

# Storm Warrior (The Grim Series) (26 page)

“Omigod,” Morgan breathed. She closed her hand around the medallion and, for a brief and panicked moment, thought of tearing it off her neck. Then sense—what was left of it in her strange situation—prevailed. Her grandmother had worn the pendant her entire life, tucked it safe inside her dress, treasured it close to her heart. Nainie had passed the necklace to her granddaughter with great love, and Morgan wasn’t going to fear it now. Besides, hadn’t Nainie known every household trick in the book and then some? She might have coated it with something, dipped it in a substance that prevented it from tarnishing, polished it with some old-fashioned Welsh remedy. Or maybe the piece wasn’t silver at all, maybe it was white gold or something even more valuable that didn’t darken as readily.

*See?*

Morgan lectured herself.

*It’s all perfectly logical. Jay and Rhys have me spooked, and I’m just seeing things that aren’t there. I’m upset today and susceptible to this silly stuff. I just need to stick to reason.*

And reason said that the necklace couldn’t possibly have any connection to the heavy chain-link collar that had been worn by the great black dog.

## SEVENTEEN

R

hys strolled through the crowded fair with Leo. The little ellyll had come along as well, sporting a Blue Jays cap similar to Leo’s favored Mariners hat. No one could see Ranyon or his bright headgear unless he wanted them to, of course—and so far, that privilege was confined to Leo and Rhys. And to Spike, of course, but the old terrier had been left at home in blissful peace and quiet.

*A wise decision*

, thought Rhys. The fair was bustling with horses and wagons, chickens and cows, entertainers and buskers, while sellers jostled to hawk their wares. It was loud and boisterous—the sounds far different than the mechanical ones that emanated from the city where Leo’s house and Morgan’s clinic stood. Crowds of people laughed and talked, dressed in vivid colors, while flags and pennants waved high above it all. It put Rhys in mind of a great trading market in Moridunum he’d been to as a small boy—with one outstanding difference.

It was clean.

Even with all the people and livestock, the smell in the air was mostly of baked breads and simmering stews and roasting pig. That's because this was a temporary city, a bright mirror image of what life might have been like in a former age. Jay had explained it to Rhys as a way to keep traditions alive. Rhys could understand tradition, but he puzzled at the playfulness of it all, at the sheer enjoyment exuded by the participants. Why pretend

*not*

to have cars when you had them? Why play at swordsmanship when people carried guns? Perhaps modern people tired of their toys and their inventions. Perhaps the so-called civilized world was a great noisy burden beneath all its wonders, and it was a relief to let go of it for a while. That he could understand. And he had to admit that the fair was a place where he understood the rules—most of them, anyway.

“Oh, now,  
*here's*

something you'll like.” Leo pulled him over to a fire where a great side of beef was slowly rotating. A moment later, Rhys had his hands around an enormous hunk of meat, and the juices dribbled down his chin. His friend opted for a slightly smaller slice folded inside a slab of bread the size of a dinner plate, and a similar one hid most of Ranyon's head. The three of them grinned at one another like small boys. “I swear food tastes better when you can throw manners out the window,” said Leo, with his mouth full.

“Aye,” said Rhys and Ranyon together. They relished every bite as they watched a troupe of jugglers. Afterward, the threesome licked their fingers and wiped their faces on their sleeves, then washed their food down with ale at another booth. It was weak as water compared with the brews Rhys remembered, but it was refreshing nonetheless. Besides, he wanted a clear head for the events. Mightily satisfied, they made their way along the shops in the direction of the viewing stands.

Rhys examined a fine black leather bridle. It would have to be larger for a ceffyl the size of Lucy, of course, but the color would look fine against her dapple-gray coat. He turned to see Leo searching for Ranyon.

“He was right here a second ago,” said the old man. “Oh, wait a sec. He's down there.”

Rhys had to look twice but finally spotted the ellyll half-hidden beneath a stand of brilliantly colored T-shirts, rapturously fingering them one by one.

“I guess he likes them,” whispered Leo. “But he probably doesn't have any money. Will it insult him if I offer to buy him one? Or can he just conjure up the cash on his own?”

“Nay. The fae are powerful, but magic cannot create something from nothing, nor can it change the essential nature of a being.”

“Wait a sec, aren't you the guy that got turned into a dog?”

“What is a human but a type of animal? A man has blood and bone and hair and teeth. The Tylwyth Teg had only to change my shape.”

Leo's eyebrows nearly met his hairline. “So they could make you into a mammal—but not a bird or a frog?”

“Aye, that’s the way of it. They can’t make a cow out of a cabbage, nor a fish from the air. So Ranyon can conjure neither coin nor shirt,” said Rhys.

“Well, it’s probably not an issue for him. I imagine if he really wants something, he can just make it disappear and walk away with it.”

Rhys shook his head. “

*Never.*

The fae are many things, but not thieves. Most of them could kill you without a second thought, but they will never steal your belongings.”

“Great. Honor among the homicidal.”

“Some have genuine honor, like Ranyon’s people. For the rest, it’s pure pride. The Tylwyth Teg will never admit they need anything from mere humans. They

*borrow*

instead, and only from strangers. When they take something, it’s a point of pride to return it to its original place by dawn of the next day. The Law of Benthylg requires it, but they would do so without such a law.”

“So if they wanted to read a book, they’d just take it for the night and put it back the next day. I might not even know it had been missing?”

Rhys snorted. “You would likely know at once. Time doesn’t move the same way in the faery realm. The book will reappear in its rightful place at its rightful

*human*

time—but months, even years, may have passed while it was in fae hands. Plus, the Fair Ones tend to wring as much use as they can from a thing before they must return it. A book may be missing pages, the cover torn and dirty, as if you or I had read it a thousand times. But the Law allows for such usage.”

“I’ll just be keeping those horseshoes over my doors.”

Leo bought Ranyon a bright-blue souvenir T-shirt, telling the vendor that the child-size item was for his grandson. It was likely the only modern item for sale in the whole of the market, and it pleased the ellyll tremendously.

Ranyon tried to wrestle the shirt on the moment they were away from the booth, but it didn’t work well with his Jays cap still on his head. Rhys patiently untangled him as Leo held the hat and chuckled. “Actually, my grandson is in his thirties. I don’t think this would even fit any of the

*great*

-grandkids. Fits you pretty good, though.” He handed the hat back to Ranyon. “Goes with those Blue Jays colors too.”

“It fair fits me fine,” said Ranyon, smoothing it over the leaves that covered him. “Tis a

*gwych*

color. My thanks to ya, my friend. You’ve a generous heart in ya.”

Rhys smiled to himself as his friends walked ahead of him hand in hand. He knew that not only was Ranyon invisible to the rest of the crowd but, like the hat, the shirt had

vanished

from mortal sight as soon as the ellyll put it on—at least to most eyes. Not Morgan's, however. Ranyon had mentioned that, had it not been for one of his famous charms, she would have seen him at the last few practices at the farm. "Most mortals can't see me because I belong to a different realm. But some can, and glad I am that I had this with me. I felt power leave it and I turned around to see your lady."

The ellyll had said nothing more at the time, and Rhys hadn't brought it up. He knew full well why Morgan had the sight, as his people had called it. By the admission of the Fair Ones themselves, there was a trickle of fae blood in her veins.

*Thanks be to all the gods that she didn't wander where the dead bwgan lay in her field.*

Rhys could not have hidden it from her. And rather than support his case for the existence of faeries, he would likely have been blamed for it somehow. He sighed. Morgan Edwards was proving to be an incredibly stubborn woman. At least she hadn't enforced her demands that he leave her property.

Yet.

They passed a bakery where

*gyngerbrede*

was just being taken out of the brick ovens. Leo inhaled the spicy air rapturously.

"Damn, that smells just like my granny's kitchen," he said. "I wish I wasn't so stuffed."

"I've a charm fer that," said Ranyon. Plucking a penny off the ground, he said a few strange words over it and passed it to his friend.

Leo looked at the coin in his palm and was about to speak when a long, loud belch erupted from his throat. Mortified, he put his other hand over his mouth, but a second burp refused to be suppressed. It was louder than the first, and a few heads in the crowd turned to look for the source.

Rhys grabbed his friend's arm as a third burp nearly vibrated Leo off his feet. Quickly, he helped the old man to a bench.

"Goddamn," whispered Leo, obviously afraid to open his mouth very far. No further belches were forthcoming, and he sighed in relief. "What the hell did I eat? I haven't burped like that since I was twelve and trying to burp the alphabet to impress Annie Mae Grissom."

"You wanted room in your belly to fit some sweets," laughed Ranyon. "I told you I had a charm fer that." He pointed at Leo's left hand that was still clutching the penny.

"Shit, I should have known it was you." Leo dropped the penny as if it was hot and shook his fist in mock anger. "You have a damn charm for everything, don't you? I'd better not start farting!"

"Nay, I have pity on these poor mortals around us," grinned Ranyon. "So, are we having gyngerbrede or not?"

As they made their way up the bleachers, a children's costume parade was just clearing the forefield. The next event would be an exhibition of falconry.

Rhys looked around and spotted Morgan at one side of the field, checking the wing of an enormous hawk for any injuries or strains. Jay had mentioned she was on duty during the fair, that a veterinarian had to be on hand during any event that involved animals.

*Rules again.*

Rhys could see it was a good rule, however. He watched as sunlight glinted on her hair, bringing out its rich chestnut color. She hadn't tied it back today, and the sweep of it as she bent to write something echoed the sweep of the hawk's wing. He wished she was sitting next to him—although it was damned unlikely she would want to do so, considering the way things stood between them. As if Morgan could feel his eyes on her, she lifted her head and looked directly at him before returning to examining the bird. She didn't smile, didn't acknowledge him in the least.

"I take it she still thinks you're crazy," said Leo.

"I've a charm fer that—"

"No!" said Rhys and Leo together.

"Well, 'twould be faster than what  
*yer*  
doing," Ranyon muttered.

Rhys sent the ellyll a warning look, then turned his attention back to Leo. "Aye, Morgan does not yet believe where I came from."

The old man shifted his Mariners cap on his head. Ranyon copied the gesture with his Blue Jays hat. "You gotta admit, son, your story is one in a million."

"My tale is far from rare. There are others like me."

"What do you mean  
*like you*  
?" asked Leo.

It was Ranyon who answered, however. "There're plenty of other humans enthralled by the Tylwyth Teg. They keep 'em like pets or like slaves. Same thing."

The old man was flabbergasted. "In the twenty-first century?"

"The Tylwyth Teg are immortal," said Rhys. "Time means nothing to them and neither do humans."

"Aye, just trifling and temporary creatures with little use," added Ranyon. "Not to be offending the both of ya. But other than providing a little entertainment from time to time, humans just aren't important to most of the fae."

Leo held up his hands as if to fend off what his friends were telling him. "That's downright cold."

"Aye, it is. But how important is a bee to you?" Rhys asked the old man. "Your lifetime is all but forever compared to its brief span. It lives in a world apart from yours. You might enjoy the

honey it makes, but what human would consider a bee's well-being, its happiness? Would it weigh on your conscience if you killed one?"

The ellyll spat—a new skill he'd picked up from watching baseball. A giant pink wad of bubblegum bounced through the floor of the bleachers and disappeared. "The Tylwyth Teg rule over all the faery races, but they have no conscience to speak of. No concern for anyone but themselves, and not even for one another. Like spoiled and hateful children they are. And no one to stand against them."