

The Golden Venue

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Clumps of muddy earth squished inside my boots as I hiked my way up the trail. Almost lost, I soon recognized the young spruce that marked I was nearly there. Even after coming here so much, my senses still tingled with anticipation. I took the familiar bend that led me into pure bliss. I inhaled deeply, opening my senses to my surroundings. The air, which was warm with the scent of honeysuckle and what I imagine sunshine would smell like, completely enveloped me. What used to be muck under my feet turned into, swaying emerald green grass. Little golden dust spectacles floated down all around me sticking to what it touched before slowly fading away. Everything here was bright, like newly polished gemstones.

I heard her melodious voice before I saw her. She flapped her colorful wings, gliding toward me, her golden beak open as she sang her greeting song. I held out my arm for her to land. She always landed with such grace. "Hello there Aerial," I greeted. She chirped and lightly pecked my shoulder in response. I giggled. I always felt so joyous here; surrounded by the birds, the trees, the miniature people with butterfly wings I called *fairies* and just the magnificence of such a place. I couldn't believe its existence. I thought I'd been dreaming when I'd accidentally stumbled upon this place while exploring our new home. The fairies suddenly exploded out of the giant flowers scattered around the venue. Some stretched, preparing for flight; some flew up the great maple tree and some swarmed around me beckoning me to dance to with them. I gladly obliged.

As I skipped and twirled to the soft music around me, I suddenly felt it again. It wasn't uncomfortable and I didn't really mind it; this feeling as if I were being watched happened quite often, so I had started ignoring it since it never bothered me. "Avangeline!" my mother's voice echoed out to me.

I sighed as my evening came to an end. I held my arm out as Aerial landed on it, cooing. She wanted me to stay. I nuzzled her beak. "I'll be back tomorrow." I gave her a quick peck of the lips and watched as she took off, her gorgeous wings extending as wide as I was in height. The trees silenced their rumbling, the little golden birds took off after Aerial, and the fairies returned back to their flower homes. The only sound left was the soft wind rustling through the trees and grass. I grabbed my boots, slipped them back on and hiked back around the bend, down the trail and into my dismal backyard.

"So, how was your guys' day?" my mom asked cheerfully. We were gathered around the dining table eating dinner.

"Fine, just cut some wood, hung out with Mitch and Ashley, and then watched some football," said Macon around a mouthful of mashed potatoes.

Macon was a slob, sometimes very annoying, and also my twin brother. We both had the same color of green eyes, but mine were a little bit brighter. He had thick strawberry-blonde locks like mine, except mine had more of a copper sheen to them. He's only older by four minutes, but he takes great pride in lording over it.

"So Avie, how'd your day go, do anything interesting?" I could tell her about the Golden Venue, but then it probably wouldn't be *my* sanctuary anymore, so I stuck with the semi-truth.

"My day was fine. I just did some more exploring out in the woods. You know, the usual," I said smoothly.

"I don't know what you do in those woods Avie. It's all dead and muddy. I don't even know how you can stand the smell. Is there some.... guy...." she probed.

I nearly choked on my water. "Nooo, mom trust me, it's nothing like that.... I just like the woods. I like being outside," I shrugged.

“Okay,” she said skeptically. Great, now she would probably try to follow me out there to see if I was lying.

I brushed my teeth while Macon leaned against the door frame scrutinizing me.

“Seriously Avie, what do you really do out there?” he asked. “If you don’t have a boyfriend, then what do you spend your time doing, selling drugs?” he coaxed.

“No, shut up, Macon! Mind your own business,” I spat.

I rinsed my mouth, ignoring his aggravating presence until he decided he was tired of trying to decode my brain and went to bed.

I sat in the middle of the grass, my pores absorbing the sun. Aerial seated by my side as I constantly stroked her feathers, and listened as the fairies played their sweetly flowing melody. The great oak tree rumbled in satisfaction causing the ground to vibrate. The little golden birds flew around me and once in a while I would hold my finger up for one to land on. They were so mesmerizing. A crack of a twig had me scrambling up in alarm. I scanned the perimeter, and there was Macon, leaning up against a tree, looking puzzled. I’d been followed. *Well, the cats’ out of the bag now*, I muttered to myself, *might as well just tell him*.

“What are you doing?” he asked incredulously before I could speak. “Your feet are caked with mud; your pants have mud stains on them..... you’re..... you’re petting the air..... need I go on?” His reaction surprised me.

“What do you mean *‘What am I doing’*? I’m sitting on the grass, listening to music, petting Aerial and soaking up the sun. Yeah, my feet are a little muddy, but if you haven’t noticed, our backyard is made of mud,” I finished with a little sarcasm.

“Grass, sun, music..... Aerial!?” he sputtered. “What are you talking about?”

“Are you blind or something, you’re standing on *‘the grass’*, beneath *‘the sun’* and my pet bird is right here.” Aerial had moved to my shoulder.

“Whoa, whoa! There’s no grass anywhere, it’s just mud, and the sun you *speak* of obviously doesn’t reach this area and I don’t think there’s any animal life within a three-mile radius of here!” Now it was my turn to be shocked. “What is *wrong* with you? Are you demented or something?” he turned to leave, muttering to himself.

“Macon, wait!” I called, but he ignored me, walking faster.

I sat there, stunned beyond belief. Was he trying to pull my leg? Or maybe, maybe.... he really couldn’t see it? So was I the crazy one, or was he the utterly blind one? Well, I always did believe he was brain damaged. I sat back on the grass, considering. About fifteen minutes later, Macon returned through the trees dragging mom with him. Mom gasped; it seemed she was amazed by what she saw. “Isn’t it beautiful mom? Look at this bird’s colorful feathers! Amazing right?” I knew it had to be Macon’s unseeing eyes. “Oh, and these tiny people with wings; they can make music you know. It’s beautiful. And do you see that gold dust spiraling down; I wonder what it’s made of? And....” mom’s eyes brimmed with tears. “Mom, what’s wrong?”

“Avie, I don’t understand. What are you talking about? Gold dust, birds? There’s nothing here but mud and dead trees,” she said with concern. “Oh Avie,” she said, walking towards me with her arms open. She hugged me, crying. This was her *‘where did I go wrong gesture’*. The same look and actions done when she caught Macon smoking weed. Macon had ducked out before he could get dragged into the middle of this emotion fest. “I’m gonna go make a call,” she sniffed, not meeting my eyes. Meaning she was going to call our family therapist. Wonderful. She hurried down the path leaving me standing there confused, troubled.

Alone for about ten minutes before it all sunk in I was about to let myself burst into tears when someone stepped from beyond the shrubs. He nearly scared me to death with his sudden appearance. I blinked back the brimming tears, lashing out on this stranger with beautiful blonde hair and hazel eyes. "Who are you? What are you doing here?" I threw at him.

Seemingly unfazed by my sharp words he said "Riley, I live here," he shrugged. "I came to see if you were okay because I heard someone crying..... Are you ok?" he asked sympathetically.

My heartbeat returned to normal but I was still skeptical. "You live in my backyard?" I asked, dubiously. He walked warily to me, to make conversation easier I presume. I stood my ground.

"Technically, it's not *your* backyard, but yes, I do live *around* here."

"I'm con...fused..... How old are you?" I hadn't realized we'd been standing so close.

"Eighteen." We stood in awkward silence and I was about to '*hit n' run*' when he deliberately leaned down, and whispered to me, his warm breath tickling my ear; "So..... you see it too?"

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