

Shimmer

a faerie's tragic tale

Claudette Melanson

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Once upon a time, there were two faeries who were very much in love.

The female faerie was a Silver Faerie. Her eyes shone like newly-minted, human coins, her hair was a night ocean, ashimmer in the moonlight. Like the white-hot stars in a winter sky, was the shine of her pale skin. And her name was Ariane.

Ariane loved best a golden elf, whose name was Aureliam. In his eyes she saw the light of a perfect June morning. His hair was a daylight, sunkissed, ocean wave, and his skin was the color of golden wheat swaying against a summer breeze.

They were summer and winter, brightest day and deepest night. Together—a perfect complement.

Or rather, they should have been. Ariane always assumed she would be allowed to live with Aureliam forever. After all, they had played together every day of their shared childhood. She'd given him her first dance, first kiss...but there was one more first she was waiting for. Her heart told her that belonged to Aureliam just as every other part of her, worldly and unworldly, did.

But she had betrayed Aureliam, betrayed both he and herself, without realizing she had done so. For one autumn day, as she had waited for the light of her heart to meet her in the forest, a human boy had appeared. His hair was a dull sort of gold, especially when compared with the dazzle Aureliam's held, his skin a sallow charade of the one she held most dear. Worst of all were his eyes. They were a sort of blue that reminded her of a poisonous lizard she'd almost lost her life to as a toddler.

As repulsive as he was—as nearly all humans were to her and all faerie-kind, Ariane had a kind and soft heart. She felt pity when the boy spoke to her, and allowed him to join them in her afternoon games. Aureliam was gracious enough to accept the human boy, merely because she had.

The human boy loved the faeries' magical games and came to play

nearly every day, after that first afternoon. Ariane showed him how to train the fireflies to shape themselves into words, and the three of them would write their names in the soft glow of the insects' bodies against the twilight skies. The human boy delighted in the way Ariane could make the flowers blossom up from seemingly nothing in the ground, with a wave of her hand.

As they grew, their games changed in a way that became less enjoyable, less free. The human boy grew jealous of Aureliam and manipulated the games in ways he might grow closer to Ariane. During Hide & Seek he would declare Aureliam the seeker, before either of them could utter a word and drag Ariane away, so that they could hide away together.

The day finally came when the boy had gained the courage to put his hand to Ariane's face, to trace his fingers across her full, silvery-pink lips. He gathered his full resolve and leaned in claim her for his own. Ariane's hand had raised to strike his cheek, but in that moment, Aureliam had found them and hauled the boy out—in no gentle fashion—by his shirtcollar. The boy had been forever banished from the faeries' games with Aureliam's unequivocal claim, "You know she belongs at my side!" The boy ran home and did not return. The faerie pair quickly forgot his betrayal, and pushed aside all thought of him, continuing on with their lives as though they had never met the human boy.

Neither could know what horrid catastrophe that first meeting had begun. The human boy had set his eye and his lust for possession upon Ariane, and fate would dictate that his desire would not be easily pushed aside.

For one day, in the heart of an unusually harsh winter, the peaceful happiness of Ariane's world was forever eradicated—like the explosion of a star or the shattering of crystal upon stone.

Humans were ever-encroaching upon the faeries' forest realm. They were murderous toward any who would stand in their way. Ariane's father, who happened to be king, was in constant turmoil, always looking for a way to keep his people safe. Ariane admired him for this, but she would certainly find the price of his resolution far too extreme.

One snowy day, Ariane had come in from ice skating across the frozen pond with Aureliam, still marveling at how warm his hand had been, even through the thick, ice-blue mittens she had knitted for him as a wintertime present. Her heart was warmed too, until her father spoke the words that would forever place an icy layer around it.

He told her that she was to be married, but not to Aureliam. It was to the human boy, who'd kept insisting on coming back to see them over and over again—the dreadful *human*, whom she did not love. She was to be joined to him, only because his father was king of the humans. In exchange for her future, there was a promise in place to leave the faeries' territory intact and unharmed. She backed away, screaming "No!" again and again, until she tripped on the lip of the entranceway, falling heavily upon the stone floor. That pain didn't compare to the one ripping its way through her chest.

Ariane was desperate to change her father's mind. She had to convince him that the only one she wanted was Aureliam. She explained that she didn't even want to get married at all, just to be by Aureliam's side for all of her existence. Ariane was certain that once her father knew what her best friend, her best love, meant to her, there would be no way he could cast her off into a life of utter misery. But his love for the whole of their people was greater than even that he held for his own daughter. She could see her defeat in his eyes—in the determination they held to gloss over the harshness of his decision. Ariane had seen that same look before, when her father had been forced to make other unpleasant decisions for the betterment of his subjects as a whole. For a few moments, so paralyzed by grief was the silver faerie, she could not move.

Her father used this pause against her. Quickly he strode forward, a pendant dangling from his hands. Ariane still had enough sense to see that it was intricately formed in the shape of a glinting—very real looking—snowflake.

The king fastened the clasp, reaching around beneath her hair. "A wedding present," was all he said.

She lifted her chin so that she could protest further. The representation of winter about her neck began to glow...and her throat hurt ached with icy cold, like when she'd taken too large a mouthful of Bumbleberry Ice at the Summer Festival. Her voice glazed over, encased and frozen. The pain died away, but still she was left unable to speak a single syllable.

Her father was so worried about her words ruining his plan, he'd silenced her forever. Even though she knew she'd be unable to remove it, due to its magic, her fingers still clawed at the unyielding clasp. Her mind was working, though, reminding her that she and Aureliam might still run away together. She wanted her people to be safe, but was filled with the fear-filled knowledge that away from Aureliam, her life would end in its own way. There was no existence for her that did not include him.

As if her father could hear the inner workings of her thoughts, he told her that his guards could very easily capture her love. If Ariane did not agree to give herself over to another man, one she held not a single whisper of love for, Aureliam would die before the next moonrise. The king asked for her decision. What could she do? There was no imagination strong enough to call forth a world in which *he* did not exist. Her head felt heavy as marble as she nodded her assent. Darkness closed around her, protecting her from the exploding grief inside her head.

When next she awoke, she was in her bed, but there were faerie maids all about her room, preparing for the unwanted wedding. Ariane, sprang from her bed, dressing quickly in a winter dress of heavy, green velvet. She went to her father and wrote a note begging for the chance to tell Aureliam goodbye. He agreed, guilt tainting his heart for what he must do to his only daughter, but warned her that if she did not return in an hour's time, Aureliam's life would be forfeit.

When Ariane stood before Aureliam, all the things she wanted to say ran through her mind, like the scamper of wild beasts before a storm. And she couldn't say how he'd filled every moment he was with her with joy that occupied her heart like a living thing, couldn't tell him that without him the world was a black, wonderless place, couldn't assure him that no

matter how far she would be from him he would pervade every corner of her thoughts and live always with her inside her heart. Torturous, soundless sobs tore up from her chest, and she would have fallen at his feet, had he not caught her up in his arms.

Aureliam had a very strange expression. He didn't appear to be filled with the utter hopelessness she felt. His golden eyes shone fiercely, as he held her away from his body. One hand slipped into a pocket of his jacket to produce a box, ornately carved by his own hand. Before he handed it to the girl he loved more than his own life, he opened it. A sweet, but sad lullaby issued forth. "I wrote this for you." He whispered, placing it into her hands. Ariane was sure this was her last living moment, her heart broke so...

He then held up a lock of hair he'd convinced the human boy to give to him many years ago. "I have woven a spell into your lullaby. It is a magical song that will put the human prince to sleep, so that he will never touch you. All you need to do is open the lid and let it play." Ariane was finally able to smile up at him, a bit of hope touching the shimmer that was her eyes. "But listen to it carefully yourself." Aureliam said no more about this. He knew there were plenty of ears that could be listening to what he said to his most precious love. Before they parted, he took her into his arms and bestowed a kiss upon Ariane's lips that she could never forget to the end of all her days.

All during the cruel ride to the unfamiliar, dreaded castle, Ariane clutched Aureliam's gift close to her breast. When the prince, who she couldn't help but see as hateful, asked her from whom she'd received it, she was comforted she possessed no words to speak.

The first night after the unwelcome wedding, the magical lullaby kept its promise. The trite human was sleeping seconds after Ariane lifted the lid. As he slept, Aureliam's song planted the suggestion within his dreams that he'd done much more than sleep, further ensuring Ariane's safety. Imagining himself very satisfied, he left to go on a hunting trip, giving his bride a quick kiss on the cheek. Even from this Ariane cringed away, trying her best not to be too obvious about it.

It had been an unfathomable relief to Ariane that the prince could not assault her. She'd spent the night, sitting in the window sill, watching the moon's glowing glide across the sky. She realized the lullaby affected her, as well. But instead of sleep, all of her most beautiful memories of the moments spent with Aureliam were brought easily, without physical recall, to the forefront of her mind. She watched them while the tears, half of bliss and half of sorrows, coursed down her cheeks. Though her very soul ached for his presence, she was thankful to relive these memories, and the night passed quickly away.

As more nights passed, with Ariane remaining awake—she now slept during the day while the prince ran after his insignificant pursuits—she realized that the song Aureliam had given her held more than the constant flow of past happinesses. There was a message there, threaded through the notes, and when she pieced it together, Ariane realized that once his plan was in place, Aureliam was coming to take her away. On this night the tears that covered her cheeks came from the relief her heart felt, knowing the chains of loneliness and melancholy would soon be broken forever.

It took nearly a year for Aureliam to construct a plan to free the two of them from any threat Ariane's father and his royal guard might present. But to the forlorn princess, sitting night after night in her starlit window sill, it was the passage of but a moment...as Aureliam had wiped the misery of her current fate from her future.

At last the lullaby displayed to her mind's eye the image of Aureliam, scaling the castle wall to her bedroom, taking her into his arms, escaping the wretched palace forever. And when he did take her in his arms in the next moments that followed, Ariane was overtaken by a happiness she hadn't known could exist. She touched his face, weeping silently, then kissed his eyes, the tip of his nose, his golden cheeks, and finally his lips...and in her carelessness...the lid of the lullaby-box was bumped. The slam as it closed, coupled with the cessation of its sleeping spell, roused the human prince from his sleep.

When Ariane's inconsequential husband saw Aureliam, who had poisoned him with jealousy for all the years since his childhood, with his bride in his arms, a murderous rage possessed him. The sword he kept in his belt, slung over the bottom bed post was drawn, and he advanced toward Ariane's true love. Aureliam pushed Ariane away from the treacherous blade, but when its tip was thrust, meant to plunge into his heart, Ariane found the strength to draw herself back, so that the blade sliced through her own. She thought it strange how this pain was much more bearable than what she'd felt when she thought she'd lost her golden faerie, love forever.

The human, enraged at losing his prize spat at Aureliam, "You'll never have her now."

With a sharp, earsplitting crack, the snowflake around Ariane's neck shattered. She turned to the despicable human and said softly, "You never had me either." Then she told Aureliam one last time how dearly she loved him, before dying in his arms.

Aureliam, afraid of just such an ending to their plans, took the vial of nightshade from the same pocket he'd once filled with a box that played a magic lullaby. Before the paltry human could blink, he'd downed the poison...

Moments later he was running along the night-colored path laid before him. In the near distance he saw Ariane standing, waiting for him...a smile on her wintry face, her swirling hair dancing in the slight wind like Christmastree tinsel...

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