly prone like this, I knew it was impossible to hide.

As it turned out, I had no need to be embarrassed about it. As soon as Sarah noticed it, it spurred her on to even more energetic and erotic motions. Her moves were almost obscene now, as her hands roamed around her body, focusing on the parts that I liked the most. Some of the moves reminded me of a stripper's dance, not that I had seen much of that other than in edited versions on TV. That just excited me even more.

But she was far from finished. She reached behind her back, and I realized what she was doing. This was even better than when I had spied on her the other night! Then it had been the hint of a dance; now it was a true dance in its most brazen and sensual form. I caught just a teasing glimpse of her naked boobs as she slipped the bra off of her chest and tossed it aside, but she immediately covered them with one of her arms. I groaned in frustration, and I heard a little giggle escape Sarah's lips.

Although one of her arms was occupied, the other was not. She swung this one around freely, utilizing it fully in the dance. She slipped it behind her head to tease her hair, or let it lead in her gyrating spins, or moved it in long, graceful arcs. All the while she kept hidden from me the sight that I so longed to see.

It was even worse when she turned away from me and let her arm leave her breasts. I lay there staring at her naked back as her arms, legs, and hips teased me with their sexy movements. She glanced over her shoulder with a flirtatious grin, then spread her arms wide, letting them sway like the branches of a tree in the wind. This contorted her body in the most alluring poses, always moving, always speaking to my basest desires.

Then, suddenly, without warning, she turned around. I gasped in delight at the view I now had of her exquisite, round breasts, now completely uncovered and exposed to my eyes. As she moved, they tended to jiggle and bounce around. Although they weren't large enough to have a lot of motion, they were certainly thrilling to watch. I think I lost track of all the rest of her body, so focused was I on her magnificent chest.

Then she surprised me again by climbing up onto the bed and standing above me, continuing that erotic dance as I stared up at her in lust and awe. The gyrations of her hips were mesmerising as she bent her knees and swung her body lower and lower, closer and closer to me. I was still fascinated by her breasts, swinging freely above me and driving me wild with temptation. I gripped the edge of the bed tightly, wanting so much to reach up and take hold of her. She was right there, right within easy reach. The only thing keeping me back was the fact that she had told me I had to lie still.

Then as the energy of the song built up to the finale, Sarah hopped off the bed again and danced in front of me, this time leaning over my thighs. She brought her chest down, just inches from that aching bulge in my towel, teasing and tempting me even more. It was one of the most frustrating, yet most enjoyable experiences of my entire life.

The song ended on a single, powerful beat of the drums, and just as it did so, she grabbed the towel and whipped it off, throwing it across the room and exposing my naked body. She then fell to her knees in front of me.

"This is the part you're going to enjoy the most," she told me, then reached out and grasped my erection in both hands. I groaned in pleasure at the contact that I had so desperately been waiting for.

But Sarah wasn't finished. Oh no. She opened her mouth and began to lower her head. I gasped as I realized what was happening. She wouldn't dare! Would she?

She dared.

The first thing I felt was her tongue brushing against the tip of my dick. That sudden electrifying sensation caused my hips to reflexively buck, and the only thing keeping me from spearing into her mouth and right down into her throat was the presence of her hands at the base.

The second thing I felt was her tongue again, this time licking all up and down the shaft. This was both heaven and hell for me; heaven because of the intense stimulation, and hell because it was still just a kind of teasing, pleasurable in its own way but not satisfying. Still, I could hardly complain if Sarah wanted to do this for me. Even in my wildest dreams I had never imagined that I could get a girl to give me that kind of pleasure, especially a princess like Sarah/Allura, and now here she was, doing it not because I had coaxed her into it or even because I had begged, but simply because she wanted to.

When she let her lips close about the head, I gave out a long groan of lusty pleasure. Now that was more like it! The moist warmth of her mouth was what I had been waiting for, what she had been building up for this whole morning. The dance, the teasing, the whole day had been planned around this moment.

Then she began to suck.

The pleasure was intense, far more intense than anything I had experienced so far in my life. Even on Friday, it had been more intimate and tender. This was raw, an overloading of the senses. I was completely unprepared for the sexual onslaught, but that just made it all the better.

"Oh god Sarah!" I cried out, "oh god! Oh god!" Was I pleading with her to stop? Perhaps; it really was too much for me. But at the same time, I also wanted her to continue, to finish the job even if it killed me.

She had no intention of stopping. Sarah sucked me hard, showing no mercy. Her lips moved up and down on me, falling into a rhythm just like when I had watched her play with herself the other night. In a way, this felt like a continuation of the dance, only now, the promise of that dance was being fulfilled. My whole body felt like it was pulsing as Sarah worked me over expertly. Every part of me was enslaved, subservient to the desires in my loins and the dance of ecstasy in which Sarah led me. The electrical feeling shot through me like lightning, but always centered where I disappeared into her mouth.

Somehow through the haze of blinding ecstasy I managed to look down and see her beautiful face smiling up at me. She wanted this; she wanted to please me. My Princess Allura, my Princess Sarah, wanted me to know just how much she loved me.

I love you too, Sarah, I thought, though I didn't say it. Even now I was a little worried that I had misinterpreted all of her signals, that somehow, even though she was giving me the most exquisite feeling in the world, that I was wrong about her. It was absurd, of course. She loved me just like I loved her. But I was still afraid.

I never knew that I could feel so good, but what happened next astounded me. Somehow the pleasure actually increased. The rhythmic pulsing became stronger, more physical, and I felt all the energy in my body starting to concentrate. The rest of me seemed to grow numb as all the sensations of my entire body came together in one point. I don't know if I cried out, or screamed, or groaned, or just remained silent, but the next thing I knew, my cock was throbbing inside Sarah's mouth as I erupted into the most earth-shaking orgasm of my life.

I heard her hum in delight, like she was eating a delicious meal. And perhaps to her, it really was. Maybe her love for me, and the knowledge that she had done something wonderful for me, made it taste all the better. All I knew is that she eagerly drank down everything I gave her.

A part of me shut down then as the pleasure dissipated and exhaustion and an inner glow filled me. I stared up at the ceiling, exquisitely happy and overwhelmingly tired. I don't think I actually fell asleep, but I lost all sense of time and space for a while as I rested there.

Sarah climbed up onto the bed and lay down next to me, cuddling like we had before. I couldn't quite work up the energy to put my arm around her, but she didn't seem to mind. She just lay her head on my chest and held onto me, smiling sweetly.

As we relaxed together in each other's arms, I thought about how she had taken charge and pretty much chased all my nervousness away with both her confidence and playfulness, both Friday and today. It was clear that she was quite experienced.

I didn't know how I felt about that. On one hand, I was glad that she was able to lead me like that, helping me to relax and enjoy the moment. On the other, I felt just a little jealous about whoever she had been with before. I couldn't feel too bad about it though. Whatever her past, she was with me now, and that was all that was important. Still, I was curious.

"Sarah, can I ask you something?" I said.

"Of course you can, Kenny," she replied with that warm and friendly smile that I liked so much.

"I mean, something personal."

"Okay, go ahead."

"How come you know so much about... um..."

"Sex?" she asked.

"Yeah," I replied, blushing.

"Well, I wouldn't say I'm an expert or anything."

"But you have done it in the past?"

"Do you really want to know?"

I nodded. Maybe it would just make me more jealous, but I think I needed to find out.

"Okay," she said, "I had a good teacher. He was a little older and a lot more experienced. I thought I was really lucky to have someone like him to teach me all about it, and because I really like you, I wanted to give you a similar good experience your first time."

"You really like me that much?"

"Absolutely!" she smiled.

"Enough to... have sex with me?"

"Isn't that kind of obvious?" she laughed. "Okay, it was really Kenneth and Allura who did the deed; we were just playing parts. But I wouldn't have wanted to play that part if I were opposed to doing it with you in real life."

That made me feel really good, and I admit I wound up with a dumb grin on my face at her compliments.

"So did you enjoy it?" she asked.

"You bet I did!" I exclaimed.

"I'm glad."

So that was it. I didn't bring it up again. She hadn't quite quelled my jealousy, but it sounded like whoever she had been with before, it was a long time ago. As long as he didn't show up on a white stallion to sweep her off her feet and take her away from me, it really didn't matter.

I was hoping to peek on Sarah again that night, or at the very least spend some time talking with her, but unfortunately it wasn't to be. The weather turned foul in the late afternoon, and by the time we went to bed it was raining, so we had to keep our windows shut.

That prevented us from talking, but I still hoped for her to give me another show. By this point I was finally starting to realize that she had done it on purpose the first time.

Unfortunately, just as she was about to get ready to bed, her father came to visit her in her room. That spoiled my chances of seeing her getting sexy, so with mostly disinterest I watched them from across the way as they sat down and had a father-daughter chat. Her dad seemed happy and enthusiastic, but Sarah looked quite a bit less so. She mostly just nodded as he talked, an expression on her face that could only be described as stoic. Whatever he was saying, she simply accepted without emotion. That got me curious; perhaps I would talk to her about it again tomorrow.

They stood up and hugged, then he left her room. Sarah sat down on her bed and stared at the floor for the longest time, then finally turned off the light.

The next morning, she met me at the front door again, and we went over to her place. Skipping the front room entirely, we went up to her bedroom and sat down together on her bed. She seemed particularly excited today, and I wondered if it had to do with the news that her father had told her last night. She hadn't seemed too thrilled at the time, but maybe she just needed time to think about it.

"Guess what, Kenny?" said Sarah with a smile on her face. "I have some great news!" That confirmed my suspicions.

"What is it?" I asked her, picking up on her enthusiasm.

"My dad just got promoted to vice president of the company."

"What? But I thought he just made regional manager."

"He did, but the current vice president just announced his retirement. He used to work with my Dad, and put in a good word for him with the board."

"Wow," I said. "That's great! I assume he's going to get a raise?"

"Yeah, we're going to have lots of nice things and live in a great big house and when he travels around the world for business conferences, he says he's going to take us with him. It's going to be so much fun!"

I stared at her, shocked. It was a surprise that I even heard all of what she said, because most of my mind was focused on one small detail right in the middle.

...live in a great big house...

What did that mean? Surely she wasn't going to move away, just after moving here. If that were the case, Sarah would be sad, not happy, wouldn't she? Princess Allura would never abandon Kenneth Shadowbane, and if it was out of her control, she wouldn't be excited about it.

She noticed my distress. "What is it, Kenny?" she asked. "Aren't you happy for me?"

"I... well... no, I mean..."

"You're *not* happy for me?"

"Does that mean you're not going to live here anymore?"

"Well, yeah. We're moving across the country. That's part of what makes it so exciting. My dad says we're

going to get ourselves a really big house. A mansion."

"But..."

"But what?"

"But then... I won't get to see you anymore."

"That's okay, we can still write to each other."

"I don't want to write to you. I want..."

Sarah's excitement dropped. "Oh, come on Kenny, please don't be like that. You're supposed to be my friend. You're supposed to be happy when things like this happen to me. Please don't spoil it by being selfish."

"Selfish? You're the one moving away. You're the one leaving me by myself."

"You won't be by yourself for long. You'll make new friends as soon as school starts," she told me.

"I don't want new friends!" I snapped. "I want you."

"Kenny, normally I like it when you act like a kid, but not right now. You're being a brat about this whole thing. Look, we've had fun together, but now it's time to move on to new things."

"But what about... what about what happened the other day?"

"What happened?"

"Well, we... you know..."

"Oh, that? Kenny, that wasn't even us. I told you, that was Kenneth Shadowbane and Princess Allura. It was all make-believe, all just a fantasy. I admit that I really enjoyed it, but it didn't mean anything."

"Yes it did!" I insisted.

"What, did you think I was in love with you?" she asked. "I'm your babysitter, Kenny, and you're just a kid. I like you, I really do. But we were never going to be together like that. I wasn't trying to mislead you; I thought you knew that we were just playing around."

"You're lying!" I shouted. "It wasn't just make-believe, it was real! You're just like all my other babysitters I had when I was growing up. You're... you're an ogre, and I hate you!"

By this point I was almost in tears, and the last thing I wanted was for Sarah to see me cry. I ran downstairs and out the front door, slamming it behind me. Then I rushed across to my house, closing and locking the door so that she couldn't follow. I dashed upstairs, threw myself onto my bed, and buried my face in my

pillow, sobbing uncontrollably.

Chapter 5

Throne Reclaimed

I was still lying on my bed staring at the wall when Mom came home. I heard the front door open, followed a few minutes later by footsteps on the stairs. Finally, she opened the door and peeked in.

"Hi, Kenny," she smiled. "Where's Sarah?"

"I hate her," is all I said.

Mom sighed. "Uh oh. Did you two have a falling out?"

At first I didn't want to talk about it, but I decided I needed to tell someone how I felt, and Mom had always been a good listener. So I began talking, and soon I had explained everything. Obviously I left out the sexual parts, but other than that, I went into detail about how much fun we had had and how I felt about the whole thing.

Mom listened patiently, not saying a word until I was finished. It felt good to get it all out in the open, to be able to put all of my mixed-up emotions into words, and to have someone actually understand me.

In the end, I reemphasized that I hated her for what she had done.

"I don't think you hate her," said my mom. "You know what I think? I think you love her. If you hated her, you would be glad she's moving away."

"I don't love her!" I insisted. "Not after what she did to me."

"What did she do? She gave you a week full of wonderful memories. And don't forget, Sarah's not the one who decided to leave. That decision was made by people who have never met either Sarah or you and don't understand how much you care for each other."

"But I'm never going to see her again!" I whined.

"Shame on you, Kenny!" said my mom, putting her hands on her hips. "I thought you were the boy who believes in dragons. I thought you spent most of your time in a fantasy world. You of all people should be able to recognize that you're living in a fairy tale."

I stared at her, not understanding what she was talking about, so she continued.

"You're a brave hero, and she's a beautiful princess. It doesn't matter that those are just made-up characters in your world. What matters is that they're who you are inside. In your imagination you've risked your life to save hers, and from what I know about you, the only reason you haven't done the same thing in real life is that you've never had the opportunity. I've seen the way her eyes light up every time she sees you. You and I both know that you love her, and I'm pretty sure she loves you just as much. That's why I say that you two are living in a fairy tale. And there's one thing all fairy tales have in common. They all end up happily ever after."

"But she's moving away!" I protested.

"So you'll be apart for a while. Write to her. Email her. Just stay in contact with her. But most importantly, let her know how you feel. In a few years you'll be old enough to decide where you want to live and who you want to spend your time with, and then I don't think all the Shadow Monsters in the world will be able to keep you two apart. Just have a little faith."

I sighed. It didn't sound particularly pleasant, but then, it didn't sound as bad as I had thought either. I was still angry at Sarah and I didn't know if I even loved her anymore, but at least it gave me a little comfort.

Mom hugged me, then left me alone to think about what she had said. Part of me wanted to believe her, but unfortunately, I was stubborn, and I had already decided I would never forgive Sarah. I didn't tell my mom this; she would probably try to talk me out of it, and right now that was the last thing I wanted. Sarah had hurt me, and it wasn't easy for me to get over that.

I stayed in my room the rest of the night, and didn't even come down for breakfast the next morning. Just before leaving, Mom knocked on the door and asked me if I was all right. I wasn't, but I told her I was fine. I don't think she believed me, but she knew that I just needed some time to be by myself. So she left me there and headed out the door to drive to work.

Despite her comforting words last night, I was miserable. I missed the fun times I had had with Sarah, but right now, she was the last person I wanted to see. Not after the way she had treated me. Not after saying that I wasn't as important to her as all the stupid possessions she was going to have at her new house. So I wouldn't allow her to talk to me. If she came over to babysit me, I wouldn't let her in the house. If she called, I wouldn't answer the phone. If she banged on the front door until her knuckles bled, I would just sit up in my room ignoring her. I was determined to never speak to her again, not even to say goodbye when her family packed up and moved away. It would serve her right.

Just like I expected, I heard a knocking on the door. That was Sarah, no doubt, coming over to talk to me. I just sat on my bed and stared at the floor, stubbornly refusing to budge. She knocked again, and again I remained immobile. I could just imagine her giving up, then walking back across her yard to her house, where she would pick up the phone and call me. In a minute or two I expected to hear the phone ring, but I

would stay right where I was. I had even closed the curtains on my window so that she couldn't call me from across the way. I had built up an impenetrable fortress around myself, a mighty castle that would never be breached by a mere girl like Sarah.

But sometimes fate has a way of intervening. My mother, always a bit of a perfectionist, always a little protective, never left the house without locking the door behind her. Except today.

Instead of a phone call, I heard a third knock, but this one was at my bedroom door. "Kenny?" Sarah's voice said on the other side.

Now I was really mad. How dare she come in my house without my permission? This was my castle, not hers. It was nothing short of an invasion, an act of war.

"Go away," I told her.

Instead, she opened the door and slipped inside.

"I don't want to talk to you!" I shouted at her, in as harsh a tone as I could muster. She deserved nothing less for hurting me like she had yesterday.

She came over and sat down on the bed. "Kenny, I came here to tell you I'm sorry."

"I don't care."

"Please, Kenny. I can't stand the thought that you hate me. Look, what I said earlier... It was all a lie."

"A lie?" I asked, shocked. My anger began to fade.

"I told you that all of my feelings toward you were made-up, that it was all just a part of the fantasy. Well, that's not true. I was just so devastated over losing you when I move away that I thought if I could convince myself that I didn't have feelings for you, that it wouldn't hurt so much. Because it does hurt, Kenny. Bad. But it hurts worse to think that you hate me. Please forgive me, Kenny." By now she was almost in tears.

I stared at her for a couple of seconds, then broke down into tears myself. I threw my arms around her and hugged her. "Oh Sarah, I forgive you," I told her. "I'm just so sad that you have to move away."

"Me too," she sobbed. "Kenny, I... I love you."

We sobbed and hugged and held each other for longer than I had ever hugged anyone before. It was as if we were afraid to let each other go, as if it would be the last time we would ever touch.

"Kenny," she whispered. "I want you to make love to me. Not Kenneth Shadowbane, but you. Last time we were just acting out parts, but this time I want it to be real."

I nodded, then turned my head and kissed her on the lips. As one, we fell back on the bed. Sarah kicked off

her shoes, and for several minutes we lay side-by-side, just kissing and caressing each other. There was no rush this time; I wanted to draw this out as long as possible, and I think Sarah did too. This was, in one sense, our first time. The other instances were just practice. But because we had had that practice, we were no longer nervous or tense. We wanted it to be special, but there was no doubt that it would be.

After lying together kissing tenderly for a while, my hand went to Sarah's hip, where I slipped it under her blouse and felt her bare skin. That had a noticeable reaction in her, but a positive one. She sighed, and all of the worry and sadness she had felt before slipped away, to be replaced by a loving smile. She gave me a look of adoration, and no matter what had come between us, in that moment I fell in love with her all over again.

Her hands reached for my own shirt, grabbing the base and pulling it upward. I sat up and lifted my arms, and she stripped off my shirt. Then she pushed me down again to the bed, where she set to work kissing me all over the chest. I loved the feeling of her lips on me, running all over my skin. I knew she was doing this because she got a thrill out of pleasing me like that, and I was almost content to just let her continue all day. But there was so much more I wanted to do to her, including returning the favor.

I gently pushed her away, but only far enough that I could reach for the buttons on her blouse. She smiled when she saw what I was doing, encouraging me to continue. My fingers eagerly made their way down her body, one button at a time, until the whole thing came open. Sarah sat up, threw her shoulders back, and shrugged off the garment, giving me a great view of her chest. She still wore a bra, but that wasn't enough to stop me from at least getting a start on what I wanted to do.

I drew her to me, lowering my head to kiss her just below the neck. She let out a satisfied hum, letting her head fall back and lifting her face to the sky. It was an invitation, and I took her up on it. My lips sought out her neck, kissing her there with growing passion and intensity. We were still relaxed and taking it slow, but there was just a touch of urgency, a bit of impatience for what would come later. Still, it didn't hurt my enjoyment any, or hers either.

As I moved on to her shoulder, I reached up and slipped off the bra strap. I kissed her first on the top of the shoulder, then on the front, then moving gradually lower. Using the loose strap, I slowly peeled down the cup of her bra, inch by inch exposing her breast and always following right behind with my mouth. From the sounds she made, I could tell that she really enjoyed what I was doing to her.

As soon as her nipple was exposed, I stuck out my tongue and scooped it into my mouth. As I began sucking, Sarah's hums of delight turned to excited moans.

She reached behind her to unfasten her bra and give me more room to work, and soon it was discarded alongside her blouse. That gave me the opportunity to shift my focus to her other breast; I didn't want it to feel left out of all the fun, after all. Sarah placed her hands behind my head and held me to her chest, gripping me tightly in her excitement.

Meanwhile, my hand returned to her hip to caress her there, my fingers running circles around the area. They slipped under the waistband of her skirt, at first just incidentally but spending more and more time there,

diving deeper and deeper until my hand rested permanently on her thigh inside her skirt.

In a way, I felt like I was trying to see just what I could get away with, but at the same time I knew that Sarah would let me get away with just about anything. We were lovers after all, even if the previous times had been just playing parts. I knew now that it meant the same thing to her that it did to me; the roles of Kenneth Shadowbane and Princess Allura were just an excuse to put us in the position where we could truly and honestly express our love for each other.

Sarah released my head and slipped her hand onto my own where it rested on her thigh. She gripped it firmly and drew it forward along her skin, and I knew what she wanted me to do. As she lay back on the bed, I slid my hand down inside the front of her panties, seeking out that pleasure point that she had shown me the other day. At the very first contact, she let out a long, lustful groan of pure pleasure.

I toyed with her for a while, watching the entertaining and erotic motions of her body. She squirmed around on the bed, sometimes her eyes closed tightly and sometimes gazing up into my own, but always with a smile on her lips. I could feel her getting hotter and wetter under my fingers, and I even grew so bold as to slip a finger inside, eliciting a gasp and an even brighter smile from Sarah.

"Kenny," she said sweetly. "Would you take my skirt off?"

I withdrew my hand, then took hold of the front of her skirt, where I noticed it was fastened together with a snap. I undid the snap, which loosened up the skirt enough that I could draw it down. Sarah lifted her hips to help me, and I took a moment to savor the view of her in that sexy pose with her hips thrust upward like that. Then I pulled her skirt the rest of the way off, leaving her in just her socks and panties. I noticed a large wet spot on the front of her panties, and I knew exactly where that came from.

"Kenny," she said again in that same tone of voice, and I knew exactly what she wanted. I reached for her panties, and gently drew them down her legs. She lifted her hips again, and the sight was even more intensely beautiful as her mound was now completely uncovered and exposed to my eyes.

I was about to reach for her socks, but she had other plans. She grabbed me and pushed me down on the bed, a grin on her face. She rolled over on top of me and kissed me deeply. To my astonishment, she even slipped her tongue inside my mouth. I balked at this for a moment, then decided that if it was something she wanted, I would oblige her. I let my own tongue run over hers, surprised and delighted to find that it was far more enjoyable than disgusting. We kissed like that for the longest time, until finally Sarah came up for air.

She winked at me, then rolled off of me and reached out for my sweat pants. I hadn't bothered to get dressed yet because I hadn't planned on anyone coming into the house, so I was still in the clothes I had gone to bed in last night. As it turned out, that made it easier for Sarah because she didn't have to deal with buckles or zippers.

In fact, she first squeezed my erection through my clothes, causing me to groan like she had earlier. She giggled at the sound, then released me. Rising to her knees, she grabbed to waistband of my sweat pants and shorts and drew them down. It felt so relieving to release my cock from its confinement, especially knowing

what awaited it moments in the future.

First, though, Sarah had other ideas. She grabbed it with one hand and started pumping up and down on it. Now it was my turn to squirm all over the bed, gasping and grunting as Sarah pleased me with her hand. I loved the exquisite feeling, especially since it came from the girl that I loved, the girl that had been my playmate, friend, and now lover. It no longer mattered to me that she had learned this from some other man, a man that perhaps she had loved just as much as she loved me. For now she was mine, and even if we only had a short time together, we loved each other. That was the important thing.

When she lowered her head, I knew what was coming. She wanted me to feel the whole range of exquisite feelings, and I was happy to oblige her. She closed her lips around the head and began to suck, and I let out more groans, even louder than before. I was tempted to grab her head the way she had grabbed mine a few minutes ago, but I was afraid I wouldn't be able to keep myself from shoving her down too deeply. So I clutched the sheets of the bed tightly instead. Each motion of her lips and tongue shot electrifying pleasure through my body, so intense and powerful. I loved the feeling; it was so thrilling and so overwhelming that I could hardly stand it.

All too soon, she lifted her head. "Kenny, I want you to do something for me," she said.

"Anything," I told her.

"I want you to do the same thing for me that I'm doing for you."

I stared at her in surprise. I didn't know how I felt about that; maybe I should be disgusted. Or maybe I should be delighted to have that sweet, beautiful thing right there before my face. Or maybe a little bit of both.

She sensed my hesitation. "It's okay," she said. "You don't have to if you don't want to."

"No, that's all right," I told her. "Let's give it a try."

She flashed me a mischievous grin. "Let's give it a try together," she said.

I wasn't sure what she meant by that, but it all became clear a moment later when she moved the bottom half of her body up toward my head. To be honest, this was a completely new idea to me, but not an unwelcome one. I figured if it would make her feel good, I would go along. In fact, I was determined to enjoy it.

When she slipped one knee over my head and straddled my face, I found that beautiful, scrumptious pussy just inches from my face. I lifted my head and stuck out my tongue, brushing it against that ridge at the top of her slit, which was now at the bottom from my point of view.

Sarah's body immediately jumped, and I knew I had done something right. I started licking her all over. In the mean time, I could feel her continuing her ministrations at the other end. There was something intensely naughty yet sublimely intoxicating about this position, and I soon lost myself in the sight, feel, smell, and

taste of her. I decided that whatever my previous reservations, I loved giving Sarah this kind of pleasure almost as much as I loved receiving it from her.

She took a moment to tell me to use my hands to loosen her up, and I happily did so. I spread her outer lips with my thumbs and ran my tongue around the soft, wet, pink tissue inside. Any disgust I might have felt was swallowed up in my love for Sarah.

We continued to mutually pleasure each other for several minutes, then finally Sarah rolled over off of me, gasping and panting. She rested there for a minute, then lifted her head and gazed into my eyes.

"It's time," she said, and I knew exactly what she meant.

I reversed my position so that I now faced the same way as Sarah, then rolled over on top of her. She spread her legs widely, and this time I knew exactly what to do. It took me just a moment to line myself up right, then I lowered my hips, spearing into her.

"Oh, Kenny!" she squealed in delight. "I love you!"

"I love you too, Sarah," I replied. I drew back and thrust again, then again. No longer nervous about my abilities, I put my trust in instinct, knowing that we would soon fall into that rhythm, that dance without music, that had taken control of us before. And just like last time, it happened.

Our bodies merged into one, a single unified whole that worked together for the good of us both. The pleasure that I received gave pleasure to Sarah, and the pleasure that she received gave pleasure to me. It was beautiful, it was sensual, it was meant to be. We held each other tightly, hugging and kissing and basking in the warmth and softness of each other's bodies. Sarah held me like she was afraid of letting go, as if I were her hero and without me she was lost. And perhaps that wasn't far from the truth.

But it worked both ways. I needed her just as much as she needed me. She had become a part of me now; the world of my imagination would be empty without her. Everything that made me who I was had now been touched by Sarah, and it would never be the same again.

We both reached our peak at the same time. I heard Sarah cry out just as my own pleasure spiked, and together we tensed up in a mutual orgasm. I could feel myself pulsing deep within her body, in a sense giving her a part of myself just like she had given me. Then I collapsed on top of her, laying my head on her breast, which wasn't hard to do since she was almost a full head taller than me.

Sarah wrapped her arms around me, and we lay there cuddling for the longest time before I finally rolled off of her and reclined beside her.

I still dreaded our separation in the future, but for now we were together. What we had just shared somehow made everything seem all right. Perhaps we would go our separate ways later. Perhaps we would grow more distant over time, even if we stayed in contact. But for right now, it was enough that we loved each other.

I glanced down and noticed that she still wore her socks. In our enthusiasm, we never did get them off of her. For some reason, I found that amusing. It was sexy, naughty, and more than a little playful.

Suddenly, it hit me. That symbolized our whole relationship. We were engaging in a very adult activity, but at heart we were still just kids. Our world was a mixture of the grown-up world of everyday life and the fantasies of childhood, making us both adults and children at the same time.

"Maybe my mom was right," I commented.

"About what?" asked Sarah.

"She said we're living in a fairy tale. She said that somehow we're going to live happily ever after."

Sarah smiled. "Your mom's wise."

"But is it true? How can we be happy if we're separated like that?"

"I don't know. But I promise you, if there's any way to make this work, we'll find it. Somehow. You came to rescue me when I was captured by Shadow Monsters. Do you think a little thing like living in different cities is going to keep us apart?"

I sighed. "I hope you're right. I'm just so scared of losing you."

"Me too."

We spent the rest of the day just sitting together on the couch, our arms wrapped around each other. It was a bittersweet time for both of us, feeling so physically and emotionally close yet haunted by the future and the separation it would bring. If only we could slow down time, or stop it entirely, to make this moment last forever. We didn't even have to have sex; it was enough just to hold each other in our arms and know that we were in love.

Perhaps in our fantasy world time travel was possible, but the real world had a nasty habit of intruding on fantasy. The clock still ticked away, still taunting us as it counted down the hours, then minutes, and finally seconds when Sarah would have to go home. I would see her again tomorrow I knew; she didn't know when she was moving but it would probably be a matter of days, if not weeks. But with that deadline, every hour away from her felt like an hour stolen from us.

Eventually my mom came home and found us still sitting there on the couch. She smiled, no doubt happy at our reconciliation.

"So you two have made up?" she asked.

"We have," replied Sarah.

"So it was a good thing I left the door unlocked," said Mom with a grin.

Even in my melancholy, I managed to laugh at that. So it wasn't fate after all, but a little foresight on my mom's part. It figured.

"Are you two going to be all right?" asked Mom.

"More or less," I said. "I'm still hoping for a happy ending, but I don't know if it's going to happen."

Sarah suddenly released me and rose to her feet, a determined look in her eyes. "I just realized that we're looking at this all wrong. It's time to stop hoping for a happy ending, and time to start creating one."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

She smiled. "I don't know yet. I just know that I'm going to do whatever it takes. I need some time to think, so I'm going home. But I'll see you again tomorrow, hopefully with some good news."

My spirits picked up at that; I still didn't have much faith, but Sarah's enthusiasm was always contagious. Maybe, just maybe she could find a way to make it all work out.

I didn't even have to wait until the next day. I was just finishing dinner that night when I received a call from Sarah's dad. My first reaction was panic; had she told him what we had been doing behind his back? But he didn't sound angry or stern on the phone; he sounded pleasant and maybe even a bit apologetic. I wasn't sure what that meant. He invited me to come over and visit with the family, and I was happy to take him up on the offer. His invitation seemed a little unusual, but right now, anything unusual was good. In the natural order of the universe Sarah and I would soon be apart, so I was open to anything that would upset that natural order.

I hurriedly threw on my socks and shoes, then made my way across to the Laurents' house. Mr. Laurent met me at the door and invited me in, and I found Sarah and her mom sitting in the living room. He motioned for me to take a seat next to Sarah on the couch, then he sat in a chair across from us.

"We've just had a family council," he told me. "Or I suppose it's more accurate to say, we're in the middle of a family council. Sarah had some very important things on her mind that concern the whole family, and we invited you over because this concerns you too."

"It does?"

"Yes it does. Sarah tells me you feel really bad about her moving away."

I nodded.

"And from what I've seen and heard, I'm pretty sure she feels the same way."

"Daddy, Kenny's the best friend I ever had," she told him with tears in her eyes.

"I understand," he said. "Kenny, Sarah also said that your mother told you that you're living in a fairy tale."

"Oh, that," I said, trying to think of how to explain it. I wasn't as eloquent as my mother, and no doubt whatever I said would come out sounding pretty dumb. "It's just..."

"No need to explain," he smiled. "I think I understand what she means. Believe me, I want to see a happy ending for everyone as much as you do."

"Sarah," he continued, turning to his daughter, "I want you to think for a minute about what this promotion means for our family. We'll live in a much bigger house, and have fancier things--"

"I don't care about that," she said. "Things aren't important to me. Only people."

Mrs. Laurent glanced at her husband. "Sounds like Sarah's the wisest one of us all," she said.

Mr. Laurent nodded. "I think you're right. All this time I've been trying to provide the best for my family, because I love you. I've worked hard to get where I am, and now a promotion comes along that will give us everything I've ever wanted for you."

"But somewhere along the way, I lost track of what's really important. Everything I've done has been for my family, but sometimes I forget that money isn't always the solution. Although this promotion will give us everything I've ever wanted for my family, I'm not so sure that we all want the same thing. So let's make this a family decision. Each of us gets a vote. Kenny, I'm sorry but you don't get to vote with us because you're not a part of this family."

"That's fine," I said.

"All right. Should I accept the promotion? I vote yes."

"I vote no," Sarah immediately said.

Mrs. Laurent stared at her husband for a few seconds, then glanced at Sarah, who wore a pleading look in her eye. Then she glanced at Mr. Laurent once more. Kenny's heart pounded in his chest as he realized that this was it. It all came down to Sarah's mom's vote.

"Honey?" Mr. Laurent asked his wife.

She sighed. "I'm already halfway done unpacking the boxes," she said. "It would be a shame to pack them all up again so soon. So I'm voting no."

Sarah squealed with delight and threw her arms around her mom, nearly tackling her in her enthusiasm.

Mr. Laurent laughed. "I guess I've been outvoted," he said. "I hope that doesn't mean I don't get a hug too. I

don't want to be the villain in this fairy tale."

Sarah immediately released her mom and embraced her dad. He hugged her back, a smile on his face.

"So that's it," he said. "Tomorrow I'll call the president of the company and tell him I'm not accepting the promotion."

Sarah broke her hug with her father, and dashed over to embrace me. I could see tears in her eyes, and realized that I was in a similar state. We hugged and sobbed in each other's arms for the longest time.

Then Sarah's mom put her arms around both of us, and even her dad joined in the group hug. Despite his earlier words, right now I felt like a part of their family.

Sarah's family.

Kenneth Shadowbane had never been gifted with the power of prophecy; like everyone in Elderhaven, he relied on the Ancient Oracle to see into the future. Kenny Grant, of course, was even more lacking in such mystical powers, and if I were to claim that I knew what would happen years in the future, people would dismiss it as just one more manifestation of my extraordinary imagination. But as I hugged Sarah and thought about how good it felt to be temporarily a part of her family, I had the feeling, stronger than the prophecy of any oracle, that one day that would become permanent. We belonged to each other just like Kenneth Shadowbane and Princess Allura belonged to each other, and despite the absurd impossibility of it all, I knew that in this one instance, fantasy would one day become reality. I glanced at Sarah, and the look in her eyes told me that she was thinking exactly the same thing. And why not? If a boy could believe in dragons and wizards and monsters, if a girl could believe in fairies and princesses and unicorns, then surely we could believe in destiny.

THE END

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