

# THE PAGEANT

Angela Blaen

NYMET BOOKS

NYMET BOOKS

Nymet Books is a imprint of The Medieval Press, Curfew Cottage, Church Street, Crediton,  
Devon, EX17 2AQ.  
[www.medievalpress.com](http://www.medievalpress.com)

© 2013 Angela Blaen.

All rights reserved.

Except as permitted under current legislation, no part of this work may be photocopied,  
stored in a retrieval system, published, performed in public, adapted, broadcast, transmitted,  
recorded or reproduced in any form or by any means, without the prior written permission  
of the copyright owner.

ISBN 9780956611949

Typeset in Baskerville Old Face

## CHAPTERS

1)	The Map of the Fairy Kingdom	3
2)	The Elizabethan Fairy College	21
3)	The Map Maker	36
4)	Fairy Cakes and a Fairy Cat	58
5)	The Earthquake	76
6)	A Warning	89
7)	Titania's Discovery	107
8)	A Meeting of Two Birds	117
9)	A Victory	130
10)	Culpepper's Labyrinth	142
11)	The Pagent	162
12)	The Transit of Venus	172
13)	The Law's an Ass	180



# THE PAGEANT

The Page Ant sighed and glowered at the white, uncovered sheet of paper. “Can’t we do some more displacement activity? You know you enjoy that.” He tried a hopeful smile.

In cold response the magician merely frowned, snapping his fingers and pointing a long index finger at the ant. Sisyphus sighed again, dipped his front feet into the silver inkwell and started laboriously crawling over the page.



## ∞ CHAPTER ONE ∞

### THE MAP OF THE FAIRY KINGDOM

IN A MAGICAL ORCHARD CALLED MORCHET, across the Shobrooke stream from the human town of Clayton, Titania and Oberon lay under a grafted pear tree. Titania's appearance changed every now and then as her mood fluctuated, but currently she was relaxed and her shimmering peacock blue and green dress suited her flowing dark hair and green eyes. Oberon rarely changed his costume as, like most males, he thought he looked wonderful in his favourite garment, which was silver and gold, covering him from head to foot and flowing behind him as a long, shimmering cloak when he walked dramatically and turned elegantly. Currently it was acting as a protective sheet for them both to lie on under the slightly dripping leaves of the tree. It was early spring and the weather wasn't as much under his control as he would have wished. He hoped she wouldn't notice. He made his cloak's corner magically brush off any drop of water that landed on her dress.

"When is Jay coming?" she yawned, revealing perfect but slightly sharp, pointed teeth. "Goodfellows are never reliable, too human for their own good."

"This one is better than the previous ones," Oberon stroked his silvery bushy hair, thinking how lucky it was he had never gone bald over the centuries. "Since Merlin banished Puck, most of them have been equally flaky, saying one thing but doing another and taking amorality far into the realms of immorality, if you ask me."

For a while they sullenly thought of Puck, alias Robin Goodfellow, whose reputation for mischief had long spread through the Fairy Kingdom although most of his enterprises had been in the human world. He was rumoured to have dabbled in slave trading, encouraged pirates, become court jester to previously good kings who rapidly discovered evil pastimes, and worked his way up to the creator of battles, supposedly always winning as he used magic and illusion to fool his enemies. Recently weapons of mass destruction had it seemed become a speciality and he was now

rumoured to be deeply involved in the nuclear industry and large scale mining activities.

“I don’t want to think of him,” Titania was aware that her gorgeous greens and blues were turning to dark grey thundercloud gossamer. “It’s such a shame that we need Goodfellows at all. If we could wander through the human world as they do, we could bypass them.”

Oberon sighed. “That’s been Merlin’s decision. He feels we would be too easily led astray by humans and that the integrity of the Fairy World would be undermined – forgive the pun, for all we know Puck’s men might be digging underneath us right now!” Titania fought to keep turquoise streaks within the greeny grey. “Supernatural heroes,” he stroked his splendid hair, “have always had beings less able than they are, so they could concentrate on what they do best and leave the more menial things to their half human servants.”

“And what do you do best?” asked Titania. He had hoped she wouldn’t ask that. And she knew he had hoped she wouldn’t ask that.

“Before that Arabian boy you stole, you thought I was the most intelligent and desirable being on the planet,” he began.

“Leonardo taught me so much,” she mused dreamily. “I’ll never forget him. So clever, so beautiful. He could do almost anything. He drew Puck so magically, made him look exquisite.”

“Hmm, he taught Puck so much too. They were far too close, almost conspiratorial at times. Being Leonardo’s assistant really turned his head. And the way the humans treated the fairy child you left in his place was unforgiveable. That was your fault.”

“They didn’t read the instructions with it – thought they were just leaves lying on the pillow and threw them away. They shouldn’t have fed it meat, it always makes changelings ugly and nasty. Doesn’t suit them. It’s not surprising Dogwood joined Puck in the end and showed him how to leave us. He had an axe to grind.”

“An axe which has changed into all kinds of worse weapons over time and which Puck has ably exploited, if the rumours are true.” Oberon’s imperious face was stormy, more drops of water fell from the tree and he

took no trouble to stop them landing on Titania's dress. By now she had noticed the rain. A thunder cloud appeared above them.

Their squabbling threatened to grow like the cloud and to spoil the previously mild April day. The birds nearby flew off, the hidden rabbit which had been bringing its young out to watch the King and Queen decided it was time to take them searching for dandelions instead. The passionate tempers Oberon and Titania could never quite conceal were a famous problem for the Fairy Kingdom. Their last Goodfellow had dared to suggest anger management or relationship counselling. No one knew what had become of him but a talented handsome stranger had been reported training dolphins in escapology at theme parks in America and no one was sure where he came from or why he seemed able to speak dolphin languages just as fluently as English. Crowds were starting to pay large sums of money to watch him dive with the dolphins and, as if by magic, be the only performer left in the pool at the end of the day. He had to keep moving from place to place as his employers seemed dissatisfied with his results though, as the dolphins didn't reappear as he had promised they would. Pods of seemingly well trained dolphins were appearing all around the American coast, hoping for buckets of fish but settling for applause.

Just as Titania's dress was changing to a flame coloured red, giving off sparks and small puffs of scarlet smoke, a cheerful figure strolled towards them through the trees. He was dressed mainly in various shades of green velvet, but with a scarf of brilliant blue striped with iridescent black around his handsome neck, and was whistling unconcernedly. His slightly long chestnut hair curled around a handsome tanned face with quick black eyes. He gave the sulky couple a quick bow and accepted the offer to sit with them.

Titania looked at him with interest, her peacock blue dress reappearing, now speckled with pink sequins, much to Oberon's annoyance. "You're late," the king grumbled.

"Sorry," Jay rubbed his face cheekily. "There was this gorgeous..." Titania looked interested and began eyeing his single dangling silver earring which was shaped like a squirrel.

Oberon glowered. “No time to listen to your excuses. You know why we’re here. Puck’s evil has been spreading into this special neighbourhood and Merlin wants us to sort it out. Our orders are to infiltrate Oaken Lane, across the water.” He leapt up, unceremoniously tipping Titania off his cloak, and started striding up and down. He liked the word “infiltrate”, it made him feel important. “We need to watch one of the occupants of the houses and try to stop whatever damage he is planning. It is something to do with a lost map, the secret entrances to the Fairy Kingdom and with ruining this countryside, the best in England, and it has repercussions further afield.” “Repercussions,” he thought, was another impressive word. But that thought distracted him from telling them more.

Jay had helped Titania to her feet and she was looking at him admiringly. This did little to improve Oberon’s mood. He seemed to deliberate for a short time and then became decisive.

“I’m going to stay with you all the time, Jay. Just so you can’t go wrong. It will be, err, reassuring for you. As you know we can’t enter the human world unless we shape shift, so I’m going to be your dog.” And, as if to demonstrate he swirled his cloak around his body and the shimmering effect produced a small West Highland terrier in place of the tall, burly king.

The effect on Jay Goodfellow was unfortunate and not what Oberon had expected. Instead of being impressed, Jay burst into sunny peels of school boy, helpless laughter, and was joined by Titania, who clung on to his arm as if to steady herself. “I don’t need a dog,” Jay spluttered, “I can cope perfectly well on my own. I know how to perform operations like this. I’ll get the local women to tell me everything I need to know about all the people living in the place. They always know and always like telling me. It will be easy.”

The terrier chased its tail fast, creating a shimmering blur that returned Oberon to his majestic self. “That’s part of the trouble. Merlin wants you to settle down, produce more Goodfellows, find a human partner, nice, steady, good with animals and nature – the earth mother type, you know the sort of thing.”

“Boring,” muttered Jay quietly. Titania nodded, still holding his arm, noticing the muscles firm under the soft velvet.

“And,” Oberon continued, pretending not to have heard, “Merlin says there is someone possibly suitable in Oaken Lane he wants you to seriously consider.”

“Who?” Jay looked slightly interested. Perhaps it was time... He was getting a little tired of his playboy image and he would appreciate a really good friend, someone who understood him, genuinely cared for him, to have a relationship unlike that of this pair of warring combatants.

Oberon reached into his cloak’s copious pockets and drew out Merlin’s letter. Unfortunately the purple ink had run in the April dampness. Oberon tried to make out the scrawl, never clear at the best of times. “She lives at the end of lane,” he deciphered with difficulty, “but I can’t read her name.”

Jay shrugged. “Only if I’m genuinely interested,” he said. “The last one Merlin wanted me to produce Goodfellows with was impossible, a total nutter.”

“Well, that would seem appropriate,” snarled Oberon, fixing his gaze on Jay’s earring and forcibly removing Titania’s hand from Jay’s bicep.

“If I’m to take a mate, I want the whole romance thing, to fall in love, bring her back to Morchet, give her everything she’s always wanted, get married, and if we produce Goodfellows that’s just up to us not to Merlin. Where is He anyway?”

Titania smoothed her dress and brought out a silvery comb to run through her luxurious hair. She placed it at the top of her head and it lightly moved itself in and out of her tresses, slipping itself back into her pocket when it was finished. “You know Merlin. So much to do. He almost turned up but then had to stay at home.”

“Trying to work out his football pools or get his knitting perfected?” Jay looked cynical. Merlin’s love of human hobbies which fairies would despise was infamous.

“He just wants to find out more about human activities so we can be more... effective.” Titania seductively applied some of the dew from a pear

blossom to her lips, so that they became even more glossy. She did not want Jay to back out of this assignment. She knew Merlin considered this much more important than he had told them. If anything, his nervousness had kept him at home rather than his preoccupation with his hobbies, she thought. Merlin was afraid this time.

She gave Jay a radiant smile, one of her most enchanting. “Look,” she beamed, gazing into his eyes. As he watched she transformed into a brindled tortoiseshell cat, with deep green eyes, half its face ginger and the other black. The expression was entirely Titania’s and the eyes seemed to look right into his soul. He was lost; for a moment he nearly told her he didn’t need a human companion and she would be all he would ever want. Reading his mind, she was thrilled; it was just the reaction she wanted.

“I’ll be with you too,” she purred, rubbing against his legs enjoyably. “I’m going to move into the Oaken Lane and keep an eye on things. I’ll help you and always be around. Cats,” she looked haughtily at Oberon, “can go where dogs can’t. I’ll get that woman to take me in. I’ll even get her to call me by my name, although I can’t speak audibly to her. You’ll see.”

“Huh,” Oberon raised his eyebrows, “that might not be a good idea. Too revealing. Too obvious. I’ll stop that.”

“You can’t.”

“We’ll see.”

“And what does that mean?”

“Oh, Puck,” muttered Jay.

~ ~ ~

LONDON, Linnet decided, was over rated. Her feet hurt in the high heeled city shoes she felt obliged to wear and her stride was confined by the straight skirt. The tube journey had covered her with dirt she was desperate to wash off. As she climbed up the steps of the Clapham Junction station and crossed the busy road and walked the dull pavements with other similar city workers, she wearily wished she was going home for the weekend, back to Devon, instead of attending yet another office party for Damian’s new

associates. Fridays no longer seemed like the end of the working week to her. They marked the beginning of two days with Damian's rather unpleasant colleagues.

Life had seemed to be so perfect when she and Damian had started going out with each other at school. He had been a farmer's son and her visits to the farm were idyllic, walking through the meadows, the small copses, enjoying the seasons, the down to earth warmth of his parents, the animals, the timelessness of the pretty surroundings. Little Silver had seemed just the place to enjoy life, be part of a community while working hard and having some time to do the paintings she loved. As their A Level courses began, however, it had become obvious that his work with the farm as a business, with its profits, yields, subsidies and markets, had been more important to Damian than the countryside and lifestyle of the farm and he had applied to study at the London School of Economics. Hoping it was a temporary phase, Linnet had taken up a place at art school in London so they could be together. When they graduated, she had hoped they would be moving back to Devon.

However, graduations over, it was now six months since, reluctantly, she had moved into the fashionable Battersea studio flat with him. Damian had taken a lucrative post with **XYX Consortium** and Linnet had been working as a temp, while painting in the evenings. Increasingly her work was being pushed aside as Damian wanted her to wine and dine some of his associates or accompany him to events she rarely enjoyed. Her dream of Devon was dispersing by the day, as was her affection for the man who was rapidly changing into something she didn't recognise and who seemed to value her less and less. As she considered this, Linnet was surprised that she used the term "value" rather than "appreciate" or even "notice". "But value is what Damian does with everything these days," she thought, "everything has a price to him."

As usual, the lift at the expensive block of flats had 'temporarily' broken down and Linnet trudged up the many flights of stairs before unlocking the door of 239b. Closing the door, she gave a long sigh, kicked off the offensive shoes and went through to the small sitting room, which

overlooked the Thames. This view was the only good thing about the flat as far as she was concerned. The mood and daily colour changes of the water seemed to sooth her, link her back into nature, her painting, the self she was struggling to retain. The constant flow of the water was reassuring.

“I wish...,” she said aloud to herself. But the sentence wasn’t completed as the sound of a key in the door announced Damian Reddaway’s entrance. He was the conventional tall, dark, handsome person he had always been since she had met him, but, as she watched him take his expensive jacket off and slip it carefully onto the back of a chair, she realised the charm was wearing thin for her. He was looking like so many others she had already seen that day. Clean shaven, with fashionable hair, fast paced walk, thinking business, appearance, how to look the part he wanted to be playing. He looked quickly into a mirror and smoothed his hair before he joined her and greeted her. “He’s more interested in seeing himself than me,” she thought quickly.

“We are travelling in style this evening,” he proclaimed, unnecessarily theatrically.

Linnet sat down and rubbed her feet, reluctant to have to put high heels back on for the evening’s event. “Hmm?”

“I’ve bought Rupert’s car. A real snip.” He twirled the keys in his fingers, the metallic shine flashing in the river’s reflected light.

“You’ve bought what?” Linnet was horrified. She knew the car he meant, his work friend’s symbol of superiority, the car Damian had lusted after since the first time he saw it. The car which he couldn’t afford. Or could he? And if he could, how had he managed it?

“The Daimler, yes. Isn’t it perfect?” Damian flung himself down on the sofa, legs stretched out in front of him, dangling the keys from his forefinger so that he could look at them admiringly.

“How on earth could you afford it? Moving here was as far as our money could stretch.”

“Oh, I’ve agreed to do some deals with him. Not worth discussing now. We have a very important evening ahead. I’ve said you’ll dance with Rupert at this party.”

“What?” The thought was totally repugnant to her. “I’d rather dance with a wart hog.”

Damian threw back his head and laughed. “It’s not much to ask.”

“But you didn’t ask...,” she began, “that’s the point.”

“I shouldn’t need to. I pay the rent here, while you play around with your art work, and it’s a small contribution to your upkeep to be nice to Rupert. He’s a gold mine.”

Linnet felt her eyes start to water and turned away. He wasn’t going to see her cry. She knew that would make him feel even more powerful.

“I wish I was going back to Devon this weekend,” she said, not in the small voice she had expected to produce but loudly. It surprised her.

As if in answer, the telephone rang. Damian picked it up, listened briefly and, rudely, without speaking to the caller, handed her the phone in a slightly exasperated manner. “It’s your brother.”

Rowan Dunn sounded upset but as if he were trying to be calm. “Hi, Lin. I thought I ought to call you because I supposed you ought to know Mum and Dad have disappeared.”

“What do you mean by “disappeared”? Gone on one of their famous trips and forgotten to mention it again?” Linnet tried to sound as if she was not alarmed. It was true that Will and Marnie Dunn had eccentric habits and, in their absent minded enthusiasm – or so it seemed, had sometimes departed to places like the Shetland Islands or Ireland without thinking to tell their children. But Rowan knew their tendencies too and he still sounded worried.

“No, not quite like that. They’ve been gone a week and I didn’t like to worry you. But this time their car keys are still on the mantelpiece, Dad’s wallet is there too, and Mum’s bag is in their room. They don’t seem to have taken anything. The cars are outside. It’s as if they just walked out or went into the garden. The dog is still here. And Astra says that the librarians living next door told her that Mr Sneerdon is going to tell social services that we are here on our own and have us taken into care.”

“What business is it of the neighbours?” snapped Linnet, although she realised such a strange event was bound not to go unnoticed. “What do you think has happened, Ro?”

“I don’t know.” She could imagine his characteristic shrug. “You know what they’re like. I was thinking it was just one of their little expeditions as there haven’t been any reports of accidents or anything odd. Apart from the gale force winds and rain but that’s the same all over the country. Then some men turned up with the boat..”

“What?” Linnet felt suddenly faint.

“They found our boat further down the Shobrooke, where a tree had fallen across the river and blocked it travelling all the way to the River Clay and then the sea. They put it in a pick up and brought it back. It’s got its oars and it’s not damaged. It’s just sitting on the lawn. Nothing seems to be wrong with it, no damage.”

“So you think they might have set out in it? In this awful weather?”

“No, well, I don’t know. I don’t know when the boat left here. I didn’t think of checking the boat house when they left. The rains have been so strong I never thought they might have gone out in it.”

“OK. You look after Rose and the animals and I’ll come down straight away. I think I’ve just got time to get to Paddington and get a train down.” Linnet suddenly felt stronger, almost a sense of relief. She now had a proper role to play and a reason to get to the place she was really needed. Whatever had happened to her parents, she knew she had to get back to her brother and sister.

“You don’t need to rush, Lin. Tomorrow would be fine.” But Rowan sounded deeply relieved at her decision and she could tell he was only saying Saturday would be as good as Friday because he felt he should, for her sake.

“No, I’m on my way. I’ll ring you again on the train. See if you can find out anything else. Search the boat, look in the boat house. But don’t go near the stream in this weather. I’ll see you later.” Linnet put the phone down and turned to face Damian.

“So, you’re running out on me?” he said, as if he too realised she was partly relieved to have received such traumatic news. He always thought the Dunns were a very difficult family to understand.

“Well, you must have picked up what’s happened. I’ve got no choice.” Linnet was already sorting through her handbag to make sure she had all the necessary things in it. Then she walked through to the bedroom and pulled a case out from under the bed.

“But your parents are always doing crazy things. This is just another stunt and they’ve forgotten to tell someone. They’ll turn up tomorrow.”

“Maybe but I can’t risk it. And Social Services are likely to get involved this time as I’m not there and Rowan is only fourteen so won’t be considered old enough to look after a seven year old. I can’t just leave them, and someone’s got to start organising a proper search for Mum and Dad.”

Damian looked petulant. “They are so irresponsible. They don’t even use mobiles so they could be contacted. They live in the past in some kind of dream.”

“In the past?” fumed Linnet as she sharply unzipped the case and started putting clothes and art materials into it. “Dad teaches Quantum Physics, for heaven’s sake. You don’t get more modern than that. Some technology they really love. Mobiles don’t work where we live so why would they bother to have them?”

“You know what I mean. They live in a dream world, refusing to be on mains water, keeping that old well even if it runs low, surrounded by old books and old family bits and pieces – that attic full of old papers for instance. They could sell them. People just don’t live like that nowadays,” Damian seemed totally unsympathetic to the events that so worried Linnet. He was also oblivious to the fact that he was describing his own parents’ home, to a lesser degree, but she couldn’t be bothered to argue with him. It was as if his own family home was not something he considered in his present life.

“I’m sure they realise that but it’s somehow important to them to keep the attic room as it is. You know how Dad uses a lot of the books and

equipment in there. Anyway, that's not the point. This isn't about money. I've got to go. You'll just have to give my apologies to the lovely Rupert."

As she talked, she gave a final look around the room to see if there was anything else she might need. She decided to take her building society pass book and pressed the hidden lever in the black bedside table to reveal a drawer which held private papers. As she looked for the book, she found her passport and made a split second decision to take it – just in case, she thought. In case of what, she wondered later. Under the passport was a padded envelope she hadn't seen before and while she argued with Damian she looked quickly inside it. It held a small black book, the title of which it was hard to make out but possibly began with *Mappa Mundi*. It also held a very large amount of new fifty pound notes. She was going to ask Damian about the envelope but suddenly felt it was inappropriate, that whatever Damian's life was concerned with she was leaving behind. It was a good feeling.

Damian seemed to pull himself together as she walked out of the bedroom. Suddenly she was the old, more natural Linnet again. She had quickly dressed into the type of clothes she preferred, the long flowing brown skirt, tight top, flat heeled boots, and had let her long brown hair down. He had to admit she looked beautiful, with a radiance the city clothes somehow smothered in her.

"Alright," he said begrudgingly. "I'll drive you to Paddington. I've got time before the party."

"You could come too," she said, softening as she saw the look of appreciation in his eyes.

"Got things to do," he said, picking up his jacket carefully and caressing the Daimler keys. "This car won't pay for itself."

She realised, as she was on the train, that he hadn't said he hoped her parents would reappear.

~ ~ ~

JAY GOODFELLOW'S PLAN OF CAMPAIGN had begun early. He had crossed the fallen tree trunk over the Goblin Brook, which now acted

as a bridge between the Fairy Kingdom and the human world, very early in the morning, before most people were awake. He wanted to take a good look at Clayton before the market town started bustling with Saturday morning business, so he walked through the fields lying outside the town, drifting through the damp mist without disturbing any of the farm animals in the fields or the wild animals in burrows, nests or hares' sets. It was as if they were already accustomed to him or beings like him or he was invisible to them. No sleeping sheep or bullock stirred as he walked past, sometimes stretching a hand along their backs to stroke them. Whether or not he was in their dreams was hard to know.

Clayton was beginning to wake. Some night time sounds continued, like the hum of the large milk factory seemingly impossibly placed beside the historic church, or the engine of a car taking either an early commuter or late reveller upon their journey. As if using some internal satellite navigation system he found himself at the beginning of Oaken Lane, which, like many small lanes, led towards the centre of the town but still felt part of the rural landscape. The first house in the lane had evidently been a farmhouse and looked a little older than the rest of the cottages. It was a large, double fronted thatched building, with gardens running into the fields he had come through. Several outbuildings seemed to surround it and the front garden would have looked fairly conventional, with cottage garden plants in borders around a lawn, in front of which was an old stone wall bordering the lane.

The strange thing about the house was the fact that a bright green rowing boat was sitting in the middle of the lawn, with its oars in place, as if someone had just stepped out of the boat, somehow thinking it was moored. As Jay focussed on the boat, he realised he was not alone in being interested in it. Two female figures in dark clothing were bent over it, searching through its interior. Seeing him, one nudged the other, who looked up and seemed to swear under her breath. Before he could approach them, they melted away rapidly, seeming to push through the hedge between the cottage and the next house, although in the semi-darkness he could not be sure where they went. He watched them

disappear into the shadows, wondering what he had interrupted so very early in the morning. Instinctively, he found their wish for concealment sinister. Who were they?

Jay went to look more closely at the small boat. There was something familiar about it but he couldn't place it. Maybe he had seen it before, a long, long time ago. The name didn't help him. "The Owl and the Pussycat" was written on its bow in flowery lettering. Surely the handiwork of someone fanciful? He smiled. How could *he* call anyone else fanciful? Intrigued, he walked up the garden path and in the slowly increasing light could read a new blue plaque on the wall beside the door, which read: "Here lived Samuel Dunn, 1723-1794, Cartographer, Astronomer, Mathematician, Natural Philosopher". Beside it was a rough wooden sign, obviously much older, simply saying in well crafted carved letters "Dunn's Cottage".

Pulling his green trilby hat lower over his eyes and drawing his collar up in protection against the increasing drizzle, he returned down the long garden path and briefly examined the rest of the houses and cottages in the lane. Most of them were terraced and the impression they gave was that they had grown up along the lane linking the old farmhouse, now Dunn's Cottage, to the town. Some were neat, pretty, some had had unfortunate new porches or double glazing installed, which detracted from their charm, some had front hedges, some walls. One had a newly built crisp brick suburban wall, which looked out of place. Jay glanced at the elaborate brass name plate tightly screwed onto the wall by the new iron gate - "Wisteria House". He smiled again. The wall and the name looked a little out of place on a small cottage with hardly a plant in sight in its garden, which seemed mainly paved. There was indeed an apologetic looking wisteria growing up the house wall but so severely pruned it was hardly recognisable. On the front wall, on each side of the gate, was a proud decorative concrete ball.

Various cars stood outside the dwellings; there were no garages, he noticed. Behind the row of houses, beyond their back gardens, were allotments, neatly separating them from the Goblin Brook, or the

Shobrooke as the occupants would know it as. Only Dunn's Cottage bordered the stream and seemed to really relate to the rural landscape of the outskirts of the town.

The last cottage interested him, after Oberon's reading of Merlin's letter. It was fairly small, with a bright purple painted front door. The garden was full of brilliant flowers although it was only April. Huge daffodils, impossibly large anemones, vivid crocuses. Pots of exotic plants covered the path and the windowsills. Wind chimes and shining objects he couldn't identify hung from the small trees. A child's toys were strewn over the garden. Holed stones threaded on a string hung beside the door. The energy of the garden was slightly overwhelming. A heavy smell of incense reached him.

Unsure quite what he felt about the place, Jay continued his exploration, through varied streets, some modern, some demonstrating the age of the town. Gradually the sun rose higher, the streets grew busier, and he turned into a small cobbled street of Dickensian feel and character. Most of the buildings held small businesses, some obviously intended for tourists. A delicatessen and dairy, an antique shop, a book shop, a gift shop. The sign above a small solicitor's office caught his attention, "Milner, Pickering and Dunn, Solicitors", but it was the building opposite which interested him more.

The Ranunculus Gallery was a small, double fronted building, standing out in the rather dark street because it was painted a glowing buttercup yellow. Obviously selling items of higher quality than the nearby gift shop, it had a few excellent paintings in its windows, with a display of silver jewellery lying at the foot of the paintings and some well crafted ceramics behind the rings, necklaces and bracelets. Jay stood looking for a while and then drew out of his jacket pocket a large case which looked far too big to have been held within the coat. He looked up at the lettering above the Victorian shop front, "The Ranunculus Gallery. Proprietor Mr Stephen J. Ranunculus, MA", smiled again and pushed open the door.

He was not the only person in the shop at that early hour. The owner, a small plump man, with twinkling glasses, artistic bold patterned tie and fair

hair swept back over his shoulders, was attending to a young woman who was placing some kind of order. Her appearance was slightly startling, even to one who lived among fairies. His customer had long black hair, decorated with stripes of bright blue, purple and pink, and each finger nail of the hand she had laid on the counter was painted a different vivid colour. Her wrists were laden with colourful bracelets, each finger had several rings, her clothes were bright and her bag sparkled with sequins and pieces of mirror glass. He instinctively stepped back, away from the mirrored glass, knowing his image would not be reflected in it, and then recovered himself as he realised how small the pieces were and that neither of these people was likely to notice.

Stephen Ranunculus had noted his appearance and evidently found him fascinating. He tried to speed up the young woman's decision making. "Why not go for the amethyst pendant? It matches your hair beautifully." She was flattered, and agreed. "Can you ask him to finish it by next weekend?" she was reaching for her purse. He put up his hand to stop her. "No need to pay until it arrives, dear," he said to quicken the proceedings. "If I could just take your name, address and phone number?"

"Astra Henry, 1 Oaken Lane, Clayton. I'm sorry, the phone's not working at the moment and I've lost my mobile. But I'll call in again later in the week."

Intrigued at the knowledge that this was the woman living at the end of Oaken Lane, Jay couldn't help reflecting he wasn't surprised that the telephone wouldn't work at a place giving off all the energies he had detected there. As she turned to leave the gallery, he noticed that she was very pretty in an over made up kind of way. In fact it was hard to imagine what the woman under all the colours and cosmetics would really be like. Her costume was as theatrical as Oberon's and Titania's. She looked at him boldly and then lowered her eyes. The look spoke volumes. She was interested, he thought. It was too easy.

He turned to Stephen Ranunculus, who was looking at him in an admiring and quizzical way. "Don't I know you sir?" the gallery owner was peering at him over his glasses and Jay found the eyes that met his looked

surprisingly knowing, unlike Astra's. "How much should I tell him?" he thought but decided to be on the safe side and tell him very little.

Jay drew his lap top bag off his shoulder and laid it on the counter. He took out a large sheet of photographic paper and laid it on the counter, facing Stephen. "I don't know if you know me, but you might recognise this," he said, watching the other's face carefully.

Stephen held it gingerly by the edges, taking it to the shop doorway to see it in the daylight. "I do indeed. This is a Jay Goodfellow and it looks like an original. And it's... it's of this street," he gasped.

"They are all originals," said Jay, modestly looking at his computer, which seemed to be blushing with pride, so he covered it quickly. "I only produce one of every photograph I take."

"And no one knows how you produce that very special one of each picture," said Stephen, not knowing whether to look at the artist or the photograph he held. Goodfellows were worth a fortune in the art world, photographs that incorporated elements from the past in each scene, combining old and contemporary with accurate detail and a strange beauty no one could understand or copy. Even turning them into prints had been difficult, though many had tried. The historical elements seemed dull, unreal, sometimes even changed, when the photographs were copied. Over the past five years Goodfellows had been found in galleries around the country and were building up an impressive global reputation. Stephen himself had travelled to exhibitions to see them, always hoping to catch a glimpse of the illusive photographic artist himself, as famously secretive as Banksie. And now he seemed to have appeared in his own gallery. Is this how he had appeared to others over the years?

"No, that's right," said Jay, simply smiling, volunteering nothing. Stephen hadn't really expected anything else.

"Would you like some tea or coffee, Mr Goodfellow?" Stephen suddenly realised he should make the most of such a visit.

"No, no thank you, nothing to eat or drink. I'm fine. But I have a proposition for you, Mr Ranunculus."

Stephen had hoped he would. "Call me Stephen, please."

“I’d like to offer you some of these to sell in your gallery. They will all be local scenes of this area. I’ll produce one a week and you can have all I produce while I stay.”

“But how much would you charge? And how wonderful you are going to stay around here.”

“That’s entirely up to you. They go,” he smiled his impish smile again, “well, I’m told. What I am proposing is that I give you one of these a week and in exchange you provide me with some rooms to sleep and work in while I am here. No one else will be given any to sell, you will have the monopoly of the signed Clayton series.”

Stephen sat down abruptly on his fancy basket weave chair. Fortunately it was sturdy.

“That’s wonderful, wonderful,” he said. “You, you really want to stay here with me for a while? I’d be so honoured. How wonderful.” Then he looked a little dubious. “You really are Jay Goodfellow, aren’t you?” He realised his mistake almost immediately as the other looked hurt and started closing his case. Stephen gripped the photo more securely, in case Jay reached out for it.

“Of course you are.” No one else could look quite so eccentrically creative as the photographer standing in front of him. Even his clothes looked a little unreal and the silver squirrel earring looked like nothing Stephen had ever seen from a silversmith’s workshop before. It glowed even in the artificial light of the gallery and it seemed to change its position slightly, as if alive – a trick of the light, no doubt.

“OK, down to business. I’ll need a room with good light, a bed, a table,” Jay paused. He thought about the toys in the front garden of the garish cottage he had passed earlier. “You’d better make that two rooms. I’ll have my niece with me. Oh, and my dog.” He saw Stephen look a little nervous.

“Don’t worry, you’ll like him. He’s only small and a bit fancy – white and fluffy, you know the sort of thing. Gold collar.”

Stephen relaxed. Now that sounded his type of dog.