

'Zaria is the epitome of fairy girl power'
EION COLFER

Violet Wings

The fairy world just
met its match . . .



Victoria Hanley

About the Book

Was it possible I'd somehow been enchanted? How else could I be so drawn to the world that killed my parents?

Growing up in the enchanted land of Tirfeyne, Zaria has always known of the dangers of Earth - and of the humans that live there.

But Zaria is about to discover that she has a rare gift - a gift of extraordinary magic that most fairies would die to possess. And those dangers that were once a world away are suddenly much closer than she thinks ...

Enchanting and magical, *Violet Wings* is a perfect story about forbidden friendship and spellbinding fey secrets.

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About the Author

Violet Wings

Victoria Hanley

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TO FAIRIES, GENIES, LEPRECHAUNS AND THEIR
HUMAN FRIENDS

'Zaria,' said Leona, so sharply she startled me.

'What?'

'You *are* Earth-struck.'

I didn't try to argue. It would be useless; Leona knew me too well.

Her wings twitched, which meant she had a big secret. 'I know where there's a portal to Earth,' she said. 'A portal we could take *today* and no one would know.'

'Today?' I blinked in confusion.

She whispered, 'This portal is in *Galena*.'

'That's impossible!'

'Unlawful, not impossible,' she said. 'It's not far from here.'

'How do you know?' I squeaked. 'Have you been to Earth?'

'Not yet.' She smiled and rose from the rock. 'Let's go.'

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Prologue

NO TREES GROW UPON THE WORLD OF TIRFEYNE. THERE ARE MANY TALL BUSHES AND A GREAT VARIETY OF FLOWERS, MOST OF WHICH CAN ALSO BE FOUND ON EARTH. HOMES ARE BUILT OF STONE AND METAL, NOT WOOD.

FAIRIES, GENIES AND LEPRECHAUNS DWELL UPON TIRFEYNE. SO DO PIXIES, TROLLS AND GREMLINS – BUT THEY DO NOT LIVE IN FEYLAND, FOR THEY HAVE THEIR OWN COUNTRIES.

Orville Gold, genie historian of Feyland

BACK WHEN I was nine, my parents went missing.

At first it was easy to believe that each new day would bring them home. After all, they had only gone in search of my older brother, Jett. This was hardly unusual. Jett couldn't seem to stay out of trouble, though I was never certain exactly what sort of trouble he kept getting into. And of course, he never told *me* where he went, or why.

It wasn't the first time that my teacher, Beryl Danburite, had looked after me. My parents always called on her when they were going to be gone for more than a few hours. I didn't enjoy having my teacher take care of me at home, but no one asked my opinion. Once, she had stayed a week.

This time, she never left.

The day I learned that my parents would not return, I was sitting on a corner perch, studying the one book from Earth

that my family owned. It was about trees. I liked to look at the glossy illustrations and memorize the shapes of the leaves.

Miss Danburite didn't approve. Whenever she saw me reading it, she would say that Earth was a dangerous place and humans were baffling creatures. But she never actually ordered me to close the book.

I was looking at a picture of a blue spruce when I heard a loud knock on our door. I put the book aside and flew to answer the knock, my wings trembling.

A stranger stood on the threshold, a wiry genie with eyes like garnet beads looking out over a bulbous nose. His skin was orange with gold blotches, his hair the colour of tarnished brass. On his wrist he wore a large ruby.

'Good evening,' he said in a raspy voice. 'I am Councillor Wolframite. Are you Zaria Tourmaline?'

I nodded.

'May I come in?'

I thought for a moment of slamming the door. Maybe if I didn't let him in, the news he carried couldn't come in, either. I feared that only dire news would bring a councillor to our home.

'Zaria?' Miss Danburite called. 'Who is there?'

I couldn't make myself speak his name, though I remembered it quite clearly.

A moment later, Miss Danburite hurried in. When she saw him, her orange wings shivered like those of a frightened child. I had never seen her lose control of her wings.

'Good evening,' he said again.

'Good evening, Councillor.'

'I am here to speak with you about Zaria.' He looked down at me once, but after that he looked only at Miss Danburite. 'I am sorry,' he said, 'but her parents have been declared *indeterminum detu*.'

Young as I was, I knew the meaning of that phrase from the ancient language. *Gone, never to return*. A window of

night seemed to open in my heart. Dark, without stars, and filled with cold.

'We believe they were caught by humans,' Councillor Wolframite continued. 'The last anyone saw of them, they were taking a portal to Earth.'

'But they—' she said.

'They have been gone a month. And we must make a decision about their daughter.' He touched the ruby on his wrist. I noticed that the figure of a crown had been carved into it. 'I must ask you, Miss Danburite. Are you willing to be her guardian?'

'I do not understand,' she answered.

'Zaria's parents named you her guardian if they should die,' he said.

I looked up at Miss Danburite and waited for her to say that there had been a mistake, that my parents were delayed, not dead. When she didn't speak, the window in my heart opened wider and let in more of the night.

The councillor frowned. 'Miss Danburite?'

'Has she no relatives?' she asked.

'Zaria has no close kin,' Councillor Wolframite answered. 'Her family has been extraordinarily unlucky.'

Miss Danburite's faded yellow eyes blazed up once and then watered over. For several moments she stood silent, her mouth twisting.

'Her parents named *you*,' he said. 'Perhaps because you have no children?'

She raised her voice a little, the way she did sometimes in the classroom. 'I am two hundred and eighteen years old,' she said. 'You expect me to move to Galena and raise an orphaned fairy?'

Orphaned fairy. Could that be me?

'She has no one else.'

Miss Danburite swallowed and blinked and brought her wings under control. 'Very well,' she said.

‘Thank you.’ Councillor Wolframite bowed to her. ‘I will come back tomorrow to ratify you as Zaria’s guardian.’

She didn’t bow. She didn’t tell him goodbye, and I didn’t either.

After he left, she looked at me. ‘Do you understand, Zaria? I will stay here with you until you are grown.’

I wanted to speak, but I felt too cold.

‘I am sorry,’ she said. ‘Your father and mother will not be coming back. Your brother is gone, too.’

When she said those words, a wonderful thing happened. I felt as if a curtain appeared in my heart, a curtain woven out of something so heavy and strong, it could cover the window to the night.

She sighed. ‘I will try to be a good guardian to you. Try not to be a nuisance to me.’

The curtain thickened. The tighter it closed, the less I had to think about my lost family. And I could look at Beryl Danburite and feel almost nothing at all.

Chapter One

FIVE YEARS LATER

FEY MAGIC IS MUCH MISUNDERSTOOD BY HUMANS; HUMANS SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT MAGIC CAN SOMEHOW TURN ASIDE PHYSICAL FORCE. IN FACT, FEY FOLK ARE JUST AS VULNERABLE TO PHYSICAL INJURIES AS HUMANS; MAGIC CANNOT SAVE US FROM BLADES, BULLETS OR EXPLOSIONS. WE CAN USUALLY MOVE FAST ENOUGH TO DODGE KNIVES OR ARROWS, BUT ONLY THE VERY SWIFTEST AMONG US CAN AVOID A BULLET.

THE FIRST TIME A HUMAN FIRED A GUN UPON A FEY PERSONAGE, THE HIGH COUNCIL OF FEYLAND PROCLAIMED THE EDICT OF THE UNSEEN, ORDERING ALL FEY FOLK TO KEEP OUT OF SIGHT OF HUMANS.

Orville Gold, genie historian of Feyland

MY FRIEND LEONA hardly ever flutters, but as she passed through the great Gateway of Galena for the first time, her silver wings quivered like a rippling mirror. Just behind her went Andalonus, unable to keep from bouncing up and down, the fronds of his blue hair waving around his head.

Meteor happened to be floating next to me, but at the gateway he stopped. 'After you, Zaria,' he said, his eyes

shining like well-cut emeralds.

Gliding past the magic columns that guard Galena, I couldn't keep my wings from trembling. I was simply too delighted.

We had all been forced to wait until every member of our class reached the age of fourteen before a single one of us could go to Oberon City. Dreadful, stupid law, but like all the laws of Feyland, strictly enforced. We'd been stuck in Galena - the land of babies, toddlers and children - until I, Zaria Tourmaline, youngest in our class of fifty, turned fourteen.

I was sorry to have caused forty-nine other fairies and genies to wait for my birthday. If I could have hurried it, I would have celebrated with Andalonus when he turned fourteen five weeks earlier.

Once through the gateway and inside Oberon City, our teacher, Mr Bloodstone, ordered us to walk. *Walk!* As if we would cause accidents if we flew. It was total nonsense, because all of us had been flying since we were four years old.

Our feet found hard slabs of granite instead of the soft sand that is spread in Galena for safety. We had to crane our necks to see the buildings. Such buildings! In Galena, all structures are low to the ground, to prevent young fairies and genies from injuring themselves. But in Oberon City, great domes rose around us, gleaming silver, gold, platinum and copper. Beyond the domes, I could see mighty towers studded with gemstones.

Squeaking with excitement, Portia Peridot soared five wingspans high before Mr Bloodstone roared at her. 'Stay on the ground, Portia, or I will bind your wings!'

Portia dropped so fast she must have bruised her heels on the hard pavement. She limped on, her green wings drooping. I glared at Bloodstone's back. Typical of him to treat us like infants, even in Oberon City!

He led the way through a marble arch into a viewing station filled with grown fairies and genies. Ignoring them, he ushered us into a room apart.

Like toddlers seeing coloured smoke, we stared. Crystal booths, clear as the purest raindrops, projected out from the west wall. Each booth contained a scope, a magic instrument of silver that looked from our world onto Earth.

We were here to get our first glimpse of the fabled land of humans. We would also see a fairy godmother or genie godfather bestow a birth gift.

Meteor was ahead of me. I watched him step into a booth and put his eye to the scope while Bloodstone hovered approvingly. (Meteor is probably the one true scholar Bloodstone has ever taught, so Bloodstone thinks he's the greatest genie alive.)

When Bloodstone waved me forward, not even a flicker of premonition warned me that in a moment my life would be for ever changed.

I pressed my forehead gently against the fitting above the eyepiece on the viewing scope. For several moments all I saw were trees and sky. Looking at them, I felt the strangest yearning to jump out of the booth and find a portal to Earth. I wanted to float through that sky and brush those leaves with my fingertips.

'Find the baby you are here to observe, Zaria,' Bloodstone said in my ear. Why couldn't he stay out of the booth?

I touched a switch that lit up a set of lines pointing to a human baby wrapped in a fluffy yellow blanket. Her skin was brown, a bit lighter than Meteor's, her hair a wispy thatch as plain as a gnome's. Apparently, humans do not have much variety when it comes to skin and hair colour. I looked into the baby's beaming eyes and watched her kick her small feet and twine her tiny fingers together.

A bell chimed, signalling the event I had been brought here to see: the transmission of the baby's birth gift - my

chance to see a fairy godmother in action.

I watched as a gift descended, streaming like mist, settling into the baby's skin. And though I wasn't asking to know, my magic told me what gift it was: to have *little curiosity*.

The baby's eyes dimmed.

I didn't understand. Why would a godmother hand out such a gift? It didn't seem like a *gift* at all, more like a curse that took away something good.

I squinted at the adjacent booth where the baby's godmother perched. Her sleek face turned away from her godchild without a backward glance. Before she left the booth I clearly saw her saffron-coloured hair, braided with strands of morganite. Her thin nose turned down at the end, and her wings were white.

My elbow bumped the arm of the scope and I couldn't see the baby any more. I tried to get her back. The scope jogged around, and the next thing I knew, I was looking at a human boy about my age. His colouring was so distinctive, he could have been a genie: hair red and gold like flames, hazel eyes filled with amber light. Somehow the scope caught him at a moment when he seemed to be looking back at me. I jumped, knocking the scope's arm all the way up.

The grey skin of Bloodstone's face creased into a familiar sneer. 'You will get used to it,' he said.

That's one of the biggest lies anyone has ever told me.

Chapter Two

SINCE THE EDICT OF THE UNSEEN WAS PUT INTO PLACE, HUMAN MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT FEY FOLK HAVE BECOME MORE AND MORE COMMON. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN HUMANS PORTRAY FAIRIES AND GENIES IN STORIES, THEY SHOW NOT ONLY FEMALE FAIRIES AND MALE GENIES, BUT ALSO MALE FAIRIES AND FEMALE GENIES. THIS IS AN ABSURDITY.

FAIRIES ARE THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES; GENIES ARE THE MALE. FAIRIES HAVE WINGS, GENIES HAVE MAGIC FEET, BUT BOTH CAN FLY WITH EQUAL SPEED.

HUMANS APPEAR TO BELIEVE THAT FAIRIES ARE TINY AND GENIES ARE ENORMOUS. THIS IS NOT SO. ON AVERAGE, BOTH FAIRIES AND GENIES ARE BETWEEN FIVE AND SIX FEET TALL WHEN FULL GROWN, MUCH LIKE HUMANS.

Orville Gold, genie historian of Feyland

AFTER LEAVING THE viewing booth, I tried to put the sinister godmother and her godchild out of my mind. All I wanted to think of was Earth. I still longed to be among the trees I had seen, really among them, instead of watching from another world through a diamond lens.

But according to law, I must be sixteen and registered with the High Council before making even one journey to Earth.

I couldn't imagine waiting another two years.

‘Well?’ I whispered to my friends.

‘I thought it would be more exciting, but it was only a baby with no hair,’ Leona said. ‘Maybe it will be different, once I have my own godchild.’

I wondered if my friends’ magic had told them what gifts had been given while they were observing human infants. I opened my mouth to ask, but then Andalonus nudged me.

‘I heard Bloodstone say you’re Earth-struck.’

‘What?’ I looked up and caught Bloodstone’s eye on me and wished an evil fairy would stuff him into an old-fashioned genie bottle.

Leona stepped in front of me, blocking Bloodstone’s view. She has never been afraid of him because she’s a Bloodstone, too – his niece, in fact. He never reprimands her, no matter what she does. ‘Do human male babies have hair?’ she asked Meteor and Andalonus.

As they talked, my mind drifted back to Earth. Was it possible I’d somehow been enchanted? How else could I explain what was wrong with me? How else could I be so drawn to the world that had killed my parents?

Chapter Three

THE MAGIC OF FAIRIES AND GENIES DOES NOT FULLY RIPEN UNTIL AGE FOURTEEN. THERE ARE WIDE DIFFERENCES IN LEVELS OF INBORN MAGIC FROM ONE INDIVIDUAL TO ANOTHER.

LEVELS GIVE THE CAPACITY FOR PERFORMING SPELLS FROM SIMPLE TO ADVANCED. FOR EXAMPLE, LEVEL 1 MAGIC ALLOWS THE CREATION OF LARGE SOAP BUBBLES AND OTHER TRIVIAL ENCHANTMENTS ... LEVEL 3 ALLOWS A FAIRY OR GENIE TO BESTOW A SMALL, RATHER USELESS GIFT ON A HUMAN GODCHILD (SUCH AS A KNACK FOR STACKING SPOONS) ... BUT LEVEL 75 - WHICH IS EXCEEDINGLY RARE - IS REQUIRED FOR THE CREATION OF PORTALS TO EARTH.

TO *TRAVEL* THROUGH THE PORTALS BETWEEN TIRFEYNE AND EARTH, ONE MUST HAVE AT LEAST LEVEL 5 MAGIC. IN AGES PAST, NEARLY ALL FAIRIES AND GENIES COULD MAKE SUCH JOURNEYS WITH EASE; BUT NOW, 89 PER CENT DO NOT HAVE ADEQUATE MAGIC TO LEAVE TIRFEYNE AND ARE ABLE TO SEE EARTH ONLY THROUGH VIEWING SCOPES.

Orville Gold, genie historian of Feyland

WHEN OUR CLASS returned to Galena, everything looked babyish. Buildings seemed too close to the ground. The sand felt squishy.

The instant Bloodstone dismissed us, we all rose into the air. Meteor and Andalonus zoomed ahead and soon they

were out of sight. Leona and I flew hard too, racing to Galena Falls.

There's a place past the topmost rock west of the falls where we like to sit. Sheltered by rocks and plants, it's been our spot since we were little. When we were very small fairies, we'd play with diamonds, eat fresh sonnia flowers - and tell secrets.

In the years since, we've outgrown playing with diamonds, but we still tell secrets. I know that Leona despises her uncle Boris, that she rarely sees her father - who prefers Oberon City to Galena - and that she believes her mother will never understand her in the least. Leona knows I love sneaking out to Galena Falls at night, and that I don't like to talk about my dead family. She also knows I see way too much of Beryl Danburite, who shares teaching our class with Mr Bloodstone.

We settled into our favorite spot, and I looked down to the pool under the falls. It was lined with gemstones - emeralds, rubies, diamonds, sapphires, topaz. Sunlight polished the colours and glinted off the spray. Lavish flowers were everywhere. It was truly beautiful, but all I could think of was Earth.

'Zaria,' said Leona, so sharply she startled me.

'What?'

'You *are* Earth-struck.'

I didn't try to argue. It would be useless; Leona knew me too well.

Her wings twitched, which meant she had a big secret. 'I know where there's a portal to Earth,' she said. 'A portal we could take *today* and no one would know.'

'Today?' I blinked in confusion.

She whispered, 'This portal is in *Galena*.'

'That's impossible!'

'Unlawful, not impossible,' she said. 'It's not far from here.'

‘How do you know?’ I squeaked. ‘Have you been to Earth?’

‘Not yet.’ She smiled and rose from the rock. ‘Let’s go.’

I sprang up. ‘Wait,’ I said. ‘What if we don’t have enough magic to go through a portal?’

Leona sniffed. ‘Level Five?’ She arched an eyebrow and turned, floating towards a boulder about twenty wingspans away. I flew jaggedly after her.

The boulder was plain sandstone, nothing special. No path beside it, just a jumble of wild zinnia flowers, orange and yellow. The nearer I got, the more I felt a strange urge to pass by the boulder and forget about it.

‘This boulder is enchanted,’ Leona whispered, ‘so children won’t want to play on it.’

‘A long-lasting spell?’ I asked, impressed.

She nodded.

‘How do you know?’

‘I’ll tell you once we get through.’ Leona glanced around, then stepped *into* the boulder and disappeared!

I hesitated only long enough to draw a deep breath. To be honest, even if someone had told me the portal would turn me into a troll or force me to live with fifteen gremlins for ten years, I still would have gone through it.

Chapter Four

PORTALS ARE NEEDED TO TRAVEL BETWEEN TIRFEYNE AND EARTH.

THE MAIN HUB FOR TRAVEL IS THE GOLDEN STATION IN OBERON CITY. PORTALS LEADING TO AND FROM THIS STATION ARE USED FREQUENTLY BY THOSE WHO POSSESS LEVEL 5 MAGIC OR ABOVE.

OTHER PORTALS ARE OBSCURE, KNOWN TO ONLY A FEW, AND THEIR LOCATIONS ARE CLOSELY GUARDED. THEY HAVE BEEN MADE FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF SMUGGLING HUMAN GOODS INTO TIRFEYNE. SUCH PORTALS ARE UNLAWFUL.

Orville Gold, genie historian of Feyland

LEONA HOVERED IN front of me, smirking. I looked back at the sandstone boulder. On the Earth side, it looked just as it had on Tirfeyne: dull stone in a tangle of bright zinnias. But here, it stood in the midst of an open field of golden grass on a hillside.

I spun in a circle, my wings open to the sky.

Leona watched me. 'Your wings are shining.'

It was good of her to mention my one beauty - my violet wings. The rest of my colouring is so drab, I've often heard it whispered that I stand out no more than a shadow. My skin is an ashy lavender, and my hair an even paler version of the same pitiful colour. It's very unusual for a fairy to be so plain; my dull appearance sometimes seems to act like a

spell that makes others forget me. Well, at least my eyes match my wings, though a friend of my mother's once remarked that it was startling to see such bright violet eyes staring out of such a wan little face. (My mother sounded very cold when she responded that it was certainly odd how perceptions could differ from fairy to fairy.)

No one disagreed about Leona's appearance, though. She is beautiful ...

I gazed around. To the west, foothills traced a scalloped line against the sky. In the other direction, the long grass of the field met a row of trees. Behind them, I could see the buildings of a human town.

'Let's explore,' said Leona.

'You said you'd tell me how you know about the portal.'

She lifted her chin. 'I've followed my mother at night.'

'You've seen her use it?'

Leona nodded. 'I think she made it herself. She must have a godchild nearby.'

'Godchild?' But why would Leona's mother, Doreen Bloodstone, create an unlawful portal from Galena? Any godmother could use the scopes in Oberon City to watch over a godchild. Wasn't it a terrible risk to break the laws of Feyland just to have quick access to a human?

Leona shrugged. 'Why else would she make a portal?'

I didn't know. I had always thought Doreen Bloodstone was proud of her status as a powerful fairy. Too proud. And although I concealed it, I didn't like her. She laughed too much. After my parents disappeared, she would giggle nervously when mentioning them, a raspy little cackle that put me on edge.

Leona spread her wings. 'Let's explore,' she said again.

We knew fairies weren't supposed to fly when visiting Earth, but how wonderful it felt to take to the air! How I loved gliding over the great sweep of land, with sunlit breezes filling my wings.

Chapter Five

THE HUMAN LIFESPAN IS QUITE SHORT COMPARED TO THAT OF FAIRIES AND GENIES, WHO USUALLY LIVE TWO HUNDRED YEARS OR LONGER. THE OCCASIONAL LONG-LIVED PERSONAGE AMONG THE FEY WILL ATTAIN TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS. HOWEVER, FAIRIES AND GENIES REACH PHYSICAL MATURITY AT A RATE SIMILAR TO HUMANS, ALLOWING US MANY MORE DECADES TO ATTAIN WISDOM.

LEPRECHAUNS LIVE SOMEWHERE AROUND ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-THREE YEARS, IF THEY DO NOT ABBREVIATE THEIR LIVES BY TAKING SILLY CHANCES.

Orville Gold, genie historian of Feyland

WHEN LEONA AND I got closer to the human town, we stopped flying to walk along a footpath that went winding through the wild grass towards the trees. Entranced though I was with Earth, I was also feeling a little afraid.

‘What’s wrong?’ Leona asked.

‘Nothing.’ I didn’t want to bring up my parents or my lost brother. Five years is a long time. To Leona, it must seem like I had always been an orphan. After all, I never talked about my family.

I brightened as the path entered the woods. I stopped to put my arms around a tree trunk. Each leaf on the overarching branches looked as if an artist had spent hours

cutting it into a pattern. I recognized the pattern – this was a maple tree. I lay my cheek against its bark and inhaled. The wood smelled spicy. ‘You’re lovely,’ I murmured.

Leona laughed. ‘Trees can’t talk.’

‘I know.’

‘Trees are harmless, but beware of humans,’ she said, talking in her best imitation of Mr Bloodstone. ‘They can be very dangerous, worse than trolls, thoroughly unpredictable.’ Her eyes sparkled, and I wondered if she even remembered that my family had died on Earth.

I drifted through the trees and thought about my mother, something I almost never did. Unlike me, she had been a colourful fairy. Soft white hair, lavender skin, and dark yellow wings that were nearly gold. Her eyes had been deep and wild, like a storm.

Why had the humans killed her?

The woods ended at a pavement that ran in a circle around a clearing covered with bright green grass, clipped short. In the centre was a playground. Sand lay under blue-and-red climbing towers, reminding me of Galena. Human children ran and leaped on the towers, as if they wished they could grow wings.

Transfixed by the sight, Leona and I stood in the shade of a tall cottonwood.

‘A little early for Halloween, aren’t you, girls?’ said a voice at my left shoulder.

Startled, I turned to see a woman in a wide-brimmed beige hat and green clothes. Her arms rested on the handle of a pram in which a human toddler slept. ‘I love your costumes,’ she said, ‘and your make-up is out of this world.’

I blinked at her. Whatever I had imagined a human to be, it was not this.

‘What amazing fabric,’ she continued, brushing my sleeve. ‘I’ve never seen anything like it. It looks as if it

should be sheer, but it isn't. Where did you get it?'

Then she touched one of my wings. 'Wow,' she went on, carelessly rubbing the margin. 'Where did you find this material?' She lifted part of my wing close to her face. 'So fine and delicate, but it looks strong. And the veins! What a nice touch. You look like a giant butterfly.'

She didn't seem to notice that I wasn't answering her questions.

'I like to sew,' the woman continued. 'Did you send away for your costume?'

'Uh,' I mumbled.

'Are you girls going to be in a play?' she asked next.

I shook my head.

Who knows what would have happened then, but the child in the pram woke and began to cry.

'It's OK, Pumpkin,' the woman crooned, letting go of my wing and crouching down to pat the toddler's head.

Pumpkin howled.

'All right, let's go home,' the woman said, straightening up. 'Bye, girls. Beautiful costumes!' As soon as she started moving, the child's cries died down.

Watching her go, I saw a tall boy with light hair and skin striding down the pavement towards us. His eyes lit on Leona, and he flashed her a grin.

My first sight of Jason Court should not have been frightening. He looked like a healthy and handsome human specimen. I had no reason to feel uneasy, and yet, that's the way it was - as if I recognized from the first moment all the trouble he would cause.

I scooted back into the trees, hoping Leona would join me and we could leave. Instead, she seemed fascinated by the boy. He stopped beside her and introduced himself. She swayed on her toes, her skirts floating around her ankles.

We shouldn't have come. Not now, not during the day and in the open. Earth at night would be safer. Two humans had