



### *Timothy and Plum*

## **Chapter 1**

Timothy stood on the edge of the playground of the Temperance, Vermont elementary school and crossed one foot over the other. He was the new boy at school. He was always the new boy at school. His mother had trouble holding a job, so they were always moving. It was late spring in Timothy's second grade year, and they had moved four times. Timothy didn't have any children friends, at least none that he could ever keep. Timothy was a small, shy little boy. He had trouble making friends.

Timothy did have one friend, however, a very special friend. His name was Plum, and he was a faerie no bigger than Timothy's thumb. Plum was a faerie who belonged to the Faerie Order, Friends of Humans. He was a very enthusiastic little Faerie, but he was also a very, *very* young faerie. Timothy was actually his first "friend."

Now Timothy chewed his nails as he watched a group of boys play kickball.

"Go over and ask to play," coaxed Plum encouragingly from his perch on Timothy's shoulder.

"But... what if they don't let me? What if they don't like me?"

"Go over there with a positive attitude."

“But what if they’re mean, like those boys at the last school?”

“Do you remember what I did to those boys at the last school?”

Timothy smiled a little, but it was a shallow smile.

“Timothy,” said Plum with authority. You are my human, my very bestest friend. Now you go over there and tell those boys you are going to join their game. If they try to tell you no, then tell them they’ll be sorry. You know I’ll back you up.”

Timothy swallowed hard, then grew a little bolder. It’s easy to feel bold with a faerie on your shoulder.

Timothy walked up to the group of boys who were in the midst of switching places since Kevin had just gotten the third out for his team. Several of the boys watched as the newcomer walked hesitantly up. Jeremy, who was always a friendly boy, smiled. None of them could see Plum sitting on Timothy’s shoulder. Most people can’t see faeries. You have to truly believe in faeries in order to see them, and even then it can often be difficult if they do not wish to be seen.

“I want to play,” stated Timothy in a rather blunt, undiplomatic way. His awkwardness made it difficult for him to make friends.

Kevin, who was still sore at having been caught out, scowled.

“Who are you? I haven’t seen you around before.”

“I’m Timothy... I’m new.”

“He can be on our team,” offered Jeremy.

“That’s not fair!” argued Sean, who didn’t like losing. “That gives your team an extra player! (Sean’s team was losing).

“You can wait for the next game. Then the captains will pick and you might get picked,” sneered Kevin, still a little sore.

“Go on,” coaxed Plum from Timothy’s shoulder.

Swallowing, Timothy balled his fists and tried to look tough.

“You better let me play... or else,” he said, without much conviction.

“Or else, what?” asked Kevin darkly, rising to the challenge.

“You just better.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah!”

Kevin didn't like to fight. He would generally have treated a new kid a little more kindly had he not been angry about getting out. But now he felt backed into a corner. To agree to let Timothy play now would suggest that he was intimidated by him. And he couldn't allow himself to be intimidated in front of the whole schoolyard by some new kid, especially such a small, scrawny new kid like Timothy.

"We're in the middle of a game, and recess is almost over. Come back tomorrow. If you're here in time when we make teams, you can play then," offered Kevin in a face-saving gesture.

"If you walk away now, they'll never let you play," whispered Plum in Timothy's ear.

"I'm going to play now!" offered Timothy, resolutely.

Kevin wasn't sure what to do. He did not want to fight, not that he was afraid, but he didn't want to get into trouble. He wasn't really sure how he had gotten into this dilemma.

"Get lost!" he finally stormed, and shoved Timothy hard.

Nobody was quite certain what exactly happened next, but Kevin was suddenly dropped to the ground with a bloody nose.

A whistle blew as two teachers ran up to the scene.

"What's going on here?" roared Mr. Turner, the P.E. teacher. "Kevin what happened to you?"

"It was him, Mr. Turner!" shouted Sean, pointing at Timothy. "He came over here and tried to break into our game. When Kevin told him he couldn't, he punched him."

"That's right," chorused the other boys looking darkly at Timothy.

"Miss Rosenthal, take Kevin down to the nurse's office. You come with me, young man," said Mr. Turner, taking Timothy by the arm.

## Chapter 2

Miss Rosenthal had her students line up before her room after recess and then led them in single file. She quickly wrote an account of the incident that she had just witnessed out on the playground and cast her eyes around the classroom looking for a dependable student.

“Molly, take this to Principal Shaw’s office,” she said, extending the stapled note.

Molly took the note, picked up the hall pass, and went out the door.

Timothy sat on the bench in front of the principal’s office chewing his nails.

“I’m sorry, Timothy,” offered Plum. He was sitting sadly on Timothy’s shoulder, his face cupped in his hands.

“It’s okay,” answered Timothy, but he knew his mother would be very angry when she got the call. He looked up at the approach of a girl his own age with brown, loose hair and a plaid skirt. She stared at him with wide eyes.

“I’ve never seen *you* before,” gasped Molly.

“I’m new,” responded Timothy, unhappily.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I meant *him*,” answered Molly, pointing to the figure on Timothy’s shoulder.

“Me?” squeaked Plum, jumping up. “You can *see* me?”

“Of, course,” said Molly. “I know *lots* of faeries.”

It was true. Molly had a faerie friend as well, a very special faerie friend. Molly’s friend was Daphne, and Daphne was the White Faerie, which is a very rare and special thing. Molly had met many faeries through Daphne, and the two of them had shared many adventures. Most recently, they had saved the world from the menace of the terrible, wicked witch queens, but that is another story.

“What’s your name?” asked Molly, this time addressing Timothy in order to be polite.

“Timmy,” answered Timothy. “This is Plum.”

“What happened?” asked Molly, seeing how unhappy Timothy looked.

“I... I got in a fight.” Timothy had been trying to hold back tears, but now his eyes welled up.

“That’s bad. You should have listened to your faerie.”

“He told me to.”

“You *did*?” asked Molly, startled. “But Daphne says there’s never a good reason to get into fights at school.”

“Those other boys wouldn’t let us play. We had to teach them a lesson,” answered Plum angrily.

Molly took a fearful step backward.

“Y-you’re not a darkling, are you? You don’t look like a darkling.”

Darklings are lawless, renegade faeries who do not follow the rule of the great Faerie King. Some darklings are harmless enough, but some can be wicked and dangerous.

“If you are,” continued Molly, “I’m warning you, my friend Daphne...”

“I am certainly *not* a darkling!” cried Plum, indignantly. “I am a Friend of Humans as anyone can plainly see. And who is this Daphne anyway?”

“She’s the Wh... You mean you really don’t know?”

Plum sighed unhappily and lowered his face back into his hands.

“It’s like he said. We’re new.”

“Molly, is that note for here?” asked Mrs. Jarvi, the office secretary, opening the office door.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Then hand it over and go back to class. The principal will see you now, young man.”

### Chapter 3

The next morning before school Timothy was sitting alone on a bench in the playground with Plum on his shoulder. Molly walked up to the pair, only this time Molly was not alone. Plum looked up and saw that a faerie was standing on her shoulder.

The faerie was a girl, a little older than he was, very bright, with silvery eyes and a mop of blonde hair. She was wearing some kind of white gem around her neck, and Plum instantly felt a little intimidated. It was like when a new teacher came in, and you weren't sure if she was going to like you.

"You must be Daphne. Hi," offered Plum meekly.

"And you're Plum," answered Daphne, eyeing him critically. "You and I need to have a little talk."

"I'm with Timothy," Plum tried.

"And yesterday, Timothy had to speak with the principal. Now *you* get to speak with *me*."

Something in this faerie's tone made Plum consider that to refuse would be a bad idea.

"Okay," he answered sheepishly.

"Molly, stay here with Timothy. When the bell rings, line up for class. We'll see you at recess. You, come with me," said Daphne.

Plum fluttered his wings and lifted into the air behind Daphne. He gulped. He was starting to get the impression that this girl was used to giving orders – and used to having them obeyed. The two faeries flew over to the large juniper tree by the fence and perched in its branches.

"Where are you from?" asked Daphne.

"Most recently? Connecticut," answered Plum. "We move a lot."

"Originally."

"Me? The Midwest."

"Do you understand that as a Friend of Humans you're supposed to help your human stay *out* of trouble, not get him into it?"

Plum's violet face blushed red.

"I... I made a mistake. It won't happen again."

Daphne squinted her eyes and looked at Plum critically.

“You’re *very* young.”

“So?” answered Plum defensively.

“Are you old enough to have your own human?”

“Timothy needs me!”

“He doesn’t need a young, inexperienced faerie helping him make bad decisions.”

“I told you... I made a mistake... It won’t happen again!”

Plum was usually pretty confident (in fact, he usually acted overconfident) but there was something about this girl’s manner that he found very intimidating.

“And what happens next time, when you make an even worse mistake? What happens to Timothy then?”

“I...” Plum started to protest, and then looked down, abashed. “You... you’re right. But Timothy needs me. And... I need him,” he added in a small voice.

Daphne softened.

“Who is your mentor?”

“Her name was Editha. I made lots of mistakes, I wasn’t very good. But Editha didn’t mind. She was very patient. She would say ‘tut-tut, Plum, you’ll do better next time.’” Plum seemed warmed by the memory.

“Where is she?”

“She... she died.” A large tear rolled down Plum’s cheek.

“What happened?” asked Daphne with compassion.

“She... she got sick.” Plum was sniffing now, trying not to break down entirely in front of Daphne. “She... she was very old. She stayed by her human friend who was dying in the hospital. They say that when a faerie gets very old, they weaken and can sometimes catch the diseases that plague the humans. I told her that I could watch her human, but she insisted and... she got sick...”

Daphne reached over and put her arms around Plum who was still struggling to control himself.

“They gave me another mentor,” Plum continued. “But he was very busy and very impatient, not like Editha. I made mistakes. I guess I make a lot of mistakes. I’m not very good. My new mentor would get very short with me and disgusted. I tried to concentrate like he said, but sometimes I would stop paying attention; I was thinking of Editha, wishing she was there. And then I’d make more mistakes, and my mentor would get more impatient and say I was hopeless.

“I... I ran away. I flew out into the forest and sat and cried and cried. Then I stopped because I heard someone else crying. I peeked into a clearing and saw Timothy. It turns out, he had run away too. He was crying because he had just moved to a new school and the other boys were mean to him.

“Don’t you see? Timothy’s special; he can see me, he can see us. He was the first human I ever met who could see me. And so I became his faerie.”

“That was a year ago. We’ve moved twice since then,” Timothy was saying to Molly in the meantime. “Whenever I make a friend, we end up having to move. But with Plum it’s different. He said it didn’t matter, and that he would come with me whenever I have to move and still be my friend. And he has! Plum’s all I’ve got. He’s my only friend, and he loves me. He didn’t mean to get us into trouble yesterday.”

“Of course, he didn’t,” said Molly. “It will be okay. Daphne will find a way to fix things.”

“What can your Daphne do?”

Molly smiled a smile that was far wiser than her seven years.

“You might be surprised.”

The school bell rang, and the children went into the building to line up for their classes.

“Why does Timothy’s family always have to move?” asked Daphne.

“It’s just Timothy and his mother. He doesn’t have a father. Timothy’s mother has trouble finding work. And sometimes she chooses a boyfriend. Timothy’s mother makes... bad choices. That’s why we had to move this last time.”

“I see,” said Daphne.

“The last boyfriend, he drank a lot of bad smelling stuff, and he tried to hurt Timothy. I... I caused him to slip and fall out of a window into a rosebush. He wasn’t hurt bad, but I guess that was the wrong thing to do.”

Daphne stifled a grin.

“Actually, that’s sounds just about right.”

“Timothy’s mother got very upset. She loves Timothy very much, and she told that bad man to go away. He said awful mean things to her. I was about to... make him have another accident... but then

the police arrived and made him go away. But Timothy's mother was scared, and that's why we had to move again.

"And this is such a pretty little town and such a nice little school and... and now I've ruined everything for Timothy!"

Great tears rolled down Plum's purple colored cheeks.

Daphne smiled.

"It's not so bad as all that. Here, blow your nose," she said offering him a large, blue handkerchief. "At recess I'm going to stand on Timothy's shoulder and do a little 'damage control,' and *you're* going to help."

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At recess, the boys were gathering to choose sides for kickball.

In a corner of the playground, Daphne stood upon Timothy's shoulder.

"All right, Timothy," she said. "Stop biting your nails. Now pick your head up... up. That's right. Now, you're going to walk over to Kevin. You are not going to bite your nails. You are going to hold your head up as you speak to him."

"But, what will I say?" trembled Timothy.

"I will tell you what to say."

"Will... will you help me if there's a fight?"

"There isn't going to be any fighting, not today. Now let's go."

Timothy swallowed hard and walked forward. As he walked, his left hand strayed nervously to his mouth.

"No, Timothy," said Daphne gently.

Timothy dropped his hand and walked up to the group of boys. The boys eyed him darkly as he approached.

"What do *you* want?" asked Kevin, bunching his fists.

"I..." A change came over Timothy. He stood a little straighter, and his eyes met Kevin's and held them.

“I came to say I’m sorry about yesterday... I was wrong... I’m new and I wanted very much to play in your game... I shouldn’t have hit you... especially when you weren’t looking... it’s hard being the new kid at school, but that’s no excuse... You have every right to be angry... but I came to say I’m sorry... and to ask again if I can play.”

Kevin frowned.

From his position on Kevin’s shoulder, Plum now began to whisper in his ear. He had memorized very carefully what Daphne had told him to say, and he whispered it word for word.

“Look at him. He’s a new kid, and he looks kind of lonely and lost. He says he’s sorry, and it sounds like he means it. He’s such a little guy. To hit him or hold a grudge against such a little guy would make you little. If you were to forgive him, if you were to let him play, that would make you big. I have faith in you, Kevin. You can be big.”

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“It worked! I can’t believe that worked!” cried Plum happily as he watched Timothy playing kickball with the other boys.

Daphne smiled, and returned to her conversation with her friend Tanya, a faerie who was a Friend of Trees.

“Did you see that? I whispered just what you said, and he did it; He did it! I didn’t know all the humans could hear us. You mean we can actually make them do anything?”

“No, Plum,” corrected Daphne, gently. “You can’t make the humans do anything, but you *can* appeal to their better natures. That’s part of our job.

“You need to learn that *most* people, humans and faeries, have good hearts. Oh, there are some who don’t, and you’ll learn to spot them soon enough. Most people have good natures, but sometimes they make bad decisions, like you and Timothy did yesterday. As a Friend of Humans, a large part of your job is to help people find their better natures, like you did today with Kevin.”

Just then, Timothy caught the ball that had been kicked in his direction. The boys on his team cheered.

Plum watched and made a slow smile. When he spoke again, his voice sounded more humble, and more grown up, than it ever had before.

“I think Timothy and I are going to be happy here. I hope we can stay.”

“Let’s work on that next,” said Daphne.

## Chapter 4

Natalie Blanchet stacked the plates from the last table as she finished her shift. She patted the pocket of her apron where she kept her tips, then grabbed a dishtowel and began to wipe down the counter. She would stay a few minutes late, just tidying up, and hope the manager noticed. This was a good job in a nice little town and she wanted to make sure things worked out.

Natalie was Timothy's mother. She was only twenty-three. She looked even younger. Natalie had raven black hair that came down in ringlets across her shoulders. She was a very pretty young woman who attracted much attention, most of which she was oblivious to. Though uneducated, she was not necessarily stupid or foolish, but she was often naïve. She was the type of young woman who had never really "grown into" her looks, a little girl who didn't seem to realize she now sported a grown-up woman's body. Her large, wide eyes looked at the world innocently.

Ralph's Place, the diner in Temperance where she had just started working, had had a slight increase in customers – male customers – since her arrival. A few of them sat at the counter now, gazing at her over their coffee cups, smiling when they caught her eye. Natalie continued to work, completely but honestly oblivious to the attention she was receiving, graciously returning the men's smiles when she saw them.

Daphne eyed her critically from behind a sugar canister.

"Oh, dear, you're going to be a handful," she mused.

"So who is she?" whispered one of the younger men as he took his time finishing his coffee.

"New waitress, new in town," responded Barney an older patron, eyeing the young waitress' rear end appreciatively as she wiped the counter.

"Think she'll need any help finding her way around?" asked another young man, hopefully.

"I wouldn't mind showing her around," chuckled Barney in a low voice.

"You're already late for work, Barney Kline," whispered Daphne darkly from his elbow. "Why don't you get a move on before your wife comes by looking for you? Maybe she'll show *you* around."

"Say, I gotta go," said Barney looking at his watch and suddenly realizing he would be late getting back to the office.

Ralph, the owner and manager of Ralph's Lunch, came out of the kitchen wiping his hands.

"Gladys called in sick. If you wanna take a break instead of going home, I can pay you overtime if you can take her shift," he said to Natalie. Ralph was a stout, no nonsense type of fellow. Natalie's charms were lost on him.

"Sure, thanks!" said Natalie. She would call the school and tell them to give her son a message to meet her at the diner after school. That thought made her pause. She closed her eyes for a moment and said a quick prayer that Timothy had had a better day at school today.

"How could you get into a fight on your first day!" she had cried when he got home yesterday.

"I... I'm sorry, mommy," Timothy had sniveled.

"Timothy, Timothy, we just got here. I got the job at the diner, and this is such a nice little town, much nicer than the last place. Please promise you'll *try* to do better at school."

"Yes, mommy."

Natalie wiped away a tear as she sat down to take her lunch break at the counter. She had brought a hard roll with a single slice of bologna in a paper sack with a can of soda and a straw, all she could afford. Timothy was such a good boy, but the world was full of bullies.

"Timothy will be just fine," whispered Daphne as she settled upon Natalie's shoulder. "As for you, the first thing you should learn is that you shouldn't let men like Barney Kline and his friends leer at you."

Natalie blinked and looked a little confused. She glanced over her shoulder and saw the two remaining men eyeing her coolly over their coffee cups. They smiled and winked, and she smiled back. Natalie was a lonely young woman who enjoyed attention.

"That's really not the kind of attention you want," lectured Daphne.

The door to the diner jingled as two more men walked in. They both started and took a moment to stare at the town's newest resident.

Sipping her soda coquettishly, Natalie crossed one shapely leg over the other.

“I’m not getting through here, am I?” frowned Daphne.

The door jingled again, and another man entered. It was Deputy Keyes from the sheriff’s office. He also took in the stranger, but unlike the other men, simply nodded hello and went over to the counter.

“It’s a pleasure to see you at least, Mr. Keyes,” smiled Daphne. Daphne knew Deputy Keyes to be a hard working, dependable fellow who was very competent. He was in fact much more competent, truth to tell, than the slow-witted sheriff he worked for.

“Hi’ya Ralph,” said the deputy as Ralph poured him his coffee. “Where’s Gladys?”

“Out sick. That’s my new waitress over there. She’ll be filling in once she’s off her break.”

“Pleased to meet you, Miss,” said Deputy Keyes turning and raising his coffee.

Natalie smiled, then turned back around and giggled. The deputy was a funny looking fellow, tall with wide eyes and a bobbing Adam’s apple.

“Why don’t you go talk to him?” Daphne tried suggesting in Natalie’s ear. “He’s a nice, dependable, good man. The only *real* man who’s walked in here. And he doesn’t *leer*.”

Natalie stared forward with glassy eyes. The two men who had stayed well past their given lunch times finally got slowly to their feet, and walked out, still staring at the new waitress as she ate. She smiled back at them and winked.

“Nope, not getting through at all here,” sighed Daphne, shaking her head. “Plum says you have trouble holding a job. Let’s see if we can do anything about that.”

Twenty minutes later, Natalie was off of her lunch break and serving customers. Daphne sat on her shoulder, puzzling how to proceed when she saw the catastrophe about to happen.

A late afternoon rush had Natalie moving about in a frenzy. She was so desperate to make a good impression. If she could clear three tables instead of two, the family that had just arrived wouldn’t have

to wait before being seated. In her enthusiasm, the young waitress started piling the dirty dishes haphazardly on the tray that she was supporting with one hand.

“Wait!” cried Daphne, and cast a fast saving spell just in time to prevent the entire tray from upending and crashing to the floor. Normally, faeries don’t like to use their magic to interfere with such mundane matters of the human world, but Daphne was beginning to decide that this young woman really needed a bit of a hand.

“Try to be careful!” cried Daphne as the harried waitress dashed into the kitchen through the swinging door, nearly spilling the tray once more.

“Those tables need to be wiped down!” cried Ralph from the grill where burgers and grilled cheese sizzled.

Natalie dumped the tray of dishes unceremoniously into the big sink and turned on the water. She looked about frantically for a towel but couldn’t find one. All at once, she remembered that one was out behind the counter, and she raced out to get it – leaving the water running and running, rising to the top of the overfilled sink.

“Uhh!” grunted Daphne as she pushed the faucet lever closed just in time to stop its flooding over. Then with a whirl of gossamer wings, she shot out through the swinging doors in pursuit of Natalie.

Natalie had lined up water glasses and was pouring water into them in an attempt to serve the new diner patrons faster. Some of the water sloped onto the floor and pooled there.

“Slow down!” cried Daphne, trying her best to get through to the spastic young woman.

“Waitress, we’re still waiting to order!” called out two impatient women.

Natalie, who had been making a bee-line for a family of three, stopped and turned mid-stride in response to the summons. Her body stopped. The tray she was holding stopped. But alas, the glasses of water upon the tray, obeying the laws of physics as glasses are apt to do, continued on their trajectory, straight off the tray, straight at the family of three, and straight at the tiny, hovering faerie who was the only thing that stood between them.

Allowing three glasses of water to strike innocent restaurant patrons would be bad. Using faerie magic to dissipate them in front of a diner full of human witnesses was also undesirable. So Daphne did

the only thing she could, given the circumstances. She arrested their forward motion and hoped no one noticed how abruptly the glass dropped to shatter harmlessly on the floor.

But again, the laws of physics will not be denied. In her haste to stop the flying glass, Daphne neglected the actual water flying out of the glasses. The water, therefore, continued on its uninterrupted course, drenching the well-meaning faerie.

“Oops!” said Natalie, pinching her lip and looking down at the three broken glasses.

“You!” sputtered Daphne, bunching her fists, her eyes turning red. “You... are... a *disaster!*”

An enraged faerie is not at all a good thing. An enraged *White* Faerie is downright dangerous. Perhaps that is what finally got through to young Natalie. Taking a deep breath, she proceeded to clean up the glass and attend to her customers at a somewhat calmer pace.

## Chapter 5

Three days later, Natalie Blanchet was once again pouring water into lined up glasses in great haste, once again slopping some of the water onto the floor. It was the late afternoon crowd and several customers sat in booths and at the counter. Among them was Deputy Keyes who had just gotten off work.

Natalie dashed about serving the customers. She had become quite a familiar if comical fixture within the town diner in an astonishingly short amount of time. All of the customers liked her, which made Ralph happy, despite the occasional broken glass.

Returning in a rush to the counter, Natalie slipped upon the water she had just spilled moments before and fell... directly into the arms of the quick responding Deputy Keyes.

“Careful, ma’am,” said Deputy Keyes, helping her regain her balance.

“Thanks,” breathed the young woman in relief.

“You needn’t rush so much,” offered the deputy. “This isn’t the big city. Nobody here is in that much of a hurry.”

“I just want to do a good job,” said Natalie.

The deputy smiled, nodded, and returned to his coffee.

“Oops,” winced Plum from the windowsill of the diner.

“Actually, she’s improved,” frowned Daphne.

“He seems like a nice fellow,” said Plum, hopefully.

“Deputy Keyes? He is, but he’s not interested.”

“Too bad. Timothy’s mother is very lonely. She is very pretty. Maybe Mr. Keyes will change his mind.”

“I don’t think so,” puzzled Daphne. “I haven’t figured it out yet, but for some reason he seems not at all interested, almost as if he had something else...”

The Faeries were interrupted by the jingle of the bell at the restaurant door. Daphne’s eyes narrowed. Burk Garrison had just entered the diner.

Daphne knew Burk Garrison by reputation. He was a tough construction worker, handsome in a rugged way. He had a boyish twinkle to his eye, and could be extremely charming when it came to young

ladies. But he was also a man who harbored resentments. His brother had been more successful than he, generally because he was willing to work harder. Burk was one of those people who believed that the world owed him more than he had received. For the most part, he would go through life in a free, easy-going manner. But the anger and resentment lingered always just below the surface, even if it didn't generally show itself.

Alcohol brought out the worst in him. Burk liked his beer, and nine times out of ten he would be fine. But then there were the other times, when perhaps he had had one too many, or perhaps he had had an especially frustrating day, or perhaps he had been brooding on his brother's nice house and nice sailboat. That's when the black anger would take hold and he would lash out physically, sometimes in a bar fight, sometimes at whatever woman who had recently fallen to his charms.

Perhaps Burk had missed his calling, for he was a splendid actor. The next morning there would be flowers and apologies, sometimes he'd even work up a few tears of regret and remorse. The boyish charm would kick in along with the promises that it would never happen again, and it wouldn't – until the next time.

Now Burk Garrison chose a booth – a respectable distance from the deputy – and sat down. Looking up, he caught Natalie's eye and gave her a smile, his eyes twinkling.

“Excuse me,” said Daphne darkly and fluttered over to perch invisibly on Natalie's shoulder.

“Well, hello, angel,” smiled Burk as Natalie came up to set his water glass, silverware, and napkin down before him. Natalie blushed at the compliment and smiled, pulling out her order pad and holding it in her small, white hands with the chipped pink nail polish.

“So, are you working hard, or hardly working?”

Natalie giggled.

“You're not funny,” snapped Daphne.

Natalie took Burk's order, a burger and fries with soda. He made a few more remarks that Natalie found amusing and Daphne didn't, and then Natalie strode off to the counter where she handed Ralph the order and then began wiping tables.

“Don't get mixed up with him. Don't fall for his act,” cautioned Daphne.

Natalie glanced shyly over at Burk. Burk raised his water glass and winked. Natalie smiled coyly.

“Listen to me,” Daphne tried. “Try to hear me, Natalie. *Please* try.”

“Whoops!” called Burk, as he dropped his spoon accidentally-on-purpose onto the floor. “Sorry, angel, looks like I was careless. Do you mind bringing me another?”

Natalie smiled a flirtatious smile as she snatched up another spoon and sauntered over to the booth.

“Natalie, you’ve done well here,” Daphne was saying as the young woman crossed the floor. “They like you at this job; you’re making friends. Don’t get involved with this loser, or he’ll just drag you down again. Don’t you remember why you had to come here in the first place? I know you’re lonely, but you can’t just latch on to the first man who smiles and winks at you. Can’t you see you’re worth more than that?”

“Say, you don’t look familiar,” smiled Burk.

“I just moved here,” responded Natalie, shyly.

Burk sized the young waitress up instantly with his usual efficient instincts: young, pretty, but low self esteem, maybe has a kid or two, not much money, easy score if he played it right. First, a sympathetic compliment.

“Well, they certainly keep you hopping around here.”

“Yeah, huh.”

“Ever get out?”

“Not too much.”

Now the bait.

“You’re too young to be working yourself all ragged all the time. When was the last time you had a nice night out?”

Natalie blushed and shrugged.

“Natalie, don’t...” tried Daphne.

“How about if I took you out for a drink sometime?”

“Well...” smiled Natalie, crossing one leg girlishly over the other.

“Natalie, please... Try to hear me,” pleaded Daphne.

And now the hook.

“Hey! I know a place in the next town where we can go dancing. When was the last time you went out dancing?”

Natalie beamed. It had been awhile since she had had a chance to go out. And she was tired of just working all the time. Her smile widened.

“Natalie...” cried Daphne, desperately.

“Actually I’d love to...”

“Damn it! *LISTEN TO ME!!!*” screamed Daphne, her eyes and the white star upon her chest blazing red.

The din of the crowded diner stopped dead as a pall of silence covered the establishment. Ralph came running out of the kitchen to look around wildly. No one had actually heard anything; no one could have explained how or why the sudden palpable feeling of terror had filled the room. Two small children started to cry. By the window, Plum hid his face.

“What... what...” sputtered Burk Garrison, his coolness and composure shattered.

Natalie stood stock still, staring straight ahead.

“Now listen,” began Daphne slowly. “You have to think of Timothy, isn’t he the one who’s important to you?”

“Yes,” breathed Natalie, not really knowing why.

“Then do this for Timothy. You have a good thing here, a job that’s working out, a nice place to live. It’s a little early to start jumping into premature relationships with men you don’t even know. Walk away from this one. Do it for yourself. Do it for Timothy. Avoid all the regrets and tears, and give yourself and Timothy a chance, a real chance here in this place.”

The restaurant conversation had tentatively returned, although in a somewhat subdued tone. Somebody laughed nervously. Burk Garrison still appeared flustered and tense. He had a panicky, almost hunted expression.

“I-I’m sorry,” said Natalie.

“H-huh?” answered Burk as if noticing her for the first time.

“It’s a tempting offer,” continued Natalie in a low voice, “but I have a son at home. We’re still adjusting to life here, getting to know people. And to tell you the truth, I... just sort of came out of a bad relationship. You understand.”

“Huh? Oh... yeah... sure,” gasped Burk.

“Order up! Burger, fries, cola!” yelled Ralph from the counter.

“Your order’s ready,” offered Natalie.

“He was just leaving,” said Daphne, darkly.

“Can... can I get that to go, Miss?”

“Of course.”

Daphne fluttered back over to the windowsill after Burk had left. Plum stared at her.

“You... you’re not just a normal faerie, are you?”

“No,” answered Daphne tightly, “I’m not.”

“Is everything going to be all right now? Is Timothy’s mother going to be all right?”

Daphne smiled wistfully.

“I don’t know, Plum.”

“But... but you’ll keep coming back to help her – help her stay out of trouble – help her make good decisions?”

“No, Plum, it doesn’t work that way. Natalie is a grown woman, a grown woman with a child of her own. She has to start making her own good decisions. We can give her a push and hope for the best, but I think she’s off to a good start. Her love for Timothy is strong. As long as she uses that to guide her, she has a very good chance.”

As if in answer to this statement, Timothy himself entered the restaurant with Emily Rosenthal.

“Hello, Miss Blanchet, I’m Miss Rosenthal, Timothy’s teacher, I thought I would walk with Timothy over to meet you and say hello.”

“That’s very kind of you.”

The two women chatted as Plum fluttered over to his spot on Timothy’s shoulder. Timothy gave his friend a wink when no one was looking. After a few moments, Natalie’s shift came to an end and she took her son over to the counter to buy him an ice-cream. Daphne noticed the tenderness mother and son shared.

And then she noticed something else, something she had never noticed before, something that made her blink and smile in astonishment.

Deputy Keyes got up off of his stool, nearly stumbling. His large eyes were wider than usual and his Adam’s apple was bobbing on overdrive.

“Well, hello Miss Emily!” he said holding his hat and fidgeting and smiling ear to ear and fidgeting.

“Hello, Deputy, I keep telling you, it’s just ‘Emily,’” smiled Miss Rosenthal.

“Oh, sure, it’s Bob... Robert... Bob... I am off duty you know.” He grinned.

Miss Rosenthal smiled, then blushed.

“Oh... hey... I read that book you told me about.”

“Book?”

“You remember, you were reading it last time I saw you, and you said you liked it. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. You know I don’t usually go in for that romance-gone-wrong stuff, but it was good.”

“Oh... well... you know it’s a re-envisioning of *Jane Eyre*, right?”

“Jane who?”

“*Jane Eyre*, you know, by Bronte.”

“Oh... sure,” beamed Bob Keyes, not really certain, and not really caring.

The two stood awkwardly for a moment. Miss Rosenthal looked at Natalie and Timothy and then at the door.

“Well, I should probably get going. I have work at the school. I promised the principal...”

“Say, can I buy you a coffee?” the deputy finally managed. “We can talk about the book or the school or... or any old thing I guess,” he was wringing his hat quite nervously now.

Miss Rosenthal was a very lonely woman, a very shy and reserved woman.

“Well I... I did promise the principal... but...”

“Go ahead, Emily,” smiled Daphne. “Whatever the principal needs, I’m sure can wait a little while.”

And then the mature, shy, reserved, and proper Miss Rosenthal did a very curious thing. She smiled girlishly and crossed one leg in front of the other very much as the younger Natalie had done a few moments before, and walked over to a booth with her date.

“Why, Deputy Keyes,” smiled Daphne. “Who would have thought?”