

BRANDER
The Faerie Realm Chronicles: Volume 1

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He, who would enter into the kingdom of Faerie, should have the heart of a child. Andrew Lang

Prologue

The canoe glided smoothly through waters of the River Avon, as the Prescott family enjoyed their Sunday trip into Salisbury for a quiet picnic along the river. “How’re you doing, Ian?” Jonathan asked, turning around slightly as he paddled. “Are you enjoying yourself?” Little Ian was sitting on his mother’s lap, nodding his head enthusiastically. Suddenly, the canoe hit a piece of anchor ice and lurched sideways, nearly knocking Aileen and Ian over the gunwale and out of the canoe. “What the…” began Jonathan, censoring his language in front of his son.

He stopped paddling and looked back to see if Aileen and Ian were both okay, but the canoe took off again, without any means of propulsion. Jonathan stuck his paddle in the water, in a futile attempt to slow it down but the canoe continued to increase speed, as it took on water from a hole that had formed at the bottom of the canoe. “We have to get out of here now! The canoe is out of control and sinking fast!” They worked frantically to secure their life vests as Crane Bridge Road loomed ominously closer.

Little Ian felt his mother’s arm wrap around him tighter as the canoe continued to gain abnormally high speeds. He did not understand what was happening, but the look of terror on his mother’s face told him things were terribly wrong. Plugging his ears, Ian futilely tried to drown out the sounds of her screams.

“JUMP!” Jonathan screamed.

They all plunged into the water before the canoe collided into the side of Crane Bridge and burst into pieces. Safely out of harm’s way, they treaded water for a moment, checking on Ian. He was scared and gagging on the water, but otherwise okay. After a moment’s rest, Jonathan took Ian in one arm and began swimming toward the shore. Too soon, though,

Aileen's expression became one of terror. "I can't move my legs!" she cried, frantically struggling to stay afloat, despite wearing her life vest.

As she began to sink beneath the water, Jonathan grabbed her vest and pulled her back. "Come on," he said, holding the corner of Ian's life vest in his fingers as he wrapped his arms around Aileen. "Let's get you to a hospital. It's probably a cramp." He had only swum a short way when he exclaimed, "I don't believe it. My legs have just locked too!"

He rocked his locked legs back and forth, trying to cause momentum, but could barely stay afloat. Finally, he kissed Aileen and said, "I'm sorry, darling, but there is no way we can make it to shore. I'm afraid Turok has found us at last. Our only hope is to try and save Ian."

Aileen nodded in resignation. They kissed Ian goodbye and cried, "Remember, son, that we will always love you." With the last of his strength, Jonathan pushed Ian away from them and they sank beneath the water of the River Avon, holding each other close. Ian floated toward the foliage along Crane Bridge Road as he watched his parents sink out of sight. In the distance, he could vaguely make out the silhouette of a black-robed man standing on the shore, pointing his bony fingers where Ian's parents had been. With the roar of his evil laughter, the memory faded, leaving Ian standing alone amidst an ancient forest.

The trees towered over him like giants overlooking an ant. He stood up, still dressed in his pajamas, and scrutinized his new surroundings. He realized that he had just been a baby only moments earlier. A gust of wind ripped through the forest, tousling his blonde hair, causing him to sweep it back out of his face. The branches creaked ominously far above him as the wind assailed the trees, causing the dangling moss to dance wildly. Ian thought the temperature seemed right for southern England, but could not recall exploring such an area.

He looked around expectantly. *Where was Drew?* Usually his cousin Drew went everywhere with him, but he sensed he had come alone this time. Their treks through the English countryside had never brought them to a place like this. *Where have I seen this place before?*

Ian scanned the trees surrounding him in an attempt to get his bearings. He felt as if the woods should be familiar, but the memory quickly escaped him. He simply could not remember when he had been in such a place.

Ian looked up, but saw only the canopy of trees. Turning around slowly, he tried to pick out anything familiar. Reflecting on the feelings this place evoked, Ian finally recalled the *Stone*. *Yes! There had once been a standing stone not far from here.* Ian took one last look around, closed his eyes and stretched his arms out before him as he moved forward, trusting his memory more than his sight.

Catching his bare foot on something, Ian swore softly, hopping on one leg as he rubbed his sore toes. He looked down at the object protruding from the ground and saw something that would have been out of place in any forest. It was indeed a jutting stone, covered by undergrowth, and would not have been visible, had he not tripped over it.

This stone was once part of a standing stone but was blasted apart many years earlier. Ian did not know how he knew that, but the image of a bright flash and explosion of stone flooded his memories. He knelt and removed the heavy piece from the mossy ground.

Most of the sides were ordinary and plain, except for the jagged portion that once connected to the standing stone. The rock face was smooth, except for the runes, which partially covered it. As he examined the area for more fragments, his eyes searched out the old trail that used to wind through the area.

Ian looked around more carefully now and was able to pick out the former trail. Clutching his find, he followed the path towards the pale light filtering through the branches ahead of him. Soon, he found the edge of the forest and walked into the bright daylight.

He shielded his eyes from the sudden brilliance and examined his new surroundings. *Where am I now?* It seemed as if the world had changed overnight. The sky was a soft green instead of the blue he was used to seeing. Moreover, the grass was golden yellow, instead of green. He had seen yellow grass before, but only after a lack of rain. This grass seemed to be alive as it waved back and forth in the gentle breeze, the sunlight glinting off the morning dew.

He looked across the field to discover an endless sea of wildflowers, dancing in the breeze. Again, memories of a long forgotten past assailed him. He remembered picking wildflowers just like these and running to give them to his mother. Suddenly, Ian went cold as the memory continued.

His mother knelt, arms open wide as he raced to meet her. His father stood beside her, tears playing at the corners of his eyes. Ian felt his mother's arms wrap around him lovingly. When she released him, Ian held out the wildflowers and she took them gratefully, placing them in her hair. His father picked him up as all three of them hugged some unknown people goodbye. The shock of what he saw next pulled him back to his present reality. His parents stood in front of a standing stone.

Ian squinted against the light as he scanned the field for the standing stone from his memory. Seeing it in the distance, he quickly made his way to the structure. Soon he was standing in front of a perfectly carved slab of stone encircled by the same type of runes he had found on the stone in the forest. Ian held the stone fragment up to the standing stone, trying to

put it back where it would have come from. Staring in wonder, he placed the fragment beside the topmost runes. The piece was a perfect match!

Ian shook his head in disbelief. *What was a standing stone fragment doing in the forest? What significance did the runes hold? Why would he and his parents ever travel to this strange land?*

He reached out tentatively to touch the runes and nearly had a heart attack when a deep, resonant voice warned, *"I wouldn't touch those if I were you."*

Ian spun around so fast that he slipped on the wet grass and landed on his bum. He looked up to see a large white horse with blue wings and a silver mane. Its golden eyes shone with the light of a thousand suns.

"You're a Pegasus!" he blurted out, "but, you can't be real."

This can't be real, he chided himself silently. *Pegasi are only ancient myths. But, if it doesn't exist, how could one be standing in front of me?* The Pegasus remained standing, looking down at him. He carried a small package wrapped in leather bands in his teeth.

The Pegasus finally watched him a moment longer before dipping his head toward the ground and gently setting down the package. Nudging the package toward Ian with his large snout, he said, *"Greetings, Prince Ian. I bear a message from the Queen of Faerie. You're to open this package immediately and follow its instructions."*

Dumbfounded, Ian stared at him, his eyes then searching for the actual spokesperson. But he and the Pegasus were the only living creatures in the area. "Who said that?" Ian demanded. "Who's talking to me!"

The Pegasus simply looked at him, *"I'm talking to you, and I'd appreciate it if you'd look at me when you're speaking."*

Ian blinked and looked up at the Pegasus in disbelief. “You?” he retorted. “How could *you* have said anything? First of all, I didn’t see your mouth move and, secondly, animals can’t talk!”

The Pegasus shook his mane violently and stomped his hooves on the ground rapidly. *“I’m more than a simple animal! Your mother never talked to me like that. You must take after your father.”* Dipping his head again, he said gently, *“Don’t you know who you are? You of all people should believe in the existence of faerie creatures.”*

The Pegasus lifted his head again, looked at Ian, and shook his head in frustration, his silvery mane becoming quite disheveled. *“I don’t have time to debate my existence with you. I’m not talking to you with words, but telepathically. Don’t you remember anything?”* Ian could hear the sadness in the voice, even if it was telepathic. The Pegasus eyed him closely and said, *“My name is Garron, and I’m the queen’s messenger. I must insist that you listen to her message immediately.”*

Ian did not know what to think. The queen *he* recognized had stepped down years earlier and King William ruled Britain now. Nevertheless, he stooped down to retrieve the package. Perhaps something in this message from the “queen” would help explain things.

He opened the package carefully to reveal an amulet containing a large amber gem, encircled by an ornate golden ring. He removed it from its wrappings and placed it in the palm of his hand. Immediately, the amulet began to glow and a beautiful musical voice emanated from within.

Seek me in the hidden city.

Come to me with quickened pace.

Search within the tombs unending.

*Here you'll find my resting place.
Bring with you the lighted spear.
Only it can win the fight.
Beware of traps within the maze.
Trust not your paths to mortal sight.
You need not journey here alone.
Bring with you, your closest kin.
Restore me to my rightful place.
Then the healing will begin.
Hurry now. Do not delay!
Tarry not. No time for rest.
I call you now, like those of old.
Keep your trust. Complete this quest.*

Ian looked up at Garron questioningly, "What does this silly riddle mean?"

The Pegasus snorted softly as he rose up into the air, "*You'll find out soon enough. Be sure you're ready when the time comes, young princeling.*"

Suddenly, the landscape began to melt around him and he felt himself being pulled backwards against his will, as if caught in an undertow. Ian awoke with a start. His pajamas were drenched in sweat. He looked around his room, trying to get his bearings. He was back at the Prescott farm in England. He turned on a light and laid his head back against the pillow, staring up at the ceiling, wondering.

His ceiling was a green almost identical to the sky in his dream. *That's it. My dream. It had to be a dream, but it was so real.* Excitedly, he felt around his bed for the amulet, but fell

back against his headboard in disappointed resignation. That was the deciding factor. *It was only a dream.*

Ian shook his head in stubborn defiance of the truth. He could recall each detail clearly, could still smell the air, feel the breeze, and hear Garron's voice in his mind. The voice disturbed him most of all. He could deal with dreaming about a Pegasus, but his voice reminded him of someone he once knew, but could not remember.

Other things about the Pegasus bothered him. *How could Garron have known me when I don't remember him? Why did he call me "young princeling"? How did he know about my father and mother? Why should Garron expect me to know about faerie creatures and be comfortable around them?* It bothered him almost as much as not being able to remember anything prior to the boating accident that killed his parents. He had awoken the day after the accident with a single precious memory: his parents' faces. Only five years old then, he had clung to that memory with every grain of his being, hoping that he would one day regain his lost memories.

After ten years, most people had given up hope that he would remember anything about the accident or life before it. All he had to remember were stories his aunt and uncle told him, trying to jog his memory. *They'd never mentioned faeries or a Pegasus though.* He rolled over on his side, staring out his bedroom window at the stars. How many times had he made wishes on the stars, hoping to remember anything about his parents?

Garron seemed to know more about my past than I could ever hope to learn. That's impossible. It was just a dream, a wishful dream. He sighed. *The memory of the boating accident had been real but if I dreamt the last part, where did the riddle fit in? Surely, my*

subconscious couldn't have come up with that. He put his hands to his forehead and pushed his palms firmly against his head, letting his fingers run through his hair.

He would have to work on the riddle, but he could not tell anyone or they would make fun of him. *Maybe I'll have the dream again and can ask Garron more questions. Obviously, the people in my dreams know more about me than I do, so it couldn't hurt.* He laughed to himself. *There I go again, thinking of the dream as reality. It couldn't have been, yet here I lie, thinking of questions to ask the next time I travel there. Maybe I should just have myself committed to an institution and save everyone the trouble of having to deal with this nonsense.*

He clenched his hands into fists and slammed them down on the bed beside his legs. At that moment, he resolved never to tell anyone about this dream and to go on with life as if nothing had happened. *It was a dream, only a dream.* Suddenly, he sat bolt upright, leaping from his bed and racing to the window. Opening the window and looking out, he did not see anything strange, but could have sworn he saw a horse silhouetted in the moonlight. *But that's impossible* he chided himself *what would Garron have been doing outside my bedroom window?*

Pulling his head back inside, he rested his head in his hands, staring off into the night sky when he heard faint whispers coming from below his window.

“Well?” The unknown person asked aloud. The voice was definitely that of a young woman. Ian listened closely for a response, but received none. Then the woman spoke again, as if in reply to her original question. “Time is something we don't have, if we're to succeed, Garron. I want you to continue your visits until he agrees to come to us.”

Afraid of being caught eavesdropping, Ian quietly shut the window and returned to bed. He closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep. *It was only a dream. It was only a dream.*