

Ethereal Relation

Everything seemed brighter, yet duller, if that made any sense. The buildings towered above me and all around like a field of giants - terrifying. This was my home now. My useless wings twitched behind me, blackened and broken, as I walked along the sidewalk. People bumped against me, but didn't see or hear me. Isolation in a world of humans that seemed overcrowded compared to my realm, with its endless fields of tall grasses and vibrant flowers, with forests to hide in and mountains that touched the clouds; this was my punishment.

I knew very little about human life, so my first few days consisted of stealing from a bakery to feed myself and the birds I'd made friends with in the park. From the moment I sat down in the middle of the green, late summer grass, they came over, as curious about me as I was about them. Their jet black wings were like mine, which is maybe why they felt comfortable with me. It was a good transition from the realm I'd called home for centuries to the human world. I still didn't know how I was going to live my life when no one could see me, especially the one I still wanted most.

The early summer seemed like lifetimes ago, when we would spend endless nights together on the sand, talking, holding hands, kissing. As I told him about my home, the deep blue lakes and bright green fields that were peppered with flowers of every color; he said that sounded like paradise. For me, being with him was beyond any beauty found in the faerie realm. Tatum's blue eyes were clearer than any body of water in my lands, his voice sweeter than the larks that sung in the trees in the early autumn. "Tesla... my Tes." The way he spoke it made my name sound like it belonged to someone else.

I tried to clear my head of those memories that might as well have been a dream. The fae only visited the human world during their transition phase, when they moved from being adolescent to adults, or for rare other circumstances. They were granted access to the gateway that connected the two worlds for an amount of time and then expected to bring back something to improve the lives of their kinsmen.

My mother had told me stories of her visits to the human world; they were my favorite bedtime stories. The land seemed so savage with their wars and plagues, but it was the stories of the castles and men on horses as white as the clouds that always captured my attention.

Of course, the human world had evolved by the time it was my turn to step through. My journey took me from the streets of the city to a boat, across the dark waters to an island where structures were made of brick and wood instead of steel and glass. It wasn't like the stories I'd been told, but it felt like a good place to learn. (There were even horses that walked the streets!)

There were rules about faeries going to the human world, three of which were paramount to keep our realm safe. First, and most important, was complete discretion. No one could know we were fae, which meant that our wings were concealed by our magic at all times. Second, we couldn't form relationships with humans beyond normal interactions to get what we needed. Third, we couldn't take anything from the human world and bring it back, only words. Punishment for a single infraction was harsh, but all three... Well, you end up like me.

I didn't intend to break any rules; I was as curious and hungry for knowledge and wanted to please my parents and the Queen. I spent my first day walking around the island, looking for what I would bring back. I was so enthralled by the people and the land that I forgot to eat.

The sun was setting and a cool breeze brushed my hair from my face when he first spoke to me. "*I recommend the lobster bisque,*" he said as he squatted beside me with a pad of paper and a pen in hand. "*I'm Tatum and will be your server tonight.*" I'm not certain what drew me in first, his eyes or... No, it was definitely his eyes. The way they pierced through me, it was like he could see right through my magic to who I really was.

I blushed and looked away, trying to make sense of the menu. *"I don't know what most of this is."* My eyes continued to look over the words without reading them, afraid that if I looked back at him, my magic would fail and I'd expose myself as a faerie.

"The sandwiches are good, too, but you can get sandwiches anywhere." He gestured around at the street which was lined with delis and quaint shops. His voice was light and friendly, similar to what I heard from servers at other tables.

"Thank you, I'll trust you and have the 'lobster bisque'." I handed him the menu without making eye contact and wrapped my slender fingers around the wet glass of water to hide the tremble in my hand.

It was ridiculous to feel anything for him, but I was there to experience human life and to bring something back. Maybe it was human manipulation that I could teach? I considered this as I watched him through my long lashes and from behind locks of my black hair that I brushed into my face to conceal my gaze. He would've made an excellent fae with how he commanded the attention of all the women, old and young, almost like a magic of his own.

I felt a strange emotion as I watched him touch their arms while they giggled at his jokes and batted their eyelashes. I wanted to unleash the fury that all fae kept bottled inside them and make them all disappear, but I had no claim on him. I couldn't even bear to look directly in his eyes when he came over. I wanted to cringe away from his touch because I didn't want to be like those other women.

As I was finishing the last of the soup (which was as good as any fae meal I'd ever eaten), I heard the chair next to me scrape against the concrete ground. I flicked my eyes up to see Tatum turning the chair around to sit on it backwards. His eyes were fixed on me and I struggled to not be drawn in by them. *"Have I done something to offend you?"* he asked in a tone that was different than he'd used with anyone else all night.

My violet eyes lit up and without meaning to, I caught his gaze. *"No!"* I said too quickly, too loudly. I felt my face heat up, not sure if it was from looking at him or the volume of my protest. *"No,"* I said more quietly, looking away. What was wrong with me? I had known love in my realm. Faeries were passionate creatures who loved hard and often. This was different. He was different. *"I should go,"* I added quickly and threw down a generous amount of human money on the table as I turned and walked away quickly.

I felt my heart racing and I grumbled angrily to myself as I jogged towards the moon that still hung low and large in the sky. I wished to return to my home at that moment and as I was about to open a portal back, I felt a tug on my arm. *"Wait,"* he said. *"Why are you leaving?"*

He was still carrying the pad of paper, which he tucked into the back pocket of his jeans as soon as he realized, looking somewhat embarrassed. *"I just... Did I not leave enough money?"* My eyes slowly moved up his face, studying closely the sharp line of his jaw, the small hairs that were growing back from the morning's shave, moving up to the curve of his slightly parted lips, wondering for a moment what they would feel like against mine, over his strong cheekbones until my eyes met him. I felt my diaphragm jerk inwards suddenly as I inhaled in surprise at how soft his gaze was.

"Money? No, you were more than generous." The waiter's tone was gone and there was something more real behind his words. *"I didn't catch your name,"* he said and took a step towards me.

"Tesla," I admitted as my chin tilted upwards to maintain eye contact. Despite the darkness, the moonlight was enough for me to see his blue orbs. That first night, we walked along the streets as the moon shifted through the sky. I asked him every question I could think of, mostly because I didn't want him to have a chance to say goodbye. When the sun had crested the horizon, we finally departed with a kiss on the cheek and a promise to see each other again.

The night that I had to return home, Tatum walked me to the place where the gateway between the realms would open. He gave me a necklace, a gold chain holding a teardrop shaped stone that was

the same color as his eyes. I heard my mother's voice in my head, begging me not to accept it, but how could I not? I didn't want this time with him to end.

"I'll find a way to return. I promise," I had told him while our lips hovered inches apart. If I could've held my breath forever to keep his essence within me, I would've.

My mother saw it in my eyes before I even said a word. *"What have you done?"* she accused. She told my father immediately, who told the Queen, as was his responsibility. I don't blame him or my mother, but I had hoped that they would understand and protect me. The Queen was harsh in her punishment. It wasn't just me who suffered, it was Tatum, too. Humans couldn't know of our kind, so a royal sage was sent to weave magic on him so he'd forget everything about the time we'd spent together.

But I remembered. That was part of my punishment. I could forever recall with perfect clarity my actions and the consequences. I would live in solitude with only memories and regrets, banished from my realm.

Several weeks passed and I had grown used to my isolation. I sat with the birds every day and slept in random human's homes every night, they being completely unaware that I was there. I learned more about human nature, good and bad, during those weeks than I had in all my schooling over the two centuries of my life. I was finding ways to enjoy my new life and my favorite was going dancing at the clubs in town. The loud music and the energy of the crowds dancing made it almost feel like home.

One evening, I was walking up to my favorite club and I heard a voice that made me freeze. *"Let's go down the street. I saw another club that looked fun."*

Tatum. If others could have heard me, they would've been able to hear my heart beating above the bass from the club. Without thinking about it, I called out to him. *"Tatum!"* I yelled, even though I knew he couldn't hear me.

But he did, or at least I think he did. He stopped and looked around with an almost hopeful expression. How was it possible? He continued looking around until one of his friends pulled him along. My feet carried me towards him without being aware and I bumped into several people along the sidewalk. Even though he looked back a couple more times, I didn't say another word. When he entered the club with a few girls, I stopped following and went to the park for the night. My heart ached and I cried myself to sleep on a bench.

The next morning, I did something I shouldn't have done; I researched where he lived. Boston wasn't far from New York, so despite my mother's voice still warning me in my head, I travelled there.

Days passed before I saw him again, a strange incident on the street involving his work truck. As I neared the scene where a police officer was talking to him while another was trying to calm a screaming lady, I heard him speak. *"I'm really sorry. My thoughts were elsewhere and I didn't see her."*

The smell of the broken beer bottles that had fallen from the back of his delivery truck into the street was thick, but through it, I could smell him. *"I'm glad you're okay,"* I whispered.

His head immediately turned in my direction, eye brows furrowed in confusion. *"Did you hear that?"* he asked while look right at (through) me.

I gasped at the same time the officer started explaining his options. His attention was slowly turned back to the man and I sighed inwardly. The distress on his face was breaking my heart. I wanted to rest my hand on his cheek and get lost in his blue eyes while telling him everything would be fine.

Everything wouldn't be fine. Somehow I'd been lost in my thoughts and memories, so when I looked around again, the police car, the truck, the agitated woman, and Tatum were all gone. My heart sank. I could give up. I should've, but instead, I went to his apartment. How easy it would've been for me to go up there, to enter when the door was open, to look around, but I didn't.

The sun was nearly overhead when I woke, stiff and sore, and thinking I'd missed seeing Tatum. Suddenly, he came jogging down the stairs (almost hitting me) with his phone to his ear, shoelaces untied, and a suit jacket half on. "I'm your best man. Of course I won't be late. I'm almost there," he said while flagging down a cab.

I took steps toward him, looking over his tall frame in the suit he was wearing. I'd never seen him dressed up before; he was stunning. My awed thoughts were abruptly interrupted by the slamming of the cab door. I managed to hear where he told the driver to go and started off there on foot.

I still didn't fully understand human ways and their ceremonies of love. Things in my world were so much simpler; you fell in love, you spent time together and then apart, and then if you were truly meant to be, you asked the Queen for her blessing and you remained together.

The woman wore a beautiful white dress that billowed out around her tiny frame. The other women were wearing lavender dresses that reminded me of the flowers that bloomed in the meadow near my home in late spring, while the men all dressed like Tatum. He stood out from them, of course, and I watched as several of the women in purple looked at him repeatedly as he stood beside the man holding the woman in white's hand. (If this was a faerie celebration, the costumes would have been more fantastic and the colors less boring than black and white.)

After a long time of talking, sitting, standing, kneeling, and singing, the ceremony seemed to be over and everyone moved to a new location. Inside the house-like structure it seemed like a toned down dance club. There was music playing (but not loud enough for my taste), food spread out on tables, and neatly decorated places for people to sit. It reminded me of the parties my sisters, cousins, and I would throw as children to trick the boys into coming over to dance with us (even though they really wanted to, but would never admit it).

Outside was a beautiful garden filled with trees, flowers, and bushes. It felt like home more than anything else I'd found in this world. I climbed up a tree, lamenting the broken wings on my back, and sat on a low branch. After a while, Tatum walked out and my lazy attention to the trees was sharply diverted. His black jacket was removed and he looked more like himself as he slowly made his way through the garden in a white button up shirt with one hand in the pocket of his dark slacks. My heart raced to see him, but as he got closer to where I was perched, I saw the sadness in his face again.

As he stared out at seemingly nothing, I nimbly jumped down and took slow steps toward him. "I wish you weren't sad," I whispered with a hand that almost touched his shoulder extended.

I had to jerk it back quickly when he turned around abruptly. "Who said that? Where are you?"

I bit my lip hard not to reply. I envied him for not remembering because my knowing and standing there invisible to him was worse than any torture I could imagine.

"Please," he whispered as he continued to look around. "I have to know I'm not going crazy."

I debated another minute before I couldn't take it anymore and spoke again. "You're not crazy," I sighed.

"Why can't I see you?" he demanded, showing no signs of recognition.

"No one can," I said softly, sadly. But I could see him. I stared into his deep blue eyes and saw his confusion and pain. "You're not supposed to hear me, either."

"But I can," he declared, his tone defensive. "Your voice, it's familiar. Who are you?" He turned in slow circles, trying to identify where my voice was coming from.

I moved with him, keeping in front of him. "Tesla," I said, paying close attention to his eyes. I saw the corner of his left eye twitch slightly before his brows furrowed.

"I don't know anyone by that name." His posture slumped, like he was looking for an explanation and had hoped knowing who I was would spark a memory.

I knew it wouldn't. The sages were very clever and had very powerful magic. The fact that he could hear me, though, made me question the strength of the spell that was put on him.

"Are you still here?" he asked.

"I am." Without thinking, I reached out and touched his forearm.

Tatum started to pull away, but then stopped and looked at his arm with confusion. "I can hear you and feel you. Why can't I see you? Why are you here?"

The last question stung and I honestly didn't know how to answer it. Why was I there? This was only torturing both of us. "I don't know. I should go. I'm sorry."

As I turned to leave, I felt the heat of his hand grab mine. I think we were both shocked. "Your voice haunts me," he said as his hand moved along mine, exploring the shape and boundaries of it. "Who are you, Tesla? Why can't I remember?"

I wanted to tell him everything. I wanted him to remember our time we shared, but all I could hear was the Queen's voice in my head, repeating my punishment. This wasn't supposed to be his sentence. He did nothing wrong. I opened my mouth to let whatever was going to come out, come out, but a woman in a purple dress called out for him. "Tate? Where'd you go, baby?" Her words were slurred, but startled me enough that I jerked away from him and climbed back up the tree.

He tried to grasp me again, but the woman had grabbed hold of his hand and brought it to her waist. "You promised me a dance," she drawled before pressing her lips against his.

I wanted to rip her arms off (don't doubt the strength of a faerie, even one that's been banished), but who was I to him but a ghost. He deserved a real lover, one he could see and feel and show off to others.

"Sure. Right," he said distractedly. "I'll be inside in a minute."

"Don't keep me waiting too long, handsome," she said and giggled just like the women at the restaurant did that first night I saw him.

He grunted a response to her and waited for the door to close before he started looking and feeling around for me. "Tesla? Tes? Where are you?"

I opened my mouth and closed it again, aware that if anyone could see me, I'd look like a fish, but said nothing. A bird landed beside me and drew his attention upwards.

"Do you know where she is?" he asked up at the raven.

Caw! Caw! I scowled at the bird, but thankfully Tatum didn't understand that the bird was giving away my whereabouts. Within a minute, a guy opened the door and called him back inside, which Tatum did begrudgingly.

"You shouldn't have done that," I scolded the bird who only looked at me like I was being ridiculous. Maybe I was, although I think it was more ridiculous that I came after Tatum at all. He deserved to be happy, and that was never to be with me.

I paced in the garden, wondering if Tatum had received my note. It had been nearly a month since I last saw him in this spot. I had stayed in Boston for a few days and watched over him, but when I saw how unhappy he was, I knew I had to fix the situation. I had taken a huge risk on contacting a sage from my realm and it was under the cover of darkness that we met. I explained to him everything and pleaded with him to give me magic to completely remove my memory from deep within Tatum. Since this was technically in compliance with my punishment, the sage agreed and returned a week later with the elixir and a warning. "*Do not seek him out again after he drinks this or else stronger measures will be taken.*" I nodded rapidly and thanked him, but it took me nearly another week before I'd convinced myself to return to Boston.

I heard his footsteps and watched Tatum approach the center of the garden, clutching the note I'd slipped under his apartment door. "Tes? Are you here?"

I took a deep, cleansing breath and stepped in front of him, speaking softly to not startle him. "I'm here. Thank you for coming."

He began reaching out for me and I was forced to take a step back. "I had a dream about you," he admitted. "The moon was fuller than I'd ever seen it and you were being silhouetted by it so I couldn't see your face. But I knew it was you."

I clutched my chest, the thought of him dreaming of me nearly broke my resolve. Was it a dream or a memory, I wondered. We had spent so much time together at night and it was during the full moon when we fell in love. "No," I whispered, not to his dream, but to my own thoughts of backing out of this.

His head tilted and he took a step closer to where my voice had come from; I didn't move this time. "It was you, Tes. It was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. It couldn't be anyone but you."

"Tatum," I said with all the determination I could find. "I brought you something and I need you to drink it without any questions."

"Drink it? Tesla, what's going on? I feel it in my heart that you are someone important to me. Your voice haunts me." He shook his head and looked displeased. "Not in a bad way. It's like a siren's voice calling out to me."

My breaths were shaky and I finally rested my hand on his forearm so he'd stop taking steps forward. "That's why you have to drink this." I wouldn't be able to contain the emotion much longer. "I'll tell you everything afterwards," I lied. He wouldn't remember I was even there after he drank it. I took his hand and set the vial on it.

He closed his hand around it and gasped when it became visible. "In my dream," he continued while his eyes fell on the light blue pearlescent fluid (it really was beautiful to look at), "I wanted to kiss you, but when I got close, I would wake up." He uncorked the vial and smelled it.

Tears were falling down my face and my insides felt tight; I could barely breathe. "You just have to drink it and then I'll kiss you," I whispered.

I was shaking when he moved his free hand along my fingers, up my arm and neck, until he was cupping my cheek. His thumb traced my jaw and then my lips; I wish I could've died at that moment. I wondered if he felt my tears, if he knew that I was lying about the kiss and telling him everything. He looked where my eyes would be as if he could see me. "What color are your eyes?" he asked as he brought the glass closer to his lips.

"Violet," I replied hoarsely.

He smiled as his lips parted for the drink. "And your hair is black?"

"Yes," I whispered. I stood there like a statue and watched, waiting for the moment to break away. The blue liquid quickly vanished and when I saw his face again, his eyes were closed.

It worked, I thought, and began to move away from his touch only to feel it tighten and his other arm wrap around my waist. Before I could protest (as if my instincts ever wanted me to protest), his lips smashed against mine and I could taste the remnants of the sweet liquid on them as we kissed passionately. I didn't want the moment to end because as soon as it did, I'd lose him forever.

Gradually, our lips separated and his hand fell from my cheek. I watched him, blinking back my tears, as his eyes slowly opened and confusion washed over his face. *Why am I here*, I imagined he was asking himself. I took a step back to give him plenty of room without bumping into me.

His brows furrowed, creating creases across his forehead. *It's for the best*, I told myself, taking another step away.

"You," he said, startling me.

My heart thumped in my chest, but I didn't say a word. Only my twitching wings gave away any sign of me being alive. *There must be someone behind me*. As I turned my head to look, the most wonderful thing I'd ever heard in the world echoed perfectly in my ears. "Tesla, my Tes."