

Advent

Halo



By
Brian D Peckham

Forward

2008 a tough year, yes? But not to worry at the moment, we still have faith and hope. This years story stretches that faith and hope into new realms. The tone is very catered to the young at heart; that little child in all of us that wants to believe all those magical things that where told to us as children; that wonderful realm that grown ups have poo-poo'd as an active imagination, malarkey or just plain silly.

Don't be so sure of yourself. How many works of fiction dedicate to print has not spawned from some child-like fantasy? We can not deny that "things" exist outside out little grasp of under-standing. Just because we grow up into hardened individuals doesn't mean that somewhere deep down inside in the remote recesses of our soul and spirit lies that little thing called hope; hope that inspires; hope that shines; a hope that brings a smile to our lips. It really wants to believe. So, pull out your blanket, sit by a couple of candles and enjoy.

B.D. Peckham

*This story is dedicated to James Kehoe Sr.
A believer, a good husband, a good father;
A good Godfather to my Daughter during the last years of his life.
Date of death reported early 1990's*

Monday, December 1st: Concerning Elementals

Do you know what a fairy is? Or a Sylph? Or know what a Water Sprite looks like dancing on the surface of a lake in a cool morning breeze? Have you ever found a gnome under a toadstool or watch the Devas playing in the flame of a candle?

They are all around us, you know. Whether or not you believe they are there is inconsequential. Elementals are sometimes good. They can lull you to sleep or they can make your cats fur stand on end for no apparent reason whatsoever. Cats can see them, and to some extent so can dogs, but being what they are they respond differently. There are elementals of light, of dark, of earth, water, plants and trees. Most times they are satisfied living without notice, but sometimes if you hang your laundry out to dry over night, or leave a window open, or forget to take the chairs off the table after you have finished mopping the floor underneath, they may take a curious interest in some events.

Do not mistake elementals for ghosts or poltergeists; they are not of human spirit. They don't go around banging on walls or tickling your nose while you are asleep. You may see them in the early mornings just at that moment between dreaming and waking for a brief second. However, if you are lucky enough to be endowed with a house gnome or elf, you may find things missing or moved but I wouldn't hold that against them. Their intentions are rarely detrimental.

Elementals can be choosy about where they live. There is so much of this world out there yet that is not inhabited by man that elementals and humans can very possibly never ever meet or see each other. I also doubt that if a forest fairy did come across a human I don't think she would even take the time to want to know unless that human thoughtlessly picked one of the fruits off her tree. Oh! And if you did take a fruit I would suggest that person take a knife to that fruit and thoroughly cut it apart to make sure she didn't put a couple of worms in it!

You need to accept that there are elementals in our world just as elementals accept that we are in their worlds. If you have ever sat in the park and suddenly felt bumps prickle your neck and you turn around quickly to see what did it, well, there you have it. And as I believe in the elemental world, this story is dedicated to them.



Tuesday, December 2nd: The Rainforest

This story starts in South America in the rain forests of Brazil. The rain forest is a relentless place that is both beautiful and treacherous. It is infested with little midges and mosquitoes that make it impossible for a domesticated person to endure. The days can be muggy; the nights dense and black. Moss clings to the bark of the elder trees like thick green goo foaming over a pot of boiling candy. The weight of the forest could compel a person to surrender to its will and lay listless at its tree roots until the body was reclaimed by earth. Some tree trunks sprouting up from the floor are so thick one could not even hope to surround it with three sets of arms.

You can't be too sure about certain areas of charm. This little corner of the earth was inhabited by Ina. It was a right charming little plot of earth nested in amongst a crown of trees that ranged in height from an 18 story building to ones not much taller than you or me. The grounds were always kept clean, and are always colorful flowers in bloom; some thick and fleshy while others looked like they would fall apart if you breathed upon. Unfortunately, not every little charming clearing you find in the deep forest are maintained by sprites and fairies; the Devil Gardens can be most inviting to the eye but don't be fooled! These little plots of land are overseen by evil forest spirits that looks just like little yellow ants, and I hope you never meet them by accident! All in all, Ina lived in her little paradise home for centuries, and she had rarely ever ventured far from it.



Wednesday, December 3rd: Life With Ina

Ina looked out the vertical gap in the root of a tall moss covered tree called home. It was going to be another humid, bright day. There would be rain that afternoon; there would be sunshine to make it evaporate and plumes of mist that would arise as a result. Ina was a sylph, a slender petite elemental of the air. She had gossamer wings that glimmered like wet mother of pearl in sunlight. If sylphs were scarce, she wouldn't know. She never met one. Sylphs like their privacy. There was a time when a fancy overcame her and she would take day trips into the forest around her, but she never found much. The best way to avoid being found out is to not make your presence known. She was not even aware that there were tribes of Indians in the Amazon forest, but they were leagues away and completely ignorant to her existence as well.

This sylph had her jobs: In the morning she would fly out of the gap and attend to all the growth in her forest. Ina would lift the heavy mists that clung to the morning ground to the upper branches of the tall epiphytes laced trees of the rainforest like angel hair on a Christmas tree. Her favorite moments were spent in the upper canopy of the trees where

the dragonflies and the parrots migrated during the day. The colorful raiment of the birds made the tops of the branches fair and gay, and their tumultuous conversations sometimes was deafening! All the while, fairy like lacewings and dragonflies danced just beneath the canopy or suspended in the bright still sunlight. It was a simple life, with simple rules and expectations.



One morning though, the sun was sallow and there was little activity in the upper branches. So much so that Ina began to get anxious. She winged her way through thicket, branch and bush but everything seemed unusually quiet. Then in an instant there was a glow of yellow in the forest: a being of light in the form of a small child appeared:

“The time has come for you to journey east” the being of light announced openly. “The sun is coming.”

And without a word, the light went out and the ghostly vision disappeared. Ina hovered for a moment then alighted on the closest vine she

could reach, her face screwed up in curiosity and confusion. Even though she didn’t understand the language the apparition spoke, she understood exactly what it was saying and her head began to swim with unanswered questions.



Thursday, December 4th: Unsettling

Ina revisited her experience with the being of light numerous times throughout the next day. The memory gnawed away at her tiny brain. She tried to busy herself with nursing a couple of sick orchid plants. They were attached to a clump of moss and had not bloomed for over a year, but she found herself staring blankly into the beyond. The sounds of the jungle were thick. You could hear drops of moisture falling from the broad leaves of the vines, the far off echo of birds, the sound of a nearby creek winding it’s way to the great Amazon river. She snapped back into focus and pulled at the roots dangling free in the air and tangling them back into the moss. A bee zoomed up and hovered in front of her expectantly but she waved it away as if to tell it to move along.

“The time has come for you to journey east” the apparition had said.

Sylphs aren't wise like elves, dwarves or gnomes. Actually they can appear as a little dense. Most sylphs don't have the ability to hold thoughts for very long so it was little wonder she was easily distracted. They are tiny creatures but beautiful to look at if you perchance have the gift to see them. Light as warm air, easily blown with a puff of breath. She had the ability to glow that could easily be mistaken for a glint of sun shining in a dewdrop. Her fair hair floated like gossamer in the warm updrafts of the jungle. Her face was white and long with round beetle-black eyes and thin lips for a mouth. She wore a dress that contained the colors of new grass and daffodils, but by today's standards would be considered highly unflattering. She didn't mind. I don't believe she cared at all. Are all sylphs like this? I wouldn't know.

Her home in the slit in the tree trunk was Spartan. Sylphs don't need furniture or stoves or ice boxes, they never entertain. The hole provide protection if anything. She didn't spend much time in it but only to avoid being pummeled by the afternoon rains or to catch a quick nap. The interior was always damp and rather drab and the smell of rotting wood was overwhelming. Ina had a big responsibility, she had a forest to look after.

But the forest seemed to be in second place now. There was an anxiousness to her flight, one that had the same feel as a child fidgeting in church, and as she took a final poke at the orchid she knew this was not she was going to be able to ignore. It wasn't just an announcement the Golden Child had spoken, it was a command.



Friday, December 5th: *Mountains and Woods.*

Fall had come to the Adirondacks. The leaves on the maple and sumac were abandoning their tired dull green to dance in the frost-filled morning light, blushing scarlet or glowing in rich yellow-gold. Wind would grab the tops of the taller trees and bend them in persistent gusts. Leaves resisted the pulling of the wind but gave up, lifting playfully into the crisp air only to have them flutter through gaps to the forest floor. Below, leaves damp with melting frost matted the ground preparing for the hard winter ahead. This natural mulch bedded many outcroppings of foliage that even though could persist through a harsh snow, often fell prey to the deer that suffered the long winters fasting. Even though it was late October, everything had been touched by the frost faeries who were responsible for causing harvests and putting nature to bed till spring awakens them the following year.

All throughout the tough stone-littered ground, patches of light fell, emblazing what fallen leaves and heating them until the frost melted. Still, in the frost dominated all. Sharp tiny white saw teeth bit into all it could grasp, eating away at small pools and puddles of water that were remnants of a rainfall the previous morning. It coating the tops of what leaves

still remained on the lower birch tree branches leaving the under-leaf untouched. Frost made everything crunch under hoof and foot.

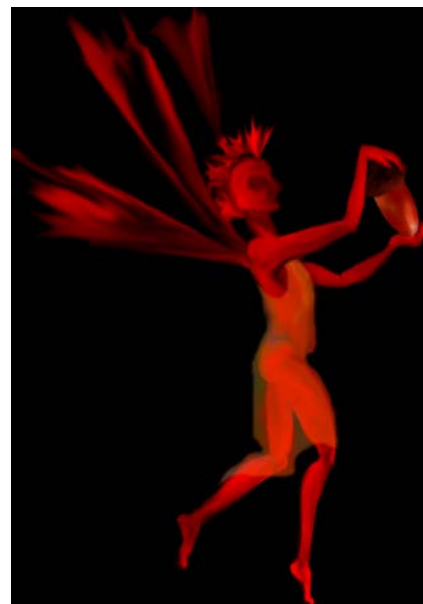
Quiet were the woods too. Most of the local birds had started their migration to warmer climate, leaving mostly the Nuthatches, Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse and the stray hawk or owl to forage what they could. The wind blew in from the trees above, causing brittle branches and the remaining leave to complain and sometimes sending little leaf-devils to whip around the roots of the birches, oaks and maples. It was cold. It was crystal.

However this forest was a home to a sprite as well. If you trudged into the southern end of a small valley that lay between two fairly tall mountains, you will find his mark: A ten foot ring of pure white mushrooms. I would be careful not to break the ring if I were you. I hear you might have some really bad dreams for this is the province of Baum.



Saturday, December 6th: Baum

Baum is a wood sprite. Like Ina, Baum lived in the wild without knowing (or caring for that matter) if anything else existed outside the perimeter of the valley he lived in. That may be a good thing though for I think he could be a mischief if he knew people lived close by. Dressed in dark grey and brown, somewhat like a rustic wood moth, you would have to look very hard to tell him from a piece of bark on a tree. His temperament could be as hard as the granite the surrounding mountains were built on, but he could also be delightfully charming. He protected his plot of forest like a faithful dog to his master. He was friend to the badger; the wolverine; the deer. He spoke the language of the thrush and the red-tailed hawk. He collected water from mist and perspiring rocks. Baum, like many elementals had the ability to generate his own light if he wanted to. He could call the light when needed or if he got extremely excited. Springtime is the best season to see many elementals because they rejoice at the return of the sun's warmth to the earth. He was like a single memory, yet in his own ambitious sort of way, a delight to watch if you had the gift.



Another similarity between Baum and Ina was that they made their homes in trees. However Baum was accustomed to a little more than just a slit in the bark: Baum had a door, even though it was just a piece of bark that folded out from over a hole that was once the nest of a downy woodpecker. He had fashioned it by peeling it off a dying oak, hitting

it numerous times onto a large flat stone until it was of the right size, then rubbing the edges smooth and somewhat pliable on the stones surface. He tacked it over the nest hole with a number of thorns, soaking one thorn in water until he could bend it to stay at a right angle. He then hooked it over the bark flap to keep it tight against the rest of the rough surface of the tree. If you were small enough to fit through the opening you would find that it dropped to a soft bottom lined with mosses, old feathers and reeds. The door really kept out much of the winter element, but it was enough for a sprite that was used to the weather of the harsh northeast. It wasn't much, but it was all he knew since his beginnings, which like you and me, we don't truly remember.

You need to understand one thing about elementals: They don't think like you or me. People can get bored easily, but life doesn't get boring for elementals because boring doesn't exist for them. They do not sit still very well and are always doing something or resting, which isn't the same as sleep as we know it. Imagine a bee that never knew night, that was Baum. Every noise had to be inspected. Every tree accounted for. These were his charge, and he cared for them.



Sunday, December 7th: Light in the forest

Every year at this time Baum was usually very busy preparing all that was around him for the pending winter and the inevitable accumulations of snow. He had a short temper for the arrogance of the fox squirrels. They had no boundaries or manners. They would bicker with him over the rights to wander into his woods and steal anything they. He found them unwilling to listen, and far less willing to obey. Often being the same color of the falling leaves they blended in with the autumnal forest. Recently one squirrel had the cheek to peel back his door and take some of the feathers to line their own nest built high in the trees of twigs and leaves. If angered, Baum had been known to cause little tree fortresses to crack and break away from the tree, sending the nest and its occupants to the ground. For Baum, it was quite gratifying to see a tufted fox squirrel freefalling helplessly through the air.

Other chores that kept him busy were making sure the roots around the trees had plenty of leaf cover to protect them from some of the extreme cold that was to come. Sometimes he would shake a branch so that whatever leaves were still attached would fall. Once on the forest floor he would promptly call up a breeze to push them in place. Trees were his main concern. He would groom the northern facing sides of the great oaks and maples with soft mosses and lichens very much like tucking in a small child at night to keep them warm.

One cold night Baum was already in his hole. The wind had ceased trying to peel the door from its hinges of thorns. Baum was laying on his back staring vacantly into the dark when

a slender thread of silver light found its way past the bark door. He blinked a couple of times in curiosity. This wasn't right. Nothing in the forest had the ability to send light into his home when all was dark! He shook his hands quickly. They began to give off a slight warm glow. He looked back to the door, now convinced it wasn't him that was causing this light. Silly sprite! Well, if it wasn't him, who was it?! His whole body began to glow in irritation. Without any effort he was up and at the hole and unlatched the thorn catch.

There, to his amazement and curiosity was a golden apparition, floating in space just above the circle of his mushrooms. The apparition looked like a slender child, dressed in silken robes encased in a cocoon of golden shining light. Without looking at Baum, the child spoke:

“The time has come for you to journey east” the child of light announced. “The sun is coming.”

The child and the light lingered for a brief moment longer, illuminating the tops of the mushrooms below and casting little round shadows onto the leaf mulch under them, then like a candle being blown out it vanished, leaving only the pale light of an irritable Baum looking out of his hole in the tree.



Monday, December 8th: Beginnings.

It had been three days since the announcement came to Ina and she was still in a fit of distraction. Her jungle home was showing signs of neglect. Moss grew abundantly as it took advantage of the extra moisture it was able to collect seeing that the mist hung low for longer periods of time; vines sent their tendrils out to put a stranglehold on other vegetation seeing they weren't being pruned back daily; some of the more exotic flowers and foliage that were sheltered from direct rain looked sad and wilted because there were no little hands bringing them drops of water. Everywhere you looked this part of the jungle was beginning to look like any other part: Untamed and uncared for.

On the other hand, Ina was doing as best she could under the circumstances. It wasn't every day something would come along and make such an impression that she would actually remember the occurrence for 3 days, or even three hours for that matter. She was a witness when two jaguars wandered into her forest and ended up having one hellacious argument with lots of scratching and snarling. Eventually one chased the other out of her forest and THAT occasion stuck with her for a miraculously 2 hours! The image of the child of golden light was so emblazoned in her mind she could not get rid of it. Go east, it had said. East. Why there? The sun always rose in the east, so why was this announcement so bizarre to her? Something was going to happen. Something that was important. Was she

suppose to be there? To witness this thing? Where was it suppose to happen? Why now? How far away was it? Questions just kept hammering away at her.

“I need some sky.” she thought to herself, and she shot up towards an opening in the trees to the sky above. But as she headed up she became so preoccupied and distracted she almost forgot where she was going and...

BUMP!

She slammed into a tree branch! A big black bird with a long, thick colorful beak that was sitting on the outer branch gave a squawk of protest and flew off to another tree. Ina recovered quickly. She remained in place, swinging lightly from a twig she had grabbed until she had regained the breath that was knocked out of her. Hanging there like an ornament on a Christmas tree, she was for the moment free of all thought. Finally, taking a measured kick with both her feet she swung around and ended up sitting on the branch she had run into.

“I guess I better go East then” she announced, and without even packing flew off in the direction of the rising sun



Tuesday, December 9th: A Stubborn Wind.

Baum dismissed the announcement pretty quickly as a trick from something in the forest. It couldn't be explained. It wasn't necessarily aimed at him. He could have just been there at an opportune time. It was neat that he wasn't the only thing (aside from fireflies) that could give off a light and spoke. Mushrooms. Maybe the Golden Child had a thing for his mushroom ring. He laughed at the thought, thinking it totally absurd. It was all a joke... for who, who cared!

But the experience did leave a mark on the little sprite. Baum slept, but it was not a restful sleep. He couldn't get comfortable, When he did sleep he rolled this way and that at the bottom of the nest, kicking his foot from time to time as if trying to fend off some invisible bug trying to drag him off. He woke frequently, usually alerted to some noise, but quickly talked himself back to an uneasy sleep. Because of this constantly interrupted sleep he failed to wake when an overcast day spread over the forest. Baum stretched and rubbed a sore spot on his back. He wasn't happy. He climbed to the opening in the tree and pushed the bark back.

There had been a dusting of snow that night, enough to be whisked around by the wind which was pushing everything it could towards him. Behind each tree, each bush, each

rocky protuberance, the snow had created a white shadow, cowering to stay out of the winds path. Snow had piled up against the ring of mushroom and trailed lightly away behind the eastern edge.

East. The wind was blowing the snow east. Baum rubbed his eyes and a grimace pursed his lips. Bah! This happened all the time! He pushed his way past the bark door and started out to see how his back yard was. Everywhere he looked, snow was being thrust up into the air, spraying tiny white crystals in front of the grey sky. Occasionally, there would shoot a shaft of piercing sunlight through the upper grey where it would ignite the blowing snow into a rainbow of sparkling crystalline color. Everything seemed to be trying to blow Baum aloft and away. Everything was pushing him EAST.

“I’M NOT GOING!” he yelled into the wind. He had already been pushed 8 trees back since he exited his hole. He had hit one birch and bounced off another in his attempts to compensate for the incredible swift gusts of the wind. Just below the clouds above he saw a hawk suspended in one place neither moving forwards or back, its white-tipped pinions rippling like a flag. Baum felt the wind loosen its assault on him and took full opportunity to fly back to his hole. Today would not be a good day to do any work in the forest.

But neither would be the next day or the day after. Baum was getting increasingly irritable, but began to suspect there was a purpose in this strange magical wind. He began to reconsider his position on this journey east and finally thinking to himself: “Well, maybe I’m silly. Maybe I’m supposed to be there. What harm could it do?” A few moments later he noticed it had all grown quiet around him. The wind subsided.



Wednesday, December 10th: Unexpected Lights.

It was well into the third day since Baum had left his forest home to sojourn east. He had no idea where he was going; he had no map, no compass except the stars and sun, no companions and no where to hide. He had been flying low across a meadow where at the far end in the direction he was taking was a thick wall of tall pine trees. Once green and full summer blossoms, the meadow was now thick with clumps of brown dried grasses rippled like water when stroked by a low lying breeze. It was cold, and not even the stones would retain enough heat to make a snake happy. Most life had gone to sleep by now even though where Baum was at the moment hadn’t seen any snow yet. The deciduous trees, defoliated from their green mantels scratched in futility at a steel blue sky devoid of clouds.

Baum did not like being out in the open, seeing that animals have an easier time seeing elementals than human being are. He flitted between the dried grass clumps until he

reached the safety of the pines, where his ascent landed him near the top of a tall fir. Looking out over the tops he could see that the leading edge of this piney wood stretched beyond both north and southern horizons, and there to the east was something new to him: A vast deep muddy-green body of restless water. Baum had never seen an ocean. As he watched the Atlantic shore being slapped time and time again with small white capped

waves a feeling of great emptiness overcame the little sprite.



It was so big! He looked up and saw the sun was past its zenith and was starting to slide into early afternoon. His gaze returned to the water. He knew he could cross it effortlessly, but still: He really didn't want to. All his thought returned to his forest and how happy he was just making the squirrels miserable. He could go back again. He could do it right now if he wanted to; and want to he did. The notion was so strong he began to glow warmly at the thought. He hopped to the pinnacle of the tree and paused for a moment hanging onto the spiny branches, mentally sandwiched between the promise to go on and the desire to return home when a gust of wind almost toppled him from his perch.

“Guess not” thought Baum longingly. He looked up into the steel blue sky and said: “And quit pushing me!”

He moved out, fluttering his lacy wings as he slalomed between the tops of the trees towards the Atlantic Ocean. The sharp smell of salty mists became more pungent a continued along his winding path when suddenly the tree line ended and a ribbon of grassy turf that graduated into sand. Dropping nearly to the ground, he began to make his way towards the sounds of breaking waves. Crossing over old shells, skeletons of crab long picked over by gulls, oddly deformed pieces of wood sanded smooth by the beach Baum made his way across the grass which ended just as abruptly as the forest did. He peered over the initial sand dune to the water and his mouth opened in astonishment.

There were lights dancing on the waves.



Thursday, December 11th: Ishi.

The Tallulah River runs from north to south in what we know as the US state of Georgia. It is a beautiful river that cuts through the Blue Ridge Mountains, creating deep crevices called gorges, but in the northern beginnings it is lush with deep green forest. With boulder and stone attempting to obstruct its meandering path, it was an active little river, talking merrily to the surrounding woods and singing to its inhabitants. Native Indians lived nearby, as did another elemental: Her name was Ishi. She too had been visited. Ishi was minding her own business when the Golden Child appeared out of nowhere and heralded her with its message. Taking care of her garden along the bank of the Tallulah River was all she was ever interested in. The appearance of the apparition did make her stop for a moment and stare at it in similar way a cow would look at a gobbling turkey at the edge of its field. The Golden Child didn't choose a dramatic time of day, actually it was hard to see the golden light it emitted in the filtered light of the afternoon sun. Ishi seemed unmoved after it faded away. Days later she busied herself with a patch of columbine that she thought was being over-crowded, picking carefully around it to remove accumulated bramble. She was quite preoccupied with this project that she was totally caught off guard when a grim feeling of being watched washed over her. She sat upright, head slightly pitched to one side listening intently to her near proximity then flattened herself to the earth. Unfortunately, being alarmed can give a faerie's location away. Ishi shed off a pale red light that seemed to be reflected by all the objects around her. There was a rustling of leaves close by, it was coming her way, getting closer and closer...

PHOOOOOSHHHHH! Ishi exploded into the air, her faerie light blaring around her and she heard something fall back into the leaf mulched forest floor. Peering down with her beady black eyes, she navigated to the place where she knew the intruder was and noticed as she got closer there was also something glowing beneath the bushes. It was a greenish golden glow. It was, much to her surprise, another faerie. It was Ina.

Their eyes met in total shock and surprise. Neither of them had seen another elemental in all their lives, so little wonder that the two of them were suspended in time, neither moving nor altering their gaze from one another. Ishi, being more voracious than Ina moved first. She fluttered down and rested on an exposed stone, the red ethereal glow still shining strong with curiosity and excitement. Ina was just plain scared. She was too far away from her home having traveled across the great Mexican Gulf to come ashore around what we would call today Alabama; and even though she had seen many things on her trip, not once did she come across another one of her kind. Ishi lowered her head and hummed questioningly at Ina in an unthreatening manner and it wasn't long before the two of them were sitting together in a patch of sunlit woods.



Friday, December 12th: To Stay or Go.

One thing all elementals have is a fundamental common language. Oh, we may not understand what they are saying, but one can guess watching them. They talk like a typical Italian; full of hand gestures and body movements. They are very animated. Depending on the elemental, you could easily mistake their speech for a ringing in your ears.

The forest Ishi lived in had a different feel to it than Ina was used to. Much of the trees in this forest had lost a large portion of its leaves except to the live oaks. That rarely happened where Ina lived. Also, there was this funny hanging stuff called Spanish moss draping over many of the trees. For a late autumnal day it was still pretty warm too, especially when one was sitting on a rock in a perfect spot for the sun to splash a few beams of light on. She was also very curious about Ishi. They were very much alike, but also very different. They both had a visit from a strange boy who glowed. And Ishi was very interested in where Ina. She wanted to know where she came from; what she did; why she was so far from her home and why she was following the suggestions of a “stupid little golden boy”. Ina tried her best to explain things, but it didn’t seem to satisfy Ishi much at all. In fact, the more Ina talked about her trip, the more irritable Ishi became. The lonesome cry of a thrush echoed through the wood and something rustled in a nearby bush. Ishi became alert and hoisted herself off the rock and hovered for a bit to look around. The sound of the river, ever present in the background did not do much to quell the other sounds of her forest home. Ina stood up, brushed off her garments and prepared herself to continue her journey east.

As she flew from the rock and began to ascend to the forest canopy, Ishi in full blaze of light flew in front of her and attempted to block Ina’s path. Taken quite off guard, Ina hovered momentarily and contemplated this distant relative. Ishi was perturbed. She didn’t want Ina to leave just yet. They circled each other as if having an argument when Ina grew impatient and darted past Ishi.

Ishi watched for a moment, her thin lips twisted and face twitched as thoughts blew through her like a screen door. One thing was certain now that she met someone like herself she wasn’t all that sure she liked this feeling of being alone at the moment. Her desire to stay was being compromised, and as the little trail of light from Ina’s exit gnawed at her. She flew hesitantly forward a bit then stopped again. She knew that every second she waited chance to follow would get more and more impossible to accomplish. She took a deep breath and with a squirrel jumping from one tree limb to another sped off into the trees in pursuit of Ina. It wasn’t long before she had caught up. Ina didn’t even slow down when she realized she had company. There seemed to be an understanding between them now, and even though Ishi wasn’t really interested in what the Golden Child had to say, she was very interested in Ina and why she was so intent on going to wherever she was going, forsaking her forest and duties. She felt the drive of her new friend and that was enough for now.



Saturday, December 13th: Sojourning North by Northeast.

The two of them flew on mostly in silence for a good number of leagues. The sun kept pretty much to their right in the morning hours, climbing quickly to noon then down again to their left. The days were remarkably short to Ina. Being near the equator in the tropic of Capricorn, your days and nights were pretty even most of the year around. This suited Ina, for she was very dependent on routines and timing. Her northern cousin though had to deal with the changes in light throughout the year, and even though Ishi had to endure some periods of cold, ice and snow, they were tolerable and sometimes preferred. Ishi liked changes. Her forest went through the seasons, and with it the migration of animals and birds, fruits and roots and flower. With so much change in Ishi's forest, it was little wonder flying so much without stopping and investigating the land they were passing over did not go over very well. She thought after the first 6 hours that flying wasn't all it was cracked up to be and totally boring!

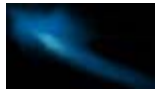
But Ina pushed on. She had made it obvious that Ishi could stay or leave as she liked but nothing was going to deter her for her decision to follow the request of the Golden Child. Once Ishi disappeared for a brief time only to reappear later ahead of Ina. They had been following the path of the Catawba river in North Carolina when she had seen something like a bunch grassy piles in a meadow just to the east of the river. Ishi couldn't help herself. She dived into the sparsely wooded area and saw a sight she had knew was there but had never seen: Indians. Brown and leathery, dressed in crude apparel, they all seemed to be hanging outside; some around fires, others in groups that were busy. She saw them beating weeds with flat rocks to grind them. One indian was at the far end of the village with a large bear-like animal that had been split open. He was being watched by smaller, younger Indians as he was working on removing the outer layer of fur from the haunches, peeling it back using another stone that had been sharpened by chipping it with another stone. Ishi found this fascinating, but she knew she couldn't linger there for any length of time without jeopardizing her trip with Ina. She flit away, looking back with longing then picked up her pace in the direction she knew Ina was flying in.

When the two of them converged again, Ishi was in front. Ina, taken a little by surprise issued an annoyed response and they ended up arguing like two bees over a particular clover blossom. But, then again, being sprites they soon were over it and again heading north by northeast. As they flew on, some miraculous things happened to them. They found more and more that they were not the only ones on this path.



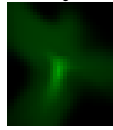
Sunday, December 14th: Meetings.

It was as much of a surprise to Ishi and Ina that by the time they came to that place where the land and sea met their numbers had grown. There were now 6 elementals in all, and similar to a flock of Canadian geese flying south for the winter, Ina seemed to be at the head of the flock with Ishi being her wingman. It was quite miraculous how the numbers increased.

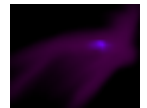


Halien joined them before they changed course and started migrating more on a northeasterly direction. She was sylph like Ina, and she was dressed in a bright cobalt gown.

Cob was already on his journey east when they overtook him resting in an abandoned squirrel nest near present day Greenville, North Carolina.



Mali had also seen the Golden Child. She was just a couple of miles from her home when she spied four elementals glowing like willow-the-wisps in the dark and decided to join them.



Dolin, who lived in the Allegheny mountains of Pennsylvania had already been traveling for days when he met up with the troop just on the other side of the Delaware river and Kiki that had travelled almost Pacific ocean at the upper joined them in Connecticut: He was the one as far as Ina, from the western shores of the end of California.



You must remember, this was a time when this land was not divided up into properties. It was all one big continent. South, Central and North America, as well as Canada were wide open. There were no homes. No electricity. No highways. Not that there weren't humans around. Tribes of Indians occupied areas all over the continent, but even if they knew of Elementals they only referred of them as gods or spirits.

And each sprite, sylph or faerie that had joined this little flock all had their unique color, each as different in its glow from another. Halien was bright cobalt; Cob a deep forest green; Mali was a ground dweller and dressed in a deep mauve; Dolin was lime green and Kiki a pale rose. They neither argued nor strayed far once they had formed their group. First off, most of them had similar shocks that they were not alone as Ishi and Ina had thought when they met, and even though sometimes there was no time to tarry on introductions and formalities, not once was an elemental denied membership of this odd little troop.

They had been heading north up the Atlantic coast. Ina had been becoming more and more lost and confused as they progressed. She knew at some point they would need to turn east again but she did not know where or when. The rest of the elementals delighted in the company and the knowledge they were not alone in the world, their bright little lights

playing in the rolling fog of the cold early morning. The group slowed down and it was Mali that gave a little squeal of surprise: She saw lights in the water!! Without thinking of how foolhardy this action could be fraught with, she flew out over the breaking waves and began to hum in delight.



Monday, December 15th: Unexpected Companions.

These other lights were elementals called known as Undines, but commonly referred to as Mermaids or Naiads. Undines live in the water and are bound to it never to live in the open air. You can see them playing in the waves if you have astute observation skills. They can froth the waves on a windy day, and cause that part just before the curling crest to glow in a ghostly greenish hue. Actually, Undines are like all faeries, sprites and sylphs except they don't breathe above the water. They too take care of gardens and fields of kelp; nurture the living things under the sea from whales to krill. Undines can understand elementals of the world above, though communicating with them through the water can be a chore.



Mali seemed to have met Undines before. She kept beckoning from the breaking tide for the rest of them to venture over the water, but only Cob was bold enough to follow her. The rest hovered on the beach watching wearily as Mali and Cob bobbed in out of sight from sight as the swells in the ocean crested. Ina and Ishi were also trying to contemplate their next move and what might be the best way to travel east seeing they were in their opinion at the end of the world. They would have to cross the water, but none of them had the slightest idea of how long that would take or how much water there was to cross. During this time Dolin became restless and alert. He posed himself in a way similar to that of a rabbit, ears front, and unblinking. He told the others that there was something out there and it was watching them, unknowing if whoever it was meant evil or good. Dolin slowly flew toward a small thicket. As he approached he noticed that there was the appearance of a weak orangeish light being thrown onto the brambles from some unknown source. He dropped low and skirted the bushes to get around behind them he came face to face with another sprit: Baum.

They stared at each other motionless for a quite a spell. The wind blowing in from off the eastern shore was chilly and gloomy, and the day had paled to an emotionless evening. Baum was more prepared than Dolin for the meeting, but it was still an awkward moment until a commotion broke through the sounds of the crashing waves, causing both elementals to turn their heads. Back at the shore, there was a flurry of active lights. Dolin

gave Baum a concentrated look and motioned for him to follow. The pair of them blew past the edge of the grassy thicket and onto the beach where it was obvious Ina and Ishi were having a moment of disagreement.

It seemed that Ishi was convinced that Ina was mental, and was not fit at the moment to lead the small troupe of faeries any further. She didn't like the idea of leaving solid ground. She did not like the idea that there was no guessing how long it would take to cross this body of water and further that they might not find land again. This was where the Earth ended. For she cared, the journey ended here. Mali, also drawn to the commotion listened to the argument, but she wasn't happy with the thought of just staying after she had come so far. She touched Cob on the shoulder and gestured him to follow. They flew back to where the Naiads were waiting in the breaking water and made some inquiries. As their conversations went on, both Cob and Mali became more excited, their ethereal faerie lights growing brighter by the second which was enough to peak the curiosity of Kiki and Halien who flew immediately out to join. A few moments later Mali came back to where Dolin, Baum, Ina and Ishi were still arguing.

The Mermaid had agreed to light their way across the wide Atlantic and guide them to the closest shore!



Tuesday, December 16th: Seven.

The news of the addition spread quickly amongst the elementals and was generally welcomed by all but Ishi. It was becoming more and more obvious that Ishi had not made up her mind or had full commitment to this endeavor. She often sulked to the side, watching the others interact with a kind of enthusiasm that poor Ishi just didn't feel. She was also skeptical that the latecomers were truly excited about the trip either and questioned their commitment to the directions of a silly child of gold that wants them all to go East. Actually, Ina had it in her head that Ishi wasn't in it for the self imposed obligation but rather out of curiosity for the most part. Ishi wanted friends now, but she wanted friends back where she lived and forgo all this rubbish called a journey.

Indeed, Ishi had become more argumentative and sullen the further she went from her beloved forest on the banks of the Tallulah River. The last argument between Ishi and Ina almost approached that of being elevated to fisticuffs. This of course would have been a major setback for Ishi and she would have been evicted from their group and most likely never be visited again. However, at this major turning point of events, the decision to fly over the water or returning home was quickly flip-flopping the favor of going home. After their last row, Ishi was watchful and silent. The light she was capable of producing was

fairly unnoticeable. She was sad and moody and felt no one was going to listen to her no matter what she said now that Halien had struck her deal with the Naiads.

For the rest of the band of faeries though nothing could have delighted them more. Once Baum had been accepted as part of the group, he found the premise of having an escort across the great body of water totally intriguing, even venturing out with Dolin to meet the elusive elementals of water and talk with them. Baum had never seen any such thing in his life. Every faerie had a different color and personality that sometimes made him laugh and shine. They were all quite friendly except for Ishi, which he soon decided to keep his distance from; not that he didn't like her: she just didn't seem to want more friends. She was always staring at Ina, who seemed to be the accepted leader of the group. Dolin seemed to take on the position of mentor to Baum, and the two of them got along famously.

Eventually, Ina began to prepare to cross. She alone went out and talked with one of the mermaids to make final plans on how to follow, possible places where they may need to rest during the long trip, alternative plans if the Naiads sense ill changes in the weather and would need to seek shelter. Shortly Ina returned and like moths to a candle the other all came together in one last moment of appreciating the land they were about to leave and gathering up courage to depart.

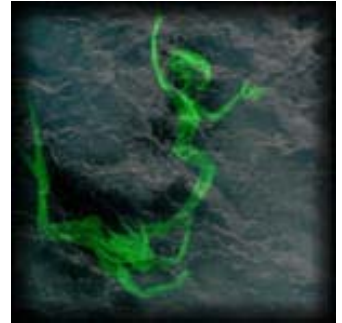
Ishi couldn't hold it in any more. In a burst of furious flaming red light she told them they were all being extremely stupid and that they would get lost and never find their way back. Their forests and gardens would wilt and die, and animals that depended on them would forsake them to go to places more suitable for their needs. She implored them to stay, to come back with her to the river and they could all live together in happiness and share the tending of the forest and river and make it the most beautiful garden in the known world! When she finished, her face was elated and hopeful, excited at the prospect of going home. But this faded quickly when the other faeries responded in silence. Then Ishi knew that she was lost. She was not going. The pain in her tiny black eyes were evident. The light just died out of her. She turned around and slowly flew several yards then halted. Turning around one last time she looked imploringly at the gathering of elementals, but seeing their conviction in their faces she sadly turned south and plotted her way home to the Tallulah River and her garden.



Wednesday, December 17th: Over the Water.

Everyone agreed that setting off at twilight would be the best option for everyone involved. It would allow the elemental companions to get used to following the iridescent glow from the mermaids under the rough surface of the ever moving

water. It would also free them from the anticipation of land which they would not see much of in the near future. A night passage under a December moon would also be exhilarating for faeries, sylphs and sprites all find the moon mysterious. It always changing shape from a tiny sliver to a huge globe; sometimes to glow a cold blue, sometimes a pale orange. It disappeared on cloudy days and never showed up in the same place, or at least it seemed so. A few times Baum had even seen it get covered up by a big black ball to the point where you could only see the edges of the moon beaming out from behind it. The moon was definitely a mystery to them, and they all gave it the due respect of anything that was beyond their comprehension.



When they set off there was a good wind helping them along. Just like most elementals, the occurrence with Ishi was quickly replaced with the current plight of their trip east. Once out over the water, Ina spotted the Naiads moving in and out of the kelp that provided much of their protection during the day. Once they were alerted to Ina and the others, the gracefully joined as a school of fish would and moved out into the deepening water. The faeries kept low to the surf, following the mermaid lead, enjoying the mood and splashing each other off the tops of the little waves as they proceeded forth.

I'm sure you remember going on trips when you were a youngster. Your parents packing bags, grabbing snacking food off the kitchen pantry shelves, filling jugs with juices, milk or water and throwing them into a cooler, shoving toys and coloring books into paper bags and clothes into suit cases. Just this preparation usually drove children into high gear, the excitement getting the better of them. You all pile into the car, wedged between parcels, stuffed animals and pillows. You pull out a bottle of juice and taste it: Yep, it was juice all right, and it was cold still. You fight with some of the pillows, stuffing them down onto the floor of the car so you can sit next to the window. You ask mom for a sandwich which she promptly denies and says you just had breakfast and to wait till later. You pull out a comic book from your personal bag and look at it for a while. The car finally finds the interstate and rolls up the ramp. You stare out the window and see hundreds of cars and it feels like you are a cow going up a cattle chute to join all the other cows. You wave in a friendly way to the cars you pass. You turn around and see if they wave back. You giggle. You nudge your brother or sister so that you both are on your knees on the seat looking the other direction. You make a yanking gesture with your hand as you pass a huge truck pulling what seems like a sea aquarium size trailer behind it and the driver smiles: He reaches up and pulls a chain and a loud honking noise could be heard.

This was similar to the elementals during the first couple of hours of their flight. But eventually the charm starts to wear off, and like all good children who sit for too long, they start to wonder: Are we there yet???



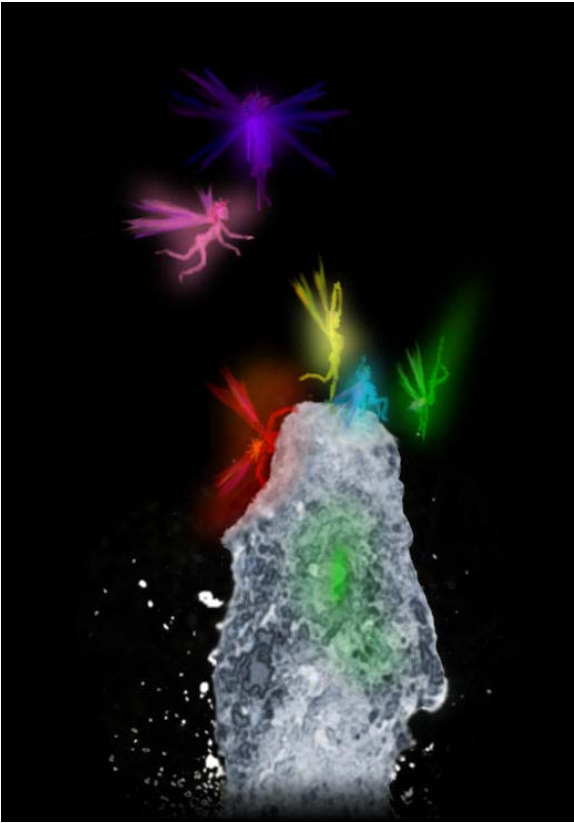
Thursday, December 18th: Troubles with Crossings.

By about mid day three days later, there weren't many elementals that lived above the water with much light to shed. They weren't quite grumpy, but they weren't happy either. This had turned into a task that none of them had expected. Sure, a few of them had flown across lakes, but even then they had a shore on the other side that could be seen to give them hope. This was different. The only thing that broke the monotony of the restless water were a few white caps and clouds. No birds, no animals, no vegetation, nothing.

The Naiads on the other hand were having a fantastic time: They were in new parts of the world that they had never seen before. The ocean was very deep where they were at the moment, and inhabited by some extraordinary life including more mermaids that weren't from the northeast coast. These mermaids were a little more serious, and I believe it was mainly because their domain was much more extensive. Every now and then you would have the stray whale wander into a bay or the likes, but here out in the great wide, deep sea large things lived in plenty.

Naiads of the deep weren't all business though, and when the strangers wandered into their neighborhood there was a greeting that would rival any reunion you have ever been to. There were stories to be swapped and songs to be shared. They would play wave-jumper to see who could breach the surface into the air highest. They would take turns on their journey to visit the deep and meet others from this family, but most importantly, even if it wasn't something specifically for the faeries, sylphs and sprites, it was a break from the boredom they now faced.

On the fourth day, heavy clouds suddenly blew down from the north and the Naiads became concerned for their charges. The wind picked up immensely and it was very very cold. A few of the underwater sprites split off from the main body and disappeared for a while only to return with a half-hearted light. News wasn't good. Evidently to the north and east the storm had intensified and though the water wasn't freezing up on top, snow was blowing so strongly that it would make it impossible for the elementals of air to see. This said, the Naiads began to swim just under the surface in a circular motion. They were discussing their options. They were not able to turn back nor could they go further much longer.



And in this realization, the mermaids did something quite incredible. For a lack of anything to compare it with, they did something with the water that was never seen before: The circle they had formed began to create a small saucer in the surface of the ocean. Faster and faster the Naiads swam and worked their magic. Ina came to a surprised halt just in the center of the dish, and the others joined her and watched as the mermaids performed their spells. The sides of the dish began to rise up then curled in towards the center to create a hollow dish in the water. It did not converge at the top, but the opening was quite small; small enough to let one faerie out if that was its desire. Then from the very center of the bottom dish a pedestal of water rose to create a platform. One mermaid beckoned Halien to come down and sit on it. Halien obeyed and the experience was delightful! The water was being pushed up from underneath like a water fountain and it kept him

a float, bobbing up and down on top without fear of falling in. The water on top was warm and frothy too. Halien looked down and saw hundreds of mermaids circling as far as the eye could see and above the wind and the newly blowing snow was prevented from entering the globe. Within moments, all the faeries were seated on the water fountain, splashing playfully in its glory, forgetting the harsh storm that surrounded them. It was a moment of rest.



Friday, December 18th: The White Shores.

There was no denying it. Crossing the Atlantic was a cold, tedious and perilous flight. Even with the help and reassurances of the Naiads, the endless glistening and turmoil of the ocean scenery was for nothing better than a lack of words: Boring. They did have their moments. The Naiads were quick to point out events as they came along. In a gray morning mist they heard a loud “pwooooooosssshhhhhhhhh” to the north, and eventually overcame a large family of baleen whales. Of course, the pwooooshing sound came when they expelled water from their blow holes. Graceful as angels, trusting as a newborn calf, they glided just under the surface causing the water to break in their wake. A few of the faeries approached them carefully, and Kiki managed to get up close and right over one of the younger whales. It rose to the surface and twisted its long behemoth torso sideways, extending a slender flipper out into the air. Kiki grabbed onto it

with both hands and hoisted himself to the front edge of the flipper, perching himself as if sitting on a fence with the wind blowing straight down on him. Laughing brightly, a shrill little sparkling laugh, he balanced himself until the whale decided he had had enough. Carefully lowering the fin close to the water and suddenly thrusting it forward, Kiki was sent sailing high into the misty air. For a moment, the other elementals stopped, peering into the grayness in some alarmed concern until there was that sparkling laugh behind them where Kiki quietly dropped from the low lying clouds in surprise.

Some of the elementals scoured at him, but others delighted in his adventure and clapped enthusiastically. Fairly soon they were back on their path east again, quickly getting impatient and bored (remember, they don't hold memories very long). At another point they were overtaken by some bottlenose porpoises. According to the mermaids, they had been following them for some time in curiosity and decided to come up and introduce themselves to the travelling band of faeries. There were four of them, all pretty much the same size and probably the same age, and they were swift swimmers, faster than anything any faerie had seen before. Curious and kind, fun-loving and protective, their intelligence beyond any guesses, they flew along with the travelers, jumping in and out of the water and chattering for a good length of time. The porpoises were wonderful companions and led the way till the evening of the forth day into the journey at which time they graciously said good bye and swam into the deep blue of the ocean.



These interruptions were most welcome, but never seemed to happen enough. Ina began to long for land, possible a small pool of rainwater to wash the salty spray from the ocean off her tiny body. She longed for her home and her mind drifted sometimes off to her garden and saw herself mending the vines, pulling back and trimming the brambles and nursing her orchids back to health. Would they still be there when she returned? Would she recognize it? What if some other sprite decided to make it their home? She began to bristle with gold-green light at the thought. Suppose she came back to her little slit in the tree to find a gnome had made it their home! The NERVE!! What would she do? She was much smaller than a gnome; she would never be able to forcefully make it leave. What if the gnome got mad at her and began to kill all the plants!! Damn him!! Damn him to.....

She had been lost in thought so much that she had come to a complete stop, staring angrily into the mist and a brilliant glow of irritation emanating from every inch of her slight little body. She realized with terror that she was alone. She peered into the mist for any signs of color, but all was gray and dreary. She made a little shout, a plea for someone to hear her and come to her rescue. Nothing. The cold grey salty mist closed in around her like a wool blanket, everything muted but then....

There was the undeniable sound of an exclamation. It was to her right. It didn't sound like a search party nor did it sound like someone in trouble. It sounded almost exhilarant. She flew cautiously towards the sound. As she pursued her course, she noticed the waves under her feet were becoming increasingly more white-capped, rolling over and over as if trying to force something out of its path. The mist was getting lighter too. The sound of waves breaking became louder until she suddenly broke out of the mist and into a dazzling daylight.

There before her were white sands and more enthusiastically, land as far as the eyes could see!!



Saturday, December 20th: Elves.

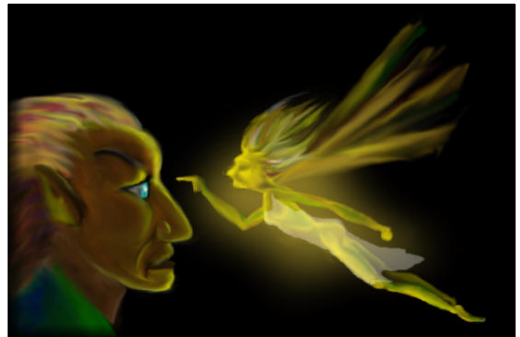
Land. Never before had these elementals retained a memory so long but for that of land. Water was just too foreign for them, and being out over it for what felt like weeks and weeks was something they had no idea what was like, but would not have chosen to ever do so by choice. This order to go east should have never occupied their little minds for more than 30 minutes, but like sticky tar, it seemed the more they tried to clean it off, the more it spread over them. It had to have been magic, there was no other explanation.

They had profusely thanked the Naiads for their constant vigilance and help in the crossing. They would not have been able to do it without their generous offer. Halien, who had evidently known of mermaids long before she came across the north Atlantic family was the last to say her goodbyes and the longest to linger as last minute questions came up about where they would go from here and what they would do when they had accomplished their journey. Halien did not have many answers, but she did promise them if their paths would once again cross in the future, she would do her best to remember all that transpired between that moment when they departed to their next meeting. Ina, Baum, Cob, Mali, Kiki and Dolin had already begun their trip inland but stopped to look back and wait. It took a few moments for Halien to catch up, but there was no discussion on what direction they needed to take. Climbing the gentle slope leading away from the vast body of water, there was no looking back. All the elementals were focused on the path in front of them.

The gentle hills of Spain were dotted with a variety of trees. Unlike the vast forests of the Northeast and the rainforests of South America, this land seemed drier, and the balance between tree and field seemed about even. You had tall statuesque poplars and scrubby looking oaks. There were cork trees and olive trees and ash trees. Most of the faeries knew

only the woods and their local trees, but the variety here was ponderous. Travelling well into the evening and had crossed hundreds of leagues. The land slowly became flatter and veined with smaller rivers that led to the Ebro, a river that flowed quickly and emptied its contents into the Mediterranean Sea. They took a rest at a spot where the smaller tributary of the Gallego River met up with the Ebro. The sun was heavy on the western horizon, and there was a chill in the air; enough to make them all stick pretty close to one another to keep warm.

It was Halien once again became alert. Seems she had the gift of sensitive ears for she was quick to dart into the cover of a nearby bush just as a troupe of oddly clothed men marched into their encampment. They were all dressed in sage and beige, they appeared to have been walking for some time, their garments soiled with dust and dotted with a few thorns. The leader held up his hand to which all the other members of his troupe responded by coming to a quiet halt. Floating in the air before him were ethereal dots of lights, not one color many. He spoke out commandingly, obviously startled by the sight. Ina rushed forth ablaze of bright yellow-green and screamed a loud chirp at the strangers. The other faeries hovered in their huddle but Halien came out from her hiding place, alighting between Ina and the intruders. She gestured for Ina to stay and moved forward to talk to the leader, and shortly was in a conversation that almost bordered on being argumentative. With voices slowly escalating, the leader advanced a few steps, which was a monumental mistake!



Faster than a blinking eye, lights were everywhere! In seconds the strangers were surrounded, and strings of light were being cast through the air binding them all hand and legs and tripping them to the ground. There were yells of protest as the newcomers fell and were herded together, feet facing outwards and hands pulled behind their backs. Halien was helpless to stop it until the rest of the faeries began to feel less threatened. She flew to center and in a loud chirp announced: These are Elves.



Sunday, December 21st: Lost.

There were five of them, these elves. Like most things on this trip, this was also a very new experience. They didn't talk like anything Ina had met so far, didn't look like anything they had met either. But undoubtedly they had been trudging through the eastern part of present day Spain for more than a month and only now were getting irritable because there was no destination in sight. They were lost. And now they by happen chance come around a bend in the river and stumble upon little colorful willow-the-wisps that also had short fuses and couldn't talk like anything they understood and then totally immobilize them. They were not a happy bunch by any stretch of the imagination. The five of them sat with their backs to each other in a five pointed star and glared at the faeries in a smoldering contempt.

In the meantime, the seven faeries were still glowing hotly over the intrusion and the possible threat to one of their own and chattered incessantly amongst each other. Halien was quick to accept that these elves were nothing to be worried about and that they should all be a little bit more hospitable to them where Ina was quick to point out that they didn't seem very friendly at first meeting. It was better to leave them tied up. The others were still talking actively, reliving over and over again the meeting and the story seemed to grow and branch into speculation that did not have anything really to do with their current situation. Ina and Halien became aware of this after a bit, and Ina motioned them to cease and desist. Talking about what happened wasn't nearly as helpful as what they now needed to do. And to admit truthfully, Ina had a secret hunch they were lost as well.

Halien approached what she took for the leader of the elves and attempted to talk to him. She was very good at animated conversations so that even if the head elf didn't talk, it was more obvious than not that he at least had a good guess at what she was saying. It would also be a good guess to make that he had no intentions of responding to Halien as long as he and his mates were uncomfortably bound to each other. After not getting anywhere, she flew back to Ina, who was now talking to the other faeries and trying to assess their situation and decide what to do. Halien relayed that she didn't think the elves where a threat, but they didn't seem very agreeable. Taking a chance, Ina and Halien flew back to the elves, but this time they chirped a couple of words and the bonds of light disappeared around the elves.

Realizing they were free, all five jumped to their feet. Two of the elves made to rush at Ina and Halien but the chief elf turned and issued a command to stay then turned back to the faeries. They studied each other for a moment then eventually the elf reached into his satchel and brought out a small bottle of a thick amber liquid, uncorked it and put it down on the ground. A sweet aroma filled the air and suddenly Baum was at the lip of the bottle dipping his hand into the sticky substance. He licked a finger. His eyes widened in delight.

Honey! Seconds later Kiki, Cob, Mali and Dolin were soon crowded around the open jar and were eating it with enthusiasm and appetite. Ina watched for a second then her gaze drifted back to the elf standing in front of her and smiled at him. The elf bowed and looking at Halien, said as best he could that they didn't mean to startle them and that they were on a pilgrimage east. Once they all understood that they were pretty much wanting the same thing, the rest of the elves sat down and pulled out some bread and they all had a bite to eat together.



Monday, December 22nd: The Golden Child.

The time passed pleasantly enough, but Ina eventually became anxious. What the elves gave them was nothing less than a taste of home, the essence of flowers, the sound of bees, the thickness of a humid day. And though the elves couldn't give off any light, the faeries were quite happy and content, and gave off enough light to make the night less dreary. The elves had taken the opportunity to dip themselves into the Gallogo river to shed off the layers of dust they had collected during their march through the flatlands and were now settled to possibly catch a few moments of sleep. Some had withdrawn long stemmed pipes and had lit the substance in the bowl but soon learned not to do that in the presence of sprites and faeries. You see, beings like Ina, Baum and the rest protect the land as best as possible from fire; so not only the glowing embers in the pipes posed a threat, but the smell of the burning weed was also cause for alarm. Being polite in nature, the two elves unwillingly pocketed their pipes.

It appeared that Ina and Halien had become relatively good friends. Halien had a wealth of knowledge that somewhat made Ina feel childish in many ways... like her response to the elves. She was embarrassed now of the way she charged at them seeing what they are now really like. Halien was cautious, yes, but had an instinct about such matters and was more willing to chance a meeting without any show of defensiveness just to see if the party that was being met was good or bad. She had met Naiads before as did Mali. She had seen and met other sprites. There were actually quite a few that had made their homes in the mountains of what we know as Virginia these days, so when she accepted the invitation to go east she was very excited to come across Ishi and Ina who were also on the same trip. Halien's heart was always strong and it carried the other elementals to an extent and keeps them in good spirits.

Ina had wandered away from the little group, out over the murmurings of the river, a pale yellow-green ghostly image floating in the air. The air around her was thick with mist again. It must be nearing morning but she had no bearing on where the sun would make its daybreak. Noticing Ina was not with the group, Halien went out to search for her and

followed the pale glowing trail to the river. Joining Ina, the two of them floated in silence, understanding completely that they were going to need to take a choice for the better or worse. Halien was for going back in the direction the elves had come from, but Ina wanted to head into where the air seemed to carry a scent of salt with it. She didn't dare take flight above the mist to see where the sun would rise for fear of not finding her way back. However, Halien was willing to follow Ina's intuition and eventually agreed. Into the wind they would go.

They slowly moved back towards where the others were situated and became curious as the mist began to glow faintly of a pale golden light that became more intense as they proceeded. As the light grew more brilliant, the quicker they moved until they stopped, bewildered and amazed at the apparition they were met with.

It was the child of light. He was glowing brighter than ever, and there was a warm smile that pulled at the edges of his lips as he spoke: "You have travelled well. The Son will be with you soon. East you must go, and quickly for the time is at hand."

As he said this, he indicated the direction they should take. He disappeared and his golden glow diminished into the mist and there were no more questions left to answer. They needed to leave. They needed to leave now and follow the golden child.



Tuesday, December 23rd: Many Meetings.

The leader of the elves made ready to leave now that they had a firm direction to go in. The others helped to clean camp and remove all traces of their activities when they began to realize there was something missing: The Faeries.

All seven elementals, not needing to do anything but regroup had already headed into the mist even before the light of the Golden Child had faded. Glowing with excitement and anticipation, they sped off slightly north by northeast. The land sped underneath, soundless and cold, not catching any of the light they emanated due to the heavy mist that now seemed to hug the ground like a thick, plush carpet. The terrain began to rise and fall as flatlands turned to hillsides. Shafts of waning moonlight broke through the mist captured between hills prickling with tree and brush and stars appeared as the travelling band flew now well above ground. The predawn air was oddly charged with anticipation that drove the faeries onward with vigor, their combined light just an imaginary blur to the eye.

Ina was still the leader and at the front of the string of glowing sprites when she came to the top of a hill and stopped. The land seemed to plummet into another flatland. There was an eerie predawn glow in the eastern sky, but her gaze was fixed on the valley below. The

land stretched east, a long wide valley with few hills sparsely populated with a variety of vegetation, and moving through them were trails of ghostly lights. If you have ever watched rain falling on a clean window, it all starts with a drop of water. It comes in contact with the glass and start to trickle down where it may join more droplets and form a larger one. Sometimes the drop would stop momentarily, build up in volume and then slide further down the glass. Smaller droplets doing the same thing may also join the bigger drop until it becomes so bloated it plunges down and leaves a small rivulet trail behind it. Dropping to the bottom of the glass it pools up with the rest of the water to stream over the frame of the window. The effect of watching all these lights was exactly like this. Strand after strand of glowing thread joined together to form larger strands, their colors becoming consumed to become a light similar to that of mouton gold.

From afar, the seven companions watched in amazement but all arrived at the same thought: They were all faeries. And just at that moment they heard a wonderful sparkling laughter like tiny bells behind them. Turning in alarmed surprise, they found that they too had been overtaken by a small ragtag group but at the front in the lead was...

ISHI!!!

Ina shouted with a delight and a joy no one could describe. The two shot through the quickening dark and joined together to shine in one blazing golden red light, like that of a match just newly struck. They circled and danced around each other in pure delight as they quickly caught up on how they both came to arrive at the same place at almost the same time. What were the chances!!! From all accounts, Ishi had only travelled a couple of leagues south when she too was overtaken by a rouge band of faeries that needed to cross the ocean. This was just too much for Ishi to ignore, so she offered to lead them to a place she knew they could get direction and help. From there, the journey to their current location was fairly uneventful. Soon, Ishi and Ina were introducing everyone to each other, and in a brightened state a new group formed with Ina and Ishi in the lead heading merrily down into the valley below.



Wednesday, December 24th: Bethlehem.

Dawn was breaking fast. As the light of day brightened it brought all kinds of new things to light. First off, the elementals began to see increasing amounts of earthly beings, many of them they had not seen before. Ishi tried to describe to the other faeries that these must be Indians, similar to those that lived around her forest. But these people seemed to be cleverer with creating things to wear and places to live. Like the Indians, they made use of large animals sometimes to carry either heavy or quantities of objects; some even had fashioned sledges made of wood and bramble to be pulled, which

allowed the Indians the opportunity to ride in groups instead of walking. These people were colorfully dressed, which seemed odd seeing that the Indians over the seas only wore animal skins when the weather got really cold. Also it was confusing to the faeries why they would wear something so conspicuous; weren't they afraid of being spotted by a lion or a wolf? It amazed them to come across Indians that herded large quantities of sheep and goats too. Surly, the animals could take care of themselves.

Another thing they noticed was that these Indians were all heading in a similar direction as they were. Did they get visited by the golden child too? Were they all coming to see the Sun as well? Maybe they could follow them for certainly they must know where the Sun is! This thought was quickly replaced by more amazing sights. The travelling faeries came to what appeared to be the rim of a wide valley; and on the furthest side, climbing up into that hill were odd shaped things that were too big to be made by nature. Again, Ishi chimed in and said that Indians lived in similar things, and even though she did not quite understand Indian talk, they provided the same accommodations that a hole in a tree did to many elementals: Shelter, or more commonly, home. These were crafted of mud and had wooden lintels and doors and windows in them to allow light into the home.

The day was full and bright and cold. The Indians were dressed in a heavy woven fabric and didn't seem to notice the movement of the elementals moving in and out of the crowd. Could they see them? Ina, Ishi, Baum and Halien flew out ahead of their ever growing numbers to find a safe passage through this group of homes and people. They felt small and insignificant next to these huge beings. They came around a corner of a shelter and were a little surprised to see that very young Indians had the ability to see some of the elementals that had now flocked into the village and were chasing them gleefully around the paths and gardens of the homes. More oddly, the faeries didn't seem to mind. They were laughing, their tiny bell like voices rippled with delight down the paths, teasing the young Indians by staying just out of reach. Baum looked like he wanted to join in, but for some reason Ina didn't quite think his intentions with the children would have been all that fun or honorable.

The faerie companions wandered through the village, looking at everything and anything they came across, wondering what they were suppose to do now. A gathering of elementals could be seen fluttering buoyantly outside what looked to be a shed with a haphazardly built fence around it. The building had a odd shaped room made of rough hewn beams that came to a point at the very top. Inside the shed they found it comfortable and warm, and there were a few animals there taking advantage of some straw that had been pitched onto the floor. The other faeries did not talk much and appeared to be waiting for something as well. Ina talked this over with Halien and Ishi and finally turned to the rest: They would wait out the day in the shelter of this little home and then continue looking for the golden child later.

Their group had grown to 12 by now, but still a small enough entourage to conceal themselves in a shallow corner up near the rafters while they waited for night and whatever would come next.



Thursday, December 25th: *The Miracle.*

For all the miracles that happened in this world, one would think it would have been heralded or announced that it was coming to everyone. Well, we didn't get that memo, but the sprites and faeries that had taken refuge in that shed that night did even though none of them were prepared for what was about to take place:

Ina was stirred into a wakeful state in the darkness of their little corner and realized that Halien was already staring curiously down to the floor below. It would appear that some of those Indians had found their way into the stable too, and Ina was present enough to watch as one of them grabbed his heavy staff from the fence and walked resolutely out of the shed. The other one was seated on a small stack of hay that must have been made into a seat by the Indian that just left. She was pale and fat and wore a deep blue mantel over blood red tunic. She seemed uncomfortable and a little on the cranky side. However, her face gleamed with hope as the other Indian entered the stable for a second time but quickly changed to sadness after he had a small talk with her.

Halien told Ina that the pair had entered not more than an hour ago led by a third Indian and followed by a small gray donkey. The donkey was laying pleasantly at the back of the shed with a fellow cow, every now and then muzzling the hay that was spread out in front of him. Ina told Halien that she didn't think this was a very happy time for the pair, and as she looked back realized that all in the little stable were now awake and watching the oncoming events with renewed interest. High above the stable, perched directly above it, a star shone, splintering multicolored rays of light into the darkness around it. Cold was the land; cold was the shed.

Then something happened that was not expected: The Indian in the blue and red grasped at her middle and groaned. She leaned back and in that moment the Child of Gold appeared and was carrying something cradled in his small arms. He stood before the Indian on the ground and proclaimed: "Blessed are you amongst women" and laid the parcel into the outstretched arms of the Indian.

Suddenly every faerie was airborne, a pulse of energy so pronounced and full of ecstasy that each tiny being turned into a beacon of brilliant color. Outside, one would think a thousand "somethings" had exploded from within. It sent shadows flying out and away, fleeing from the glorious luminosity of these combined light. Elementals outside became

so excited that they gathered together to form a pillar of light that seemed to stretch to the sky joining with that of the light of the brilliant star.

Something very important just happened; something historical; something that would forever be carved into the memory of every living elemental there:

A Child Was Born.

Ina, glowing in her brightest gold and green timidly flew down to the Indians. They had now taken some of the straw that lay on the ground and put it in a strange looking hand-crafted box made of thick brambles and laid the child on top wrapped in a dirty but dry cloth. The others joined Ina just above the manger and started humming happily. Mali circled the head of the child, cooing softly to it in her tinsel bell voice. She was joined by Kiki, Baum and Ishi. Eventually each elemental in the shed had taken a position around the face of one of the Indians and circled it in a similar manner, and as they circled their light joined together to create a ring around each head, blessing the halo with gold, warmth and good will.

Out in the fields, shepherds that were guarding their sheep during the night were visited by the golden child and all they needed to do was look into the village and at once understood that something amazing had occurred. Grabbing anything they could find that might help the new family they started walking towards the stable with the soft beam of gold light that too their eyes was coming from the star above.

How little they knew. As I said: Not everyone can see elementals.

The End.