

With no control of anything going on, Sydona Wilder watched from the closet as men in white coats entered her home. The look on her parents' faces burned into her memory. Her mother offered them coffee, but only as a standard gesture. One of the white coats sat stiffly on the couch with a blank expression while the other poked around the house. Her father grew impatient because he knew why they were there. Her father and the men had only said two things to each other before the men grabbed him. Sydona shook at the scene happening before her eyes. As she covered her wet, red eyes with her hair, her mother pulled her out of the closet.

"Grab Raoul. Now." Her mother kissed her forehead and pushed her out the back patio door. Sydona stumbled but kept going, wiping her tears as she ran across the backyard. Approaching the oak tree, she called for her fairy, Raoul, who appeared within seconds. Evelyn joined them shortly after and shoved a green tote bag into Sydona's arms.

"Take him and run. Run as far as you can, Syd! Don't worry about us; we'll be fine. I need you to remember this. Don't trust anyone. Raoul is the only one you can trust now. Don't let them take you. You're my special girl..." Evelyn choked back tears. She grabbed Sydona's face with both hands, and Sydona memorized her mother's eyes, fearing that she may never see them again.

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A rooster call forced Sydona's purple eyes to open, relieving her of the painful reoccurring dream. Trying her best not to dwell, she stretched her arms up high and let out a big yawn. She looked out the window as the sun peeked above the nearby treetops. A loud snore from a tiny, red-winged fairy asleep on the windowsill disrupted the peaceful scene, but it just made her smile. She then grabbed a golden frame on her night stand that pictured a young couple in a black and white photo from the early thirties. The man held the woman around the waist, and she had a hand on her extended, round belly. Sydona outlined her young mother's face with her index finger and gave the photo a quick peck before setting it back down.

Going about her normal morning, she headed down the creaky stairwell to the kitchen, grabbed her wicker basket, and strolled out the back door to her luscious garden. It was ripe with carrots, cucumbers, radishes, broccoli, and cauliflower. She set her basket down next to the carrots and radishes and bent down to start digging them up. Reaching to her side, she pulled out a sharp, small blade with inscriptions that read *Borba i amor bez strah*, and it made her smile. Written in the ancient language of the fairies, it would always have a special meaning in her heart.

Once she finished in the garden, she headed behind her great blue, two story home. Bright green vines decorated the white columns that held up the wrap around porch and even covered some of the windows on the second floor. Popping inside a small wooden shed on the west side of the house, she scooped up some chicken feed from a large plastic container and opened the gate to greet six hens and one mighty rooster. Using one hand to hold the food and the other to fan it out amongst the clutter of chickens, she did her best not to step on any of them as they always seemed to get under her feet. Soon, a fleet of fairies that lived in the giant oak tree a few feet away from the garden came to her aid. One of the fairies, sporting red see-through wings a smidge smaller than his sixteen centimeter self, was Sydona's best friend, Raoul. He wouldn't help feed the chickens so much as jokingly boss his family members around and sit to chat with Sydona. Raoul was very proud of his thick brown hair that he always styled with a bit of tree sap and was afraid running around with the chickens would mess it up too much. As the fairies finished feeding the birds, she took the opportunity to gather up the eggs from the coop that she handmade for them.

Sydona wiped her hands off on her worn blue jeans, grabbed her basket full of vegetables along with the eggs, and went back inside the house to wash up. She set the food down on a small space she cleared off on the counter and began to store everything in containers to put in the fridge. While washing her hands, she looked outside and realized it was around 8 a.m. With help from the fairies over the years,

she learned to keep in touch with nature and rarely looked at the clock. She yelled out Raoul's name, and he joined her in the kitchen while she gathered up a worn green tote bag. Strapping it across her body, she then grabbed her keys from the table by the front door. She locked her house up tight with a couple extra pushes on the handle. She squinted at the morning sun on her way over to her red Jeep and placed sunglasses on top of her head.

With a sputter from the engine and a heavy sigh, she backed down the long dirt driveway that wound for a quarter of a mile before meeting the paved country road to the city. The drive was long, but she always had the company of Raoul and her favorite radio station that played classical music. She always dreaded getting to the city because of all the traffic and the constant honking of horns in every direction. Only five minutes in standing traffic and Sydona's eyes would flash green with frustration, but it always made Raoul laugh.

"Might be a good time to wear your sunglasses, Syd," Raoul said, snickering in the passenger's seat with his legs sprawled out.

Sydona agreed and tried not to laugh as she placed the dark concealing glasses on her pale face. Once the traffic finally let up, she drove down a less congested part of town and found a parking spot on the side of the road. Throwing her bag back over her shoulder, Sydona opened a gap in the top, and Raoul routinely dove inside. Walking down the familiar sidewalk, she nodded her head toward a large man sitting on a stool in front of a modest newspaper stand.

"Ey there Syd, how we doin' today?" the man asked.

Sydona smiled. "I'm great Jim, how about you?" she asked as she read the front pages of some magazines full of celebrities she had never heard of.

"Still here, ain't I?" he chuckled, "What's you gettin' today?"

"Oh, I think just this one." She handed him a newspaper called the *Chicago Tribune* and grabbed some change out of her pocket.

"Thank yous. You have a good day, miss Sydona, a'ight?"

"You too, Jimmy. Stay cool," Sydona said and waved her hand as she moved along.

Walking her normal path to the local farmers market a few blocks away, she observed the city scene. She held her head high and tried to focus on more familiar sounds like birds and the wind blowing through the trees stuck in the concrete sidewalk instead of the car honks, beepers, and people yelling at each other. She did enjoy looking in store windows that had clothes she could only dream of owning, though they weren't practical like her jeans that needed to have pockets for supplies or boots to support her ankles for running. Peering down at her own steel-toed brown boots she put on that morning, she grinned with satisfaction. Catching her reflection, she got a second look at her simple white tank-top that fitted her perfectly. Loose clothes could be grabbed. This theory failed when it came to her dirty blonde hair, however, as it reached down past the middle of her back. She noticed she had dirt on her fair white-skinned cheek. She wiped it away swiftly and continued on her way.

Finally, she arrived in a quieter part of the city filled with local farmers lined up on either side with hand painted signs. She always stopped at a fruit stand with some usual faces smiling from behind the wooden frame with mangos, limes, and cantaloupes hanging in baskets.

"Hey, Syd!" a kid yelled from behind the stand as she approached. He ran up to her and gave her a big hug, squeezing the tote that Raoul was in. Sydona heard Raoul make a grunting sound and quickly removed the kid off her tote.

Sydona grabbed his shoulders. "Joseph! How are ya, buddy?"

A boy about seven years old with shaggy short brown hair and little freckles on his face beamed up at her. "Good... How are you doing?"

"I'm wonderful! How's school going?" Sydona asked Joseph while looking up at a dark brunette woman with her hair pulled back in a messy ponytail. She smiled brightly and rolled up her sleeves.

"Good. I got lotsa homework though," Joseph said.

"Oh," Sydona laughed, "I do not miss those days!" She glanced up at his mother, Annie, who laughed with her and nodded in agreement.

"So, how's the garden doing?" Annie asked.

“It’s good. You know, water, dig, water, dig,” she said while examining the fruit for spots.

Annie nodded. “Well, you know, I’m still recovering from that storm we had last week. How did you recover so quickly?” she asked.

Sydona paused for a second. When the storm hit, the fairies helped clean up and get everything back in order. What took days for most only took mere hours with the help of her fairy friends. Of course, no one could know about the fairies, and Sydona hated to arouse suspicion. She quickly came up with an excuse. “Oh, I uh, had help. Had some family in town at the time,” she answered while avoiding eye contact and inspecting her items.

“Oh,” Annie said, “Well, I would’ve come and helped you out.”

“Aw, thank you, but it’s fine now,” she said, grabbing her last kiwi. “I appreciate it, though.”

Annie placed Sydona’s kiwis in a bag. “Yeah, not a problem.” She changed the subject. “You know, I’ve always wondered something. How come you can grow vegetables, but you always come here to buy fruit? Why don’t you just grow fruit trees?”

“Well...” she confessed. “I’m pretty sure I have bugs or something. I’ve tried everything to get rid of them, but it seems like nothing works.” The real reason was because her fairies were fruit fanatics, and when the fruit became ripe, by morning it would all be devoured.

Raoul blurted out a muffled laugh inside her bag that she hoped she could only hear.

“Alright, it’s gonna be five fifty,” Annie said, and Sydona handed over the cash.

“Well, I’ll see you in a few days,” Sydona said to Annie and peered over at Joseph. “You behave now, and stay out of trouble, okay?” She grabbed his shoulder and grinned.

“I will...” Joseph answered, swaying back and forth bashfully on the balls of his feet. “You too!”

Sydona laughed as she left the stand. She continued to stroll down the street to another sidewalk full of businessmen and people who always seemed to be in a hurry. She walked past a wall that had a huge graffiti symbol of a wing outline surrounded by a circle. She walked this street frequently and had never seen it before. Thinking it might be fresh, she furrowed her brow in curiosity but continued on her way to the car.

They finally returned home, and the sunset never looked more beautiful to her as it burst through her kitchen windows. She grabbed her bag full of fruit, walked into her messy kitchen, and spread it out on the countertop. Wandering over to the living room, she opened up an old recipe book with a fruit cake on the front cover. She then began to cut the apples, mangos, pineapples and kiwis into little pieces and put them into a cake mix. She prepared to bake the dessert, placed it in the oven, and set the kitchen timer.

Once she completed her baking, she boxed the cake up and headed outside where the fireflies began to shine. The insects made the backyard sparkle as the sun dove behind the trees. Sydona helped the countless number of fairies to build a bonfire that reached easily ten feet high. She took a seat on a wooden stump among the fairies, and they all patiently waited for something to begin. Soon, a fairy with a large headdress and robes joined the rest of the party, and everyone hushed.

“Welcome, welcome, welcome one and all!” He had a much deeper voice than other male fairies. He floated proudly in front of the fairy tree that was decorated in white lights and shiny objects as he addressed the crowd. “Tonight! Tonight is a big night for one of our little fairies, Jubilee! On this day, four years ago, she was birthed onto this great planet. The spirits have blessed me, Shaman Faro, to grant this beautiful young darling her dust to make her fly! This tradition as most of you know has come to be known as our Vila Prah, or--VIP as some youngsters have modernized it. However, the acronym deems valid as Jubilee is a very important person tonight. At this time, please donate some of your own dust to her pedestal in which she will sleep on tonight. Your donations are very helpful, and the more of you who donate, the more the Spirits will bless us in great ways! Alright, enough chit chat! Let’s all do what we do best before the ceremony. Let’s party!”

Four fairies flew out from behind the tree carrying a little fairy with yellow wings and made their way to the center. Jubilee wore a lace pink dress made by her grandmother and a flower hat made by her mother. Music started up, followed by cheering and dancing. Sydona opened up her box to reveal the fruit cake, and it was the hit of the night. It always surprised her how much an average fairy could consume. VIP

was her favorite day to look forward to because it was her way of rewarding everyone for their hard work in helping her with the chickens and storms. It was also a chance for her to socialize and get to know more of Raoul's family. They were always growing, and it was hard for her to keep up sometimes. Seeing young fairies get their 'wings' was moving for her, and she loved seeing the looks on their faces when they could finally fly. Jubilee had been gabbing on about it for the past month to Raoul, and Sydona could tell he was getting sick of it.

After a few hours, the party came to an end, and it was time for the Vila Prah to commence. Everyone waved at Jubilee as she entered a hole in the tree that had her wooden pedestal covered in fairy dust. Shaman Faro closed off the area with a sheet as he performed his ritual. Sydona took her box of cake crumbs and headed back to the house, but not before searching for Raoul. She found him surrounded by three giggly fairies.

"I'm heading to bed. Are you coming?" Sydona asked with a yawn.

Raoul kissed a fair skinned, blue-winged fairy on her dainty hand as she blushed tomato red. "In a minute, Syd."

Sydona sighed and headed up the stairs to get ready for bed. Raoul flew up shortly after to his own little bed on the windowsill that overlooked the backyard to search for the fairy he kissed goodnight.

"Hey, that was a great party, Raoul! I'm happy for Jubilee. She'll be able to follow you anywhere now!" Sydona said sarcastically.

Raoul ignored her tone and had a silly grin on his face from the blue-winged fairy. "Yes, it was..."

"Goodnight, buddy," she said as she turned off the lantern sitting on her side table and pulled a handmade quilt over herself.

"Sweet dreams, Syd," Raoul answered as he slipped into his tiny bed.

The next morning, the trusty rooster called out again, and the sun blinded her barely opened eyes. She threw her feather pillow over her head and tried to get a few more minutes of sleep from a late night of partying. After a few more calls from the rooster, she finally got out of bed. She began her day with brushing her teeth while trying to get dressed at the same time. She rummaged through her messy closet for a white tank top and her favorite one shouldered red top. Struggling to fit her shirt over her toothbrush, she got toothpaste residue on her hair, forcing her to put it up in a ponytail. Once she got situated with dressing herself, she headed to the shed to feed the chickens. As she reached down to scoop out the corn, she found it was almost empty, and she frowned. Shaking her head in confusion, she went to look for Raoul. Hiking back up through the chicken pen as they pecked at her feet, she apologized and closed the gate. As she entered the back door, she spotted Raoul on the counter munching on a mango like a ravenous hyena.

"Morning," Raoul said with his mouth full.

"Wasting no time eating, I see," she said, grabbing an orange and digging her nail into the peel.

"It was just staring at me." He wiped his mouth of mango juices.

She smirked. "I'm sure it was, Raoul," she said and popped an orange slice in her mouth. "Oh, are you coming to the city with me today?" Sydona threw her peels away.

"We just went yesterday! What do we need to go back for?" Raoul paused his eating.

"I'm glad you asked! On my way out to the chicken coop this morning I could have sworn there was more feed in there, and now, there's barely a handful."

Raoul blushed and turned away from her with eyes darting in every direction.

"Do you know anything about this?" Sydona asked and crossed her arms with a stern but not entirely serious face.

"Noooo..."

Sydona tapped her boot quickly without saying a word.

Raoul threw his hands up. "Fine! A bunch of us were a little buzzed on fermented fruit and got into the chicken coop..."

"What--did you eat it?"

"Ew no!" Raoul made a sour face and stuck his tongue out. "We... got the idea if we took enough corn and planted it, you could grow corn! We were trying to help!"

Sydona's face lightened, and she burst out laughing. "Whose brilliant idea was this?"

Raoul slumped over with his wings low. "Mine..."

"Well, congrats! Now we need to go back into town and get more," Sydona said and gathered up her things for the trip back to the city.

Raoul put down the rest of mango and lazily flew to the table at the front door, waiting for Sydona.

"Bye, chick chicks! We'll have some more food for you when we get back!" Sydona yelled throughout the house, not caring that she was talking to chickens or that they couldn't hear her at all.

"Alright, ready bud?" she asked Raoul as they hopped inside the Jeep.

"I guess," Raoul said and flopped his head on the back of the seat with a sigh.

"I know you hate getting in my bag when we go to town, but maybe you should've thought about that before you stole all the chickens' food," Sydona said while she started backing down the driveway.

"We were trying to help!" Raoul argued and slumped his head down.

"No, you were showing off to that blue-winged girl!" Sydona spat back and laughed.

Raoul didn't respond, but his face was suddenly pink, which made her laugh harder.

As they arrived to town and got through the traffic, she was able to park down the same street as they normally did. They went through their normal routine of Raoul hiding in her bag and Sydona wearing her sunglasses as she stepped out of her Jeep. She headed straight to the farmers market and bought a twenty-pound bag of feed that she lugged over her shoulder. As she looked around the rest of the stands, she didn't see Annie or Joseph there. Normally, she never went to the city two days in a row because of the drive. She assumed maybe they were never there during the weekend. Strolling back to the car, Sydona decided to stop by the newspaper stand to see Jim and get the paper.

"Hey Sydona, how you doin' this mornin'? And 'ey, wasn't you just here yestaday?" Jim asked before taking a sip of coffee.

"Hey, yeah," Sydona laughed, "I ran out of food for my chickens."

"I can see that! You need help with that? Looks heavy!" Jim offered instantly.

Sydona grinned. "No, thank you. I got it."

"Suit yaself!" Jim said and shrugged, moving back over to his stool. He grabbed a paper from a stack on the ground. "Hey, you seen this yet? Some crazy shit, eh?"

"Oh yeah, what happened?" she asked distractedly as she read headlines of pop magazines.

As Jim handed her the *Chicago Tribune*, she dropped the feed on the concrete, almost bursting the seams as she read the headline article of the paper:

## **New Scientific Camps Set Up For 'Fliers'**

OREGON - Scientists from the National Fliers Association (NFA) have started new studies on the human-like species of fliers. They say they have reached a breakthrough in replicating the gene that gives fliers the ability to fly and can soon start modifying it for human use.

"It's really very exciting," said Dr. John Malik, lead scientist of the NFA. "We can soon apply this ability to everyone so that we can further improve life for human and flier alike."

While controversial, Dr. Malik assures the public that the research is for prosperity. "We're not playing God, as some groups would have you believe. With this ability, we can begin to do things never thought possible. Building infrastructure, accessing places previously inaccessible—the possibilities are endless."

Because fliers are rare, the NFA has encouraged fliers around the world to come forward to be a part of the study and will be compensated for their contribution. Dr. Malik also encourages friends and neighbors of fliers to contact the NFA. "That way, we

can personally pay them a visit to inform them of this exciting opportunity to be a part of something bigger...”

Sydona stopped reading. Her palms sweat, her heart raced, and she found it hard to breathe. She mumbled to herself, “*It’s happening again....*”

“Yo’ Syd, you okay?” Jim asked.

Her hands shook like a leaf, and she couldn’t find any words.

“Sydona? What’s wrong?” Jim asked again.

All reality as she knew it seemed fictional now. She looked at Jim as nothing more than a stranger. Could he be part of the NFA? Does he know about her? Jim kept speaking to her, but for some reason, she couldn’t hear anything he said. Her heart was beating out of her chest, and she suddenly felt suffocated, like more people had populated around her from out of nowhere. Whispers from all the people clogged up her thoughts, she felt trapped, and the Earth felt like it rotated at an accelerated speed. She rolled the paper up, heaved the food over her shoulder, and took off running without saying a word.

Jim yelled after her, but she was so far gone, she couldn’t hear him anymore.

She hurled the feed in the backseat of her car and then did the same with her tote bag, unaware that Raoul was still inside. He yelled as it hit the seat.

“Sorry, Raoul...” she apologized and rubbed her face nervously, hoping the motion would turn back time. Or if she rubbed her head long enough, she would somehow erase the article from her mind.

Raoul shimmied out of her bag, smoothed out his shirt and hair, and grabbed the paper she had thrown on the seat. “What’s this?” He used his whole body to flatten it out and read it to himself. His eyes widened and flew straight up in shock.

“This can’t be true! It has to be one of those fake newspapers, you know, where they say that a monkey went into space! Like that could *ever* happen,” he laughed loudly. “I wouldn’t worry about it, Syd.”

Sydona stared ahead, ignoring his joke. “No--” she said blankly, “this isn’t a fake paper. It’s very real.”

She gripped the top of the steering wheel and dropped her head on top of her hands. Raoul’s wings laid flat to his body, and he flopped down on top of the paper, staring at the name ‘John Malik’. Silence overcame the car.

She sat back up with a red face and watery, bloodshot eyes and spoke softly. “I can’t believe this is happening again...”

Sydona blinked her eyes clear of tears and wiped her face of sweat. She had to clear her head and think of a plan, but first she needed to go home. Taking a deep breath, she started up her car and drove out of the city as fast as she could. She left the radio off, unable to listen to music with so many thoughts flying through her head. They both sat reserved the entire thirty-minute drive home. Anger began to pulse through her veins and stepping on the gas pedal more seemed to help. It felt like she was in limbo between wanting to speed and get anger out and the fear of getting pulled over. Then, she would really be in trouble. There were a few times Raoul wanted to interject when she went over ninety miles per hour, but he was smart to stay quiet.

The arrival home felt less than happy and more like entering a trap. She felt if she stayed there, it would only be a matter of time before they found her. A sudden image of men in white coats popped in her head, and she imagined them invading her home. It was enough to turn her eyes green, and she slammed her fists on the steering wheel. The camp wasn’t as innocent as they were making people think, and she knew it. It needed to be shut down and now.

Shutting the car off that she parked on the lawn, she quickly hauled the bag of feed over her shoulder and over to the hungry chickens. Raoul zipped over to the great oak tree and informed everyone of the news. Once Sydona had quickly fed her birds, she listened in on the fairy tree. Most of them were there the day it happened last time, and the tree filled with cries. The elder fairies whispered amongst each other, trying not to upset the little ones. Raoul simply informed them of what the article said, not what happened years ago. It was hard to hide the panic in some of the fairies’ voices and actions, and it still upset some of the newborns. Sydona couldn’t listen to the heartache anymore and darted inside her house. She grabbed her tote and a black backpack and filled it with clothes, food, and medicine.

“Where are we going, Syd?” Raoul asked immediately as he flew in the back door. Sydona couldn’t answer that question right away and was afraid that if she opened her mouth, emotions would take over. She found it easier to keep her lips pursed and focus on grabbing essentials for the long journey ahead.

Raoul floated in one spot in the middle of the kitchen while Sydona continued to grab things. “I can’t leave my family. What are they supposed to do?” he yelled as loud as he could.

Sydona blinked, trying to disperse the water that wanted to break free. It blurred her vision, making her double check the items she was grabbing. Her shaky hands didn’t help either.

“Sydona?” Raoul asked with a worried tone.

She stopped and took a breath. “I wish I could tell you. I couldn’t hear them anymore. It was--too hard.”

“Are you making me choose? Between you and my family?” Raoul whispered.

His words made her stomach twist because she thought that she was part of his family. “No, I’m not...”

“So what do I do?” Raoul asked.

Sydona hung her head low. “That’s something you need to ask yourself.” She paused. “But I’m going to Eagle Lake. And I would love for you to accompany me. But I’m not going to make you come if you don’t want to.”

It was obvious that Raoul wanted to get angry, but he was so conflicted that he sat and clenched his fists, making his knuckles turn white.

Sydona continued, “I need to do something, Raoul. I mean, do you not realize what this is? It’s the same shit they pulled all those years ago. I was--powerless to stop it then. I was just a child. But maybe now that I’m older... I can maybe have a chance.”

“Chance to do what?” Raoul asked with anger lingering in his voice.

“Stop it? I don’t know. I just know that I need to try. And maybe... Maybe they’re there, too,” Sydona said.

“You don’t really think? Syd, that was... Sixty years ago. They can’t be--”

“Why can’t they? They’re strong. Strongest people I ever knew. They have to be there.”

“They would be well into their hundreds now, kid,” Raoul whispered, leaning in closer to Sydona.

The two sat reminiscing in the kitchen for several silent moments.

She lowered her voice, “I never knew you to be the pessimistic one, Raoul.”

Raoul fluttered his wings. “I’m not... I guess you’re right. I bet they are there...” Raoul smiled but then frowned. “I just can’t up and leave with my family here.”

Sydona lifted her nose and wiped her reddening eyes. “I don’t want to make you choose, but I don’t think I can do this without you. And I need to think about my family, too.”

Just as she gave up on things to say, a certain phrase popped into her head.

“Borba i amor bez strah,” Sydona whispered.

Raoul perked up at the familiar phrase he seemed to have forgotten but then sunk his head with even more conflict. Feeling defeated, Sydona picked up her black backpack she filled with things she couldn’t fit in the tote and threw them both over her shoulders. Raoul sat looking like a sopping wet butterfly on the countertop, and her stomach twisted. He glanced at her for a second with jaded brown eyes and then back down to the tiled floor. It was the only look she needed to know that he wasn’t leaving, and her eyes changed from purple to auburn.

She moped through the house, walking slowly and hoping that Raoul would eventually fly over. Opening the door, she waited for a few minutes and peeked back through the kitchen, but he never came. A heavy sigh left her lungs, and she locked her door shut.

As she sat in her car, stalling on starting it up, she stared at the house. It was eerily quiet. Almost like the birds and creatures felt the tension of the news, too. Sydona eventually started up the Jeep and with a heavy heart, backed down the excruciatingly long driveway. Her heart beat faster with every full rotation of the tires.

“*What am I doing?*” she said to herself. Nothing about this felt right. Raoul had been with her every minute of her life and leaving him behind weighed heavily on her. Should she have given him more

time? It was too big of a decision to make in such a short amount of time. She stopped right at the edge of the driveway, still wavering on leaving alone. With a shake of her head, she grabbed the gear shift and began to put it back in drive when Raoul came flying up to the car. Her face lit up, and her eyes turned back to normal as he hugged her shoulder.

“You changed your mind?” Sydona grinned.

“I didn’t have it decided one way or another. But as I sat there, I thought about you as a child and the look on your face when you had to tell Evelyn goodbye. You had that same look just now, and I couldn’t do that to you again,” Raoul said.

Sydona smiled from ear to ear, touched by how genuinely nice he was being without being sarcastic.

“Besides, Jubilee would have been driving me bonkers, and I wouldn’t be able to escape with you gone,” Raoul said.

There he was. She backed the car up and took one last look at her beautiful house before they took off. The lighthearted reunion soon turned quiet as the real reason they were leaving sunk in, and Sydona no longer smiled. Raoul dragged the newspaper back out and read it over again.

“It says here the camp is at Eagle Lake. In Oregon. Do you know how far that is?” Raoul read on the other page where the article continued. He did his best to keep the pages from flying away by stepping on it and forcing it down with his tiny arms.

“Yeah, I think it’s about a two day drive...” Sydona answered while maneuvering her head to keep her hair from whipping her in the face. She hoped that her old car would be up for the challenge. She only drove it a couple times a week, and even then, she never had much faith in it. She tried fixing little things herself with manuals she took from the library. She was no professional, but it did the job.

They sat quietly in the vehicle listening to the radio, switching it every time they heard anything about fliers or the NFA. Sydona eventually turned it off. Even the station she listened to her classical music on was constantly interrupted by the new story.

Raoul finally spoke up in the silence. “So, why don’t we just fly there? You know we would get there in like a third of the time.”

“Don’t be silly. You know we can’t do that. If anything, right now would be the worst time to fly. It’s been decades since I’ve flown...” She shook her head. “I wish we could, though. I hate this stupid Jeep.”

And as if she jinxed herself, the car started to sputter and shake more than she was used to. She groaned and hit the steering wheel before pulling off to the side of the road. Frantically, she seized her backpack from the floor and dug around. After throwing things out and making the car even messier, she found a rag and tools she thought might help. Walking to the front of the Jeep, she propped open the hood and, after examining it for a few minutes, decided nothing seemed wrong with it. The sun beat down on her hard as she wiped her forehead of sweat and then heard a whistle from inside the car. She peered around the hood and saw Raoul standing on top of the steering wheel.

“Did you fix it?” Raoul yelled, his arm shading his face from the unyielding sun.

“No,” Sydona said. “I think it’s the transmission--not a cheap or quick fix.”

She slammed the hood down, went back to the driver’s seat, and threw the items onto the passenger’s side floor. Sydona didn’t know what to do. Finding a car mechanic out there would be nearly impossible and fixing it would cost more money than she could afford. The mechanic would probably find fifteen other problems with it, too, as it had not been serviced in several years.

Sydona waited for a sign, for anything, but there was nothing. Not even a single vehicle drove by in the twenty minutes they sat in the car. Sydona reached over and opened the glove compartment to rummage around for a map. Spreading it out over the seat, she saw that they had been going in the right direction, which was good, but now they needed a way to get there. Hitchhiking was absolutely not in the cards at all, driving was apparently out of the question, and she thought if she stayed in the sun any longer she would melt.

“I guess we’re walking...” she announced to Raoul who was using a scrap of paper to fan himself. It was the best option and a less risky one, too. She thought about going somewhere to get gas, but if the car didn’t break down here, it would only be a matter of time before it did. Unsure of where they would get

faster transportation, she tried staying positive that something would come along. Then, Raoul mentioned they could just fly all the way there.

“Stop it.” She sighed, sluggishly grabbed her bags and keys, and began to walk. Raoul flew to her and landed on her shoulder, where he usually went when he was too lazy to fly alongside her.

“Come on, Syd! We’re gonna die in this heat! At least if we fly, we can have wind in our faces to dry up the sweat,” Raoul said and tugged on a chunk of her ponytail.

Sydona looked around cautiously. They *were* in the middle of nowhere with nothing but abandoned corn fields surrounding them, and not a single car had passed by.

“You need to be my lookout though. If you see a car or a person or plane or a bird! Tell me, okay?” Sydona asked.

“A bird?” Raoul laughed.

Sydona threw her hands up. “I’m just being thorough!”

Raoul had already flown above her head to look out and said to himself, “You’re being paranoid--”

“What?” Sydona called up to the little fairy several feet above her.

“Coast is clear!” Raoul held up two tiny thumbs up and flew back down to her.

Her heart and stomach fluttered at the idea that she would be flying again. Her face flushed as she tried to remember what to do, but she still couldn’t help smiling. It had been at least thirty years since the last time she flew and could barely remember the last time she did. She laughed thinking about it, wondering if it was when she ran from the cops. Raoul grew impatient as he waited on Sydona to stop spacing off.

She began by sprinting for several feet and, once she picked up a good speed, kicked her left foot off the ground. Soon, she was two, ten, fifteen feet ascended into the sky above the wheat fields. Angling her body slightly forward, she was able to fly faster, and when she leaned back, she went higher into the air. The Jeep no longer looked like a car but a red blur as she soared high above the treetops. Raoul joined her as he trailed red-orange dust behind him. As the wind blew her hair, she closed her eyes, and she thought of the first time that she learned how to fly.

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Sydona ran out of the house with a spring in every step and a smile on her face. “Come on mom! Let’s go!” she yelled. She took in a big whiff of the autumn leaves littering the yard and exhaled dramatically. The sun was just coming up, but Sydona didn’t care. This was the day she looked forward to since she could talk. Her mother walked towards her while putting her dirty blonde hair up in a bun.

“Okay, sweetie. Now stand over there and watch me first,” her mother said.

“I already know what to do, mooom!” Sydona whined as she bounced up and down on her feet, looking like she was about to explode. She then noticed a neighborhood kid curiously watching them from his backyard. Sydona waved at him, although she had never met him before.

Her father then joined them, sitting at the patio table with a cup of coffee. “Now Syd, listen to your mother. She’ll tell you how to start.”

Evelyn began to run across the giant unfenced backyard, kicked her feet, and soon, she was high in the sky. Watching her fly back toward the house and then away again made Sydona’s heart swell. After twisting and rolling and doing tricks in the air, Evelyn finally straightened back up and floated back down to earth like a feather.

“Me next!” Sydona ran up to her before she barely had two feet on the ground.

“Okay, come on. I’ll hold onto you,” her mother giggled.

She grabbed Sydona’s hand tightly, and they sprinted off together. Her mom kicked off the ground along with Sydona, and Sydona shut her eyes quickly. When she opened them and looked down at her dad, he looked no bigger than her pinkie finger. Looking down at the neighborhood around them, she saw the kid next door. He pointed in awe at her. She waved back to him again and couldn’t contain her laughter. It was nothing she had ever imagined feeling. As light as a feather, she felt she could literally do anything. She had no bounds.

“I’m going to let you go. Are you ready?” her mother asked.

Sydonia nodded her head, and Evelyn let go gently but kept her arm outstretched in case she needed to grab her daughter again. But Sydonia was on her own and flying perfectly. She tried doing the same tricks as her mother but wasn’t very good yet. Her new fairy friend, Raoul, soon joined the fun and flew in circles around her.

“Hey buddy! Look at me! I’m just like you now!” she laughed. They ventured over treetops, houses, buildings, and flew down the street. Sydonia waved at anyone she saw, and all they could do was stare and watch her fly away. Some people waved back and some smiled, but most were awestruck. A car came rolling down the street, and Sydonia got a bit too close, making the car veer off and hit a fire hydrant. Her mother made her come straight home after that, but Raoul and Sydonia couldn’t stop laughing about it. The look on the driver’s face was priceless.

She wasn’t allowed to fly for a while after that, but the experience was worth every second, and she knew she would not soon forget it.

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Opening her eyes to the vast scene in front of her, her face wrinkled from a smile she couldn’t subdue. She let her hair down from the ponytail and let it play in the wind. The sun did not seem so cruel now but rather warmed the goosebumps that appeared on her arms and legs. She glanced at Raoul who did rolls and used his hands to do a ‘wave’ motion. She laughed and felt like an innocent kid again, flying for the first time.

Raoul perked up, flew way in front of her, and yelled back, “There’s a sign up ahead! Mayfield is ten miles away!”