

Daughter of Tarragon

Chapter One : Rare flowers

The child's eyes widened as she noticed a bouquet of white flowers on the table. They were a shining beacon within the small, darkened house, and she could not help but investigate. Her bare feet slapped across the floor as she broke into a trot in order to reach the place faster, knowing they would not last long. The flowers were fresh and the scent was familiar, but exotic. These were special.

It didn't matter that flowers grew all around them. Even children grew used to their surroundings as the months and years went by. Special things came from far away places, and secret spots that were nearly impossible to get to. Such was the case with Sun and Moon Lilies. Those flowers were only in bloom a few times per year, and could only be found in a place far from the area she lived in.

“Rowena! Don't run in the house!”

The little girl stopped running as her father's commanding voice reached her ears. Instead, she crept soundlessly over to the table, reaching a small hand towards the bouquet.

“Those are for the trade, small lady.” Her father said again, in a softer voice.

She withdrew her hand quickly and turned to face him, unable to keep the guilty look from her face. He smiled, and knelt to her level.

“Your mother works hard to retrieve them. The customers only buy them if they are fresh and clean, do you understand?” He asked, knowing she was still very young, and certain things did not cross her mind in the same way.

Rowena nodded, nonetheless.

His blue eyes shifted to the bouquet on the table, and his lips pursed as he stood. Rowena watched him reach over her head and then bow towards her, offering a single white flower.

She smiled broadly and took it, keeping gentle fingers wrapped around the stem as if it would break at any moment.

“Thank you!” she said, remembering her manners. Her father obviously found that acceptable, and smiled down at her as he stood up.

“She'll be back soon. Best be off before she sees you with that.” he winked, and watched as Rowena trotted towards the front door of the small cabin.

She knew where she was going, of course. Into the thick wooded area that was beyond the crops in the back yard of her house. Along a trail she herself had memorized, and across a small stream that wasn't very hard for her small legs to take her through. The path led over a large rock, and across a root patch that she had learned weeks ago to slow down before climbing over. Rowena came to a stop before an enormous tree, and knelt down on the soft earth.

With hands that seemed too gentle for one of her age, she laid the Moon Lily down and began to dig a tiny hole next to it. Once finished, she lifted the flower gently, placing it into the hole with one hand, and using another to cover it with dirt. Having effectively planted the flower into the earth, she sat back and admired her work. Her childlike features scrunched a bit, and she reached forward to adjust the slightly drooping flower.

Rowena wiped the dirt from her hands and sat back, smiling at the lone Moon Lily. Of course, it would never survive. Having been cut along the stem, and transplanted in an area where it wasn't indigenous, the chances of its survival were very low. The young girl had no idea of these things though, and merely saw that the flower stood tall. She had given it a second chance, and a new home.

Smiling, the girl got to her feet, and looked down again at the flower. Her brown eyes were drawn upward as a flash of white caught her attention. Rowena's mouth dropped open in surprise at what she saw. A large, white horse stood mere feet from her, watching her as she watched it. Beside the horse was a girl of about her height, and presumably the same age, though something about her seemed much older. The girl's hair was long and almost as white as the horse's mane. Like the horse, the girl also stood and watched her with a curious expression.

There was no exchange of words, only the searching gazes of all three parties, standing still in the summer breeze. Rowena was fascinated to note that both the girl and the horse had extremely pretty blue eyes. She had never seen such color in the eyes of either species, and she guessed that these two were not of her land. Like the Moon Lilies, they seemed to shine even brighter than the picturesque landscape around them.

After a few moments, the horse turned and left. The girl nodded toward her once before doing the same. Rowena thought of going after them. In fact, something in her yearned to follow, but she knew where she must go. With a final glance at the Moon Lily, Rowena turned and began her run back towards her home. Her mind was filled with nothing more than telling her story.

“What did I tell you about those woods? The stories we've heard are true, Michael.”

“You're worried over nothing. The girl has a vivid imagination, just like we did when we were her age. Are we to forbid her from going beyond the crop fences?”

Rowena's frown deepened. Her parents rarely fought, and she understood that this fight was about her. They seemed too caught up to even notice that she was peering around the corner.

“She says she's spoken to a girl and a horse!” her mother's voice was getting louder. “Not only are there no other children her age in our area, but no white horses, and certainly not horses that speak!”

“Renee, she's just a girl. She doesn't have any friends, so she's made up friends of her own. Didn't you do the same at her age?”

“I don't remember being her age.”

There was a sighing noise, and a chair scraping. Rowena ducked further behind the wall.

“I’ll speak to her in the morning. I won’t forbid her from going into the woods, but I will tell her that she cannot go as far.” Michael said. “Is that fair to you?”

She must have agreed.

“Alright. Come on. We both need to be up with the sun.”

Rowena trotted back to her room with practiced grace. She was into her bed and covered before her parents made their routine check on her before they retired. It took some time for her to sleep, however. The words her parents had spoken had made enough sense to worry her.

Luckily, her aforementioned imagination took her beyond her worries and into her memories. The child drifted off dreaming of her new friends. As she’d told her father and mother, somehow she knew their names. Spirit was the horse, and the girl was Silna.

She was being lifted and pulled into a tight embrace.

“Get her sweater!” said her father’s voice. He was the one holding her.

“Michael we’re not going to make it! They’re here already!” her mother’s voice called desperately.

She was set down on her feet just as her eyes opened. There were orange lights flashing above her father’s face as he knelt by her. She woke up more as he lifted her arms and pulled on her sweater.

“Rowena. I need you to run from here.”

She did not understand. Her mother was crying, and looking from the window to the two of them. The flowers were still sitting on the table.

“Small lady!”

Rowena met her father’s eyes again at the mention of her nickname. He was scared, and that made her even more frightened. What was going on?

“You go to see the horse again, ok? You go see your new friends!”

“Silna, and Spirit.” she said in a sleep drugged voice.

“Yes, you go to Silna and Spirit as fast as you can!”

“But it’s night-time!” she said, remembering the rules that she must never leave the house after dark. Her mother had always told her that night-time was for sleeping, not running.

“Rowena, it’s ok!” her mother was kneeling by her now. “Just this once, we need you to go to them and wait for them to come!”

Her mother took her by the hand and lead her to the back door. There were shouting noises and hoofbeats behind them, and Rowena felt the floor vibrate beneath her feet.

“Go, small lady!”

She trotted a few steps, feeling the cold dew on her skin, before turning back towards her parents. Both stood watching, still wearing their own sleeping clothes, and watching her with wild looks in their eyes. This wasn't right. She was not allowed out at night. She was not allowed out in bare feet.

“Go Rowena! Find them!” her mother's voice yelled in a way that demanded no contest.

At that order, she turned and ran. Rowena knew the forest well, and though she couldn't see, she made her way back to her normal spot. She heard yelling and voices from far off, but she ran. As her mother and father had told her to, she ran to the spot. She stumbled over the roots, and fell to her knees by the spot she called her own. Her eyes filled with tears as the pain got to her, and she glimpsed the Moon Lily she had planted earlier. It was wilting.

Rowena sobbed softly, sitting with her back to the huge tree, and curling into herself tightly as the cold began to seep through her sweater. Fall's chill was already settling into the summer nights.

“Come now, what hurts?”

She stopped crying at once when she heard the words, but no voice seemed to be speaking them. Rowena looked up to see the same two she had met earlier; the large white horse, Spirit, and the small little girl, Silna.

“Why do you call so loudly?” the words again filled her mind, though neither girl nor horse moved their lips. However strange it was, Rowena was not surprised by this, since it was how she had learned their names.

“I... my Dad and Ma...” she took in a shuddering breath and felt the sting of tears again, letting her mind play over the past few minutes of her life. Though she did not fully understand, Rowena knew deep down that something had gone horribly wrong.

Silna stepped forward and tilted her head. The horse's head bobbed once, sending her white mane floating in different directions.

“They are protecting you from danger.”

Rowena sniffed and looked up at the two again. Silna held out her hand and said something unintelligible.

Rowena's brows lowered in confusion.

“She says she will help you. Your mother and father sent you here, yes? You will be safe with us.” Spirit's words came in a feminine tone.

Gathering herself, Rowena stood and walked toward them. Spirit lowered herself to the ground and Silna gave a little hop to mount the horse. She offered her hand to Rowena, who climbed up in a more careful manner.

Spirit stood and Rowena nearly gasped. She had always been fascinated with horses but her parents would never let her ride one. The horses they owned were not for riding, and she was

too young for lessons of any kind.

She nearly forgot her thoughts as the world passed her by. She sat up more straight, feeling tired as the horses slow gait rocked her, but trying to catch her surroundings at the same time.

“*Sleep if you must,*” Spirit said into her mind.

Rowena let herself droop over Spirit's neck as her mind filled with soft thoughts, and blurred into sleep.

The night sounds of the forest usually calmed him, keeping him from even his most angry moods. Tonight, however, the sounds seemed muted. It was as if the forest worried in the same way he did, though for much different reasons. His deep blue eyes scanned sharply over the trees. The darkness did not stunt his vision, and he seemed to have a grasp on exactly where he needed to look.

“Again?” said a soft voice from behind him.

He nodded, not needing to turn and look. He knew she would be standing behind him, wearing silken resting robes. Her hair would be down, flowing gracefully in the slight breeze, and her ocean blue eyes would be as concerned as his own.

“This is the third night in a row, A'dair. She cannot keep doing this.”

“She will do this, as long as she is Lae'ra's daughter,” he replied, letting his lips turn up a bit as he felt her sardonic look. “I will follow her trail if she is gone for much longer.”

He felt her hand slide across his back, and she stood close to him for a few moments. After a long, yet comfortable silence, Lae'ra left his side, seeming to accept his decision.

A'dair waited exactly a half hour before dropping from the overhang that served at their watching-porch. He touched ground without a sound, and began his smooth trek into the trees that surrounded their home.

He hadn't gone more than a handful of steps before he saw the familiar white form of Spirit stepping into his path.

“How you travel in such darkness without cover is beyond me,” he commented softly, directing his thoughts toward Spirit.

The horse's head lifted, regarding him before she moved a few more steps to the side, showing him her 'cargo'. A'dair smiled at his daughter, but his elven eyes quickly picked up the second form that sat in front of her.

“Silna, what have I told you- ” he whispered, focusing on the sleeping female.

Spirit crouched, and lay down on her belly to allow Silna to slide off, and A'dair kept his eyes on the other small child. It appeared to be female, with dark hair splayed across her face, and from her lack of motion, he could tell that she was asleep.

“This is Rowena, father,” Silna offered cordially.

Spirit moved her head to the side, nosing the girl and no doubt giving her a mental nudge as well. A'dair watched as the girl awoke, and sat up in a defensive motion. She moved her hand up to shift her black hair out of the way, and rub her eyes. Only when she opened them did he take full awareness of her species.

“Silna,” he warned in a soft voice. “Do not tell me you've brought a human child to our home.”

Silna seemed to shift, and a rare guilty look passed over her features.

“Ohhh the fates made you a daring one,” A'dair whispered again, more to himself that time.

The tall elf knelt down to watch the small human slide from Spirit's back. He wasn't able to ask any more questions, for Spirit stood, and filled his mind with her own thoughts.

“She was the one Silna has been watching, and this evening her home and family were destroyed by raiders.”

A'dair stood again as the horse spoke into his mind and tilted his head slightly as he picked up the unmistakable sounds of his life-mate on the overhang above. .

“She's alone father. She has nowhere to go!” Silna protested from his side.

“What's going on?” Lae'ra said from above.

A'dair tried compose his own feelings, remembering that Spirit herself was a wise being. Had it been a mistake, she would have sounded much less confident in her choice. Looking upward, he did his best to explain.

“Silna has brought a human girl to us. Apparently she was orphaned this evening. Her family killed, and-” he stopped for a moment when Lae'ra dropped down soundlessly a few feet from him, her eyes finding the human girl immediately. “Spirit seems to be of a mind to have aided her.”

“Her home was destroyed. I believe her parents were as well.” Spirit said into both of their minds.

Lae'ra seemed speechless, so A'dair took over once again.

“And how to do you suppose the elders will react to a human trespassing this far into the lands, much less being invited by our own kin? Human troubles do not belong here.”

A sniff brought his attention back to Rowena. Tears were welling up into her eyes.

“I can't hear what you are saying!!!” she said in her own language, and A'dair took a step back as he realized that her words were lost in translation in his ears.

It seemed to solidify the fact that they were indeed dealing with a genuine human child. Looking over, he saw a similar expression in Lae'ra's eyes. Two small girls of very opposite kinds looked up at him with pleading eyes. The soft eyes of a certain white horse didn't exactly help either.

Clenching his teeth, A'dair sighed.

“Silna, take her to your room. Do not leave the house for the rest of this night.”

“Do not leave the house until you are told you are able to.” Lae'ra put in after him, and he smirked.

Silna nodded hard, knowing she had just been let off of a decent punishment, and took Rowena by the hand. She led the girl up the steep tree trunk, showing her slowly how to climb without falling.

“Word of this cannot go beyond our vale until I am able to speak with Ta'llevny,” A'dair said absently, turning to watch the girls.

Lae'ra did not respond, which tended to signal her agreement. The two adult elves watched the young ones ascend into their modest home, listening to Spirit's soft hoof-beats recede back into the trees. The horse seemed to walk the forest as an apparition.

“Many things will change if she is to stay here.” Lae'ra said at a length.

A'dair focused on his life-mate, his eyes widening fractionally. As much as they both feared the consequences, they somehow knew that a second daughter had just been adopted.