

FANNY AND THE KNIGHT: ANOTHER WARPED FAERY--UH--FAIRYTALE

Once upon a time, in a kingdom far, far, amazingly far away, lived a beautiful princess named Fanny. She was hopelessly in love with a knight named Sir Stubby. But King Conceit would not allow such a low class man to marry his beloved daughter. This left Fanny miserable. She wasn't used to her father denying her anything. He always spoiled her so. At least, when her mother, the Queen, wasn't around.

Fanny was determined to have her way again. So, one dark night when there was no moon at all, she sneaked out of the castle, carrying her packed garment bag and favorite lantern, and went into the forest to meet her handsome knight. They met under the tree of knowledge, and there they kissed for one, no two, no three full minutes! WOW!

Even the birds and the forest animals stopped to watch. The last time they saw a kiss like that, it involved some girl named Sleet. Or was it, Rain? They had trouble remembering human names. Anyway, it had something to do with the weather.

Suddenly the sound of horses' hooves echoed throughout the woods. Fanny knew that meant trouble. No, it wasn't the King. Much worse. It was Queen Spitalot, Fanny's mother. She couldn't speak without spitting. The spray was worse when she grew angry. And boy was she miffed! All of the forest animals ran for cover. Thank goodness Fanny had thought to pack her umbrella.

The Queen, followed by three palace guards, dismounted her horse. Spitalot called Fanny to her. The Princess obeyed.

"What are you doing out at this hour?" the Queen demanded, holding a lantern to her daughter's face. "It's a school night." Before Fanny could answer, Spitalot snapped, "Get back to the castle. You are going to be sequestered for this little stunt, young lady!"

Fanny, wiped the saliva from her brow and stomped her foot. "Mother, the least you can do is listen to my side of the story." She pouted.

The Queen studied her daughter then finally said, "All right. But this better be good."

Fanny took a deep breath of courage. "I'm in love with a knight, and Father won't allow us to be married, so we're going to elope." She sucked in a shallow breath and added, "And you can't stop us."

A gasp came from the listening animals. All anxiously awaited the Queen's reply.

"You watch your tone, young lady," spewed Spitalot. Her face relaxed. "So, that's why your father sent me out after you." She glanced around the forest but darkness met her eyes. "Where is this knight?"

"Here, Your Majesty." said Stubby, as he stepped into her view.

"Well," said the Queen. "I might have known it was you, Little Stubbs." She turned to Fanny. "Of course you can marry him. He's heir to the throne anyway."

Stubby and Fanny gazed at each other. Stubby smiled briefly then shrugged.

"Your father and your Uncle Sly had a fight years ago," the Queen continued. "King Conceit was so angry that he sentenced all of Sly's sons to a legacy of knighthood rather than a chance at the crown."

"So," Fanny said in shock. "Stubby is really my *cousin*?"

"Yes, dear," said the Queen. Then she turned to her nephew. "Didn't you tell her, Little Stubbs?"

"No," he replied. "I thought if she knew I was robbed of my chance at the crown, she would start trouble with Uncle Conceit and I would be banished from the kingdom." He turned loving eyes on Fanny. "But now that your mother supports us, we can get married without trouble. Oh, Fanny, I couldn't be happier."

Fanny stepped back into the shadows. "Hold it, Stubby! I'm not marrying my own *cousin*. That's sick! I can't believe that you didn't tell me we were related. I certainly don't want any two-headed children."

"But, Fanny, sweetheart--" Stubby objected.

"Forget it, Stubby. It'll never work." Fanny turned on her heels. "I'm going back to the castle." Then, stopping in mid stride, she called, "Coming, Mother?"

The Queen nodded.

"Sorry, Little Stubbs." Spitalot gave him an apologetic smile. "Better luck next time." She and the guards followed Fanny.

Stubby studied the faces of all the little animals as they peered from under their covers.

"Relatives," he said. He stood there alone. Holding his sword.