

Chapter Three

The Fickle Forest

Albert and Florrie were blissfully unaware of the utter evil and deadly danger that was preparing to carve them up like a butcher, especially as Arthur Canarthy and Ebenezer Smythe decided the children could do with a few more days of much needed stability before embarking on the next leg of their journey.

They tore around the lush green landscape that surrounded The Edelweiss Inn and ate Hilda Hoppenhauß's mouth watering home cooked meals until their bellies were

fuller than they had ever been. Even Uncle Arthur and Mr. Smythe seemed to relax for a while, but as the days marched into May decisions had to be made if the next quest was to be completed on time.

It was with great reluctance that they said goodbye to Hilda Hoppenhauf, who tearily dabbed her eyes, not just because she knew she would miss the children, but also because she had developed a soft spot for their guardian.

It must be said that you would be hard pressed to describe Arthur Canarthy as an attractive looking man with his huge sticky out ears and his insipid drain water coloured eyes, but even though he was blunderingly bad at wooing women, there was something endearing about his clumsy attempts to win her over which Hilda Hoppenhauf had found

herself falling for. (Besides the fact, she had been widowed for more than nine years and quite missed not having a man about the house.)

However, the children's guardian was forced to put his own personal feelings to one side as he bade her farewell, leaving a lingering kiss on her cheek and a promise he would return one day. As they waved farewell and rode off into an uncertain future once again the children did not feel happy about leaving such a lovely place.

After a few days travel the group's mood was still rather subdued as they reached the edge of a vast forest late one afternoon. The sun was sinking like a shipwreck and, as there did not appear to be any dwellings

nearby, the adults decided they should set up camp underneath a large leafy tree.

So they unloaded a roll of blankets and pulled out the remaining provisions that Hilda had prepared to sustain them on the journey, whilst Ebenezer Smythe collected some wood and started a small fire to keep them warm. Soon they were all munching their way through a selection of sausages, a loaf of rather stale bread and some pears.

As the door of dusk finally closed into darkness, the children succumbed to an easy sleep as they snuggled into their makeshift beds, blissfully unaware of the shadowy figure that keenly watched them, before vanishing under a deathly cold moon.

It was some while later that the Leadington twins awoke with an unpleasant

jolt, as they heard Arthur Canarthy shouting,
“Get back you fiends!”

The horses were snorting and braying in a terrible fright, rearing up before managing to pull their reins free and gallop off into the murky blackness of the forest.

“What’s happening?” yelled Albert, jumping to his feet only to find himself confronted by what appeared to be a pack of wolves who looked none too friendly. Their yellow eyes glittered dangerously in the smouldering light of the remains of the fire.

“Quickly children, come here!” urged Arthur Canarthy. The children scrambled over to their guardian as the snarling creatures prepared to spring at them.

“Wot the ‘ell!” exclaimed Mr. Smythe, quickly pulling a pistol from his pocket and

firing it into the air. “Get away you brutes or the next bullet is going into one of you!”

The creatures seemed to pause for a moment, before the largest of them, who appeared to be the leader of the pack, rose up on its furry hind legs until it stood towering over them. It pulled back the corners of its mouth to reveal the sharpest looking teeth that the children had ever seen. The wolf seemed to smile slightly as drool dribbled down its hairy chin, taking a step forward as the small group took a step back.

“I won’t tell you again,” stammered Mr. Smythe, “don’t come any closer or I’ll fire!”

“Just shoot them anyway! We might be able to make a run for it!” urged the children’s guardian. “Do it now!”

The smuggler fired the gun again but this time aiming directly at the beast, which

naturally only incensed it more. It angrily plucked out the bullet with its claws and threw it to the ground. Right before their eyes the injury healed almost immediately.

“Unless your bullets are made from silver, which is highly unlikely, then your luck has just run out my friend,” leered the wolf.

“Flibbertigibbets,” gulped Ebenezer Smythe, looking more than a little taken aback as he turned to Arthur Canarthy. “They’re bleedin’ werewolves! We is good an’ scuppered this time!”

Now it had to be said that this wasn’t the first time by any stretch of the imagination that Albert and Florrie had almost been eaten alive, and whilst you might think they knew what to expect and how to escape, it still didn’t really make things much easier. I mean, would you like to be torn to shreds by jagged

teeth and sharp claws, your flesh gnawed away from your bones? No, I didn't think so.

As the old smuggler desperately fired his weapon for a third time, it quickly became apparent that the creature wasn't lying as the bullet simply bounced off its fur this time. The werewolf did not even so much as flinch or whimper, it simply sneered, "Now you've made me really mad and just for that I am going to kill you slowly with more pain than you can ever imagine."

"Wait!" Arthur Canarthy cried out sinking to his knees.

"It is a waste of time to beg for your lives. There's nothing you can say which will alter your fate," growled the beast, unaware of the fact that the children's guardian was actually picking up a dead branch of wood that lay on the floor. In great haste he plunged

the tinder dry leaves into the remains of the fire watching as it instantly caught light.

“You’ll have to find dinner elsewhere!” he bellowed defiantly, as he swung the burning branch at the werewolf, singeing the creature’s underbelly in the process. The werewolf yelped out in pain, clearly caught off guard and jumped back.

“Stay away from us!” he continued, whacking the beast again. “Ebenezer get that branch over there, you as well children - make torches, they won’t touch us as long as we have fire, they’re afraid of it!”

“Good thinkin’ Arthur! Come on little ‘uns,” he urged, handing them some dead wood to burn, watching as sparks spat and fizzled into flames. However, fate was about to deal them yet another blow as it started to spit and splatter with droplets of rain. “I don’t

Adam an' Eve it!" bellowed Ebenezer Smythe. "Fer gawd's sake! I swear it ain't just your parents wot is cursed, I reckon it's you two nippers as well!"

Which wasn't far off the truth, because at that precise moment in time back in the warmth and safety of her London mansion, Madame Divitan had just cast a weather spell and was watching the fruits of her labour in a large crystal ball. She smiled an evil smile as she tapped her long finger nails against the magic ball. "Let's see you get out of this one," she smirked.