

The Everlaster

A Novel by Michael Horne

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Chapter 4 **Fallout**

*How the prince in the Emerald Tower
learnt of Fairies. Of what was said
between the Fairy and the adventurers,
including some detail of the Fairy's home
world.*

With Woe gone the whole forest seemed to breathe a sigh of relief.

Percy and Esme's tears had dried up. All four children now turned their gazes to a patch of grass from where there came the Fairy's voice.

"The germ is purged from this body of leaves;
It is safe once again the forest believes.
But for the pale lady we are still prey;
To be safe we must slip quickly away"

"What did she say?" whispered Percy to Merry.

Merry went over and knelt by the Fairy. "Thank you for helping us, and that. But we can't quite tell what yer saying."

"Ahh," said the Fairy in understanding. She seemed to think hard to find the right words. "I'll try to speak crudely, as humans do".

She spoke slowly, as if speaking without rhyme was difficult for her. "That creature may return. We aren't safe here."

"Who were that woman who attacked us?" asked Percy

"She walks the shadows of worlds and of minds, bringing despair to each person she finds... Sorry, this will take some getting used to. I mean, her name is Woe... of the Jae-Mareeda. Amongst her people... A fearsome leader."

Merry frowned. "What is the Jae-Mareeda? I've never heard of it."

"The Jae-Mareeda is the species that Woe is of. From Omaur. You probably know them by another name. In our language Jae-Mareeda means *the light extinguished*."

"Know them by another name?" said Merry. "I don't know who yer talking about. I thought she were human till she vanished through a shadow and came out another. I've never seen owt like that before."

"Then you do not know that creatures from another world walk your planet?"

“Another world?” exclaimed Percy. Percy, Trent and Esme had joined Merry, kneeling down around the Fairy. “What do you mean, another world?”

The Fairy didn’t answer. She thought for a moment then said, “if you are unaware of the Jae-Mareeda there can not be many of them on the planet. Which could mean that they have only just discovered Earth. At least they have not yet attacked your world, which means I still have a chance of getting help.”

The children had a thousand questions to ask, but the Fairy spoke again before they had a chance to voice them.

“Please, we must leave.”

“Okay,” said Merry. She put her hands on the ground and let the Fairy step onto them. As she lifted it up she could see one of its wings was limp with a great tear through it. The wing felt soft and silky against her skin.

“Are you okay?” Merry asked the Fairy.

“Yes, thank you. Do not worry about me. The wing will heal eventually. Now let us go. I can answer your questions when we are in a safe place. And you can answer mine.”

The children hurried quickly through the undergrowth as they took the quickest route out, towards the farmer’s fields and home.

Chandler Dahl sat at his desk reading a report. It told him that the striking employees at several factories across the country had held union meetings last night. They had voted to continue the strike. The union still demanded that the planned job losses be stopped and that the workers should receive a 10% pay rise as a result of their increased productivity.

He snorted contemptuously and threw the report on the desk.

What can they possibly hope to achieve, thought he. Well, let them strike. They’ll come crawling back to work after a couple of days, when their money runs out and they can’t afford to go down to the pub any more. Production’s being delayed but we can hold out.

A light beside his computer began to flash. It meant that Woe had returned to her chamber. He rose from his chair and made his way to the lift.

“What happened to you?” asked Chandler Dahl, when he caught sight of Woe’s face and hand in the weak light of her room.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing? You’ve lost your fingers and you’re all bleeding,” said Chandler Dahl.

A faint laugh came from the captive at the back of the room. Woe span round to face him. “*Do you want to die?*” she snapped.

“Yes,” the man whispered, and then was silent.

Woe turned back to Chandler Dahl. “*These wounds will heal.*”

He frowned, “What? Your fingers?”

“*They will regenerate, but I will have to rest.*”

“But, who did this to you?”

“*I discovered the source of the phenomenon detected by your Seers. A Fairy has travelled from its world to your own. What the Seers must have felt was a distortion of the spacetime continuum, which would have been the Fairy ripping her way into this world.*”

Chandler Dahl looked puzzled. “What do you mean, ‘Fairy?’”

“*The Fairies are a race of tiny winged creatures. They look human except...*”

“I know what a Fairy is,” interrupted Chandler Dahl, “but what are you saying? That they really exist?”

“Yes,” replied Woe. “*But how can you know what one is and yet not know they exist?*”

“We have them in myths and stories, like genies and dragons, but they’re not real.”

“*Hmmm. Well, they do exist, though not in your world. But let me warn you, Chandler, they are evil little creatures. Intelligent, yes, but that makes them dangerous. They are not to be underestimated. As you can see, one of them*

managed to wound me on its own. Can you imagine the destruction a whole swarm of them would make? I only saw one but hordes may follow it."

Chandler Dahl pondered a moment over this information, and then asked, "if these Fairies can travel between worlds I assume their technology is advanced?"

"O, it is. I left the Fairy injured in the forest with some children. If you want, you could find her and ask to play with some of her toys."

"Children? They didn't see you did they?" asked Chandler Dahl anxiously.

"We were having a pleasant chat until the Fairy came and spoiled everything. I had to defend them from the vicious thing."

"Woe! What have I told you about this kind of thing?", shouted Chandler Dahl. "How could you be so foolish. It's bad enough that you kidnap people and keep them in here. How the hell are we meant to keep your existence secret if you're just going to walk up to people in broad daylight and introduce yourself? What did you do to them? Answer me?"

"Easy, Chandler," laughed Woe, and she put her fingers to his face, as a blind person would to explore someone's features. *"You worry far too much. Who is going to believe the fantastic tales of what four children saw in the woods? Now leave me. I feel tired."*

"Very well, if you have no more information. But in future, Woe, you *interact* with people on my authorisation only. Understood?"

"Of course." Woe smiled as she nodded.

"Goodbye Woe," said Chandler Dahl, turning to leave.

"Goodbye Chandler," she replied. *"Turn the light off when you leave."*

The children were sat in a shed in Aunty Rosemary's back garden. It was cosy and quiet, and they felt safe inside with the door closed, comforted by the smell of sawdust and varnish. Their nerves were still shattered by their encounter with Woe.

Merry placed the Fairy on a dusty worktop. It stood about the height of a pencil; one that had been sharpened a few times.

Merry found a cork for the Fairy to use as a stool.

“I was gifted the name of Ayina,” said the Fairy.

“O,” said Merry, reminded that she had not introduced herself properly. “My name’s Merry. Her name’s Esme, he’s Percy and that’s Trent.”

Trent was lying back on a pile of sacks with a hand over his eyes as if he had a headache.

“Is he all right?” asked the Fairy.

Percy looked at him. “You alright, Trent?” he asked.

“Yeah,” said Trent. “I just feel a bit tired.”

“Maybe you should get him some water,” the Fairy suggested to Merry.

“Yeh,” said Merry, jumping up. She left the shed and went into her Auntie’s house.

“What did she do to yer, that woman?” Percy asked Trent.

“I dun’t know,” sighed Trent. It was like trying to remember a dream. He could remember the gist of it but the details evaded him.

“I think maybe she were showing me future or something,” Trent explained. “I think it were a war or somert. A lot of people dying and stuff. Horrible things. Tha dun’t wanner know.” He looked back at Percy. “What did she do to you? Tha started crying.”

“I dun’t know, I can’t remember,” said Percy. He felt embarrassed remembering that he’d cried in front of them. He didn’t want to tell them what Woe had whispered to him; that she had told him his parents secretly hated him and that people only pretended to be his friend because they feared him. She said that he would grow up alone and worthless. The words she spoke had conjured up images in his imagination that seemed real and he’d believed her. Thinking back, he now knew that she’d been lying. But what if it *was* true?

“What about you, Esme?” said Percy. “What did that woman do to thee?”

“Nothing really. She were really frightening. I thought she were gonna kill me.” Esme trembled as she remembered the event.

She looked at the Fairy, who had been listening carefully to them, and told her, "I'm so glad you saved us."

The shed door opened and Merry walked in with a big bottle of water and some beakers. She poured the water into the beakers and handed them round. From out of her pocket she took a thimble, which she carefully filled with water and placed next to the Fairy. "I'm sorry, Ayina, but this was the smallest thing I could find for you to drink from," she told her. The thimble seemed like a bucket to the Fairy.

"I am very grateful for your effort," said Ayina, and she cupped some water in her hands and drank. When they had all quenched their thirsts, Ayina explained things as simply as she could.

"I come from a planet called Aeval. I was sent to Earth, by my people, with a great purpose." The children listened to Ayina, intrigued. "My planet has been invaded by the Jae-Mareeda, a cruel and selfish species from alternative dimensions. They came without warning.

"There had been no wars on Aeval for over four hundred years, so we have had no need of weapons and had forgotten the ways of war. We were unprepared when they came. They captured an entire continent, the continent of the Centaurs, before we built up our armies and began to resist."

"Centaurs live on your planet as well?" interrupted Merry.

"Yes," said Ayina. "On Aeval there are many sentient species. Amongst them are Goblins, Trolls, Merfolk, Dryads and Genies. We have lived in peace amongst each other for generations. A member of a land dwelling species can even live in the underwater cities of the Merfolk if they are willing to undergo several simple operations.

"It is only the Elementals that we are not allied with. They are elusive and chaotic, and we still have a lot to learn about their nature. A few years ago a group of Troll scientists tried to capture a Fire Elemental for study, they all died in the attempt. They have communicated with other species on rare occasions. They have been

known to help people on certain occasions, and on others to kill them. We do not know why.

“Now we have a new species living on Aeval, the Jae-Mareeda, and they have a continent to themselves. The Centaurs do not live in cities but roam nomadically, so the Jae-Mareeda have begun to build their own. The Centaurs could not fight back, as their hunting weapons are useless for warfare. Those not killed or captured into slavery fled to the other continents.

“I was sent to Earth because we knew of Humanity. Some Fairies lived on Earth centuries ago. Some of us believe that your species might have developed to the stage where you could be useful allies. However, if Humans have not matured then it will only be detrimental for us to initiate contact. That is why it is important that you keep your knowledge of me a secret.”

“O, you can trust us,” said Merry. “Can’t she?” she asked the other three. Trent and Esme said yes and Percy nodded.

“I thank you,” said Ayina, smiling. “Before I decide on my actions I must find a man known as the Everlaster. I wonder if you could help me locate him? All I know is that his real name is Utnapishtim and he lives in a place called Poppy Field House, Lopside.”

“I know where Lopside is,” said Esme excitedly. “It’s darn south.”

“Then maybe you could tell me the way or show me on a map,” said Ayina.

“I only know the way by train,” said Esme. “You have to get two trains. I think it takes about an hour n’ half.”

“She can’t take a train,” said Percy, “unless they have a special rate for Fairies.”

“We can take her,” said Merry, “if we hide her in somert.”

“We can’t go, it’s too far,” said Percy. “We’d probably get lost, and we’d get right done if someone fon’ out.”

“What happened to Mr Adventurer?” said Merry.

“He got left behind in ‘woods when that woman attacked us. But I forget, she didn’t do owt to you did she?”

Merry was taken aback. She looked at Trent, who was lying with a hand over his eyes and then at Esme, who looked down when their eyes met.

Merry blushed as guilt crept over her. She’d been so caught up in the excitement of finding a Fairy that she had forgotten about the trauma her friends had experienced. And Percy was right, she had not suffered from Woe the way they had.

But Merry thought about Ayina. A whole world was under threat and Merry wanted to give what help she could.

“Well, that woman’s hardly gonna be on a train or in Lopside, is she?” said Merry finally. “And Esme’s been to Lopside, so we shun’t get lost.”

“I an’t actually been there,” said Esme meekly, not liking to contradict her friend. “There’s just a train I’ve been on a lot that goes through it.”

Ayina interceded. “Percy’s caution is well considered. If Woe does find a way of tracking me down you will be in danger if you are near me. Show me a map and I can make my own way.”

“But your wing’s damaged,” said Merry. “You’d have to walk and it’d take ages and be really dangerous for someone your size, with all the roads and stuff. And you’d probably be seen.”

“If walking is perilous, then I will wait until my wing heals,” said Ayina.

“How long will that be?” asked Merry

“A week perhaps,” said Ayina.

“But if Woe does try and find you, the first place she’ll look is round this area,” argued Merry. “The best thing is to get away as soon as possible and let your wing heal at that man’s house.”

“I am fortunate to have stumbled upon such a wise and compassionate person as yourself,” said Ayina. Merry glowed inside at the complement, but she tried not to let it show. “I will accept your offer of assistance.”

“Brill,” said Merry. She turned to the others. “I’ll take her on my own if none of you want to come.”

“I’ll go with you,” piped up Esme, as she’d go anywhere with Merry.

Trent and Percy said nothing.

“So are you brave boys gonna let two girls go off on their own?” Merry asked, certain that this would work on them.

“Sure,” said Percy, “we’re feminists, aren’t we Trent?”

Trent stirred. “Aye, Femaleists. Whatever.”

Percy looked at Merry. She stood with her stern expression, as if nothing in the world could get to her. But Percy could see vulnerability in her eyes. The same vulnerability he saw when the bullies called her names. A vulnerability which she hid from everyone by pretending nothing bothered her. But Percy always saw through the bravado.

“Of course we’ll go with yer,” he sighed.

“Good,” said Merry, smiling.

“Just one question,” said Trent, who had finally decided to get involved in the conversation.

“What?” said Merry.

“What’s a femaleist?”