

Fairy Tales

FOR REFUGEES

by Ksenia Kirillova





Ksenia Kirillova

Fairy Tales
for Refugees

БОСТОН • 2024 • BOSTON

KSENIA KIRILLOVA. *Fairy Tales for Refugees*

Translated from Russian by K.Kirillova

Editing and proofreading by Maria Bloshteyn

Copyright © 2024 by Ksenia Kirillova

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of the copyright holder.

ISBN 978-1960533630 (pbk)

Published by M•GRAPHICS | BOSTON, MA

 mgraphics.books@gmail.com

 mgraphics-books.com

Book Design by M•GRAPHICS © 2024

Cover Design by Anastasiya Kondratyeva © 2024

Printed in the U.S.A.

CONTENTS

A Tale of the Rain Elves: Survival Mission	9
A Tale of Ghostly Happiness	29
A Tale of an Ice Heart	53
A Tale of a Forgotten Memory	70
A Tale of the Rag Doll	90
A Tale of Stardust	112
A Tale of Brave Dwarves	135
A Tale of the Garden City	157

Rain elves live in constant anxiety and fear that their new haven might evaporate in the blink of an eye. An unhappy ghost lingers, trapped within the crumbling ruins of an estate where he was once happy, unable to escape. A delicate snowflake stands ready to sacrifice herself, longing to share the fate of her fellow snowflakes.

Beautiful forest fairies, valiant gnomes, and indomitable serpent youths face the most daunting trials. Yet, through their struggles, they discover new joys and unearth profound meanings of existence within themselves. So, every reader is invited to find a glimmer of happiness, even in the face of adversity.

A Tale of the Rain Elves: Survival Mission

AS THE PRE-DAWN DARKNESS SWEPT over Nileen, she felt anxiety flood her entire being—pervasive, overpowering, and unusually intense this time. She was uncertain whether this fear originated from within herself or was pressed upon her from the outside. It permeated every inch of her existence, both inward and outward, leaving her feeling desperate, panicked, and frail. There seemed to be no escape from its suffocating grip, driving her to the brink of madness, as if the deepest horrors of the underworld had materialized and engulfed the world around her.

Her diminutive, almost translucent body quivered with tension. Instinctively, Nileen curled into a protective ball, seeking solace in the water, which yielded reluctantly beneath her slight weight, cocooning her tenderly and securely, akin to a feather bed. “I’m home. Everything is alright now,” she whispered, though the longevity of this home remained uncertain, subject to the merciless incineration of the sun’s rays. It was inconsequential whether it lasted a week or a month, luck permitting, until the arrival of more rain—all that mattered was the present moment, finding solace within this small haven of safety.

Yet, even these thoughts failed to sooth her. Awareness of the ephemeral and fragile nature of her surroundings loomed too large. She had never truly known a home, nor had she ever possessed one, none of her kind ever did. Nileen believed she had grown accustomed to this reality, much like the constant

specter of death—not fear, but rather a palpable anticipation of its imminence and inevitability. However, as this morning starkly demonstrated, it was impossible to become accustomed to such fear.

In the encompassing darkness, Nileen couldn't even discern her own hands against the water's surface, a stark reminder of her precarious existence. Unable to endure the relentless anxiety any longer, she rose into the air above the water, gliding towards the nearly dry grass, untouched by the dew. Nileen paused, endeavoring to inhale the night's unadulterated air, not yet diluted by the dawn, before addressing the void with clarity:

“Mom, I'm scared.”

The air beside her stirred imperceptibly, granting her a fleeting sense of the night's freshness.

“It's alright, my dear,” her mother's voice reassured. “It's normal at your age. We've all been there, my girl.”

“Will it always be like this?” Nileen implored, desperation creeping into her voice.

“No, no, no,” her mother's soothing tone enveloped her. “As you grow older, you'll learn to live with this anxiety. You'll come to realize it's our greatest asset, the Creator's best gift bestowed upon us. Everything in this world, Nileen, is ordained with wisdom. What troubles you now is the essence of our survival. We would've perished long ago without this guiding fear. It's our compass, steering us away from peril, giving us foresight them, and guiding us to safety and helping us to find a new shelter in time. Those who forget it, perish.”

“But I don't understand why I'm so afraid,” Nileen lamented.

“You're not meant to understand yet,” her mother patiently explained. “You're still too young, and therein lies nature's wisdom. Other creatures your age may be reckless, but we can't afford such luxury. Every mistake can cost us too much, which is why we're born with this fear, and why it intensifies during adolescence, safeguarding us from irreparable harm. You'll grow, and so will your anxiety. And that's alright.”

“The days are so dark,” Nileen murmured. “Everything is shrouded in gray, yet there’s still no rain. In this grayness, I can’t even see myself in the mirror. I long for even a glimmer of sunlight.”

“It’s certainly more enjoyable when the sun graces us with its presence,” the mother’s voice suddenly shifted, tinged with a steely resolve. “But one mustn’t become too enthralled by it either. Remember how your father perished—as a boy, he was captivated by the sun’s reflections as they sparkled and shimmered in him. Yet, he was already a grown man, an adult, considering that we already had a child by then. Do you understand what this means?”

Nileen nodded in silence. The age at which one might decide to bear a child now seemed a distant milestone to her. But they still had to survive those years!

“He was overly confident, thinking he had mastered survival to the extent he could reach the Caves unscathed—and look how it ended!” the mother continued solemnly. “Be careful, my dear.”

“But I’m always trying to be careful,” Nileen protested tearfully. “I’m afraid to live, to breathe, to stray from the water even for a moment!”

“Well, that’s not feasible either, my dear. You wouldn’t want to perish from fear, would you?” Her mother stressed the last words, as if discussing something forbidden, a notion too dreadful to think about it. Nileen shuddered involuntarily. Death by fear was the most senseless and dishonorable fate for a rain elf—a demise that brought shame upon the entire family. It was worse than simply evaporating under the sun’s rays or freezing in the cold. During this dreadful demise, fear became unbearable, and the hapless elf, unable to endure the torment, shattered into a flurry of crystal splashes, literally torn apart. Nileen knew of no one who had suffered such a fate in their lineage, and the mere thought filled her with horror.

“You must undergo the Ritual,” her mother reminded her with a hint of envy in her voice. “The doctor prescribed it for you twice a week. We adults can only dream of such luxury. Treasure this blessing, my girl, it’s the finest gift youth can offer. Cherish it and remember it throughout your life, holding every fleeting moment dear. Wait until dawn and make your way to the Caves. But remember to return no later than noon—we’ll need to seek out a new home.”

“Already?” Nileen’s voice trembled. “I hoped...”

“My dear, you are already able to understand,” the mother’s voice took on metallic undertones again. “Can’t you see what’s unfolding? Can’t you feel the impending threat? Yes, the sun is absent these days, but observe how stifling it is, how swiftly the water evaporates! Our current dwelling may not endure till evening. It’s time for us to relocate.”

“I understand,” Nileen whispered, but then, unable to contain herself, she spoke hurriedly through the tears: “Mom, why do all the other elves, unlike us, live without such turmoil? Sea and river elves reside in vast, secure homes, living out their days in tranquility. They are unacquainted with death or the dread of it, never wandering from place to place, embracing their element from infancy to old age! Even the lake elves possess their own permanent home. Why are we the only ones doomed to this torment?”

“Because we bear a sacred, monumental mission,” her mother replied sternly. “We safeguard the water that graces the land, the water that, descending from the sky, does not flow into rivers or lakes. It’s the water of small forest streams, which may dwindle at any moment—yet it quenches the thirst of creatures unable to reach the rivers. It nurtures the roots of plants, fills the clumsy human vessels. It’s the same water that people offer to their dying loved ones in their final moments.”

Nileen nodded quietly. Yes, she understood that their kind’s habitat was the most precarious water, scattered in tiny pearls across the earth’s surface: the water of raindrops on glass, small puddles, and the dew that falls every morning on the

grass. Water whose lifespan was as fleeting as a breath, never sturdy enough to be a reliable foundation for the elves who dwelled within it.

“It’s this very water that sustains all life forms, as without it, the seas and oceans alone wouldn’t suffice to support life on our planet,” the mother continued earnestly. “Since time immemorial, it’s been the rain elves who’ve safeguarded this vital resource, and for this great honor, we’re compelled to endure perpetual risk. Yes, the water we’re bound to, upon which our existence hinges, is fragile and fleeting, but without our guardianship, it would vanish entirely. Can we truly allow that to occur?”

“We cannot,” Nileen affirmed. In that moment, a swell of pride momentarily eclipsed even her anxiety.

“After the Ritual, consult the Sages on this matter,” her mother advised. “They’ll offer a far more comprehensive explanation than I ever could. But for now, you need to rest—as you know, getting into the Caves is not easy.”

* * *

Nileen grasped why her loving mother couldn’t conceal her envy at the mere mention of the Caves—to her, nothing could be more glorious. Yet, reaching there was difficult. The rain elves weren’t accustomed to lengthy travels, resorting to teleportation even for the nearest Caves. Finding a suitable damp stone nearby, they focused mentally on the Ritual, striving to dissolve entirely, spreading across its slick surface, and then materializing as quivering droplets on the inner walls of the Caves.

Children and frail adult elves were never dispatched there—the risk of failing teleportation and failing to materialize on the cave wall loomed too large. Generally, ordinary elves could only venture into the Caves to undergo the Ritual, which was authorized solely by a doctor’s prescription. In practice, doctors prescribed this solely to adolescents robust enough to endure teleportation relatively painlessly but in dire need of solace and sustenance, both physical and emotional.

Mom was right at this age, the already apprehensive rain elves completely lost their capacity to manage anxiety. Unprepared for the swift blossoming of their innate fear, they found themselves in a literal panic. It felt as though their translucent bodies were internally consumed by cold, freezing every cell like ice. A constant, vibrating anxiety either rendered them nearly immobile or impelled them toward immediate action. This torment plagued the teenagers incessantly, permeating not just the elf but seemingly the entire world around them, rendering everything hostile, not merely joyless but utterly unbearable.

However, within the Caves, everything was different. The Caves truly resembled paradise—everything was steeped in humidity! Water droplets cascaded from the majestic stalactites, loudly splashing into streams meandering along the underground tunnels. The walls dripped with water—a life-sustaining element so abundant here that Nileen felt as if she had ventured into a veritable sea or even an ocean. Unlike seas or oceans, from which rain elves were strictly forbidden, the path to the Caves was open to them during the rare moments of the Ritual.

The Ritual entailed traversing a labyrinthine network of caves. Initially, Nileen leapt with delight onto the surface of the stream coursing through the dark passages. The water buoyantly supported her diminutive frame, and immediately pushed her transparent body to the surface. Nileen glided along as if on a conveyor belt, unable to fathom the sudden lightness, bursting into uncontrollable laughter. She lay on her back, and the water, dependable and restorative, carried her amidst the granite walls before abruptly depositing her into the cave lake.

Nileen and her fellow elves, holding their breath, observed as the Cave began to radiate with a phosphorescent glow, and greenish sparkling stalactites, elongated like arrows, rushed with their tips straight toward them. Delicately sculpted, resembling Christmas ornaments, they reflected the green and

golden hues emanating from nowhere, casting shimmering reflections across the water. The water itself seemed to glow from within, like molten lava, and Nileen, laughing, immersed herself in its tranquil golden sheen. She knew the water wouldn't scorch her; it would remain refreshingly cool.

Mesmerized, Nileen watched as a luminous radiance poured into her from the water's surface, causing her entire being to sparkle, shimmer, and refract the ineffable beauty of the Cave. Like an enchanted forest unfurling its branches, the underground grotto blossomed before her eyes in vivid yellow, green, and reddish hues, revealing patterns on the rocks, and rivaling the delicacy and beauty of frost patterns on glass.

Now, Nileen saw herself more vividly than ever—she was entirely composed of light. It danced upon the water's surface, contrasting sharply with the surrounding black shadows that penetrated the lake's depths. Unlike sunlight, these illuminations posed no threat to her. They didn't scorch her or threaten to erase her existence at any moment; instead, they imbued her with vigor and elation.

A sensation of security, so profound and nearly unfamiliar, swept Nileen away to a realm of celestial bliss beyond consciousness. Drifting upon the water, she bathed in light and shadow, while resonating drops continued to descend from above, as though reminding her that the entire world was now safe and healing—from earth to sky. As the cave came to an end and the subterranean passage resumed, light yielded to darkness, then to glimpses of timid rays that somehow miraculously penetrated from the surface. The water held varying sensations throughout: in some places, it exuded a sense of dampness; in others, it sprawled like a majestic force; and in yet others, it surged like a wild stream—playful, irrepressible, audacious...

Courage was fostered within these Caves: a total absence of fear, a celebration of life, and a yearning to live! Suddenly, Nileen spotted a striking elf nearby—tall, ablaze with internal radiance, much like herself. Amidst the cave's reflections,

he appeared particularly bold to her - exquisitely audacious. There was something heroic in his cocky profile, in his almost flawlessly proportioned physique, despite his youth, and suddenly Nileen felt an overwhelming desire to fly to him and kiss him passionately. Despite the unusual surge of courage, she managed to restrain herself. Of course, thoughts of kissing were out of the question, and the issue wasn't about sanctimonious morality. As always, all limitations stemmed purely from concerns about safety.

Physical intimacy among the rain elves manifested in merging into a single stream, fervent and impassioned. With adequate strength, another tiny stream could crystallize from this union—their joint child. Inexperienced teenagers, unfamiliar with properly harnessing either their strength or vulnerability, might simply perish after such merging, unable to muster the strength to reconstitute themselves as separate, whole beings. The torrent of passion could simply wash them away, and hence such intimacy could spell doom for lovers.

Only adult elves capable of managing their emotions chose to have children. This vulnerability, the inability to surrender to love without fear was also their retribution for their grand mission. Nileen often pondered, whether the rain elves would fail to be born from the heaviest downpours and floods, their race would inevitably perish in such conditions.

Nileen noticed the unfamiliar elf also observing her and hoped he remembered: they wouldn't be able to get close for a long while. Nevertheless, no one could forbid them from being friends—merely friends, innocently and purely, meticulously adhering to all safety protocols. He likely resided nearby—typically, elves from the same city were summoned to undergo the Ritual on the same designated day. The thought of potentially becoming friends with him buoyed Nileen's spirits once more. She began to envision how, perhaps, they would spend years together and then, upon reaching adulthood, navigate all challenges side by side, surely enduring until they reached the cherished Caves.

It seemed unbelievable to Nileen that within these Caves, within these incomprehensible, heavenly Caves, elves could live so effortlessly—just like herself, differing only in age. Only those exceptional elves who reached a hundred years of age were permitted to dwell permanently within the Caves. Nileen found it incredibly challenging to envision living for so long in their world fraught with dangers, inundated with anxiety. It was no wonder they were referred to as the Sages—unmatched masters of survival, those who could fully fulfill the rain elves’ grand mission until the end. Yet they coped, and then retired to a well-deserved rest, where fear and demise were unknown. Here, within the ancient Caves, the Sages lived on endlessly...

For everyone else, access was granted solely for the Ritual, and Nileen believed there was wisdom in this: to behold this paradise as a child. Not only did it bolster resilience and fortitude, but it also infused life with purpose. No, she wouldn’t perpetually exist in eternal fear, fretting over her future; she wouldn’t forever wander amidst new bodies of water, yearning for refuge and striving to relocate before the next home evaporated with her. After enduring all of this, she would eventually find her place here. She would surely prevail, she would survive, because now she witnessed firsthand the example of real elves who had attained their happiness!

* * *

The ritual concluded, and Nileen nearly forgot the question she had long yearned to pose to the Sages. Now, fueled by a surge of recklessness, her mind began to operate with remarkable agility, and Nileen herself marveled at the clarity of her thoughts and the unexpected boldness of her inquiries.

“Forgive me, I’ve been eager to inquire for quite some time,” she addressed the venerable elf with a fluttering heart. “My mother told me that we have a unique mission—we are the guardians of the water that sustains all life, and thus we endure all our tribulations.”

“Your mother is absolutely right,” the elf nodded solemnly.

“But I’d like to clarify how exactly do we guard it?” Nileen asked, her words stumbling. “I mean, we don’t undertake anything special for this. We have an unwavering rule: if our habitation is drying up, and we have no recourse but to sacrifice ourselves, to dissolve within it without a trace and thereby prolong its existence, we should, under no circumstances, do so. We must relinquish our home yet preserve ourselves and seek out a new refuge.”

Nileen fell momentarily silent, still grappling with her newfound courage.

“I can’t help but wonder: we change residences so frequently in our lives, yet each new one inevitably dries up,” she continued more confidently. “We take no action to preserve it; on the contrary, we draw sustenance and vigor from it. But if these reservoirs still deplete, if we are unable to aid them in any manner, then what is our purpose? If we serve no function, why don’t we dwell in rivers or lakes and lead an ordinary, happy life, like all other elves, while the terrestrial waters disappear and appear again without our involvement?”

“How could such thoughts enter your mind!” the Sage exclaimed in horror. “Since time immemorial, the world has relied upon the elves! Only our presence sustains life within it. We needn’t undertake any action for this, we need only exist. Our mission is inherently to survive, and that alone is sacred, our lives are sacred! Each element in this world is safeguarded by our presence!” he declared passionately, then, lowering his voice, he added:

“Do you understand the consequences for those who dare venture into lakes or rivers? It is a shameful death in the desert beneath the scorching sun, devoid of water, ostracized by their kin. This is not mere desertion—it is a betrayal of our mission; it is the destruction of the foundations of the universe! Never forget who you are and where you belong,” he concluded solemnly.

“Of course,” Nileen murmured, nodding. She fluttered towards the Cave’s exit and spotted the unfamiliar elf whom she

had observed during the Ritual. Under the weight of the Sage's words, she had entirely forgotten about him, yet it seemed as though he had been awaiting her all along and smiled—quite approvingly, as it appeared to her.

“Shall we go together?” he invited, pressing himself against the wall.

“Let's go,” she nodded, spreading out onto the stone beside him. “Where would you like to appear?”

“At the old tower in the historical quarter of the city,” he promptly responded. “There was a pipe burst this morning, water is gushing everywhere, all the stones around are splashed completely.”

“Fantastic!” Nileen exclaimed. “Let's hurry!”

Finally melding into the damp cave wall, they were swiftly carried by the surge of energy from the Ritual into the city, arriving amidst a sparkling fountain of spray from the ruptured pipe.

“How marvelous, how wonderful!” Nileen cried, soaring into the sky. The sun bathed everything in radiant light, and the elf basked in its warmth with delight. Strengthened by the Ritual, she felt no fear at the scattering of solar sparks, especially with so much saving water nearby. Laughing, she marveled at her newfound carefreeness as if the night's paralyzing fear had never occurred.

“Where do you live?” Nileen inquired of the elf, finally descending to the ground.

“Right here,” he chuckled, gesturing toward the broken pipe.

“But that's very risky!” Nileen began to regain her customary caution. “This pipe could be repaired at any moment, and then all the water will dry up rapidly.”

“Well, it would dry out just the same in any other place,” the elf laughed in response.

“Yes,” murmured the bewildered Nileen, “but elsewhere, at least there's hope, whereas here we know for certain it has no other source.”

“In simpler terms, it’s easier for us to delude ourselves elsewhere,” the elf continued. “But how can self-deception aid our survival?”

Nileen was utterly perplexed. She no longer knew whether he was jesting or speaking earnestly.

“I overheard your query to the Sage,” her newfound acquaintance continued. “And you know, I think you’re right. Perhaps we once had a mission to preserve all living things, but I have a sense that we lost it long ago.”

“But the Sage said...” Nileen began to argue.

“After all, flower elves are actually unable to preserve the flowers in which they live. Every autumn they perish alongside them, only to be reborn in spring with the first grass,” he continued, paying little heed to her words. “Unlike us, they are too carefree and fail to comprehend death, which is understandable—they have no chance of survival regardless. Though theoretically, since they cannot save their flowers, they could relocate to warmer climes where cold never encroaches and dwell there forever. It seems none of us elves are fulfilling our original mission anymore, and we suffer out of habit, entirely in vain. Yet, it’s impossible to verify, even the Sages cannot discern the truth. No one dares to break the taboo and depart, and if we stay put, we’ll never know how the surface world fares without us.”

“So, what should we do now?” Nileen inquired, confused.

“Nothing,” the elf laughed again. “Just live, try to enjoy life. And perhaps, don’t be overly fearful, for the world may not be as it seems.”

“No,” Nileen protested. “The threats are very real, and elves do perish from them. My father died from sun exposure. Would you claim that’s also an outdated legend?”

“Well,” the elf responded diplomatically. “Of course, caution is necessary. I’m not suggesting otherwise. But it’s crucial not to let fear consume you to the point of death.”

“I’ve heard this before, but I’ve never seen a single elf perish from fear,” Nileen admitted.

“My father,” the young elf replied, unexpectedly solemn. “Perhaps I’m foolish for telling you this. It’s not customary to discuss such matters, but my father died of fear...”

Nileen stared at him, incredulous. This elf, brave to the point of recklessness, came from a family marked by disgraceful lineage? His father, his own flesh and blood, was a feeble coward who fell to pieces, failing to utilize the very instinct bestowed upon him to fulfill their unique mission? Was she standing before the son of a coward?

“What, are you going to shun me now?” the elf asked bitterly. “Do you think I’m the only one? It’s just not spoken of, but in truth, many elves perish from fear. Consider it—who would confess to such a thing? Fear was once heralded as the greatest virtue—perhaps it was. But it seems now it does more harm than good.”

“What are you saying?” Nileen felt a wave of dizziness. She sat upon the water, yet even its soothing coolness did not bring the long-awaited relief.

“Don’t dwell on it,” the elf attempted to comfort her. “Just avoid excessive fear, any adult will tell you that.”

“Yes, my mother said the same,” Nileen nodded, still reeling. “By the way, what’s your name?”

“Vincent,” the elf smiled again, a beam of sunlight passing over his face and infusing it with an uncommon radiance.

“Vincent,” Nileen whispered admiringly. “A noble name. Do you hail from an ancient lineage?”

“Somewhat,” he laughed softly. “If you wish, we could spend more time together. Where do you live?”

“I’m not sure,” Nileen hesitated. “We must relocate today; our dwelling is drying out... Oh dear,” she realized. “It’s nearing noon, I must return. We need to search for a new home.”

“Of course,” Vincent nodded seriously. “Ah, the repair truck has arrived. Soon they’ll destroy my beautiful home, so it appears we’re kindred sufferers. Don’t fear, I’ll find you, wherever you may be. Good luck with your resettlement!”

“And you,” Nileen replied.

“Have no worries, these fellows have several hours of work ahead,” Vincent waved dismissively.

“Regardless, don’t delay in finding a new home,” Nileen requested, then added unexpectedly to herself, “It would be very hard for me if something were to happen to you.”

* * *

All subsequent days and weeks blended together for Nileen into a seamless stream of happiness. Not a day passed without her seeing Vincent. The fountain in the main square of the city finally began to flow, and they whiled away countless hours each day amidst its refreshing spray. Nileen’s anxiety didn’t vanish entirely, but it dulled somewhat, and the young elf gradually learned to manage it. Mornings remained the toughest, as fear gripped her upon waking, but as she learned to rein it in, she found herself eagerly anticipating happiness—happiness embodied in the form of Vincent.

This routine persisted until one day when he suddenly proposed, “Nileen, wouldn’t you like to visit the Caves?”

“I would,” she sighed, “but we’ve already attended the Ritual twice this week, and the next opportunity is a week away.”

“No, that’s not what I meant,” Vincent interjected. “I’m suggesting a stroll in the Caves.”

“That’s impossible!” Nileen exclaimed, regarding him as if he were insane. “No one will grant us access there.”

“We can gain entry through acquaintances,” he countered. “Through connections, as humans say. I happen to know several Sages quite closely.”

“Did you know them before they retreated to the Caves?” Nileen began to guess.

“Exactly,” Vincent affirmed. “They’re all from aristocratic families, residents of the Mists.” Seeing her confusion, he added, “Are you really so naive as to believe that ordinary rain elves can live for a century?”

Nileen fell into a despondent silence. Why had she never considered this before? Surviving in misty regions was

undoubtedly easier than in arid ones, but only members of ancient aristocratic lines were permitted to settle there. So it was they who became the Sages? It dawned on Nileen belatedly that she and her peers had no personal connections to any of the Sages prior to their retreat to the Caves. Did that mean elves outside their circle had no chance of survival?

“Our family resided in the Mists,” Vincent divulged. “We were expelled after my father’s death—his disgrace brought shame upon us. We lived well there until an unusually dry year when the fogs failed to materialize for months. Unprepared, many perished, including my parents. Not all succumbed to fear, but such instances occurred. In prosperous times, we never learned to manage our anxiety, so we were ill-equipped for it.”

“Are you an orphan?” Nileen inquired sympathetically. He nodded.

“Mother couldn’t foresee that the dew would vanish from the grass. Those who survived eventually relocated to the Caves. I had agreed to go there today, but if you wish, we can go together.”

Nileen couldn’t believe such fortune—a chance to visit the Caves, the coveted Caves, without restriction! Speechless, she merely nodded. They soared to the nearest rock, and Nileen, closing her eyes, surrendered to the anticipation of impending bliss. Moments later, they stood within the unusually quiet, deserted Caves.

“Vincent, are you alone?” Nileen heard a Sage’s voice.

“With a friend,” he replied. “She’s trustworthy.”

“I hope so,” the Sage muttered. “I won’t disturb you, just behave yourselves,” he cautioned before vanishing into the tunnel.

In the cavern’s depths where Vincent and Nileen found themselves, no familiar stream flowed, yet healing humidity enveloped them, inducing a serene relaxation in every cell. Holding her breath, Nileen followed Vincent further into the shimmering depths.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been here,” she whispered.

“Correct,” Vincent confirmed. “The Ritual isn’t conducted in this particular spot.”

Nileen quivered with excitement. A place where the Ritual wasn’t conducted, accessible only to the Sages themselves! Or perhaps she was merely dreaming? In the flickering greenish light, walls adorned with water droplets shimmered. Nileen reverently touched them, feeling the rough lines beneath her fingertips.

“Vincent, what is this?” she asked in a hushed tone.

“Wait a minute,” he replied, deftly catching the phosphorus light’s reflection and directing it onto Nileen’s hand. Writing emerged on the cold stone—rock paintings, almost faded by time and water, yet still visible on the granite surface.

“Wow!” Vincent whistled. “Looks like you’ve stumbled upon an ancient relic.”

Nileen scrutinized the drawing. It depicted rain elves encircling a small oval pond, hands joined, each with a stream of water gushing from their chests like miniature fountains. Though the drawing remained still, Nileen felt as if the reservoir before her eyes filled and expanded, transforming into a small lake.

“Well, this is...” Nileen breathed out, unable to finish.

“I suspected as much,” Vincent said softly, his voice unusually tinged with confusion. “I guessed, but I never imagined I’d be so right! This...” He trailed off, the unspoken understanding passing between them: the ancient rock painting depicted a long-forgotten ritual, evidence of how rain elves once nurtured the bodies of water near their habitats.

“The Sage said we just need to exist,” Nileen whispered finally. “But here, it’s clear that it wasn’t always so. We used to share our water with the earth. Have the laws of the universe changed, or have we?”

“And then the world learned to manage without us,” Vincent finished for her.

“But if that’s the case, can’t we safely return to the rivers and lakes?” Nileen asked hopefully.

Vincent sighed, addressing her gently, as if to a child.

“Nileen, what rivers? Do you understand the consequences? We’ve discussed this before: our hypothesis can’t be proven, and this painting alone isn’t evidence. We can’t be certain if water will persist on land after we depart. The only way to know is if all, do you hear, all rain elves head to the seas and lakes. But even if one remains on the surface, it could be said that water persists because of him. Understand, no matter how convincing our theories may be, breaking the ban is unthinkable. Most elves won’t agree. Even if our hypothesis is correct, it remains unprovable.”

“But it shouldn’t be this way!” Nileen objected, her voice nearing tears. “Perhaps everything changed long ago, and we’ve been dying senselessly without even knowing it! And despite our caution, we can’t even reach the Caves, reserved only for aristocrats. What’s the point of living then?”

“For ourselves,” Vincent replied softly. “For each other. For every moment we share together.”

Nileen nodded silently, wiping away her tears, and leaned into his shoulder.

The world transformed for her that day. It appeared different—not just unsettling, but also devoid of color, and even the Ritual failed to alleviate this huelessness. The water’s current, as ever, whisked Nileen through the cherished tunnels and deposited her into the Cave aglow with lights. Nileen touched the gold on the surface of the underwater lake indifferently and felt that she did not want to dive into it.

She still spent time with Vincent, but an awareness of life’s futility and the inevitability of death stirred within her a strange, reckless carelessness that sometimes even alarmed him. Increasingly, they ventured farther from the city, from their homes, wandering through forsaken meadows and desolate lands, gaining strength from the occasional streams stumbled on amid the grass.

Once, on the city’s outskirts, they glimpsed cars—large and strikingly similar to the one that had fixed a pipe, destroying

Vincent's home on the day they met. This time, however, no pipe was in sight. Upon closer inspection, the elves observed people swarming around the wreckage of a massive apartment complex. Nileen had never witnessed such a colossal structure collapse like a house of cards. Almost echoing her thoughts, Vincent remarked:

"This happens to people sometimes. I believe they call it a gas explosion, foundation erosion, or something of the sort. Regardless, we must depart. Such locales typically experience heightened dryness or, worse, actual fire."

"But I sense the water," Nileen insisted stubbornly, darting towards the gap amidst the beams protruding from the mound of rubble and concrete. Vincent hurried after her, attempting to restrain her, but Nileen had already slipped into the cramped space and vanished into darkness. Frustrated, Vincent followed suit. Crushed by concrete slabs, a still living girl lay on the floor covered with a layer of dust. As they drew closer, she emitted a groan, as though sensing a presence nearby. Fire was approaching her—a long, advancing tongue of flame. Only a small puddle stood between the child and peril.

"Nileen, we must depart; we cannot aid her," Vincent implored. "Remember our cardinal rule—to survive at any cost. This puddle won't last. Let's drink from it, gather our strength for the journey home, and leave."

Nileen remained silent, fixating on the girl. The child couldn't see or hear them, yet Nileen stubbornly believed she was attentive to their exchange. With effort, the girl extricated one hand from beneath the rubble, extending it in a futile attempt to scoop water.

"I'm dying," she whispered, barely audible. "Mom, where are you? I'm dying..."

Nileen hovered at the edge of the puddle, suspended over its surface—warm from the encroaching fire, yet still comforting, familiar, and soothing.

"Drink!" Vincent's whisper brushed against her ear.

Nileen knelt by the water's edge, her hand pressed against her chest where her tiny elven heart pulsed. With closed eyes, she recalled the Caves, where a stream of water carried her into a realm of wonder—an embodied paradise amidst labyrinthine tunnels and stone grottoes. As eternal anxiety slowly ebbed away, it was replaced by boundless peace, enveloping her in joy. There, she and Vincent felt with their fingers ancient lines of ancient drawings...

“I’m dying,” the girl murmured.

“Everyone dies,” Nileen replied in the same hushed tone. “Even the flower elves cannot preserve the blooms they inhabit; they wither each autumn along with their flowers. They simply choose not to dwell on it...”

“Nileen, what’s happening to you?” Vincent’s voice seemed distant, unheard amidst her inner tumult. Suddenly, her heart filled with an extraordinary, indescribable fullness, then broke through, a refreshing stream gushing like a fountain from her chest, filling a small puddle.

“What is this?” The girl extended her palm under the stream, greedily drinking from it. After a few sips, she hesitantly spoke, her voice replacing the earlier hoarse whisper, initially weak but growing stronger.

“I’m here!” she shouted into the triangular gap between the beams.

“Did you hear that?” A male voice echoed from above. “There’s someone down there, I heard a child cry out. Let’s hurry!”

“Nileen!” Vincent grabbed her hand, attempting to pull her away from the puddle.

“Don’t interfere!” Nileen interrupted weakly. “Can’t you see? I’m fulfilling our mission.”

“But we’ve discovered there’s no mission anymore!” Vincent cried out in despair. “It’s all just legend, an illusion perpetuated by foolish elves clinging to ancient myths.”

“Let it be so!” Nileen shouted with all her might. “Let this be only a deception, only an illusion for everyone. But only I

alone determine whether it's illusion or truth in my life. Only I can decide how to live it. You see, our life depends only on us."

"I understand," Vincent whispered, embracing her like never before. The two elves intertwined, merging like streams into one, strong and unyielding. As consciousness waned, Nileen glimpsed daylight filtering through the opening above, and a man's voice shouting:

"I told you, there's a child down here! Help me, quickly! The girl is lucky, it looks like there is some kind of groundwater source or something like that. Otherwise, she might not have survived."

The rescuers swiftly removed the concrete slabs, revealing the girl.

"I saw little beings," she gasped, clinging to her savior. "Two, almost transparent. They transformed into a stream, then vanished into that stone over there."

"Of course, of course," the rescuer nodded, addressing his partner. "She must have inhaled too much dust. It's a miracle she is even alive".

Handing the child to his waiting partner, he made his way out. Accidentally stepping into the spilled puddle, he cursed, hastily retreating. The sun flooded the opening, casting golden reflections on the water's surface.





Ksenia Kirillova is a journalist, expert of leading Western analytical centers and also a writer and poet. Author of several novels published in Russia, Ukraine, Germany, Israel, and the USA. Her poetry and prose have been published in Russian, Ukrainian, English, French, and Serbian languages.



Ksenia Kirillova has crafted a magical and fantastical world, but what truly sets her fairy tales apart is their therapeutic power. They offer solace and restore faith in goodness. Although penned by a renowned journalist, writer, and political analyst, this collection presents an enchanting realm where each character endures trials, losses, fear, and sadness, ultimately emerging stronger.

— *Alena Joukova*, writer, screenwriter,
editor-in-chief of Litsvet Publishing House, Canada



ISBN 978-1-960533-63-0

90000 >



9 781960 533630