A Midsummer Nightmare

by CeslaToil

Summary

After mysterious figures break into his home, McGucket runs to Stanford Pines in the early hours for the morning for protection. Thus is how the story of Midsummer Nightmare begins, and the Pines Family find themselves entangled in all sorts of predicaments over the course of the night, including sword fights, daring rescues, a child kidnapping warlord, a chain smoking Fairy Queen, and the perils of community theater.

Romance, adventure, and mangled Shakespearean canon abound in A Midsummer Nightmare!
In Which There Are Unexpected Guests

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes.

The sun had not yet risen when Old Man McGucket had woken up to a mysterious, crashing noise. He tried not to think too much of it, but, being a naturally anxious person, the noise had troubled him. When he was still living in the dump, noises like that could mean anything; from rowdy teens vandalizing his little hut where he lived, to an impromptu game of rugby by those Manotaurs in the woods. Sudden crashing noises meant move, stupid, before you get hurt!

Now, come on, he thought to himself as he wrapped the quilt on his bed tightly around his body. Quit that fussin'! It's probably just Raccoon Wife rootin' through the garbage again. Satisfied by this comforting suggestion, McGucket sat up, adjusting himself to a more comfortable position on the bed. He really did have to do something about that varmint. Lately all she seemed to do was tear up his important robot designs, steal his food for herself, and cause a ruckus during all hours of the night. Technically his marriage was only legally recognized in the court run by that adorable owl dressed as a judge, but from what he had gleaned from that fella who married the woodpecker last summer, inter-species divorce was a messy business. McGucket yawned, and was just wondering what his raccoon wife would be entitled to should he decide to go through with separating when another crash sounded from downstairs.

"Conflabbit, Raccoon Wife, you cut that out right now!" he hollered. "I'm tryin' ta get some gat dang sleep!"

Suddenly, near the foot of his bed, a fuzzy ball of fur lifted its head to hiss at him for shouting. His eyes widened in terror. Another crash from below rang out as the raccoon hopped off the bed and scurried out the room, pushing open the bedroom door. Holding his breath to keep from screaming, McGucket crept out of his bed, the quilt now draped over him like a patchwork cloak. His banjo was leaning against his work desk. He grabbed it with both hands, holding it in front of him as he crept out the door.

I should call the police, he thought as he tiptoed down the hall, the noises increasing in volume as he got closer to the stairs. The old man then reconsidered. Sherriff Blubs and Deputy Durland meant well, but he supposed a drowsy fruitbat also meant well and would have done a much better job at protecting him from whatever had broke into his mansion. I should call my son, he thought as he crept down the staircase. His knees wobbled as he tried to avoid making any sound that could alert the intruders to his location. When he reached the bottom of the landing, he remembered that his son had gone to a fishing tournament several towns over, he wouldn't be able to save him. In his nervousness, he noticed that the front door was ajar. Gulp,ing, he took trembling step after trembling step towards the kitchen, where the mysterious sounds were coming from. He almost dropped his weapon, his old hands were shaking so much.

I should call Stanford.

Even in his fear, a flush appeared on the tips of McGucket's ears at the thought of his old friend. McGucket hadn't seen Ford since he and his brother had returned earlier that week for the summer. They had promised to spend time together once everyone had a chance to settle in, but he didn't imagine those plans involved fighting off home invaders. Another crash made him jump, an involuntary squeak escaping from the old man's near-toothless mouth. Vowing to call Ford the second he saw for himself what exactly he was dealing with, McGucket found himself quaking in front of the kitchen door, the sounds louder than ever.

Heart pounding against his ribs, McGucket kicked open the door, his banjo raised high above his
head, ready to smash it into anyone or anything's face.

"Baaaaaaaaaaaah!"

There before him, in the wreckage of the kitchen, stood Gompers the goat. The creature must have sneaked into the house, and, finding a room full of metal pans and food, proceeded to tear it apart. Fiddleford cackled in relief. Just a goat. Nothing spooky at all. "I don't know how ya got all the way up here, but ya don't know how glad I am it's you, mister," he said, patting the critter on the head. Gompers began chewing on the hem of the quilt, still draped over the old man. "C'mon, git!" said McGucket, "let me loose!" The goat did no such thing, and it yanked the quilt off McGucket's shoulders as it ran off into the dining room. Feeling silly for getting so worked up, the old man headed back into the hall. He knew it would be a pain to wake the Pines so early in the morning, but he figured that Gompers ought to be collected before he did any more damage to the old mansi--

Eyes.

So many glowing, glowering eyes.

Hundreds and hundreds of eyes were gazing at him as he entered the hall. Shadowy figures were in every corner of the room, whispering inaudibly at the frightened old man. McGucket could not see them fully in the darkness, but something about the way the silhouetted figures were moving unsettled him deeply. One of them, a hulking beast that towered over the rest, began to march its way toward him.

Screaming, McGucket ran out the door, banjo in tow, into the moonless night.

Chapter End Notes

I'm trying my hand at writing a multi-chapter fic to develop my writing style a bit; bear with me! This is just an idea I had floating around for a few weeks that I thought might be entertaining.
In Which We Reunite With Old Friends & Learn About the Midsummer Festival

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

"Dipper... Mabel... Wake up!"

"KIDS WAKE UP."

It wasn't that the kids weren't happy to spend another summer in Gravity Falls with their Great Uncles again. Quite the opposite! However, even Mabel cringed at the idea of waking up at six a.m. on the first day of summer vacation. Unless there were fireworks involved. Early morning fireworks were the exception. Judging from the way both Stan and Ford were grinning, however, the reason behind waking up so early looked promising.

"Grunkle Stan? Great Uncle Ford? Wha... What time is it?" said Dipper, rubbing his eyes as he sat up in the bed.

"No time for grogginess, my boy," said Ford excitedly, "We've got to seize the day while we can! There's something we have to show you two outside!" The old scientist was bouncing on his feet as he pulled his nephew from the bed. Dipper grunted as his uncle set him on the floor, but a small ember of excitement began to warm in his brain. One of the many things he looked forward to this summer was studying the town's anomalies with his Great Uncle, and not even early morning grouchiness could douse that.

Mabel looked to Grunkle Stan, who said, "Trust me, it's good. Bring the camera, Sweetie, you're both gonna want to see this!"

Mabel had hopped out of bed at the word "camera," grabbing said device off the nightstand. The first scrapbookertunity of the summer! Both pairs of Pines twins headed out of the attic bedroom down the stairs.

"Soos found it this morning while he was setting up the Shack," was all Stan offered as an explanation. When Dipper and Mabel asked just what exactly had Soos found, both uncles shook their heads, grins widening across their faces. "Patience, children!" said Grunkle Ford as he opened the front door, ushering the kids outside. As the kids headed out onto the front lawn of the Shack, Mabel gasped, and began to snap many pictures of the scene that lay before them.

A tiny circus has sprouted up overnight, apparently run by equally tiny elves. A dozen or so acrobats had begun to form an elvish pyramid while another crossed a high wire on a minute unicycle. In the center stood the ringmaster, beckoning everyone to some see the best show on earth for one night only.

"Oh my gosh! A fairy circus! That's the cutest thing I'm gonna see all day!" cried Mabel as she snapped more pictures of the miniature acrobats below.

Dipper gave a weak grin. The circus certainly was unexpected, but he had expected something a little less cutey from the way his Grunkles were acting.

Apparently, so had they. "What? No, that's not it," said Grunkle Ford, scratching his chin as he examined the bizarre circus below.

Grunkle Stan grabbed the garden hose and sprayed the elvish circus away with one watery blast.
"Get off the property, ya creeps!" snapped the old man.

"The real surprise is in the back!" said Ford, grabbing both children by the hand and leading them behind the Shack. There they found Soos and Melody, who were staring at what appeared to be a sleeping--

"DRAGON!" cried Dipper.

"Shhhhhhhhh," hushed Melody, raising a finger to her lips.

Dipper lowered his voice, and continued to say, "A dragon! Oh my god, there's a dragon in the yard!"

"A wyvern, actually," whispered Ford. He walked up to the sleeping creature and crouched down next to it. "See the way it has wings rather than front legs? Also, note the diminutive size? A full-grown wyvern never grows more than five feet long. Think of it as a mini dragon. You don't often see these creatures out and about, but this one has apparently chosen to nest right here!" He was grinning as he pointed to the winged beast.

Mabel snapped even more pictures of the wyvern, noting how the creature's green scales glittered in the early morning sunlight.

"Are they dangerous," asked Dipper tentatively. The wyvern had begun to yawn, revealing several long, pointed fangs within its maw.

"They're actually quite docile, compared to their larger counterparts," said Ford, patting the creature on top of its horned head. "However, it would be wise to keep Waddles and Gompers away from it while it's here. Wyverns will not hesitate to eat any livestock if they're hungry enough."

"Waddles doesn't go outside anyway. We learned that last summer when he got kidnapped by that pterodactyl!" said Mabel, taking even more pictures.

"So, what do you think, Dr. Pines?" asked Soos. "Do you think we could keep him as some sort of exhibit for the Shack?" Soos looked over at Stan, eager to add even more impressive exhibits to the mystery tour now that the original Mr. Mystery was back in town.

"I'd wait til it got used to its surroundings before bringing new people over to see it," said Ford, "but, once that's out of the way, that should be fine. Just as long as no one makes any loud or sudden noises while it's napping. They can get... irritable if woken up too soon."

"Can we take a picture with it?" asked Mabel.

"First family picture of the summer," grinned Stan as Ford cheerfully nodded in approval. "C'mon, gremlins, gather around the fire breathing death monster!"

Dipper and Mabel crouched next to the wyvern between Stan, who stooped by the tail, and Ford, who was still crouched down by the head of the beast. Soos, to whom Mabel had handed the camera, instructed the Pines family to smile.

Melody, however, began to notice that a strange noise seemed to be coming from the woods as the family began to gather around the beast for the picture. Before she could even ask, "Hey guys, what's that mysterious screaming sound coming from out of the forest?" several different things happened all at once. The most mundane of these events was that Soos had taken the picture. Let it be said that the picture was actually quite good, though it no longer contained the four Pines twins smiling around a sleeping wyvern as was originally intended. The source of the screaming had managed to jump into the frame just as Soos had taken the shot. Old Man McGucket had
wrapped both his arms and legs around Ford's upper body, knocking him over onto Dipper, who was being squished by the combined weight of his Grunkle and the old kook. Fiddleford's banjo had managed to fly out of his hands, smacking Stan across the face, knocking his glasses off. Mabel merely sat between this chaos, staring in awe at the now wide awake and extremely churlish wyvern, who had reared back its head and began to breathe fire in irritation. The flames caught hold of the Shack and slowly began to crawl up the house.

"Oh no," said Melody, whom, over the course of the last year, had gotten quite used to all the little disasters that had fallen onto the Shack. "I'll grab the fire extinguisher."

"I better grab Abuelita out before she gets trapped inside," said Soos, leaving the Pines to deal with the chaos that had come bursting into their lives.

"What the heck is your problem?" said Stan to the still screaming hillbilly now latched on to his brother. He rubbed his jaw where the banjo had hit him, noting a large lump seemed to be forming where they had connected. The wyvern had spread its wings and flown away from the family, nostrils still smoking indignantly. "Get off my brother you old kook, you're gonna strangle him!"

"Don't call him a kook!" said Ford, though, with both of Fiddleford's arms now wrapped around his face, it sounded more like "Dert kullfim ert kerrk!"

"Please get them off me!" said Dipper weakly, wondering how it would look to all the other ghosts in Gravity Falls if they found out he died being crushed under his uncle's butt.

"Monsters in mah house!!!!!!!" screamed McGucket, as Stan and Mabel managed to lift both him and Ford off of poor Dipper.

"Monsters?" asked Ford, his voice still muffled as Fiddleford tightened his grip around him.

"It was terribibble!" the hillbilly said, looking Ford in the eyes. "At first I thought they was Raccoon Wife, but then it turned out to be the goat, but then it weren't! Eyes everywhere! Big! Creepy! Stole my quilt! Aaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!"

"Thanks, that cleared everything up," grumbled Stan, moving his finger in a circular motion around his head.

"Stan please," said Ford, who was gingerly removing Fiddleford from his neck, placing him gently down on the ground. He had not seen Fiddleford this upset since the incident with the portal all those years ago. Whatever had managed to frighten him so deeply, Ford was sure it was serious. "Take a few breaths, let's get you inside," he told Fiddleford, who, at these kind words, rewrapped his arms around Ford's middle.

"Um... Maybe we should wait for the house to stop being on fire, first," said Dipper, pointing to Soos and Melody, who were still trying to douse the flames creeping up the side of the Shack.

"Well... yes, that would be for the best."

Eventually, the fire was put out with a minimum amount of charring to the Shack, which was quite a feat. Once it was safe to return inside the house, Fiddleford, still wrapped around Ford, explained about the intruders who had broken into the mansion in the early hours of the morning.

"And you say there were hundreds of them?" asked Ford with a frown. He knew quite a bit about the strange creatures of Gravity Falls, yet he couldn't think of what sort of cryptids in a group of that size would be doing breaking into people's homes.

"The Northwest Mansion is pretty old," said Dipper as McGucket nodded his head tearfully. "Maybe it has some more ghosts haunting it?"
"It weren't no ghost," said McGucket. "I've met almost all of em in the house already. They ain't so bad. Wouldn't intentionally try to scare me now. It was some kind of... I don't know..."

"Then what could it be?" asked Mabel curiously.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door.

"I'll get it," said Stan, who figured it might be Wendy arriving for work. He would explain to her what was going on at the door. He didn't think he could sit through another round of McGucket blubbering about spookems.

When he opened the front door, however, a small gnome dressed as a police office had arrived, with a very soggy and annoyed looking troupe of circus elves trailing behind him.

"Stan Pines, this is a warning from the Enchanted Forest Police Department," said the police gnome.

"Enchanted what now?" blinked Stan.

"These elves here say you vandalized their circus with a garden hose?"

"They shouldn't have been on my property then if they didn't wanna get the hose!"

"We have a permit from Judge Hoot Hoot saying we have a right to perform in this location for the Midsummer Festival!" cried one of the sodden elves.

"... Judge Hoot Hoot."

"Stan, considering that your and your family saved us from certain doom last summer, I'm gonna let this slide," said the gnome officer. "But I don't wanna hear about any more trouble from these here dancing freaks about you. So watch it." The gnome handed Stan a piece of paper, warning him against any further trouble he might get into should any further damage come to the Elvish Circus. "Happy Midsummer!" said the gnome cheerfully, closing the door in Stan's face.

Stan wandered back into the living room, the ticket still clutched in his hand.

"I just got a citation for disturbing the peace by a gnome," he deadpanned to his family. "Some hooey about Midsummer."

"Midsummer!" cried Ford, a look of realization crossing his face. "Of course! Fidds, you have nothing to worry about. Those vandals should be gone by tomorrow morning."

"Huh?" said McGucket.

"What 'choo talkin' bout?" asked Mabel.

"Um... what exactly is Midsummer? And what does that have to do with the people who broke into McGucket's house?" asked Dipper.

"Those weren't people... those were the Wild Hunt," said Ford. He further explained, "I've never been here to witness a Midsummer festival myself, but I've read numerous accounts about it! It's an event that happens every quarter century, where all the gnomes, elves, fairies and what have you gather for a festival, when the barrier between our world and the land of the Fair Folk is opened for one night. Most of them are harmless, like those circus elves outside, but the Wild Hunt... They're not so nice. They terrorize the town trying to kidnap children for Oberon's army of rogues, monsters and changelings."
"Who's Oberon?" asked Mabel; though she liked the idea of a fairy themed carnival, she didn't like the sound of a spooky, kidnapping army.

"According to the sources I've read from, he was the king of the Fairy realms before he committed a terrible crime against his queen," Ford explained. "He was banished, along with his servant, into this dimension, and has been recruiting dangerous creatures ever since."

"That's terrible!" cried McGucket, shivering. "I don't want a bunch of child snatchers using my house!"

"We may not have a choice," said Ford solemnly. "I've read that ages ago the Northwests made a magically binding deal that the Wild Hunt may use the mansion as a hunting lodge every Midsummer, so there really isn't any kicking them out I'm afraid. But, we'll do what we can to keep kids off the street so the Hunt can't catch them."

Ford wrapped an arm around McGucket protectively, which had not been unnoticed by Mabel.

"Fiddleford can stay here until they finally clear out," he announced. "They should return back to their home dimension by sunrise tomorrow morning."

"Where the heck is going to sleep?" said Stan, raising an eyebrow at his brother. "This place is already packed, now that you, me and the kids are back."

Ford coughed. "I ah, don't mind doubling up for the night. As long as Fiddleford doesn't mind..."

"Works for me!" said McGucket, a wide, toothless grin cracking across his bearded face. Stan rolled his eyes.

"Say, Dr. Pines, this Midsummer thingy, does it have some kind of, you know, Goblin Market type deal? I wanna get a souvenir!" said Soos.

"Soos, that's genius!" said Stan, "We can grab up all the fairy junk we can carry and market it as some kind of special exhibit! The tourists will eat it up til they choke!"

"Humans aren't normally welcomed at these sort of things," said Ford, "But, as long as you disguise yourselves, they should let it slide."

"Do you think we could go to the festival too?" asked Dipper, "It would be an important event to study--" Dipper stopped, noticing the odd frown that had formed on his Great Uncle's face.

"I'm sorry, Dipper," said Great Uncle Ford, "I'm sure you could take care of yourself, but with that Wild Hunt on the loose... It might be unwise to let you and Mabel out tonight."

"What? That's crazy! We beat the apocalypse last year," said Dipper, annoyed. "How's an army of Fairies going to be any tougher than Bill's army of demons?"

"Kids, do us a favor," said Grunkle Stan. "Can we please get through one summer where we don't nearly have a stroke worrying about you two? There will be other adventures this summer. Let's not kick it off by being chased by child kidnappers."

Dipper pouted, but said nothing more.

"Um... Grunkle Stan? Ford? Can I still invite Candy and Grenda for a sleep over tonight? We won't go outside," asked Mabel, still looking at Grunkle Ford's arm on Fiddleford's shoulder.

"That sounds like a great idea, actually," said Grunkle Ford. "I can teach you girls all about all the anti-fairy defenses I've learned over the years!"
"Wait... you're not raiding the Goblin Market with me and Soos? I thought you'd be all over this sort of mumbo jumbo," asked Stan.

"I ah.... well. Somebody has to keep watch over the house while you three are away" Said Ford, indicating his brother, Soos and Melody, his ears reddening under the attention. "I'll sit this one out and go to the next Midsummer. When I'm eighty. Mmmmmmyep."

Stan smirked at his twin. He too had noticed what Mabel had seen.

"Fine. Have fun babysitting. The Mystery Shack is going to Midsummer!" said Stan, pulling Soos and Melody into a bear hug.

Chapter End Notes

My apologizes for the sudden ending of this chapter, but I've got to get ready for work! I'll try to keep updating frequently. Enjoy.

EDIT: whenever I re-read my work I always cringe when I see too many repetitive usage of words. Like, how many times did you put the word "Tiny" in that one paragraph about the elf circus? Get it together, Ces. 6/7/2016

EDIT: I've been going back over this fic and there's a few things I've wanted to tweak, be it small grammar mistakes or just wanted to beef up the world building in the story-- the early chapters suffer because I was making most of this up as I went, so I want them to match the quality of the later chapters. 5/23/17
Wendy walked in to work to find Stan Pines wearing what looked like donkey footie pajamas.

"I quit," she deadpanned, after staring blankly at her elderly boss for thirty seconds.

"Get to work," Stan replied, pointing a behooved hand towards the gift shop. "And don't ask," he added, as Wendy walked past him, not even bothering to hide her laughter. When she left, Stan called out to the other room, "Ford, I look stupid!"

"You look fine," said his twin as he returned to the front hall, a large maroon cloak draped over his arm. He too paused to look at Stan before chuckling himself. "Well, no, I lied, you do look really stupid," said Ford, ignoring the string of insults his brother hurled back at him as he draped the cloak over Stan's shoulders. "But, while wearing this, nobody at the Goblin Market should bother you."

"Who is this costume gonna fool? What, are all pixies idiots or something? I look like one of those puppets in that creepy movie Mabel likes!" said Stan, pacing around the room like a very irritable plush toy come to life.

"It's not really meant to fool anyone, honestly," answered Ford, who had pulled out a black crayon and began to draw designs on Stan's face. "Basically the only rule for humans to attend any of the Midsummer festivities is to be in a costume of some form. Think of it as a masquerade."

"Or a comic convention!" said Soos, who had burst into the living room along with Melody. They were also dressed in costumes, though both were quite different. Melody wore a simple white shift dress with red stains splattered across the front. A long, scraggly wig that covered most of her face sat atop her head.

"I'm the Well Witch!" She explained cheerfully to the elderly twins. "It's an exhibit we set up shortly after you two left last year. We bought a wishing well that tourists could throw loose change into. If anybody didn't throw in enough, I'd jump out and scare them until they gave up at least ten dollars."

"That's amazing!" grinned Stan, impressed by the pure audacity of the scam. "Soos, this one's a keeper!"

"Aw shucks," said Melody, blushing at the complement.

Speaking of Soos, his own costume was something much more elaborate than the Well Witch. He too wore a wig, one of long, dark, shiny curls that framed his face. A black cape with dark glossy feathers around the shoulders was draped over him, nearly covering the black leather jerkin and breeches. Under one arm he carried what look like a cardboard sword, under the other, a large white plushie of what appeared to be some kind of dog.

"Well, now I'm only the second most ridiculous looking person in the room," said Stan,
acknowledging Soos' strange outfit.

"It's certainly... ornate," said Ford diplomatically. "Erm... what exactly are you dressed as?"

"JIMMY FROST!"

Soos had opened his mouth to answer, but it was Fiddleford who had spoken when he entered the room. When he caught sight of Soos, he began to bounce excitedly up and down on his feet.

"That's it, dood!" said Soos, pleased that at least somebody got the reference. "I didn't know you watched A Storm of Clashing Kings!"

"Oh, I can't get enough of it!" said Fiddleford, who had begun to inspect the feathers on Soos' cloak. "I'll be darned, ya even got them feathers right!"

"Oh yeah, Jimmy Frost is like, my favorite character ever," said Soos. "He is a loner even among his own Flock, longing to reunite with his family. I relate so much."

"Isn't he that little pretty boy who looks like he's constipated in every scene he's in?" said Stan, who had stopped watching Clashing Kings after season one, when they killed the main character in the season finale.

"You watch yer mouth!" said McGucket, wagging his finger chidingly at Stan. "I near about cried my eyes out when them fellers of the Flock started stabbing him!"

"Same!" said Soos, who began tearing up at the memory. "And only a few episodes after his girlfriend Yvonne was shot by King Jerry, too!"

"How... uh... interesting..." said Ford, feeling completely out of the loop.

"Guys, come on, you're going to spoil everything for Ford before he's even seen the show!" said Melody, noticing the confused look on Ford's face.

Fiddleford turned to his old friend. "You mean to tell me you ain't seen any of Clashing Kings?" he said, grabbing both of Ford's hands.

"Not really," he confessed, yet another flush tinting his ears pink. "I haven't honestly watched much TV or anything since I returned to this dimension, what with being kidnapped by aliens, and the apocalypse, plus traveling overseas--"

"Oh but you gotta!" smiled Fiddleford, who began to hop up and down excitedly. "It's real neat! I watched it all a few months ago when I first moved into my fancy shack! There's lots of fighting, and plot twists, plus, one of them girls on the show, the one with the fancy hair, she's got pet dragons! Oops, ya ain't supposed to know that yet. Oh well, it's still good! We should watch it tonight after the kids go to sleep; it ain't really something yer supposed to show youngins, but it's amazing!"

"Oh, well... Sure," said Ford, giving Fiddleford a small smile, which the hillbilly returned with a tight hug.

"Well, anyway," said Ford loudly, remembering that there were three other people in the room. "Those costumes should suffice for later tonight. Remember: bring something to trade with the merchants if you plan on bringing anything back tonight--"

"I'm shoplifting everything that isn't nailed down!" said Stan smugly.

"I'm ignoring that," said Ford, "And remember: turn down any offers of food or drink while
"Ooooh, is that cause fairy food carries some kind of enchantment that turns humans into mindless servants to the Fae?" asked Soos, who had read enough fantasy novels to know a thing or two about food chains.

"Um... not really," said Ford. "Festival food for fairies is about seventy five percent sugar and twenty five percent flowers. You'll probably get diabetes from one bite. Plus, there's an entire subset of fairies that do nothing but puke, I'm not even sure if their food is edible for them, let alone humans."

"Fair enough," replied Soos.

"Come on honey, let's change," said Melody. "We should have a tour coming through any minute!"

"I am needed elsewhere," said Soos, and, with a dramatic swish of his cape, exited along with Melody.

"Y'know, ridiculous as this thing looks, it's actually pretty comfy," admitted Stan, stretching his arms behind him. "I think I'll take a nap wearing this."

Just then, Mabel ran down the stairs, a long list clutched in her hands. "Grunkle Stan, can you take me into town? I just called Candy and Grenda about the sleepover, they'll be here at six! I need a lot of stuff if this is going to be the best first sleepover of summer ever!"

"Sorry Pumpkin, but there is no way I'm going out in public dressed like this," said Stan, indicating the donkey suit.

"Actually, Mabel, I might be able to take you into town if you'd like," said Ford. "There's a few things I need to pick up myself for tonight as well."

"Oh em gee," cried Mabel, beaming at the suggestion, "thank you Grunkle Ford! You're coming too, right McGucket?"

"Why, sure!" said the old man, finally releasing Ford from the hug. It warmed his heart to be included in one of Mabel's plans. "I'll meet ya at the car!"

McGucket scurried out the front door. Once he had left, Mabel and Stan met each others gaze and grinned.

"Ok, why do you two keep doing that?" said Ford, flustered.

"Doing what?" said Mabel innocently.

"We weren't doing anything," Stan assured his twin.

"You keep looking at each other with those pie-eating grins every time I try to hold a conversation with Fiddleford. Stop it!"

"Stop what?" Mabel said, hiding her hands behind her back.

"Stop plotting whatever it is you're plotting," Ford told his niece.

"Grunkle Ford, such wild accusations!" Mabel chided.

"The very idea!"

Ford took a deep breath. "You two are filthy liars; I will be in the car." And with that, he left.

"Grunkle Stan?"

"Yes, Sweetie?"

"I'm going to get those two married by the end of the summer."

"You pull it off, I'll buy you a pony."

"It's a deal!" Mabel hugged Stan, running out the front door after Grunkle Ford.

The ride to town was peaceful, for the most part. Ford wasn't the greatest at driving, but at the very least he didn't drive with the same kind of maniacal frenzy that Stan was prone to. Mabel noted that he kept filling them in on some of the adventures he and Stan had gotten into while sailing all over the world last winter, some of which were funny, most of which sounded kind of scary, but a good scary. McGucket would talk about all the new inventions he had been planning, which turned into this really complicated discussion about engineering that Mabel thought was too techno-babbly to really follow, but the two old men seemed to be having a good time, so who was she to complain? Ford announced that they arrived at their first stop, and after spending a good ten minutes trying to parallel park, the trio hopped out of the car.

"The flower shop? Why are we stopping here, Grunkle Ford?" Mabel asked.

"Remember those anti-fairy defenses I mentioned this morning?" said Ford, opening the door.
"Well, one of the charms that's supposed to keep away some of the nastier creatures, like the Wild Hunt, is a chain made out of daisies--"
"Wait, we're making flower crowns? Yay, magical arts and crafts!" cheered Mabel.

"Well, that's certainly one way to put it," chuckled Ford. "I'd figured you and your friends would like something like that."

"Welcome to our shop!" said the old woman at the counter, a sleepy pug curled up beside her. "How can I help you folks?"

"Yes, we need about five dozen daisies," said Ford. While he and the lady continued to talk out the order for flowers, Mabel noticed a blonde girl in an apron watering a bucket of snapdragons.

"Pacifica! Hi!!!

Mabel skipped over to where her friend... pal... currently non-hostile enemy was working.

"Hey nerd," said Pacifica in a mostly affectionate way. "So you're finally back in town."

"Yep! We got here last night! Grunkle Stan and Ford picked us up at the bus station, then we went out for dinner at this sushi restaurant that had just opened up--"

"You mean Innsmouth Sushi?"

"Hey yeah, that was it! Did you know that place is run by some kind of mutant anglerfish person? We ended up fighting him off and learned some important lesson about teamwork or something--it was pretty wild. How are you doing? Are you working here? That's so grown up--"

"Mabel," said Pacifica, interrupting a new wave of babble, "In order for you to ask another question, you've got to let me at least answer one first, got it?" Mabel made a big show of shutting
her mouth to let Pacifica speak. "Yeah, I'm working here at the moment. My family's still broke because my dad was a complete idiot last summer. He's been doing these embarrassing get-rich-quick schemes all over town; it was kind of funny at first, but now it's just sad."

"Sorry to hear about that," said Mabel.

"Don't be. I have no need for pity," sniffed Pacifica.

"Pazzy," screamed a voice from the back, "Be sure to finish up watering the display flowers soon! This manure ain't gonna spread itself on the flower beds!"

"Ugh... act like you're going to buy something so I can look like I'm trying to sell it to you; I am not going to try to spread poop anytime in a hurry," said Pacifica. "Anyway, what's your creepy SciFi uncle doing with McGucket?" The Northwest girl pointed towards the counter, where Ford was paying for the flowers while Fidds patted the sleeping dog on its head.

"Buying daisies! I'm throwing a slumber party and we're going to make flower crowns!" said Mabel excitedly.

Ford turned and waved to Pacifica.

"Hi, Mabel's mean friend!"

"Hi, Mabel's weird uncle!" Pacifica called back. She turned back to Mabel, "anyway, what's McGucket got to do with it?"

Mabel grinned. "Matchmaking!"

"Wait, you want your uncle to start dating the former town kook? Gross."

"It's not gross, it's beautiful," said Mabel, putting her hands on her hips. "Picture it: two old friends who, after a tragic fight broke them apart when they were young, reunite as a couple decades later during their autumn years. They're crazy about each other, even if Fordsy's too much of an emotionally constipated dummy dumb to admit it!"

"Whatever," said Pacifica, rolling her eyes at Mabel's speech. "You know that McGucket smells like pure roadkill."

"La, la, la, can't hear you over the sound of true love!" chimed Mabel, clamping her hands over her ears.

"Mabel, say bye to your little friend, we've got to get going," said Ford, his arms full of flowers.

"Ok!" said Mabel. She turned to Pacifica and said, "You know, if you wanted to stop by for the sleepover tonight, you're more than welcome!"

"That better not be a pity invite," said Pacifica.

"Mabel, come along!"

"Pazzy, the manure!"

"It's at six!" said Mabel, who scurried out the door with McGucket. "Bye, doggie!" shouted the old man, waking the dog from its peaceful slumber with a start.

"Ugh... Fine!" said Pacifica at last. Anything had to be better than playing with cow poop at this point.
"Ok, what's bugging you?" Wendy asked Dipper, who had been glaring at a large snow globe for the last ten minutes. "You're acting even moodier than Robbie today."

"Oh god, no," said Dipper, snapping out of his reverie. "Everything I ever feared."

The two had been sitting in the gift shop, catching up on the past year since they parted ways and watching tourists fall for the Well Witch scam outside the window between customers. Though, if Dipper had to be honest, he felt distracted. It was stupid to dwell on the fact he wasn't going to the Midsummer Festival, he told himself. Even so, the idea that a magical gathering of oddities was right outside his door tonight and he wasn't even going to be able to see any of it rankled with him.

"It's just... Ford said I wasn't allowed to go out with Stan and Soos to that Midsummer thing tonight. I know I shouldn't care, but I just feel... left out?"

"Hey, just cause you can't go to the actual festival doesn't mean you can't have a good time tonight," said Wendy, lightly tapping Dipper's arm with her fist. "Come over to my place tonight and hang out. I need somebody to watch cruddy horror films with; I've had Robbie and Tambry over at my house since the rest of my family's been out of town for the fishing tourney. Honestly, kinda sick of being a third wheel."

"Uh, sure!" said Dipper, blushing slightly. A dim flicker from his old crush began to glow again. Spending an evening with Wendy was a good enough consolation prize, even if it meant dealing with Robbie and Tambry.

"Sweet," said Wendy, "We'll head over once I get off work. We're gonna own the night!"

"We're back!" said Mabel, pushing the door open with her foot. Her arms were laden with what looked like enough candy to make a dentist cry.

"AND SO IS GRENDAAAAAAA!"

Grenda had arrived early for the party with an overnight bag at her side and Candy Chiu sitting on her shoulders.

"We are back with a vengeance!" declared Candy, pumping a fist into the air. "And this time, it's personal," she added darkly.

"I hope no one minds, but we stepped on that elf circus on the way in," said Grenda, who was trailing the pink remains of a diminutive circus tent under her foot. The elvish ringmaster was sobbing over the loss of his tent a few feet behind her.

"Ah, let me get that guy something to replace his tent with," said Wendy. She winked at Dipper, "Remember, we're leaving once I clock out." And with that, she left.

"Aw, you're not staying tonight?" Mabel frowned at her brother. "But we're making flower crowns!"

"Eh, flower crowns were never really my thing," said Dipper.
Mabel smiled and said, "That's fine Dipper, I mean, now that you're over your crush, you can finally act like a normal person when you hang out with her! But still, you're missing out on some amazing flower crowns!"

"I think I'll be fine," he deadpanned.

"Flower crowns are a serious defense against evil, Dipper," said Ford, who had his arms full of brightly colored daisies. McGucket was clinging to Ford's back, sticking stray flowers into his fluffy hair. Dipper wondered why Ford didn't tell McGucket to quit clinging to him like a koala all the time, but it seemed his Great Uncle didn't mind, so why should he?

"Girls, could you take these for me?" Ford thanked Grenda and Candy as they took the overflowing flower bags. "I've got to make a phone call to the mayor. Perhaps I can convince him to put up a curfew..."

"Good luck trying to get the mayor-- he's probably run off to that fishing whatever along with most of the rest of town," said Wendy, who had returned sans flannel overshirt. "I made those guys a new tent using a laundry basket and my shirt." she explained.

"Wow, lot of people going to that fishing tourney," said McGucket, weaving a blue flower into Stanford's hair. "Ain't that contrived?"

"Contrived and unfortunate," agreed Ford. "I can't imagine what might happen if some kid goes wandering out on a night like this with that Wild Hunt about."

"Ha, yeah, that would suck..." said Dipper with a nervous laugh. He coughed and said, "Great Uncle Ford? About tonight. I know I can't go out into the festival, but, do you think I could go over to Wendy's house? It'll still be daylight when we leave, so we should be safe, right?"

"Dipper, I'm sorry, but that's out of the question," said Ford. "I would feel a lot more comfortable knowing you kids were here in the house where it's safe."

"But why?" said Dipper, raising his voice more than he though he would.

"Um... maybe we should start setting up in the attic girls," Mabel suggested, ushering Grenda and Candy out of the gift shop.

"Awwww, I want to watch them fight!" said Grenda.

"The drama is too good!" agreed Candy.

"Nope, leaving now," said Mabel, who pushed her friends out of the door, leaving Dipper alone to deal with his Uncle.

"Dipper, this isn't a good night to be wandering around, I told you that," said Ford, trying to keep his voice calm.

"But I won't be wandering around, I'll be with Wendy and her friends! We'll just be watching movies in the house, I promise," said Dipper.

"You can spend time with your friends once Midsummer is over," said Ford, "but for now my answer is no. It won't be so bad. Once I've set up Mabel and her friends with proper precautions, how about you, me and Fidds start a game of Dungeons, Dungeons and More Dungeons? Just us guys, wouldn't that be fun?"

"Yeah, Dipper, don't worry about it," said Wendy, giving him a smile. "We can hang tomorrow. It's not a huge deal."
Dipper knew deep down that he didn't need to fight this. He could just spend a quiet night in, spending time with his hero, not having to worry about anything. But, what had been stewing within him all day had at last come to a boil, and before he could even stop himself, he said, "I just don't understand, after all the adventures we had last summer, why are you treating me like a little kid all of a sudden? You said yourself I can handle things most kids my age couldn't; well, I think I can handle a walk across town!"

He immediately regretted his words. Wendy had given a low whistle, a weak attempt to break the tension; McGucket had ceased weaving flowers into Ford's hair. Ford glared down at Dipper.

"You know, I lied," said Ford, quietly at first. "When I said I couldn't imagine what would happen if the Wild Hunt actually managed to snatch up a child later tonight? Oh, I can imagine. Quite clearly, I can imagine being ripped from your own life by some fearsome warlord, surrounded by folks who don't care for your safety, just how they can use you for whatever demented plans they have. I can imagine being drafted into some unknown army fighting some meaningless battle against your will, because if you try to run, you get your limbs rearranged if they catch you, and believe me, they will catch you. And, ten times worse, you're a small child while all this is happening, unable to get home all because you acted like a spoiled, screaming brat, too good to listen to common sense!"

The quiet that fell over the room was deafening. Dipper looked close to tears when Stanford had finished his speech. Ford's face softened once he was able to calm down, but when he tried to reach out to Dipper, the boy turned and ran out of the room.

"I... I think I went a bit far with that," Ford sighed, his shoulders drooping.

"Yeah, that was intense," said Wendy awkwardly. "Um... my shift's actually over now, so... I'm just going to... yeah." She too slipped out the door, turning the open sign on the gift shop door closed.

"I wouldn't worry yerself too much," said Fiddleford, sliding down Ford's back onto the floor. "I used to get into fights something terrible with Tate all them years ago... Though, I think one of those fights was about the time I ate a live squirrel at his high school graduation... that's a bit different. But hey, he forgave me eventually! It'll all work out!"

"... I hope you're right," said Ford, pinching the bridge of his nose with one hand.

"Course I am!" Said Fidds, taking the other six fingered hand into his own. He began to lead Ford out of the room.

"C'mon, let's help the girls set up their little party! That'll keep yer mind off all that shouty biz!"

***

Gideon Gleeful was drawing pictures on the sidewalk with chalk in another attempt at being a normal kid. He had been told that arts and crafts were a good way to express your inner frustrations in a constructive, non-violent way. He failed to notice, however, anything alarming in drawing all across the sidewalk pictures of monsters graphically eating people you didn't like, which today included the dentist, Deputy Durland, who took the last push pop from the ice cream truck before Gideon could buy it, and the kids who took his skatin' board.

"Drawing my enemies, getting what's coming to themmmmm," he sang cheerfully. "Oooh, it's getting dark. Better head on home." He scooped up the remaining chalk pieces and shoved them in his bag. As he got up to leave, he spotted Pacifica Northwest carrying an overnight bag across her shoulders walking down the sidewalk.
"Hi friend!" said Gideon, waving towards her. Pacifica cringed.

"What do you want, you goblin?" she said, annoyed that Gideon had sided up next to her as she walked towards the Mystery Shack.

"Why, I was wondering if you could walk with me to my house," said Gideon in his cloyingly sweet southern drawl. "It's growing late and I don't have Ghost Eyes or any of my prison pals to protect me. What, with your big strong man hands, you could probably fight off anything that tries to get me."

"Number one, you insult my hands again and I'm slapping one right across your face," said Pacifica, jabbing Lil' Gideon in the chest with one finger. "Number two, I'm not going towards your house, dingus, so bug off."

"Ooooh, might I ask where you're headed off too?" asked Gideon. "You know there's supposed to be some kind of monster hunting party out and about tonight; I read all about it in the second journal I found. Mighty dangerous, you know."

"I'm ignoring your veiled threat," said Pacifica, "and because you're just going to annoy me until I tell you where I'm going, you should know I'm headed to Mabel's for a sleepover. She begged me to come because the party was going to be so lame without me, so I reluctantly agreed."

"Mabel's back in town!" said Gideon, his wide freckled face beaming. "Why, that sounds delightful! Funny she didn't call me, heh... since I just about texted her every day she was gone until she blocked my number. Wonder how she's doing?"

"Probably amazing now that she doesn't have her stalker following her around like a lost puppy. Later," said Pacifica, turning left, away from Gideon's house.

Neither had noticed the figures lurking in the shadows by the town junkyard.

"Wait!" said Gideon, reaching into his pocket. "Before you go, could you give Mabel my number again? Just in case it was a mistake she ended up blocking me." He handed Pacifica an old business card for the Tent of Telepathy that had his number still scrawled across the front.

Pacifica took the paper, crumpled it into a ball, and threw it on the ground.

"Bye," she said, turning and leaving the ten year old boy behind. Gideon made a mental note to draw Pacifica getting her hair shaved off by gnomes next time he went drawing.

When he turned, he found himself surrounded by a silent group of armored strangers.

Before he could even scream, he was shoved into a sack. The boy was surrounded by rough burlap that he tried to claw his way out of, to no avail.

"Your Majesty, we caught a child!" hissed one of Gideon's abductors. The sack was roughly passed to someone, and was shortly opened. Gideon was grabbed by the hair, yanked from the sack to face his captor, a large man in a suit of armor that was black as thunder clouds.

"If you scream," said the knight in a deep, distorted voice, "I will rip your tongue out."

Gideon clamped his hands over his mouth.

"This child..." muttered the black knight disdainfully, "it's soft. It'll never make a good soldier in my army... but we do need cannon fodder. Bring him back to the lodge; he is our first catch of the night."
"Wait please! Don't take me! I-I know who you are! King Oberon, please don't take me, take Pacifica instead! She's just down the street, headed to the Mystery Shack!"

"What need would I have for some spoiled girl child, boy?" said King Oberon.

"She's got really big hands, could wallop you right in the mouth and it'd knock out half your teeth! She's much stronger than I would ever be! Take her instead!"

"Perhaps he's right, your majesty," said a slender figure beside the King of the Fae. He lifted his helmet, revealing lots of silvery blond hair like Gideon's, and eyes as wide as a full moon. "What would you need with such a cowardly figure in your army? Perhaps the girl would be a better catch."

"Yeah, I'm a total coward!" agreed Gideon hysterically. Oberon was silent for a long while. Frantically, Gideon added, "And not just her! She's heading to a place where there are four other children, all better fighters than I am. Twins, a boy and a girl, fought half the monsters in this town and won every time! There's also a really big girl who's tremendously strong, and a little one who's smart, and invents things! You can take all of them, just leave me out of it!"

"... Wow that was cowardly. More than the normal amount of cowardice. I'm a little embarrassed," muttered the white haired Fae under his breath.

"Hmmmm... that does sound like a much more bountiful quarry," said Oberon at last. He turned to his smaller Lieutenant, who flinched as Oberon cupped his pointed chin in his hand.

"My dear Puck," hissed Oberon, "I shall take half of our party to this house with the boy-- just in case he's lying. We'll set him free if he is being truthful. If he is not... I'll dispose of him in my typical fashion." Gideon gasped as Oberon pulled out a long obsidian dagger from up his sleeve. "Until then, take the others and continue the chase. There are others we need to catch this night." Oberon shoved Gideon back into the sack, rallying his posse behind him as the sun sunk below the horizon.

Chapter End Notes

I'm worried I made Dipper too much of a brat, please, tell me how to unbratify my son.

Edit: I've actually been informed that Ford yelling at Dipper hurt Gummy's feelings; it's okay, it hurt my feelings too, and I'm the one who wrote it.
In Which Some Embark on a Journey and Others Prepare to Stay In

Chapter Notes

So, I just wanted to send a big thank you to all of you guys who are reading this silly thing I'm writing, especially to Cirilee for being incredibly supportive! It's really lighting this fire under my ass to keep writing, so, please enjoy! This next chapter is going to be a bit fluffy.

"You made it!" Mabel cheered when Pacifica arrived on her doorstep.

"Don't read into it," said Pacifica, "I only came because all the other parties I was invited to tonight were much more pathetic than this one. Your party won by default."

"Hey, do you know your nose gets all crinkly when you lie," asked Mabel, as she invited Pacifica inside. "Grunkle Stan calls that a tell in poker."

"Just show me where to put this bag," said Pacifica, her cheeks going pink.

"Gladly! You can store it upstairs in our room!"

Pacifica caught a glimpse of the living room, where Mabel's Uncles, Soos, and Melody were going over their plan for the evening. "Um, why is your Uncle dressed like a donkey?"

"He needed a disguise for tonight, so we went through a pile of old Summerween costumes. That was the only one that still fit," answered Mabel blithely.

"Do I even want to know why they needed to wear costumes for tonight? That was rhetorical," said Pacifica before Mabel could answer.

As Mabel showed Pacifica to the attic room, Ford reiterated what he had told the group earlier in the morning about the Midsummer Festival. "Ok, everyone's in their disguises; did you bring your items to trade," he said, surveying the group. Melody lifted a basket that she was carrying, full of trinkets from the gift shop. "All the defective bobble heads and misspelled key chains we got last shipment should be fine, right?" she asked.

"Eh, I'd throw some glitter on it so it at least catches the eye a bit more," said Ford, eyeing the bag of broken souvenirs. "But otherwise that should do the trick."

"I've got some snacks hidden in my cape!" added Soos, spreading the dark folds of his cloak to reveal that he had sewn bags of chips and candy bars into the inner lining.

"Well done," said Ford, nodding to Soos.

"And I brought a sawed off shot gun!" said Stan, holding the weapon above his head.

"While I do think bringing weapons along for protection is a smart move, Stanley, I'd pick something a little more concealable," said Ford, who had retrieved a large duffle bag from behind the recliner. "You three go through this bag and pick whatever you're most comfortable with handling."

"Woah, you're like Santa with knives!" said Soos, picking up a dagger with a polished oak
"I think I met a Santa in one dimension who did hand out knives instead of presents on that world's version of Christmas," said Ford, but as he was about to tell an anecdote about the time he and Santa overthrew a tyrannical regime in a magical winter wonderland, he caught sight of Dipper, who was heading up the stairs with a book under his arm (the title read The Sibling Brothers and the Mysterious Ticking Noise). Their eyes met briefly, but before Ford could say anything, Dipper ran up the steps, sulking. Ford sighed quietly, crestfallen.

Stan, noticing this silent encounter, sheathed the rapier he had taken from the bag. "That one's mine, so keep your mitts off it," he told Soos and Melody before attending to his brother.

"That's fine," Melody said to Soos, raising her chosen weapon from the pile with both hands. "I've always been more of a war hammer person myself!"

"It's so you!" agreed Soos.

"Wanna tell me what that all was about?" Stan guided his brother out of the parlor.

"It's just... do you ever have good intentions but end up only ticking everyone off," Ford replied with another question.

"Yeah, loads of times... usually without the good intentions part, though," Stan grinned. This failed to make his own brother smile.

"So," Stan continued, "what did you do? The kid looks like a freshly kicked puppy."

"I... I'm afraid we got into an argument about tonight," Ford confessed. "He wanted to go out with Wendy and I told him no. We started bickering and... I lost my temper."

"That's it?" said Stan, incredulous.

"What do you mean, that's it?" replied Ford.

"I've yelled at that kid more times than I can remember!" said Stan. "He's a stubborn know-it-all, just like us. Well, mostly you. Ninety percent you."

"Watch it," said Ford with a scowl.

"Look," Stan continued, "all I'm saying is that Dipper thinks the world of ya, so I wouldn't worry too much. He'll bounce back."

At last, Ford began to smile, to his brother's relief.

"I guess you're right... But, it's a little hard to take you seriously wearing that outfit. If you don't mind me saying... you look kinda like an ass."

"I'm not taking this sort of pun-related sass from a man with blue flowers stuck in his hair."

As they laughed, the Stans saw Soos' Abuelita coming down the stairs wearing a dark pea coat.

"And where are you going?" asked Stan, as she opened the door to leave.

"Out," she replied in her soft voice. "I have plans."

"... Such as?" Stan raised his eyebrow inquisitively.

"That is for me to know, and you two to mind your own business," she said darkly. She waved to
a car that had pulled up in the driveway, blaring thumping music with a heavy bass. "Hasta luego, perdedores." And with those words, she left.

"Well... that certainly happened," said Ford after a while. He suddenly turned to his brother, grabbing his elderly twin into a hug. "Try not to get killed tonight," he told Stan once he released him.

"Yeesh, ya got me teary eyed over here, ya big softie," was Stan's crusty reply. No one was fooled. He was touched.

"We're all ready to go!" said Soos, entering the hall along with Melody, weapons in tow.

"We'll be back in the morning, tell the kids we said bye!" said Melody, opening the door to leave.

"Take it easy, brother," said Stan, giving Ford one final pat on the arm before leaving with the others.

"Hey, take this with you," called Ford, handing them a walkie talkie he had in his coat pocket. "This way we can communicate if something goes wrong."

"It most likely will go wrong, but I'm sure we can handle it!" said Stan. And so, Stan Pines left his brother to run Mabel's sleep over.

"Excelsior!" cried Soos, waving a dagger in the air.

"Soos if you talk like that the entire night I'm glueing your mouth shut," replied Stan as they vanished into the forest.

Mabel and Pacifica returned down the stairs. Noticing her uncle watching the others go out into the night, Mabel crept up next to him and pulled on his sleeve.

"Hey, did you want us to start making the flower crowns now?" she gently reminded her uncle as he snapped his attention back to the shack.

"Of course!" he said, warming up at Mabel's smile.

"Can I not put those things on my head?" asked Pacifica, already starting to get bored. "Flowers are a lot less pretty when you have to see all the aphids that crawl around on them every day at work."

"Flower crowns are mandatory!" said Mabel as Ford led them into the kitchen, where Candy and Grenda were already waiting with the flowers along with McGucket.

"Lookit! They done braided my beard for me!" said Fiddleford, indicating his long white beard that had been twisted into a relatively smooth plait.

"They certainly did," chuckled Ford, sitting down next to his old friend. Mabel grinned smugly at Pacifica, who gagged in mock disgust.

"Now," said Ford, addressing the four girls gathered around him, "This is actually very simple. Just use a fingernail or a small knife, like the ones in the middle of the table, to cut slits into the stems of the daisies. Once you've made the incision, insert a flower into the cut. Then, after you've attached a blossom to the stem, continue until you have enough to circle the entire head. All right, everyone get started."

"Why do daisies keep fairies from kidnapping you, I wonder?" asked Candy, whom had been first to complete her flower crown after only a few minutes.
"Oh, well, the fragrance in daisies, though pleasant to humans, is actually a deadly neurotoxin to most forms of the Fair Folk," Ford explained.

"I feel so deadly," she said proudly, dropping the crown onto her head with a flourish.

"Grunkle Ford, can I have one of your blue daisies? I'm trying to make a pattern with mine," asked Mabel, who had made a chain of pink, blue and purple daisies.

"Hope you don't mind," said Ford to Fidds as he gave one of the flowers in his hair for Mabel to use.

"Aw, I'll just put some more in later," said Fiddleford.

Soon enough, the girls finished their crowns, and all but Pacifica put them on their heads.

"I'm still keeping mine on me," said Pacifica when Ford complained. "Just not on my hair. It's like this family never heard about head lice or something."

"Well," said Mabel grabbing her Uncle and Old Man McGucket by the hands, "I think we can take over from hear, boys. Why don't you two call it a night?"

"It's only seven, Mabel," said Ford, who had planned to show many more tricks against the fey. Never the less, Mabel kept pulling the two old men down the hall towards Ford's room.

"What do you know? It is seven! Just in time for that *Storm of Clashing Kings* marathon on tv tonight!"

"Golly, yer right!" said McGucket, his eyes lighting up. "They're gonna show all of seasons one and two tonight, holy wow!"

"I thought kids weren't allowed to watch that show?" said Ford incredulously.

"I'm not, but I do anyway!" said Mabel. "Also I might have done a teensy bit of eavesdropping this morning when you two said you were gonna watch it together. I figured, hey, wouldn't tonight be a neat time?"

They had arrived at Ford's room, where Ford discovered that the TV had been moved, along with several blankets and a bowl of popcorn.

"I got Soos to help me move the TV in here this afternoon!" Mabel explained.

"Aw, ain't that sweet! Look, one of the blankets has a map of the Seventeen Kingdoms on it!" Fiddleford held up a plush throw with a bizarre continent printed on the front.

"Yeah, Soos also let me borrow it," said Mabel, who ignored the annoyed gaze Ford was giving her. "Well, show's going to start any minute," she finished, running out the door. "I'll leave you guys to it!" She slammed the door behind her.

An all too familiar creeping flush began to color Ford's face. It was the first time all day he had been alone with Fidds, and he wasn't sure what to say. He'd been delighted when he found out Fiddleford was no longer angry with him for what happened with the portal, but all the same, no matter what Mabel seemed to think, or what Ford honestly felt about Fiddleford himself, he found it unlikely that anything romantic could happen at this point. They were too old, they'd been through too much trauma for anything even remotely stable to form. If he were to be honest with himself, however, if there was even the slightest possibility for a happy end for them...

*Listen to yourself,* he thought, as Fidds took a seat on the couch, patting the cushion next to him,
inviting Ford to sit down. You sound worse than your niece, there's nothing romantic about watching a TV show together. Even if it's Fidds. You're just sitting down... watching a show... together. Surrounded by blankets. On Midsummer. Together. In the room that you're sharing for the night. Together.

"You all right?" said Fidds when Ford finally sat down on the couch. "You look a might tense."

"It's nothing," said Ford, his voice cracking like a teenage boy. "Just. Erhm."

"I get nervous when I watch this show too," said Fidds, covering his friend with one of the blankets beside him. "You never know what's gonna happen. OOOOH, it's startin'!"

Fidds began to hum along to the theme music for the show, which, to be perfectly blunt, was adorable, even if Fidds didn't hit any of the right notes. The scene opened on a group of men dressed in black feathers fighting what looked like zombies in the snow. "There are zombies on this show?" Ford asked, raising an eyebrow. "Yeah, but technically they're called the Cold Others," answered Fidds, who looked rapt. Midway through the fight, just when all seemed lost for the guys in black, a man who Ford guessed was Jimmy Frost emerged, wielding a sword with a white dog at his side.

"Wow, Stan's right, that guy does look constipated," said Ford, noting the permanent wide-eyed frown on Jimmy Frost's face.

"Shush!" said Fidds, pressing a finger to Ford's lips. "Watch!" he commanded, slightly enjoying how flustered Ford looked. Ford did have to pay quite a lot of attention to the show to follow what was going on, for their were a lot of plot lines going on in just this one episode. While Jimmy Frost battled zombies in the north with his feathered Flock, a horde of attractive actors of varying levels of acting ability came and went, teasing plot lines that involved everything from politics, gender equality, magic, wizards, direwolf pet care, and a highly inappropriate relationship between siblings that made Ford want to gag.

"What does any of that stuff have to do with the Cold Others?" said Ford.

"Y'know, I don't rightly know," said Fidds, who had scooted closer to Ford throughout the show. "Probably going to tie that all together in the series finale."

"Hmmm... when does Dennys' dragon hatch?"

"No spoilers!"

Ford found it hard to focus on the show, though, as Fidd's head began to droop onto his shoulder. Without even thinking, Ford stretched out his arm and enveloped Fidds into half and embrace, much to the latter's delight. "Hey Ford?" said the old hillbilly, as his own arm curled around Ford's middle.

"Yeah?" said Ford, who was staring wide eyed as Queen Catie ordered her royal guards to kill Sallie's pet dog Biscuits.

"It's nice being with ya again," said Fidds, taking Ford's other hand into his own.

Ford, absolutely red in the face at this point, rested his head on top of Fidds'.

"It's nice being with you too."
Mabel was in her element. With Ford and McGucket nestled away safely on their date, she could finally focus on the simple things, like making this party the first of many amazing sleepovers this summer!

"Okay girls, gather round!" she called to the others. "We have five minutes til the pizza guy arrives—"

"Half pineapple and Canadian bacon and half artichoke pesto!" Grenda bellowed excitedly.

"Um... yeah no," said Mabel, gently patting her disappointed BFF on the arm. "But, once the pizza's delivered, what does everyone want to do first?"

"Party games!" cried Candy. "I brought a Ouija board with me! We can use it to talk to cute ghost boys!"

"Absolutely not, said Pacifica, crossing her arms. "I refuse to attend another party that involves vengeful ghosts."

"It's karaoke time!" cried Grenda. "Hold on to your butts, Grenda's got the voice of an ANGEL!"

"We'll do that for the next sleepover," said Mabel before Pacifica could comment. "But I think we should keep it relatively quiet tonight. Things are still a little shakey from this afternoon. I wouldn't want to stress Grunkle Ford out anymore than he's been already today."

"What happened?" asked Pacifica, just as there was a knock at the door.

"Erm... I'll fill you in once the pizza guy is gone. Poor pizza guy. We're pen pals, you know. Real sensitive soul. I'm not sure if he could handle all the drama."

After Mabel spent a few minutes catching up with the pizza guy (Pacifica thought he would never end his story about how werewolves stole his pet iguana Lucille), the two carried the large pizza box into the kitchen.

"So, anyway," said Mabel, "Dipper was going to hang out with Wendy tonight, but Grunkle Ford said no, and Dipper was like, 'whaaaaa,' and then Ford totally yelled at him and it was super scary and loud!" said Mabel all at once.

"So? That's it? They just got into a fight? What's the big deal? I get in fights with my parents all the time nowadays," said Pacifica, placing the box down on the table. Candy and Grenda descended upon the box like ravenous wolves.

"Not Ford and Dipper," said Mabel. "They never fight like that, not really. Usually it's like, 'Dipper, let's go on a nerdy adventure!' and Dipper's like, 'wow, sure! Hope we don't get kidnapped again!' but of course they do, but it all works out in the end and everyone has a good laugh about it. Except, you know, that time the world almost ended." Mabel grabbed a paper plate on the counter and put two square slices of pizza on the pink disk.

"Hey girls, I'm going to bring these up to Dipper. I'll be back down in a bit."

"I'll go with you," said Pacifica; she had grown to like both of the Pines twins (though she would
deny it fervently if anyone asked) but she wasn't quite ready to hang out with Candy and Grenda by herself. You had to draw the line somewhere.

"Hey yeah!" said Mabel, leading the way towards the gift shop. "Who knows, maybe you can convince him to join the party," she added, waggling her eyebrows at Pacifica.

"You try and set me up with your brother and I will spread day-old fertilizer all over your bed," warned Pacifica.

"You're blushing!"

"Shut up!"

"Here, hold this," said Mabel, handing the pizza plate to her frenemy. She climbed up the secret ladder to the roof, lifting the trap door when she reached the top.

Dipper was sitting on top of the roof, staring down at the elf circus below. A small crowd began to file into the laundry-basket-turned-circus-tent for the show. He didn't look up when Mabel arrived.

"Hey Bro-Bro," said Mabel gently. Dipper didn't say anything as Mabel sat down next to him. "Still sad about earlier?" she asked, rubbing his back.

"I'm not sad," he sighed, lowering his head. "I just... I don't know. I think I need to be alone right now."

"That's fine," said Mabel, pulling her brother into a brief hug. "We just wanted to bring you dinner," she continued, indicating Pacifica, who had joined them on the roof with Dipper's pizza.

"Thanks," he replied, giving his twin a weak smile. "I'll just eat it up here."

"Okay," said Mabel, getting up to leave. "We'll be downstairs if you change your mind." She slid down the ladder to the room below, leaving Dipper alone with Pacifica.

"Thank you," Dipper repeated as Pacifica handed him the plate. In truth, he wasn't hungry.

"If it's all the same," said Pacifica, taking a seat next to Dipper, "I think you should go."

"What?" said Dipper, taken aback.

"I think you should go anyway," she repeated slowly, as if he were stupid. "Just go sneak off to Lumberjack Betty's if you want to go so badly."

"But Ford said--"

"Your uncle's downstairs in his room watching that Dragon show with the hillbilly, he's not going to notice if you leave for a few hours," sneered Pacifica.

"He'd kill me if I left, though!" said Dipper, gesticulating with his arms.

"I highly doubt it. No offence, but your badass paranormal investigator uncle is actually a squishy teddy bear. One night of teenage rebellion isn't going to matter to the guy in the long run." She stole an uneaten slice of pizza from Dipper's plate.

Dipper mulled the idea over in his mind while she ate. The thought of sneaking out was tempting; it was certainly better than moping on top of the roof all night. However, the way Ford had looked at him when they had argued... he didn't want to think about what would happen if Ford caught him trying to leave tonight. A fresh wave of anger, however, began to rise anew in Dipper's chest. Ford was one to talk about being too good for common sense-- he got into dangerous situations all
the time! Who was he to preach to Dipper about being careful?

"... You think the fae will try to get me if I leave?" asked Dipper, raising an eyebrow mischievously.

"Yeah, watch out, those mini carnies at the circus look super suspicious," said Pacifica, pointing to the tiny acrobats below.

"I'll be sure to be on my guard," Dipper said, grinning.

One trip down to the clone-copy machine later--

"Um, you know, I was just going to stuff your bed with pillows and have, like, your hat stick out," said Pacifica, blinking at the newly printed Dipper clone.

"The hat stays with me," said Dipper, readjusting the fur cap Wendy had given him.

"Besides, this way we have a more concrete alibi," said the clone, whom Dipper had dubbed 'Tyrone the Second.' The clone then departed for the roof.

-- Dipper and Paz snuck out into the front yard, gingerly stepping around the elf circus.

"One more thing," said Pacifica before Dipper turned to leave. Making sure nobody (especially Mabel) was watching, she kissed Dipper on the cheek. "Just in case you do wind up being kidnapped by fairies," she explained. "You tell anyone, and I'll rat you out."

Dipper, who had made a face that would have won a Jimmy Frost lookalike contest, squeaked "Goodbye," and ran off towards Wendy's.

Pacifica, once she lost sight of Dipper, returned to the shack. She was greeted by Mabel, who was flanked on either side by her two nerdy besties. Each held a flashlight in their hands.

"So," said Mabel, holding up the flashlight to Pacifica's face, "what would you say to a game of flashlight tag?"

"I'd say you're all nuts if you think you can catch me," said Pacifica smugly. She missed getting into competitions with Mabel; nobody else in town could quite match up against Paz the way Mabel could.

"That's why you get to be It first!" said Mabel, handing the Northwest girl a spare flashlight. "Whomever Pacifica tags first is the next person to be It," she explained cheerfully. "Remember: stay in the front yard, don't go by Ford's room, and stay out of the woods!"

The four walked out onto the porch once these rules were explained. As Pacifica counted to a hundred, Mabel and Grenda, who was carrying Candy on her shoulders again, ran in opposite directions to hide.

"Ninety eight... ninety nine... one hundred!" she cried. Pacifica hopped off the porch, strategically flashing her light toward the opposite direction of where she was walking. Misdirection was key. During one brief blast of light, Paz thought she had seen Grenda's feet sticking out of a shrub by the living room window. Just as well. She would go back to that area once she had caught Mabel, who was the harder target.

Silently, she crept through the grass, occasionally hearing the wind rustle some leaves. The new moon, slim and sharp as a sickle in the sky, could only barely be seen above. She had to admit, it was clever cover for a game like this. Never the less, a sharp crack from the edge of the woods caught Pacifica's attention. Found you! she thought triumphantly. She crept closer and closer
towards the noise until she was right at the hedgerow.

"Breaking your own rules, Mabel? Woods are off limits, remember? You don't want to get snatched up!" she asked smugly, shining the light into the forest.

It was not Mabel.

The creature before her looked like a knight in black armor. It held in its massive hand the struggling form of Gideon Gleeful.

"Well done, soft child," boomed the knight, dropping Gideon at his feet. "You told the truth. These children will be a much more valuable addition to my army. I won't even have to draw them out of their accursed shelter." With a wave of his hand, King Oberon summoned several other twisted hunters from out of the woods, each leering at Pacifica as they began to surround her.

"Where are the others?" Oberon asked one of his subordinates, a decaying Banshee carrying a scythe.

"Clooooose," she whispered in a high, reedy voice. "The boy though... I saw him leave ten minutes ago. He must be miles away by now."

Oberon snapped his fingers. Appearing by his side in a flash of light was the silver-haired Puck.

"The boy," he told the Puck, cupping his chin with two large fingers, "he's headed east, towards the woodcutter's house. Follow him."

"As you command, my Lord," said Puck dully, a milky white gleam shone in his eyes at Oberon's command. He snapped his fingers and vanished into the night.

"As for the rest-- they're in the yard," said Oberon to his court. He moved closer to Paz, his arm outstretched. "Round them up--" he bellowed, but as he was about to snatch Pacifica, she felt herself being yanked upwards.

"Grappling hook!" Mabel shouted as they ascended above the Wild Hunt. Screaming, Paz held on to Mabel as they shot from tree to tree, avoiding the fae that had begun to pursue them.

"Put your crown on!" said Mabel, yanking the flower crown from Paz's pocket and shoving it onto her head. The Banshee, who had been close to grabbing the two as they flew over the Bottomless Pit, recoiled at the sight of the daisies.

"Don't let them escape!" shouted Oberon, "That house has a unicorn enchantment on it! We won't be able to enter!"

"Candy, Grenda, get inside!" Mabel called to her friends as she and Paz arrived on the porch. With a grunt, Grenda burst from the bushes, punching away any fae that tried to impede her and Candy's escape.

"Wait for me!"

Gideon ran towards the Shack, panting all the way, as an ogre strided quickly behind him, ready to recapture the boy.

"I'm on it!" shouted Grenda, putting Candy down on the porch as the others ran inside. The large girl grabbed the chair on the porch, her favorite weapon. She dodged the grasping hands of the Wild Hunt as she rushed to Gideon's side, her focus unwavering.
Gideon tripped, landing face first in the dirt. Had Grenda been any later he would have been doomed. She threw the chair into the ogre's face, knocking it out cold.

"Get over here, mister!" screamed Grenda, lifting the fallen Gideon over her head.

"Put me down! Put me down!"

"Okay!" she cried and with a mighty heave, she threw the small boy through the open door of the shack into the hall.

"Eat it, freaks! GRENDA RULES!!" she cried to the Wild Hunt, jumping inside just as King Oberon himself made a grab at her.

"Latch the door!" cried Mabel; Candy slammed the door shut once everyone was inside, while Grenda and Paz moved the table from the kitchen into the hall, forming a barracade. The sound of furious howls and screams could be heard, but no one outside made any attempt to break down the door. The charm had worked.

"Okay. No more flashlight tag," said Mabel, breathless.

Chapter End Notes

It took me a bit longer to update this chapter; work schedule kept me occupied for most of the week. Also, had to look up the rules to flashlight tag. I don't think I've played since I was eleven years old. Always hated that game; first of all I was a fat kid and hated running after people, and second, I was a huge wuss and didn't like the dark. It seemed like a nice creepy game for this chapter though, so I thought it would be a good idea for Mabel's party to play.

Also, word of advice? Do not listen to the It Follows soundtrack when you are home alone by yourself at night trying to write a creepy chase scene. The spoopy synth will get you every time.
In Which a Tale is Told Around the Fire

Chapter Notes

So, originally this chapter was going to put the focus back on Stan and Soos at the festival, but I planned that one out to be a lighthearted chapter, and this week I wasn't feeling particularly lighthearted. Being an adult is terrible. Absolutely the worst. Instead, I decided to go with the Dipper and Wendy chapter, which is a bit more serious.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Move out of the way, kid!"

Dipper jumped, but it was only Jeff and his pack of gnomes chiding him. They swarmed around his feet, running down the dirt path that led to Wendy's cabin in the woods.

"C'mon, c'mon, move!" said Jeff again, this time to his followers. "The festival is still two miles away, that's like, half the continental United States for us! Pick up the pace!"

"Um... why are all of you wearing donkey ears?" asked Dipper, who had noticed the little headbands the gnomes were wearing in lieu of their usual pointed hats.

"Hey, go mind your own business, kid!" Jeff snapped, pointing rudely at Dipper.

"Schmebulock!" agreed the older gnome, his own ears drooping lopsided on his head.

"Come on, lets go! We're this close to getting our queen at last!" cried Jeff, rubbing his hands together as he and his brothers disappeared into the woods. Dipper continued on once they had left; he could see the outline of Wendy's house in the distance, windows aglow with light. It had certainly been an unusual trip, though Dipper could hardly say it had been particularly dangerous. Sure, Soos' Abuelita had almost run him over when he had been crossing the street-- he wondered when the little old ladies in town had taken up drag racing?-- but no other harm had come to him at all.

However, there was and increased amount of activity amongst Gravity Falls' magical community. Minute sprites like the one Soos had once crushed outside the twin's bedroom window were fluttering around in people's gardens like fireflies. It would have been quite pretty, thought Dipper, if they didn't keep trying to bite him every few seconds. The fabled Leprecorn had been peering into the windows of Greasy's Diner, pleading in its ancient tongue for the sweet release of death. Lazy Susan misinterpreted this as the creature begging for scraps, so she chased it away with a broom. Even Celestebellebellebellebelle was out and about, though she appeared to be on the run from a trio of goblins shooting arrows from crossbows, one of them screaming something about unicorn stew.

Dipper wondered, as he finally approached Wendy's front doorstep, if that was the legendary Wild Hunt Great Uncle Ford had been warning him about. If so, he'd have to tell his uncle that the information on the Hunt was wildly inaccurate, and that he had worried for nothing.

... Well, Dipper would tell Ford after the summer, preferably in a letter once he was miles away back in Piedmont.
Dipper knocked on the door, his knuckles scraping on the rough, splintery wood. As he waited, he noticed it sounded as if there was a loud argument going on inside the house. Wendy at last opened the door, her eyes looking tired, her mouth locked in and exasperated frown. Her expression changed drastically into one of pleasant surprise once she saw Dipper.

"Oh, hey!" she smiled. "I didn't expect to see you here tonight, you know, after... after earlier today."

"Um... turns out my Uncle changed his mind?" he said, a sheepish grin stretching out his face. Somehow lying to Wendy felt tenfold worse than talking back to Ford had been, but at least this way, if he was caught, she wouldn't be accused of being a bad influence.

Wendy raised her eyebrows, but said nothing.

Crash!

"Guys! Don't break my stuff," yelled Wendy back into the cabin, but yet another crash! told Dipper that this warning had been ignored.

"I'll stop throwing things when Robbie learns to stop being such and irredeemable, sexist pig!" snarled Tambry from within.

"Quit comparing me to farm animals!" Robbie's voice shouted back.

"Oh, gladly; calling you a pig is and insult to pigs! You worm! You rat! You- you revolting slime mold!"

As they continued to bicker, Wendy slapped her palm to her face. Just as Robbie was about to describe what sort of vermin he thought were comparable to Tambry, Dipper gently closed the door, muffling out the sound.

"Sorry," said Wendy. "We were watching A Storm of Clashing Kings, and Robbie said something about Dennys' actress being hot. It got... hairy."

Dipper frowned. "Are they... Okay?" he asked cautiously.

"Honestly? I think they should just give it a break," she sighed, rubbing her temples. "It's exhausting, watching them fight all the time. It only really just started, but from my experience, when it starts to get to this point it's the beginning of the end.

"But hey," she said with a lighter tone, "I'm glad you're here, man. I think watching a movie is out with that mess inside going on--" Wendy gestured toward the door as another crash! punctuated Robbie and Tambry's argument. "--But if you want," she continued with an easy smile, "we could start a bonfire."

"Well, who can say no to minor acts of arson?" Dipper asked wryly.

"Go get some snacks from the house," said Wendy, "There should be a bag of marshmallows somewhere in the pantry. I'll start making the fire; time to put those old Lumberjane skills to good use!"

Dipper had to avoid all the random objects Robbie and Tambry were still lobbing at each other, but otherwise, retrieving a barely stale bag of marshmallows from the Corduroy's pantry was a cinch. For good measure, he also took some hot dogs, skewers, and a liter of Pitt Cola along with some plastic cups. It always helped to be prepared.

After narrowly dodging a blow from a couch cushion Robbie had hurtled in his direction, Dipper
returned to the lawn and found Wendy a few yards away near the edge of the woods with a fire already crackling brightly in the night.

"Hey, check it out!" she called to him as he approached. She was pointing towards the fire, where tiny, glowing, lizard-like creatures were forming in the flames. A few began to leap out of the fire towards the woods, leaving ember-like footprints behind as they went.

"Salamanders!" cried Dipper excitedly. "I've never seen them this close up before! Well, there were some at the zoo once, but those were the boring kind that live in water. Not fire salamanders." He handed some of the food to Wendy, who began to place things like the soda and cups on a nearby tree stump.

"Glad something cool came out of this night," said Wendy, impaling a mallow onto a skewer to roast on the fire.

"Me too," said Dipper, also skewering a marshmallow. One of the salamanders had crawled up next to his feet; carefully, he placed a marshmallow next to the vermilion fire spirit. It sniffed the sugary treat before taking a small, hesitant bite, leaving behind charred marks where it had been chewing.

"Excuse me for interrupting," said a voice from the woods. Wendy and Dipper jumped back as something leaped down from a nearby tree, landing next to the fire. A silver-haired young man, thin and lanky, stared at them from across the flames. "Would you two care to share the fire with a weary soldier?" he asked, pushing the silvery down of his hair out of his face, revealing two of the largest eyes either of them had ever seen. Like his hair, his eyes had a lunar like glow to them that looked sinister when illuminated by the fire. When neither of them answered his question, he continued to say, "Yes. The answer is yes. You'd be too young to know, I suppose, but typically, when one of the Fair Folk ask for a favor, it is wise to do it for them, especially on Midsummer. It's just good manners."

After a while, Dipper spoke in a trembling voice. "W-would you like t-to sit by the fire?"

"Gladly," said the silver haired Fae, suddenly appearing between the two humans. "May I have a marshmallow?" he asked Dipper, who was still holding the bag. There was something plaintive about the expression on the Fae's pointed, narrow face as he held out his hand for the marshmallow. Dipper handed the treat to being silently; a wide, toothy smile stretched the being's face abnormally as it popped the mallow into his mouth.

"Thank you," he said, eyelids fluttering in ecstasy, still chewing as he spoke. "It's been too long since I last tasted sugar."

"No offense," said Wendy, the tone of her voice implying that she meant every offense possible to commit, "but who the hell are you?"

"My sweet lady, that is something I ask myself every day," the Fae said, snatching the remaining bag of marshmallows for himself. "For it has been so long since I have ever truly been myself. Centuries ago I was once called Robin Goodfellow-- a knavish sprite, a merry wanderer of the night-- the jester in the court of Queen Titania and King Oberon."

"Oberon?" said Dipper, a creeping realization trickling down his spine, causing him to shiver. "You mean--"

"Yes," said Puck, a wicked grin yet again revealing several rows of sharp teeth. "King Oberon-- well, merely Oberon now, ever since his wife banished him from the Realm-- current master of the Wild Hunt. Commander of Erlkings, Redcaps and Kelpies; snatcher of children who unwisely wander about at night..."
Wendy jumped between the Fae and Dipper, her ax in hand, sprung back over her head, ready to swing. After a tense pause, the Fae carefully backed up, his hands held up in front of him.

"It's a good thing it's only me, Puck, and not that guy, am I right?" he cackled. Wendy did not lower the ax.

"Forgive me," he continued, "I merely jested. I forget mortals and my kind don't typically see eye to eye when it comes to humor. I mean it truly, boy, I have no interest in delivering you to my master for his twisted game. In truth, were I not magically bound to him as his servant... well, that's neither here nor there, is it?"

"You. Leave. Now," said Wendy, her voice low and threatening as she began to move towards the Fae, her ax still held aloft.

"If... If I may just tell my tale before I go?" gulped the Puck, his wide full moon eyes staring at the sharp blade of the ax. "It's typically how it's supposed to go... a way for a traveler to repay such kindness that you two have shown me in the brief time we've known each other. Only one story, and I'll be out of your pretty red hair and on my merry way."

"...Just tell your stupid story, then go," said Wendy, lowering the ax but still gripping it tightly in her hands.

"I thank you for your mercy," said the Puck, an impish smile returning to his face once more. He cleared his throat, and began to speak: "I have not been back home since I was cast out of the realm of the Fae alongside my master for our crimes against the Queen."

"What did you do to the Queen?" asked Dipper.

"Oh, it had merely started as a marital squabble between husband and wife," said Puck, gesturing vaguely with his hands. "You know how it goes: Wifey brings home a human baby, a favor done in the name of the child's mother, who had died giving birth; Hubby reads one too many scrolls about the Trojan War and gets the grand idea to turn the baby into a brutal soldier. A few hurtful insults, some hair pulling, a bit of changing the weather and destroying a few towns later, the whole kingdom is divided over who should keep the baby in what way.

"So, one day, my master comes up with a most excellent revenge for Titania's impudence--"

"Wait," said Dipper, "I've read something like this before! Oberon told you to put a love spell on Titania, so she'll be so infatuated by the first thing she sees that she won't notice if you took the baby. Then, it turns out the guy she falls for is some actor in a play you put a donkey's head on, something about puns--"

"Yes, yes," said Puck, annoyed. "I'm well aware of that hack playwright in Stratford-upon-Avon butchering of our history. But, as usual, he forgot the finer details in this story. Like the fact Titania actually did fall in love with the Ass-headed rude mechanical once the initial spell had faded... the fact that when my master had the young baby in his possession, he had asked me to transform it into a beast of such terrible power that when I had finished with it, I had twisted it irreparably to my master's whims, it no longer resembled anything that could be mistaken for a human child even in a madman's dream. Still yet, it is omitted the part how my mistress had sobbed when she saw what became of her charge. The playwright also neglected to mention how Titania had ran to her mortal paramour for comfort, or how coldly Oberon had struck him down. Those little details were left out, I'm afraid. I wouldn't have told the scribbling fool had I known otherwise. Take my advice, humans: never get involved with a writer."

"It serves you right that you got kicked out," spat Wendy at the Puck.
"I do not deny my guilt," muttered Puck, lowering his head. "But it seems sad, doesn't it, that you and your little friends have to suffer for my crimes? Always being haunted like prey, being tormented into becoming something monstrous? Seems to me rather cruel and undeserved on your behalf." He turned to Dipper. "I meant it true when I said I wasn't interested in turning you in, boy. I detest this exile. I long to be back at the festival, enjoying the revels, rather than bulking up this foolish project of Oberon's. You will not be harmed by me tonight."

"... thanks," said Dipper after a beat. "I mean... all that stuff you did in the past was pretty messed up... but maybe you're starting to become not such a bad guy?"

"Oh... no," Puck drawled, crushing a salamander with the heel of his boot. A pair of screams came from the cabin just then. "I'm still a pretty bad guy," he continued, his expression cruel as Dipper and Wendy gazed at him in horror. "See, like it or not, I still have to find new recruits for Oberon's army if we're ever to make an army strong enough to reclaim the kingdom. But using children is foolish. Teens now? That's a smarter move. Fueled by hormones and rage; why, the four we had caught in Athens when we were banished made some of the most beautiful abominations I had ever seen. I can't wait to see what I can make your friends into."

Black, scarab-like wings sprouted from Puck's shoulders; Wendy swung her ax but missed when he took to the sky. He was joined by two other winged creatures in the air, each carrying the struggling forms of Tambry and Robbie.

"Goodbye," called Puck as Wendy and Dipper demanded he release the couple. "I thank you for listening to my story."

With a snap of his fingers, all five of them vanished.

Chapter End Notes

So. Originally Robbie and Tambry weren't the ones Dipper and Wendy had to rescue. It was going to be Raccoon Wife.
McGucket was going to get all upset that he had left her behind with the Wild Hunt at the mansion and Wendy was going to mount a rescue mission along with her friends to get her back. Dipper volunteered as well, but was forbidden to go by Ford. Of course, he sneaks out anyway, leading to shenanigans.
I dropped this plot line for the simple reason that it was the stupidest idea ever conceived by the human mind. Plus, it makes the Hunt sound more threatening if we actually do see them kidnap people, in addition to learning that they transfigure their captives into monsters. It adds weight to our antagonists' actions and puts our protagonists in real danger that they have to think their way out of.
... Anyway, next chapter is going to be Stan and Soos frolicking around in the woods, and then after that we're going to return to the sleepover under siege.
In Which We Catch the Nine 'O Clock Midsummer Parade

Chapter Notes

Not going to lie, wasn't truly feeling this chapter at all because of real life DRAMA, and if it seems rushed and forced at all then that's probably why. Also, I'm also currently in a production of Macbeth? Yeah, it's sort of weird to be going from writing a fic heavily inspired by A Midsummer Night's Dream to being in a Shakespeare play about politics, murder and witches. It's putting a lot of potential writing time to the side due to rehearsal. We're opening in three weeks; so updates are probably going to be less frequent than usual. But, speaking of witches, little tidbit: originally I was going to have this story take place during Walpurgisnacht, and was going to be about witches and demons; however, Walpurgisnacht is in early May, which wouldn't fit in the whole "Pines Twins come to Gravity Falls Every Summer" time frame. So, you get horrifying child-kidnapping Fair Folk and pretentious Shakespeare references instead! Huzzah! Anyway, done babbling. Enjoy chapter eight!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Donkey pajamas were never meant to be worn on a two hour hike through the woods. Every few feet it seemed as if the costume Stan was wearing kept getting snagged on brambles, causing the old man to yell at Soos to untangle him.

"How much farther is this thing," Stan asked grouchily once he had been untangled.

"Another half mile, according to this map your brother drew," said Melody, pushing the scraggly wig out of her face to get a better look.

"That's not so bad!" said Soos cheerfully.

"Speak for yourself, my feet are killing me!" Stan complained. "It's like the path is paved with nothing but twigs, rocks, and broken glass!"

"And little candy houses!" cried Soos, pointing to a minute village that was made of chocolate, graham crackers, and marshmallows to say the least. Casually, Soos leaned down to pick up the chocolate roof off of an ornate mansion made of marzipan.

"Hey, Mel, you think anyone would mind if I ate this?"

"Soos, you already took two bites out of it," said Melody.

"Yeah," said Soos through a mouthful of chocolate, "but I thought it'd be neat to grapple with the moral implications."

"Hey! You just ate the roof off city hall!" cried the Elvish mayor of Candytown inside the now roofless building.

"Oh, uh... sorry doods," said Soos, abashed.

"No, no, it's cool!" assured the Mayor, "We've been meaning to replace that roof for ages! It's gotten stale and moldy..."
"Huh. That explains that aftertaste," said Soos, staring at the decaying candy bar in his hands. He reached into his Jimmy Frost cloak and pulled out an extra large Mr. Adequate bar. "Here, let's trade!" he offered.

"Oh, thank you sir!" cried the mayor as Soos began to re-roof city hall. "Your kindness has saved my citizens much in tax schmeckles! I owe you much gratitude!"

"No Prob!" said Soos with a smile.

"Ugh... this cutesy shtick is wearing thin," muttered Stan as they hiked further down the road.

"I'd rather it be cutesy than dangerous," replied Melody, who had pulled a camera out to snap a photo of a trio of Fae dancing merrily around a maypole. "Cool as this war hammer is, I don't think I'd like to use it on anybody tonight."

"I say we get in and out as quickly as possible with as much stuff as we can in either instance," said the old man, wincing as he stepped on yet another rock.

"Hey, look! We're here," said Soos, pointing to a bustling marketplace a few yards away.

Stan Pines was something of an expert on tacky junk meant to drain tourists of their money, and in his thirty-odd years in the tourist trap business, he had never seen anything quite as splendidly tacky as the Midsummer Festival. A Picturesque village square had magically been constructed in the grove, with pastel-painted shop carts lined all in a row. Fairies of all shapes and sizes were peddling cheap trinkets; one sold paper flowers that looked almost like the real thing, others sold bright, sparkly clothes that would've made Mabel squeal with excitement, and yet another sold hand stitched dragon and unicorn dolls (Stan nabbed a dragon each for Dipper and Mabel, stashing them into his onesie).

The three of them stopped at a Glassblower's stall, where a rabbit-eared Pooka was creating little glass figures of mythical creatures like scarlet phoenixes, cerulean sea serpents, vermilion dragons, and even pink winged pigs. Once the glassblower had finished creating a figure, he would place it on a display shelf, where it would gingerly pace behind the glass, beckoning customers to purchase them.

"That's amazing!" cried Melody, approaching the booth. "By any chance would you be willing to trade?" she held up the basket of souvenirs.

"That all depends on what you got," said the Pooka, his eyebrows raised in interest. While Melody bartered with the trickster spirit, Stan pocketed the glass pig, which fluttered up to his head, eventually nestling in his hair to rest.

"Mr. Pines," said Soos, nervously looking back at the glass vendor, "maybe tone down all the shoplifting while we're here? We don't want to get these doods mad, y'know?"

"Listen," said Stan, picking up some small paper-bound books from a bookseller's cart and stashing them away in his donkey suit as well, "I'm only stealing gifts for the family; presents mean more when they're obtained in a high-risk environment!" They paused at a shop cart selling delicately crafted jewelry made of silver.

"Why don't you give it a shot?" said Stan, waggling his eyebrows.

"M-me?" gulped Soos, staring at the jewelry vendor, who was obliviously polishing a pair of silver candlesticks.

"Yeah, pick up something nice for your girl, eh?" said Stan, nudging Soos with his elbow.
"Uh... I don't know..." said Soos, sweat beginning to bead on his forehead at the very idea.

"Do it! Do it! Do it!" Stan chanted as Soos anxiously snatched a ring set with a bright lavender stone. Just then, the jeweler snapped to attention.

"What do you two creeps think you're doing?" snapped the dwarf.

"Quick, let's disappear into that whimsical musical number happening down the street!" said Stan, grabbing Soos by the arm and dragging him away from the vendor as the Dwarf cursed at them.

"I'm a criminal," whispered Soos, his eyes wide with shock as they maneuvered around twirling Fae.

"Just like the rest of us!" said Stan cheerfully, avoiding a pirouette from a glittery, dancing sylph.

"Congrats, kid; you made me proud out there!"

Upon being told he had made Stan proud, Soos' face contorted into an expression of pure delight.

"Okay... I think we lost sight of Mel, but that's fine," said Stan once they had broken free of the dancers. They stopped to rest against a golden statue of a terrifying, chubby cheeked baby with wild hair. "We'll just stick around here for a little bit, she'll find us again eventually."

"Your attention please!" cried a pretty fairy girl in a poofy pink dress made of sweet pea blossoms. "It is my pleasant duty to inform you that the Midsummer Parade is heading this way! Please stand by!"

"A parade? I tell ya, this place is even cornier than Pioneer Day," said Stan, crossing his arms at the sight of a little elvish marching band that had begun to pass by.

"I bet the kids would have liked it, though," said Soos, retrieving a bag of Gummy Koalas to snack on as the parade continued.

"Hey, you, with the face!"

Stan looked down to see one of those annoying gnomes glaring up at him, a pair of long, gray ears resting atop his fat head. "Can I help you?" Stan asked, scowling.

"Yeah, you can change your outfit! We're the ones trying to get Queen Titania's attention, we don't need some human bozo hogging the spotlight!" Jeff threw a punch at Stan's shin. The old man responded with a swift kick that sent the gnome flying into a passing float warning about the dangers of daisy fumes.

"Sorry," Stan smirked as Jeff was carried away by the float, "these old reflexes, you know?"

"What do you think that guy meant by all that?" asked Soos, offering the rest of his bag of candy to the remaining gnomes gathered around the statue.

"Don't know, don't care," said Stan as the gnomes tore open the bag to devour the gummies.

"We would-be suitors of the fairy Queen always don the guise of an ass in honor of the Queen's lost paramour; every Midsummer she chooses a mate to help her rule over the celebrations, a most honored and valued tradition of the festival," Schmebulock explained.

... Well, he tried to, at least.

"Ugh, I wish that guy would quit with that 'schmebulock' business; he's giving me a migraine!" said Stan, rubbing his temples.
"Hey, look, I think that's the Queen that gnome was talking about!" said Soos, pointing to an oncoming float, a willow tree adorned with glowing glass bubbles that hummed melodically as it passed.

Atop the willow float stood Queen Titania, perhaps the tackiest thing Stan had seen so far tonight. She wore a gaudy, flouncy dress the color of ice, a monstrosity of tulle and rhinestone. A long, silver scepter was kept in her dainty, china doll hand, which she waved insipidly at her adoring populace as she passed. Her rosy-golden hair were piled high on top of her pretty head in ridiculous curls, a comically undersized tiara stuck haphazardly within.

"She's certainly flashy," said Stan as the queen used her scepter to conjure golden fireworks over the crowd, illuminating the night's sky. He wondered where he could snag some magic fire crackers for the kids...

"I welcome you all," said Titania in a merry voice that sounded like tinkling silver bells. "May this be the most splendid Midsummer in our grand and wonderful history!" Stan gagged as the Queen blew kisses into the cheering crowd.

As if by fate, however, Stan managed to catch the Queen's eye, her head snapping in his direction to get a better look.

"Oh my stars," she cried musically. She fluttered down from the willow-tree float, towards the statue where Stan was sitting.

"You!" sang the fairy Queen joyously.

"Whaaaaa..."

She pulled Stan up by the shoulders, putting him to his feet. "At last! We have found him once more! My one true love!"

"... What???
" asked Stan, dumbfounded. The Queen threw her arms around his neck, planting a kiss on his nose.

"Aw, cheer up guys," said Soos to the dejected gnomes as the Queen dragged Stan with her back to the float. "I'm sure you'll find cute fairy queen of your own who will love you for you."

"My devoted friends," said Titania melodiousely, "I must retire to my pavilion with your new King of the Festival! I'll be back shortly for tonight's performance of Pyramus and Thisbe once your new king is ready! Toodle-ooooooo!!!!"

With a wave of her scepter, Titania vanished along with Stan in a puff of purple smoke.

"Huh. I should probably do something about that," said Soos.

"There he is!" cried the Jewelry Dwarf, flanked on each side by a gnome cop. "That's the guy who stole my ring!"

"Uh, maybe later!" said Soos, jumping into the parade to avoid the law once again.

Miles away on the other side of the festival, Stan found himself in the pavilion of the Queen.

"What the heck is your prob--" Stan began, but the Queen of the Fae, once out of the public eye, was a much different person altogether. The simpering, insipid smile was gone, replaced by a deep, miserable scowl.

"Cram it," she snapped at Stan, glowering. "Do me a favor? Get me a cigarette. I am not getting
through this dopey festival without nicotine."

Chapter End Notes

One of the advantages of delaying this chapter was that I got to re-evaluate how I was going to portray Titania in this story. I was originally going to have her just be a stereotypical ditzy, infatuated fairy princess who turns into a monster when Stan eventually turns down her advances. I changed this because A. Roadside Attraction already gave Stan a monster girlfriend who tried to eat him, and B. Coming up with nuanced character interpretations of Oberon and Puck while doing nothing really new with Titania is... pretty much the worst thing ever. So, now you have a bright, sparkly fairy queen who deep down inside is a bitter, chain smoking curmudgeon and I'm super excited to continue with that character arc. Stay tuned, friends.
In Which Ford Loses His Temper Again

Chapter Notes

.... I started writing this at one in the morning and passed out around three; as a result I lost most of this chapter when my computer ended up restarting. Everything is pain.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"So... Whatcha think?" Fidds asked, squeezing Ford's hand gently.

"That... That can't be right!" replied Ford, gesturing with his free hand at the TV screen. "Sallie and Annie's father just gets his head chopped off by Prince Jerry?!

"I knowwwww..." Fiddleford sniffled.

"But that's ridiculous!" said Ford, outraged. "He was the only one who knew who killed Princess Linda at Denny's Quinceanera! Who's going to tell the court that it was Queen Catie's evil twin Kaatja?!" Ford paused when he saw Fidds, still tearing up and moaning, "Poor Neduardo!"

"Hey now," murmured Ford, rubbing the hillbilly's shoulder. "It's going to be okay-- at least Sallie and Annie got away, right?"

"Aw, shucks, they end up getting captured by Senor Lancaster midway through season two," was Fidds' dejected reply. He buried his tear stained face into Ford's chest.

"Sorry," said Fidds, his voice muffled by the thick wool of Ford's sweater, "That was a spoiler."

"That's quite all right," Ford assured him with a chuckle. He wrapped his arms around Fiddleford, resting his chin on top of Fidds' head. "Do you still want to keep watching? We'll stop if you're upset," Ford asked, gently tracing circles on Fidds' back with his right hand.

"You crazy? Of 'course I wanna keep watching!" said Fidds, pulling away from the hug. "The second season is amazing! Little Timmy ends up setting fire to a whole armada with-- Ah! Ya keep making me spoil things on accident!"

"It's been my evil plan the whole time," said Ford with a smirk. Fidds lightly tapped Ford's chin with the back of his hand before snuggling back against Ford.

Once Fidds was comfortable again, Ford's attention was directed back to the TV where Yvonne, Jimmy Frost's secret girlfriend, was eating a plate of frosted lemon cookies while discussing how to sneak over the Snowfort that separated the Seventeen Kingdoms from the Tundra of Doom. "Oh, god, not another scene where they eat!"

"What's wrong with it?" asked Fidds, who also began to watch the scene as Yvonne nibbled on a cookie.

"It's completely unnecessary to the plot!" Ford complained. "Sticking a plate full of steaming hot cookies into an exposition heavy scene like this, just to keep the audience invested, it's just shoddy writing!"

"Hey, yeah," said Fiddleford, now seeing Yvonne lick the confectioner's sugar off her lips in a new light. "They do put a lot of food in these slower paced scenes; and they make the girls eat
more than the fellas do... weird."

"It's blatant fanservice is what it is," nodded Ford smugly.

"... I still want those cookies, though," said Fiddleford after a while.

"... I suppose I am getting hungry," Ford reluctantly agreed. He turned to Fidds. "I'll grab us something from the kitchen," he told his old friend. Before he got off the couch, he squeezed Fidds' hand once more.

"Come back soon!" said Fidds, smiling his toothless smile.

Say something else, you idiot! a small voice in Ford's head cried shrilly. Of course, as it always seems whenever you or I want to sound cool and confident in front of a person we like, Ford couldn't manage anything wittier than, "Uh, yeah, you too?" He scuttled out of the room before Fidds could process what he had just said, hitting the door frame with his shoulder on the way out.

All embarrassment aside, Ford couldn't help but think this-- Get together? Gathering? "Date" still felt like too official a word in this context-- whatever it was had been going well. A strange, nervous emotion kept fluttering in his chest, a bizarre hybrid of anticipation and joy that Ford associated in his youth with waiting for presents on his birthday. "I... I think I might have a crush," he told Waddles, who was indeed waddling up the hallway towards the stairs. The pig squeaked as Ford bent down to scratch him behind his ears. "You didn't hear that from me, though," Ford said, gently tugging Waddles' ear before getting up again. "So don't squeal on me, got it?"

Waddles snorted, perhaps in agreement. It's rather hard to say what goes on in the mind of a pig.

Ford noticed, as he began to cross over towards the kitchen, that the table had been pushed against the front door. Odd. The older man didn't have much time to think about the kitchen table's unusual location, however. When he walked into the kitchen, he found himself in the midst of a scene of complete and utter lunacy.

The Northwest girl was being physically restrained by Candy and Grenda; the blonde girl kicking and thrashing all the while in hopes that they'd lose their grip. The flower crown she had constructed earlier was hanging lopsided on her head, as if it had been jammed on in a hurry. She was screaming at a little fat boy with poofy white hair, the most printable of insults that she hurled at him being "traitor," and "snitch." The boy held a chair out in front of his body like a lion tamer, though, judging by the quickly swelling welt on his cheek, it didn't appear as if it had offered him much protection.

Poor Mabel stood in the eye of this tempest, urging Pacifica to calm down. " STOP YELLING, YOU TWO ARE CAUSING A SCENE!" Mabel shouted. "W-T-you-know-what!" She pointed towards Ford, barely looking at him as she spoke. "Oh great, just look! You've upset Grunkle Ford!"

"I... wouldn't say upset so much as thoroughly confused," said Ford with a cough. The other children directed their attention to him as he fully entered the room. "Mabel, what on earth is going on," he asked, kneeling down to his niece's eye level as he spoke. "What is this boy doing here, and why is the Northwest girl trying to kill him?"

Mabel looked down. "Well, we were playing flashlight tag in the yard," she began, all at once realizing what a stupid mistake that had been.

"You told me specifically this morning that you weren't going to go outside tonight!" he exclaimed, his eyebrows knitting together in a scowl.

"I... I know," she mumbled. Ford's expression thawed as Mabel began to fold in on herself, arms
wrapping around her torso as she continued to speak. "It was a dumb idea. I didn't think those Wild Hunt guys were going to show up; it was just supposed to be a quick game out in the yard!"

"The Wild Hunt was here?" Ford gasped. His heart began to thunder against his ribs; how could he have been so foolish as to let his guard down, even for a moment?

"One of those creeps almost took me!" the Northwest girl piped from across the room, her hands balled into fists. "It's all this slime-king Gideon's fault!" She snarled, attempting to break free from the grasp of Candy and Grenda once more, this time succeeding.

"Is not!" cried Gideon, tossing the chair to the floor as he climbed up on the kitchen counter to avoid Pacifica's attack.

"Oh yes," said Pacifica with a roll of her eyes, "You're completely innocent! Except for the fact you brought those monsters here in the first place!"

"You have no proof!" snapped Gideon as he jumped out of Paz's reach back onto the floor.

"That big one, Oberon, he said you brought them here!"

"Liar!" was Gideon's retort. He then grabbed hold of Mabel, twirling her in front of him as a human shield.

"Um, no offense, but you are the liar," Candy spoke up. "We heard him say with his own words that you lead them here."

"We should have left you out there with them!" Pacifica spat.

"Yeah, really the only reason I rescued you was because I wanted to knock out that ogre," Grenda admitted.

"Your bloodthirst is unquenchable," said Candy in awe.

"You're a creep and a coward," said Pacifica, her voice soft and low. "If it were up to me, I'd throw you right back outside and let those monsters take you!"

"No one is throwing anyone back outside," said Stanford, recapturing the room's attention. Pacifica booed at this announcement, but Ford ignored her jeers.

"Oh, thank you!" Gideon simpered sweetly, "I can't even begin to express my gratitude." Gideon's voice caught in his throat when he saw Ford glaring down at him, however.

"Get your hands off my niece, boy," Ford said with tranquil fury. Gideon hadn't realized how tightly he had wound his chubby hands around Mabel's arms. Quickly, he released her from his clutches, his manicured fingernails snagging a few threads on Mabel's emerald green sweater.

"Ah-heh... Sorry," he told Mabel. The girl impudently stuck her tongue out at him.

"Does anyone know if the Wild Hunt is still outside?" Ford asked the room at large.

"I checked outside," Mabel answered, "But I think they left. The unicorn charm on the shack seems to be keeping them out."

"Well," said Ford, the anxious tempo in his chest slowing down a bit, "That's a point for us, at least." The panic resumed, however, when he noticed Dipper's absence in the kitchen.

"Mabel, where's your brother?" Ford asked, an edge of fear slicing through the question. Unnoticed by the old scientist, Paz's hand shot to her mouth, silencing a shriek.
"The roof," Mabel whispered, horrified. "He went to eat his dinner on the roof! You don't think--"

Ford was already running toward the gift shop, adrenaline pumping through his veins. Mabel followed after him on his heels.

Ford clamored up the ladder, pushing the trapdoor out of his way towards the roof. Once he was standing on the surface, he immediately saw the terrified boy backed into a corner, a pale, cadaverous woman creeping towards Dipper, her rot-mottled arm outstretched.

"Come away with me, sweet one," it wheezed, phlegm and spittle spraying as she spoke.

With deadly speed, Ford reached into his boot and pulled out an iron dagger. Without a word, he stabbed down the blade into the Banshee's back; the creature let out a final screech as she dissolved into dust. Ford stashed the great knife back into his boot. He returned his attention back towards Dipper, who was still in shock by the look of things.

"It's all right, my boy," he said, relief spreading through his veins now that his nephew was safe. "Let's get you inside. Can you walk?"

"I... I can try," said Dipper, his voice hoarse. "Though I think I might need to change my pants when we get downstairs."

"Banshees do have that effect on people," Ford admitted, pulling the boy to his feet and leading him towards the ladder back into the shack.

"Dipper!" cried Mabel joyfully when they returned to the bottom of the ladder. Once Dipper was back on the ground, Mabel pulled him into a tight hug.

"Now you know why I didn't want you two going out tonight," said Ford, embracing his niece and nephew as well. "Those creatures are dangerous; the Wild Hunt will do anything to get their hands on you kids. I want you to promise me, no more going out tonight."

"We promise," the twins agreed.

"Now, I'm going to go outside and scan the perimeter. Stay in the kitchen and keep an eye on the clock; If I'm not back in fifteen minutes, you get your friends and McGucket into the lab and stay there until dawn." He let the twins go, handing Dipper the walkie-talkie from within his coat. "If things go south, call Stan; tell him we need back up." the children nodded. Ford took out his gun, tightly clutching the grip with both hands, one finger close to the trigger as he went out into the night.

The yard was deserted, or, at least it seemed that way. The ground outside was trampled. Grass kicked up in clumps near the edge of the woods told Ford that was where the Hunt had retreated. there must have been at least fifty of them, judging by the amount of footprints stamped into the ground. Ford shuddered to think what might have happened if the full party had been there when the kids were out playing.

A sudden groan directed Ford's attention to the porch. Lying a few feet away, the shattered remains of the chair laying in fragments around its great, ugly head, was the ogre Grenda had mentioned. Some of the attendants from the Elf Circus had gathered around it to gawk. One, a rabbit like creature that was about the size of a small child, was prodding the ogre in the face with a stick.

Ford approached the small crowd. "What happened?" he asked the Pooka child. "Tried to snatch up a kid," said the bunny, poking the ogre in the eye. "The big girl hit him with the chair and knocked him out cold. He'll live, probably."
"Did you see what happened to the rest of the hunt?" Ford interrogated further.

"Ran off when the kids went inside," said Bunny Boy, shrugging. "Oberon-- at least I think it was Oberon? It was hard to tell with all that armor on-- threw a fit and tried to get us to help him break into the house, but the ringmaster was like, 'um, you're not the boss of us anymore.' It would've been cooler if Oberon hadn't kicked the whole circus off into the woods. That's how come I'm poking this guy in the face."

"Never harm nor spell nor charm come our lovely lady nigh," the ogre mumbled stupidly. Ford pointed his gun towards the ogre's head as it stirred.

"Woah, are you gonna shoot him in the face?" asked the little Pooka, grinning wickedly.

"He threatened my family," was Ford's stony reply as he looked down the barrel of the gun. "I'm going to do what I must."

"I really wouldn't do that, if it pleases you, sir" said a voice by Ford's ear. The cold edge of a blade pressed against the man's throat.

"If you put down that gun," said Puck unctuously, "I'll put away my knife. That's a proper trade, yes?" Ford didn't budge.

"Look, from one uncle to another, it's going to be difficult for you to protect those children if I open up your throat, so I suggest you put down the gun," Puck whispered, his breath scalding against the back of Ford's neck.

"Let him go!" screeched a voice from the shack. Puck's eyes rolled back into their sockets, exposing the bloodshot sclera. The blade was no longer pressed against Ford, as Puck had limply dropped it to the ground. Free from Puck's grasp, Ford turned his head to see Fiddleford sticking his torso out of the front porch window, his white knuckled hands clutching the window sill.

Puck groaned when he was released from the trance. His eyes had just returned to normal when Ford hit him across the head with the pistol.

"That's fair," Puck grunted, prodding the lump now forming on the side of his head with one long finger. Puck then waved to McGucket cheerfully.

"Hello sir!" he lilted, exposing the many rows of sharp teeth as he smiled towards the old man. "We met this morning, if only briefly. I take it you're the new master of the Northwest Manor?"

"What the damn hell is your problem, mister?" snarled McGucket, ignoring the question Puck had asked. Fiddleford hopped out of the window, scurrying to Ford's side. "What do you think you're doing," said McGucket, jabbing a bony finger into Puck's chest as he spoke, "sticking a knife at Stanford's throat like that? I outta pop you one in the mouth!"

"Well," said an amused Puck, "Perhaps if your boyfriend hadn't pointed a gun at my fallen ogre, I wouldn't have needed to stick a knife at him, wouldn't I?"

"That beast tried to kidnap my niece and her friends," said Ford, his face turning red at the word 'boyfriend.'

"That's unfortunate," Puck drawled, "but I think it's safe to say that he failed, yes? So, if you two don't mind, I'll be taking him back to the manor to recuperate."

"Why in the world would I let either of you go," snapped Ford, pressing the muzzle of the gun against Puck's forehead. "So you can come back and terrorize my family once he's back on his feet?"
"I have no particular interest in your family one way or the other, sir," said Puck coolly. "One of my underlings has been wounded. My main concern is getting him medical attention as soon as possible so he recovers, and would you quit poking Fleance with that infernal stick you overgrown rodent?!

This last bit of dialogue was addressed to the Pooka child, who had resumed prodding Fleance the Ogre in the face as the adults were talking. Sheepishly, the Pooka threw the stick behind his back.

"Just get out of here," McGucket hissed.

The odd, trance-like expression returned to Puck's face. "I thank you, my lord," said Puck, his voice dreamy. With a snap of his fingers, Puck and Fleance vanished.

"Dammit!"

Ford kicked the ground. He had let Puck escape! With no visible enemies around, Ford stashed the gun back into the holster on his hip.

"Was that really Puck?" the Pooka asked tentatively.

"I'm afraid so, yes," Ford sighed, rubbing his neck where the blade had been.

"But... he's so mean now," said the Pooka.

"You'd better run on home to your family, little guy," suggested McGucket, not unkindly. The Pooka nodded, and hopped back into the forest. Without the unconscious ogre to torment, the rest of the crowd dispersed to find new entertainment as well.

"Deep fried possum on a stick!" Fiddleford pulled on his braided beard while he was talking. "That fella was fixin' ta cut you open!"

"I've had worse," said Ford, trying to downplay the incident as much as possible. "I've got a scar on my abdomen from when organ harvesters from dimension D-H2001 tried to steal my liver. Once they saw how much I drank, though, they left it well enough alone."

"That ain't funny!" Fidds snapped, crossing his arms across his chest.

"It's a little funny," Ford smirked. Fidds turned away from him with a little "harumph." The hillbilly's scowl faded when Ford put both hands on Fidds' shoulders. "Thank you for saving me, Fidds," he said softly.

"How... how exactly did I save you, do you reckon?" Fiddleford asked, confused. "He just sorta gave up when I yelled at him."

"I couldn't tell you," said Ford, equally at a loss. "But I'm going to assume it's to let our guard down. Let's get back inside; the charm should hold for now and keep the Hunt out, but it simply isn't safe to linger out here."

Once back inside the gift shop, Ford began to lock all the doors and windows with Fiddleford's help. After they had barricaded the door with the abominable statue Soos had made in Stanley's honor, they returned to the kitchen, where the kids had all huddled together. Pacifica still glared ferociously at Gideon, but was thankfully no longer actively trying to murder the boy.

"Are they gone?" asked Dipper in a hushed tone.

"For now, yes," Ford answered solemnly, "but from this point on, everyone is to stay inside, understood kids?"
The children nodded, still clutching each other fearfully.

"I know this all seems scary," said Ford comfortingly, "But right now this is the safest space any of us can hope for. While the unicorn charm is still active, it will prevent anything malicious from getting inside. If, god forbid, any of that should fail, I've several back up plans and maneuvers that will keep our enemies at bay.

"Dipper," Ford continued, turning to his nephew, "I want you to stand look out in the attic; if the Wild Hunt returns I want you to sound the alarm." The boy nodded to show that he understood.

"Excellent," said Ford, "in addition, I need to take back the walkie; We need all hands on deck, so that means we've got to get Stan and the others back ASAP." Dipper handed back the walkie-talkie, not making eye contact as he left for the attic. Ford frowned at his nephew's listlessness, but there were more pressing matters that needed his attention, so he let it slide.

"Candy, take the leftover flowers from earlier and make extra daisy chains, the more the better. Putting them near the windows and doors should ward off any malicious fae."

"Candy will destroy them all with her daisies of doom!" the girl cried happily, scooping up as many flowers as she could.

"That a girl," said Ford approvingly, "Grenda, go into the living room and fetch the duffle bag behind the sofa, you're my combat woman. I want you to distribute any weapons made of iron--that means knives, swords, daggers--to everyone in this room."

"Darlin', you really got to stop handing out dangerous weapons to children," McGucket interjected.

"Desperate times, Fidds," Ford replied, squeezing his hand as Grenda ran off into the living room.

"Mabel and Pacifica, get all the sleeping bags and pillows into the lab, that'll be the sanctuary for the night. Make it as comfortable as possible, we're going to be down their for the long haul." Ford hadn't even finished speaking when Paz ran out of the room, presumably to set up the sanctuary.

"I'm thinking I can slap together a security system that'll make it even more difficult to get inside," added Fidds, scratching his beard pensively.

"Great idea." Ford affirmed, squeezing Fidds' hand once more. "I'll meet you in my room once I've contacted my brother, we'll work on it together."

Fidds gave Ford's hand one last squeeze before letting go to work in the other room. To Ford's astonishment, he saw that Mabel was giggling.

"And just what in the world is so darn funny, little miss?" he asked, though he had a good idea what it might be.

"He called you daaaaaaaarlin'!" she said in a sing-song voice. Ford tried--and failed--to keep a straight face. "Go help your friends set up," he chuckled, tousling her hair. "Now is not the time for any of that!" Mabel skipped out of the room, still chanting "darlin" as she went.

Ford had completely forgotten about Gideon at that point, who was sitting next to Candy as she began to weave daisy chains. "What would you like me to do, Dr. Pines?" the boy asked in his usual cloying twang.

Ford raised an eyebrow. "Er... you should probably call your parents and let them know you're
staying here tonight. Otherwise I've got all my bases covered."

"Heh, no I don't think you understand," Gideon insisted, "See, you might not remember me, we only met briefly last summer, but I was the one who found your second journal? Gideon Gleeful? I might be of some help with any additional defenses? Maybe as a researcher or as a lab assistant--at least I don't stink like a dead possum, am I right?"

"You should stop talking right now," said Candy, not even looking up from her daisy chains.


"Really?" asked Gideon, giggling nervously.

"Yes," said Ford, his glasses reflecting the lights from the kitchen as he glared down at the boy. "I've been told quite a bit about you, actually. How you manipulated my niece into going out on dates with you when she didn't want to, how you broke into my house, stole the deed and threw my family out on the street for your own personal gain."

"Heh... yeah..." said Gideon, rubbing the back of his neck. "I sure was a stinkbug--"

"Going back a bit, you tried to cut my nephew in half with lamb shears," Ford continued, "let's see, that was after he told you Mabel wasn't interested in seeing you anymore, correct?"

"Well," Gideon gulped, "When you say it out loud like that it does sound much worse--"

"Then," Ford pressed on, his voice raising alongside his temper, "you tried to have Dipper and Mabel blown up with dynamite when they tried to stop your patsy father from becoming the mayor, and on top of that, you led a dangerous warlord hell bent on inducting child soldiers into his army to this house just to save your own skin; that just about covers the highlights, wouldn't you agree?"

Gideon lowered his gaze.

"Look me in the eye when I'm talking to you," Ford thundered. Gideon complied. He had once watched a documentary on the Used To Be About History Channel about the Gorgons, how one deadly glance would turn their hapless victims to stone. Gideon would have gladly gotten into a staring contest with Medusa herself than face the glare Stanford Pines was giving him at that moment.

"You want an assignment, boy? Stay as far away from my niece and nephew as physically possible tonight, or any night hereafter! You don't look at them, you don't talk to them, you don't even think about them! Additionally, if you ever insult Fiddleford Hadron McGucket within earshot of me again, I'm going to punch you right in the wiener; am I being clear, you pompous little turd?"

"C-crystal clear," Gideon stammered.

"Wonderful," Ford growled, "Now get out of my sight!"

* * *

Mabel found Pacifica crying on the top of the stairs. Paz's head was down, her long blonde hair covering her face, but all the same Mabel heard the soft sobs catching in her throat.

"Pacifica?" Mabel asked kindly, alerting the other girl to her presence. Paz looked up; Mabel saw
that her eyes had gone puffy and red, mascara tinted tears trickling down her face.

"P-please," choked Pacifica, wiping away tears with the back of her hand, "J-just go away a-and leave me a-alone."

"It's okay if you're scared," said Mabel consolingly. "That Oberon guy is a total creep. But Grunkle Ford is going to keep us safe, I promise!"

Rather than comforting her, these words only made Pacifica cry even harder.

"Come on, Paz," said Mabel, unnerved by her former rival's sobbing, "this isn't like you. What's the matter, Mad Hatter?"

"Dipper," Pacifica wailed, turning away from Mabel. "He-he's gone!"

"What you talkin' bout?" Mabel asked. "He's not gone, he's in the attic."

"... That's not the real Dipper," Paz confessed with a snuffle.

Mabel stared at the girl, shocked. "... What are you saying?" she whispered.

"It's a c-clone," she gasped. "I convinced Dipper to sneak out and see that Corduroy girl. I didn't think this Wild Hunt stuff was that serious, but it is, and he's out there alone and it's all-- my-- fault!" Paz's wailing brought the girl to her knees.

The horror of this revelation had hardly hit Mabel when Dipper-- the false Dipper-- came running towards them, his face as white as a death shroud.

"We have a problem," not-Dipper cried out.

"Oberon's back?" Mabel gasped.

"...Kinda," Dipper's clone replied. He led the girls to the window at the end of the upstairs hall. Mabel screamed.

Oberon had indeed returned, but he had brought ten fold the amount the soldiers. The shack was under siege.

Chapter End Notes

I think I might have made Ford a little too mean? But that's the way the news goes, I guess. I'm tired. I need a shower. Hopefully I'll post a new chapter before my birthday on Friday.

EDIT: Did I say I was going to update by Friday? Well, I was wrong. I literally spent Wednesday and most of this morning sleeping. I haven't even finished the chapter outline. Update will probably be next week at the earliest. --05/26/2016
Okay, back on schedule. This chapter should be shorter than nine, which became something of a runaway beast while writing it. It helps that I have about half the amount of characters in the Dipper and Wendy plot line than in the Slumber Party plot line. Let's do this.

EDIT: I went back and polished up this chapter. 6/5/2016

There is always a bit of social discomfort when one has to talk to an older person they're unfamiliar with. The age difference alone can make conversation difficult, and that's without asking for favors like "Please help, our friends have been kidnapped by fairies and are probably being turned into misshapen abominations as we speak, will you give us a ride?"

Luckily for Dipper and Wendy, Abuelita Ramirez wasn't the kind to question such things. In fact, after finding the two of them running alongside the road as she and Arturo were driving by, she gladly had the car stop to offer them a ride, on the lone condition that they didn't tell Soos what she was up to.

And so, that is how Dipper and Wendy found themselves in the back of a flashy car, being driven by a body builder with Soos' sweet little grandma sitting in the front. They sat in awkward silence as they were being driven to Northwest Mansion at lightning speed. "Are you sure they took them there?" Wendy asked Dipper with a whisper.

"Ford said that the Wild Hunt uses the mansion as a hunting lodge," said Dipper with a frown. "That's the most likely place where they would keep Robbie and Tambry prisoner."

"Even if they are there," said Wendy, "How the heck are we going to sneak them out past the fairies?"

"I don't know," said Dipper anxiously, "McGucket said there were hundreds of them!"

"... You know, it's really hard to say 'fairies' like it's some kind of dire threat," Wendy admitted with a smile that never reached her eyes.

"If we ever do manage to rescue them, we're never going to let Robbie live down that he was kidnapped by fairies, are we," asked Dipper with a small smile.

"Not a chance," Wendy agreed. She paused to stare out of the window pensively. "Dipper, we gotta call back up. Call your Uncle Ford and tell him we need help."

"Uh... right... about that," Dipper stammered, his eyes going wide with fear.

"I know you snuck out, dude," Wendy admitted, "and, yeah, he's probably going to be super pissed that you did, but we definitely need his help right now. Take it from somebody who once ran away for a week and made it to Portland before she got busted, it's better to have them mad at you and still be alive than have them never knowing what happened to you."

Dipper gulped as he dug his cell phone out of his pocket. Before he could even begin dialing,
however, the phone began to vibrate furiously. Startled, he answered without bothering to look who was calling.

"H-hello?"

"Dipper!" cried an alarmed Mabel from the other line. "Oh my god, where are you?"

"Mabel!" said Dipper, relieved to hear his sister's voice. "I'm okay! I'm with Wendy; the Wild Hunt hasn't got us." Dipper could hear Mabel laughing in relief over the phone.

"Don't you ever make me think you died again, you jerk!" Pacifica Northwest's voice could be heard on the cell, sounding distorted as if she had a cold.

"She totally cried," said Mabel mischievously.

"Shut your face!"

"Dipper," Mabel continued, her tone serious, "Things are crazy messed up right now at the Shack; that King Oberon creep just showed up with all these monster guys, he's got us surrounded! Grunkle Ford and McGucket are working on a way to make them leave, but you gotta promise me-- don't go anywhere else! Stay with Wendy and don't mess with those guys!"

"Uh..."

"Promise!"

Dipper bit his lip. He wasn't sure how he was going to tell Mabel that he and Wendy were now headed to the very headquarters of the Wild Hunt without upsetting her. So, he decided not to tell her that at all. "Okay. I promise."

He could hear Mabel sigh in relief over the phone. "Just make sure to call back if anything else goes wrong. Stay safe, bro-bro." The line went dead.

Wendy was glaring pointedly at Dipper as he put away his phone. "What the junk, dude?" Wendy snapped, throwing her hands in the air. "Call them back and tell them we need help!"

"Mabel says the house is surrounded, there's no way anyone could escape without getting caught themselves," Dipper countered, guilt crawling in his guts like a parasitic worm. "I don't want to put anyone else through that tonight."

"Well, that still doesn't fix the fact that Tambry and Robbie are caught and we're outnumbered!" Wendy exclaimed.

"... Are we, though?" said Dipper, an idea beginning to flare up in his mind. "If Oberon's got the Wild Hunt at the Shack, maybe that means the mansion's empty, save for a few guards. We could probably still pull this off by ourselves."

Wendy was silent for a long time. "Okay," she reluctantly agreed, "But the second something goes sideways, I'm calling Mabel myself." Dipper nodded. Arturo the driver began to slow down the car at last; the gates of Northwest Manor loomed over the car.

"Be careful out there, children," said Abuelita kindly as they exited the car. "Mess those guys up for me." Once Dipper and Wendy were out of the car, she and Arturo drove away into the night like a wolf out on the prowl for blood.

"So," said Wendy, taking her ax out of her belt, "How do you think we're going to get in?"

"The only way to get in once we're past the front gates is through the main hall," Dipper said,
"The only way to get in once we're past the front gates is through the main hall," Dipper said, scratching his chin thoughtfully. "We can probably climb the gates easily, but after that--"

"Confound these gates!" a voice cried out a few feet away from Dipper. The two jumped, they turned to the direction of the commotion to find a man in the process of trying to scale the gates himself. His flip-flop clad feet were dangling only three feet off the ground, his hands clutching the bars of the gates like an ugly barnacle on a ship.

"Preston Northwest?" said both Wendy and Dipper in shock.

"Hey, go rob your own mansion, peasants!" snapped Northwest as he began to slide down the bars.

"What are you even doing here, man?" said Wendy, ignoring this bizarre oxymoron.

"What does it look like? I'm trying to get back my family's estate!" Preston fell to the ground, dirt and grime kicking up around him in clouds where he landed.

"And you're going to do that... how, exactly?" asked Dipper.

"By stealing back the deed from that usurping hick! Once it's in my possession, the house is mine again!" Preston cackled gleefully.

"Ugh, boo!" said Wendy, disgusted. "That was lame even when Gideon tried it last year!"

"Yeah, and besides," said Dipper, crossing his arms at Pacifica's father, "That's not even how deeds work. You physically having the deed doesn't entitle you to ownership of the mansion if it's under McGucket's name."

"Look I'm desperate!" said Preston, scrambling to his feet. "I'm not a man who was meant for the life of poverty! Look at me, I don't even have a nice suit to wear anymore! I'm wearing a t-shirt with a tuxedo printed on it! My belt's made of cardboard! I'm wearing tube socks with sandals! I've sunk to the lowest of depths!"

Somewhere in the world, a quartet of tiny violinists were screeching out a symphony to accompany this poor man's miserable plight.

Sudden inspiration dawned on Dipper at that moment. "Wait... do you know of an alternate way to get into the mansion if we get you past the gates?"

"Well... there is a secret entrance in the front yard that leads to the hidden bunker under the house," Preston admitted, dusting himself off with his hands. "But I would never tell anyone about that! Especially not the likes of you!"

The two of them stared at Preston sardonically.

"... I said that out loud, didn't I?" asked Preston.

"Just show us how to get in," Wendy said, rolling her eyes. "My friends are at the mercy of some prissy creep with piranha teeth, and one way or the other, I'm going to rescue them whether you help me or not."

"Wait... Prissy creep? Lots of teeth? Doesn't happen to occasionally sprout wings and teleport, does he?" asked Preston as Wendy began to scale the gate.

"Yeah," said Dipper, "Puck. He took our friends and he's going to turn them into monsters if we don't get them out of here!"
"Ha!" said Preston, ignoring this latter sentence, "Puck! I haven't seen that rascal since I was a boy in 1988! Midsummer parties were always better when the Wild Hunt was in town! I can't believe I forgot it was tonight!"

The gates creaked open; Wendy had gotten to the other side and unlocked the door. "So you and your family used to stay up and party with these monsters while they went out and kidnapped children?" spat Wendy, ushering in both Preston and Dipper inside the gates.

"Look, that was none of our business," said Preston, leading the two to the secret entrance. "The alliance between the Northwest family and the Wild Hunt has been a tradition for generations, ever since Persephone Northwest traded her youngest son to Oberon for a changeling baby instead."

"Your ancestor traded her baby to the Hunt?" said Dipper, horrified.

"A really ugly baby," said Preston callously, lifting the hatch at the base of what appeared to be an old oak tree. "I know what you're thinking," said Preston, leading the duo down a long flight of stairs to the bunker. "That's hardly a fair trade, exchanging one measly baby for a bunch of elvish riff-raff to come and go to our ancestral home every quarter of a century whenever they like, but King Oberon was generous enough to have his underlings act as loyal servants to the Master of the House every Midsummer. Puck used to hang on my every word, catering to my every demand when I was a boy, as he did to my father and his father before him."

"Disgusting," muttered Wendy under her breath.

"Wait... I think that could be our way to getting Robbie and Tambry back!" said Dipper, a grin crossing his face. "Mr. Northwest, since you're the last person to own Northwest Manor in your family, you could probably just order Puck to let our friends go and he'd do it!"

"And why would I help you with such a plan?" said Preston haughtily.

"Well, for start," said Wendy dangerously, her ax tightly in hand, "We won't tell the cops that you tried to break into McGucket's house if you decide to help us."

"... Fair point," said Preston, stopping in front of the ladder that lead to the main hall.

"Just go up, tell them to let them go, and get Robbie and Tambry out of there!" said Dipper, glad that this night could end peacefully after all. Preston sneered, but climbed the ladder to the main hall anyway.

Once he reached the top, Preston couldn't help but stare aghast at the state of his once beautiful home. Tacky metal robots were laying about the hall in a half completed states, the floor around them littered with tools and scrap metal like some crude auto shop. Not that Preston knew what an auto shop looked like. He didn't fix his own cars, he just bought newer, flashier models whenever the old cars wore out!

Luckily enough, several of the smaller members of the Wild Hunt, the brownies and house elves, were sweeping up this refuse and filth, doing their best to clean up the mess McGucket had left behind. Overseeing all this was Puck, who was sitting at the top of the stairs with a raccoon on his lap, his long, slender fingers gently stroking the creature's fur.

"A human!" squeaked one of the sprites who had caught sight of Preston coming out of the hole in the ground.

Puck snapped his neck up at this, his eyes aglow with curiosity. Still clutching the raccoon, Puck's wings sprouted from his shoulders once more, lifting him to the air so he could float down to see this new intruder.
"Can it be? Little Preston Northwest, all grown up," said Puck, catching sight of Preston's face as he came to a landing in front of him. "It's been ages since I've seen you!"

"Er... yes!" said Preston smugly to the imp. "I, Preston Northwest, the master of this house, have returned for our usual Midsummer festivities!"

Puck tried to choke down a giggle, which he hid by placing the raccoon on the floor. "Yeah, funny thing about that," said Puck cheerfully, wrapping his arm around Preston's shoulders, "I don't recall seeing you here at all today; where have you been, old friend?"

"Oh... around," said Preston nervously. "I'm very busy and all, running my vast empire; I haven't been able to stop by the house recently I'm afraid. Say, by any chance would you be interested in letting a couple of the teenagers you've caught go?"

"Well, that's certainly a funny thing to ask," said Puck, guiding Preston to a table that had been set for what looked like late afternoon tea. "Have a cucumber sandwich. See, the point of this whole little project is that we can't let our new recruits go, otherwise Oberon would have our heads. I thought you understood that?"

"But I do!" said Preston, shoving cucumber sandwich after cucumber sandwich into his mouth greedily. "I understand completely! It's those two in the bunker that can't get a grip on that. Forced me to break into my own house at the point of an ax just to get their way. Savages, all."

"... They wouldn't happen to be a girl with red hair and a boy with an unusual birthmark on his forehead, would they?" Smirked Puck, gesturing to a few underlings towards the basement door.

"Precisely!" said Preston, helping himself to some tea as well.

I, the omniscient third person narrator who is supposed to remain impartial to the characters actions while telling this story, would like to take this time to break the fourth wall and mention what a boorish idiot Preston Northwest is, and reassure the readers that yes, he's going to get exactly what's coming to him at the end of this chapter.

"Indeed. Pardon me for just a moment, would you?" said Puck, excusing himself from the table while Preston gorged himself on snacks.

Puck teleported down into the bunker, where Dipper and Wendy were fighting off his lackeys as desperately as they could. They weren't doing too bad, actually, thought Puck, though then again, he sent the cleaning crew after them. Dipper had gotten quite good at fighting since last summer, and was able to punch his attackers with blunt force. Impressive, thought Puck. However, the girl with her iron weapon was still the bigger threat. Wendy almost hit one of the house elves with her ax, which is when Puck decided to intervene.

"That's enough of that," said Puck, grabbing hold of Dipper and placing the knife at his throat. Wendy froze at the sight of her friend in danger.

"Put down the ax," said Puck quietly, the other fae huddling around his legs in fear of the iron weapon Wendy was holding. "Somebody could get hurt with you flailing that thing around all willy-nilly like that."

Not taking her eyes off of Puck, Wendy carefully put down the ax.

"Now kick it over," said Puck, still clutching Dipper but no longer pressing the knife against the boy. Reluctantly, she complied to this demand. The ax slid towards the Fae and clattered against the wall.
"Splendid," Puck lilted, and with a snap of his fingers, both Dipper and Wendy fell to the ground, unconscious.

"Take these two into the guest bedroom, I'll deal with them in a moment," Puck commanded his underlings. "Right now, we have other guests to attend to."

Puck arrived back at the tea table, taking a seat opposite of Preston, who was still enjoying his tea. "I must say, I have the funniest story to share with you, little Preston," said Puck, stirring a dozen lumps of sugar into his own cup.

"What would that be?" asked Preston, not liking the look Puck was giving him.

"See, I've hear the most shocking rumor," said Puck, taking a sip of tea before deciding to add even more sugar to the brew. "That you no longer live here."

"Why... That's a lie!" said Preston, now beginning to panic. "I... I have always lived here, you know that, Puck! I am the last remaining male heir to Nathaniel Northwest, and this is my home."

"Was your home," said Puck with a wicked grin. After draining the cup of its tea, Puck popped the whole of the dainty teacup into his mouth and began to chew. "For you see, I've already met the new Master of this house. Nice guy. Wanted to punch me in the face. I can relate. But, all the same, he's not here tonight, he's babysitting with a handsome gentleman friend all the way across town. Now, why in the world would you lie to me like this, Preston? I thought we were friends?"

"We are!" said Preston hysterically, getting up from the table away from Puck, who was glaring down at him dangerously.

"Friends don't tell stories to each other, Preston," said Puck, lifting Mr. Northwest in the air with a spell.

"P-please!" begged Preston, "Let me down!"

"I'm sorry, but you must be punished," said Puck. Preston began to writhe as the magic took hold of him, changing his form into something inhuman. "I think I have the perfect idea, too. I once read from this funny little book you humans like to leave lying around in hotel rooms. It said something about the path to salvation for a rich man is harder to achieve than it is for a camel to get through the eye of a needle. You're no longer rich, Preston... but I do say," said Puck, releasing the thing that had once been human Preston Northwest to the ground. "You do make an excellent camel."

Chapter End Notes

How many ways am I going to punish all of Gravity Falls' established villains in this story? Who knows! Let's see!
In Which Stan Woos the Faerie Queen With His Usual Charm and Grace

Chapter Summary

RIP Donkey Suit.

Chapter Notes

So, when I first started writing this Fic, the plot outline was very different than what it is now. Ford was going to be oblivious to the Wild Hunt antics at the sleepover, Dipper and Wendy were going to try to rescue Raccoon Wife for some reason, etc. I've found that, as I continue to write, the story grows and diverges from the original plan, and certain ideas become superfluous and are discarded.

With that in mind, changing the characterization of Titania has completely revised Stan's plotline in this story. Nothing about this was supposed to be a serious romance- similar to the real Titania and Bottom in A Midsummer Night's Dream. However, because I changed her character from "Cute but Psycho Fairy Princess" to "Peppy and Sickly Sweet on the outside, Sad and Salty on the inside romantic foil," I now have to figure out a way to make her interactions with Stan believable, entertaining and endearing.

As always, constructive comments and criticisms are welcome.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Stan! Stan! Come on, answer me," Ford spoke into the walkie, his voice edged with unease. The Wild Hunt still stood poised around the Shack, ready to attack. The situation couldn't have been more dire, and yet Ford was unable to get a hold of Stan at all. Was his walkie damaged? Could something terrible have happened to Stanley while at the festival? If so, their chances of surviving a full on attack from King Oberon became non-existent. Of course, he dared not voice this to the kids, tensions were high enough as it was. Ford, upon hearing about the return of the Hunt, ordered Dipper and Mabel to stick to the plan, to move as much supplies to the basement as possible. Should the charm fail, the basement laboratory was the last place they could hide until sunrise. Even so, who could tell how long that would even stay safe with that amount of soldiers rushing the house?

Ford was jolted from these troubling thoughts by static coming from the other end of the line. "Good evening, this is Peaseblossom, how can I help you?" The voice on the other line was cheerful and syrupy, the voice of a manic kindergarten teacher.

"Who is this, and what have you done to my brother?" asked Ford, frowning.

"This is Peaseblossom," repeated the voice with a girlish squeak, "Queen Titania's personal assistant and advisor."

Oh no, thought Ford. He hadn't a clue how Stan could have gotten himself tangled up with another Faerie Monarch, but he doubted it would lead to any good.

"If you wish to speak to the Festival King," Peaseblossom continued amicably, "I'm afraid you'll
"... Giving him a bath," Peaseblossom sheepishly admitted.

"Wait, what?" Ford blinked, utterly bemused by this piece of information. Ford, for all his knowledge on the fantastical and bizarre, could not for the life of him see why any sort of person, let alone fairies, would want to willingly bathe Stan.

In fact, had Ford been in the room with Peaseblossom at the moment, he would have seen poor, sweet Peaseblossom overseeing three other fairies bathing a screaming and muck-covered Stan Pines in a copper clawfoot tub. This might have looked strange to an outsider, but it was well and truly bonkers for everyone involved. From the perspective of the fairies, it was a bit like trying to bathe a fully grown grizzly bear after it had skipped breakfast and been rudely woken up from a nap. From Stan's perspective, it reminded him too much for his taste of the time he had been kidnapped by hygiene obsessed circus performers when he was twenty two. In short, no one was happy about any of this.

"Do you ever shave your back?" asked a fae with dark brown skin clad in a frock made from yellow flowers.

"Mind your business, Buttercup!" snapped the old man.

"Like I said the last seven times, my name is Mustardseed!" the fae snapped back, hitting Stan in the back with a scrub brush.

"That name is stupid!"

"Your face is stupid!"

"Please," said a spindly, pale fae with hair as wispy as spider silk, (she was washing Stan's hair) "stop this mindless arguing. Somebody's just going to get hurt."

"Oh, let them argue!" giggled another fae, this one green and plumpish with large, moth-like wings sprouting from its back. This poor creature had the unpleasant task of washing Stan's feet, which, even under normal circumstances, would have been a nightmarish task. "Maybe if he gets her mad enough, Mustardseed will dunk him underwater again! It'll be funny!"

"I'll dunk you underwater, you friggin bug!" Stan kicked at the fluttering pest, which earned him yet another whack from Mustardseed. Moth, still laughing hysterically, began to chant "Bug! Bug! Bug!"

"Would anyone mind telling me what the hell is going on?" Ford growled over the walkie.

"Listen up, mutants!" said Stan, trying to sound tough and intimidating, which is hard to do when you're naked and sopping wet with lavender scented water, "You're gonna let me talk to my brother right now, or there's gonna be trouble, got it?"

"Well, all right," said Peaseblossom reluctantly, but before she handed Stan the Walkie, she added, "just please let us do our job! I know this must be very unpleasant, but the sooner we finish getting you cleaned up for her Majesty, the sooner we can move on with our lives. That's a fair trade, isn't it?"
"... Fine," the old man grumbled. He snatched the walkie from Peaseblossom's hands, allowing the fae to clean him up as he talked to his twin. "Coming here was a mistake! I get snatched away by some froufrou fairy princess in a dress made of Christmas tinsel, and now she's sicked her goons on me all because she can't take a joke--"

"Not to be rude," said Ford, cutting off the lengthy rant that he simply didn't have time for, "But what in the world did you do to get yourself kidnapped by the Queen of the Fairies?"

"That's just it! I'm just sitting there with Soos, minding my own business, when she just out of nowhere grabs me and starts saying this one true love bull and calls me King of the Festival," said Stan, who began to angrily nudge with his right foot a rubber duck Peaseblossom had placed in the tub to amuse him.

"Stan, listen to me, this is important," said Ford, clinging to the fragile thread of hope brought by this piece of information. "Right now, you are in the presence of one of the most powerful magical beings in the known universe. Thanks to this Gideon twerp, I've got the entirety of the Wild Hunt right outside our doorstep--"

"Gideon brought the child kidnapping army to the house?" said Stan, outraged. "I'm going to tear that kid a new one when I get my hands on him!"

"Believe me, I've got that under control," said Stanford, smiling evilly, "But I need your help with something else. Queen Titania loathes Oberon from the legends I've heard told--"

"That's an understatement," said Mustardseed, forcefully grabbing Stan's free hand so she could scrub under his fingernails. "The Queen says if she ever gets a hold of him again she's going to string him up like a pinata and have the whole court beat him with clubs until candy falls out."

"I personally was fond of the time she said she was going to have him decapitated and use his great ugly head as a volley ball. Eyes closed, please," said the white-haired Fae, whose name was Cobweb. She rinsed out the sweet-smelling lather from Stan's head, the lukewarm water trickling down Stan's face to his annoyance.

"My favorite," added Moth, the smallest of them all, "was when she said she was going to tie one end of him to a dragon and the other end to a sea serpent, then have them go off in different directions until he's ripped in twain like a new year's cracker."

"... Ford, I wanna go home," Stan mumbled into the walkie as the fae continued to cheerfully list all the violent, nasty ways Titania planned to have Oberon dispatched should she ever manage to capture him.

"I know," said Ford, "But the only way we can make sure there's even a home left is if you can get Titania on our side. It sounds like the King of the Festival spends the whole night with the Queen until sunrise. If you can convince her to fight with us, we could have a chance."

The three fae bathing Stan began to laugh shrilly at this statement, the sound unnerving Ford even over the static of the walkie. "What' so funny? Why are they laughing?" asked Ford, pacing nervously across the room.

"Well," said Stan, frowning. "About that..."

* * *

"Are you just going to gape at me like a codfish all day?" said Titania, hours earlier. "I know you've got cigarettes human, you absolutely reeked of them before I even came within two feet of you."
"You've got some nerve, lady!" Stan glared at the Fairy Queen, who decided she wasn't going to wait for Stan to hand over the coveted cigarettes and simply summoned them out of his costume with a lazy flick of her wand. "Just who do you think you are, dragging me all the way out here in the middle of nowhere, stealing my stuff!"

"I think I'm the Queen and you'd do best to remember that," said Titania haughtily, grabbing a slender cigarette from the pack and lighting it on a nearby candle. She took a drag from the lit cigarette before continuing her speech, smoke swirling dragonlike from her nostrils as she exhaled. "Besides, it's not like I had much of a choice. It was either pick you or the gnomes again this year, and I am never going to put myself through that nonsense again, even for this ridiculous festival. So, congrats. You're marginally more attractive than a horde of gnomes."

"What's this 'picked me' crap you keep going on about?" Stan snapped, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Ugh, it's this tradition they started after... after I ditched my loser ex-husband," was Titania's reply. With her free hand, she began to wave her scepter back and forth like a metronome, her outfit changing with each whisk of her wand. She settled on a backless, aureate gown of glittering gold, revealing magnificent, iridescent dragonfly wings that were attached to her shoulders. "Whomever has the best donkey costume gets to be King of the Festival. I'd honestly rather get a root canal, but the crowd eats this sort of thing up, so I mostly just do this for them."

"Well, leave me out of it!" said Stan, turning away from the Queen to leave. "I don't want anything to do with this mess!"

"Listen, buddy," said Titania, suddenly appearing in front of Stan to block the exit. "If I've got to suffer through this then we've all got to suffer!"

"Whatever," said Stan, rolling his eyes, "I'm not going to get bossed around by some bug!"

"... What did you just call me?" said Titania in a dangerously quiet voice.

("Oh my god, Stan, you didn't," said Ford, rubbing the bridge of his nose as his brother recounted the story. "He totally did and it was the best moment of my life!" said Mustardseed with a smirk.)

"B-U-G," said Stan, grinning wickedly at the offended Queen. Her face began to go livid with rage.

"... You have ten seconds to apologize before I lose my temper, bub," said Titania, jabbing Stan in the chest with her scepter.

"Oh no, Glinda the Good is gonna to lose her temper!" said Stan, holding his hands out in front of him in mock fear. "What are you gonna do, put me in one of your tacky dresses? Although," he added, eying Titania up and down as he spoke, "This one doesn't look nearly as bad as the get up you had on before. You'd actually be a knock out if you didn't have those mosquito wings sprouting out of your back."

Silently, Titania raised her wand above her head, her eyes aglow with fury. She sliced down the scepter, and the next thing Stan knew, he was halfway across the room, his head pounding with pain, his entire body coated head to foot with bat guano.

Titania took the cigarette out of her mouth and tossed it to the ground, stamping it out with one dainty foot. "We shall dine together after my servants clean you up," she said, her tone icy. "I don't want to see you again until that time."

* * *
"You mean to tell me," said Ford, his eyes wide with shock as he clutched the walkie to the side of his face, "That within thirty seconds of meeting a Fairy Queen, you managed to insult her in every way imaginable?"

"He did! Oh man, he totally did!" laughed Mustardseed.

"It was rather diverting, I suppose," said Cobweb, a small smile creeping across her milk-white face.

"Bug! Bug! Bug! Bug!" Moth continued to gleefully chant.

"I can't help it if she's got a snotty attitude," said Stan, scowling.

"Snotty attitude or not, we really need her help," said Ford, "Stanley, I need you to promise me that you're going to apologize to her over dinner and get on her good side."

"Like hell I am!"

"The kids, Stan," said Ford quietly, "I don't know if I can keep them safe by myself."

Stan sighed. He had done seemingly impossible things all in the name of protecting his family. What was one crappy blind date in comparison?

"Fine," he said, "I'll make nice with Queen Crazy, but I can't make any promises. Just hang in there until I get back with the others, and we'll work something out from there."

"Thank you," said Ford, at least one little knot of worry coming undone. However, this moment of peace was short lived, as Ford could hear a loud shrieking sound coming from the other room. "Stan, there's a situation at home, I've got to go," Ford cried into the walkie before dropping the line. Only static could be heard on Stan's end once he left.

"Yeah, that's not ominous at all," said Stan, handing the walkie back to Peaseblossom.

"I'm sure once you explain the situation to Queen Titania, she'll gladly help your family," Peaseblossom assured Stan, whose face was wrought with worry.

"Yeah, right," said Mustardseed, rolling her eyes, "That woman's the most bitter, hateful, shrewish Fae I've ever laid eyes on."

"She used to be fun when Puck was still around," Cobweb conceded, "but when he and Oberon snatched Daya away, something in her snapped."

"Yeah, she a big dumb meanie pants," said Moth, who had long since abandoned washing Stan's feet and had begun riding around on the back of the rubber duck instead. "Why should she even care, that was like, a bazillion years ago, just get over it already."

"Of course she still cares," Peaseblossom scolded the tiny Fae, "She loved that little boy like he was her own, she has every right to be upset, especially around this time of year. What Oberon did was despicable."

"What I can't believe is the fact that Puck went along with it," Cobweb added. "He and Titania were the best of friends before that day, and he doted on Daya just as much as she did. Remember when Daya started walking, and all he would do was totter after Puck wherever he went?"

"Why'd he do it then?" said Mustardseed, who had also abandoned scrubbing Stan to gossip.

"Oberon's his master," said Peaseblossom darkly. "The spell that binds Puck to Oberon is too powerful to break. He has no choice but to obey his every command."
"Still," Mustardseed added, "You would have thought Puck would have rather died than let anything happen to that boy."

A gloom fell over the quartet of fairies that was shattered by the sound of Stan clearing his throat. "Hey, I'm still here and I have no idea what any of that was about. Can I just go?"

"Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry," said Peaseblossom, the pep returning to her voice. "Yes, you should be clean enough now, I think. I've got some warm towels and freshly laundered clothes behind the screen, we'll leave you alone to get changed if you'd like."

"Why," asked Cobweb, raising one wispy eyebrow, "We've already seen everything."

"I wish I could forget," Mustardseed deadpanned.

"All of you get out!" Stan bellowed. The four of them scampered out of the room gratefully, the sound of Moth's peals of laughter echoing in the night. Stan got out of the tub and headed towards the screen Peaseblossom had mentioned, where there was a pile of fluffy white towels folded neatly on a stool waiting for him. As he dried himself off, he noticed the outfit that Peaseblossom had picked out for him, and honestly, he would have rather gone naked. A bright purple silk suit with gold designs on the jacket hung before him, with little pointed shoes that would have looked fine on a genie resting on the floor beneath it. At the very least, he no longer had to wear the donkey pajamas. Reluctantly, he put on the outfit, which he found to be surprisingly comfortable, even if it did look ridiculous.

"All set?" Peaseblossom asked from outside the washroom.

"Ugh, yeah I guess," Stan sighed. He walked out of the room, the tight shoes pinching slightly with each step. He found Peaseblossom outside holding a crown with floppy donkey ears attached to the sides.

"I have to wear that, don't I?" Stan asked, already resigned.

"Ah... yes," Peaseblossom answered apologetically. She handed the crown to Stan, who repressed the urge to toss it in the garbage somewhere, instead resting it on top of his head. Peaseblossom offered the old man a warm smile that he did not return.

"I know she can be a pill sometimes," said Peaseblossom sweetly, leading him towards an old cabin not far from the pavilion, "but she's been through a lot of pain. She tries to hide it around most of her subjects, but it gets harder to hold back around this holiday. I'm not saying you'll become soulmates over dinner but... at the very least, try to be her friend. She could desperately use one."

"... She hits me with crap again all bets are off," said Stan once they were at the front door of the cabin.

"Just apologize for earlier," said Peaseblossom, "that'll go a long way. Oberon was always so cruel to her when he was her consort, if you make amends she'll be grateful."

"What are we even going to talk about?" Stan asked.

"Tell her she looks lovely in her dress," said Peaseblossom.

"She'll know I'm lying then."

"Then... tell her funny stories, make jokes, talk about music, art, puppies, even the weather if you have to, just try to keep her entertained." Peaseblossom looked up at Stan entreatingly. Stan took a
guess that the fae were older than they outwardly seemed, but Peaseblossom looked as if she was barely older than Mabel with her round, chubby face and hazel colored, puppy-dog eyes.

"I'll do my best, kid," said Stan, forcing a smile for the girl. "After all, she's just an all powerful magical queen who hates my guts. I've managed worse." She wished him good luck as Stan entered the cabin.

Titania had not noticed Stan enter the room, which was made clear by the fact she seemed to be playing with the fruit that had been set out for chocolate fondue at the table.

"Drown in chocolate, you stupid grape! No please, have mercy! Ha, ha, nope!" Titania dunked a grape she had skewered into the pot of chocolate, before popping the fruit into her mouth. Stan cleared his throat. Titania jumped at the sound, looking like a cat who had been found playing in a koi pond.

"Having fun?" asked Stan, grinning.

"Maybe if you didn't keep me waiting so long I wouldn't have had to entertain myself in your absence," said Titania, recovering her icy demeanor.

"So, you missed me?" said Stan, sitting down at the table across from the Queen, still grinning like the Cheshire Cat. She grabbed a cherry from her plate and threw it at Stan, the fruit barely missing his ear as it flew past his head.

"My aim will get better," she shrugged. (I'm so sorry)

He was surprised to hear one of his favorite puns from somebody who seemed so humorless. Maybe this could work.

"So," he said slowly, picking at the fruit salad in front of him, "I thought I'd say I'm sorry for saying some things that might have made you mad earlier."

Titania stared at him from across the table, her expression unreadable. "I appreciate the apology," she said at last, spearing a strawberry and dipping it in the pot, "I... guess I'm sorry I cast a bat crap hex on you. I might have overreacted."

"Ya did me a favor," said Stan, dipping his own fruit into the chocolate as well. "You wrecked that stupid costume so bad they had to burn it. Good riddance."

"It actually did save me the trouble of not having to pick those gnomes, you know," said Titania, nibbling delicately on her food. "Every Midsummer they show up asking for me to marry all one thousand of them, and every time I've got to think of some BS reason to say no."

"Why not just tell them to b- to take off?" Stan asked.

"Well," she said, after sipping from a glass goblet, "as Queen, it's my duty to present myself as a kind and fair ruler to all my people, even the ones that live outside of Faerie. If I told everyone how I felt about them all the time, I'd have no people left to follow me. I only let those in my innermost circle know my true feelings. So, congrats, I guess that makes you one of the cool kids."

"I'm honored," he said flatly.

"... Sorry we don't have anything more substantial for dinner," said Titania, noticing that Stan wasn't eating all that much. "My kind really doesn't need anything more than a little fruit and water everyday... I can have one of my servants sneak out of the festival to get you something else if you wish."
"I'll probably just grab something at the diner later," said Stan dismissively.

"That diner's still around?" said Titania with a smirk, "I thought for sure it would've been shut down by the health department long before now."

"It helps to be the only game in town," said Stan, mirroring her smile.

"I don't think I've eaten there since the thirties," said Titania.

"I thought your kind didn't need to eat greasy fast food?" asked Stan.

"Just cause I only need this stuff doesn't mean it's the only thing I want," said Titania, hitting another grape off of her plate with a flick of her skewer.

"... You want to ditch this and get a burger instead?" he asked. She bit her lip. "I can't stay out too long, they do need me to be at the play later tonight."

"When's that thing," said Stan, who, like most sane people, was unwilling to sit through live theater outside in the middle of the night.

"Around two in the morning," said Titania, gagging.

"It's only eleven now," said Stan, checking the clock that stood across the room. "That gives us some time to skip out for a bit on this mess of a festival. Why not give it a try?"

He held out his hand.

She took it.

Chapter End Notes

OH MY GOD GUYS, MACBETH IS FINALLY OVER.
This show was such a drain on me, and I'm just so glad that it's done with. No more running around outside in the sweltering summer heat, no more getting heat stroke from the ratty, disgusting witch costume I had to wear that snagged on everything, no more of the obnoxious cast mate that kept trying to upstage everyone onstage despite having like, no lines, FREE AT LAST, Y'ALL.
Of course, I'm probably going to put myself through all of this all over again next year when they put on A Midsummer Night's Dream, and I'm going to hate myself, but I'm gonna do it for ART, dammit.
Anyway, with that rant out of the way, my goal is to at least give you guys reading at least two updates a week if I can, because I finished the plot map a few weeks ago and estimated that this fic is going to probably end at around nineteen chapters. Lovely.
In Which We Check In on Bill Cipher

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Bill Cipher is still a statue. He will still be a statue in the next chapter, and will remain a statue at the end of the story.

I'm sorry to tell you this, but it's true.

I will say, later in the story, somebody does spit on the statue (which, to be honest, is still less than Bill deserves since he was a horrible creature and not even death is a stern enough punishment for his deeds). That should be fun. I'll let the readers try to figure out who does the deed.

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, just wanted to post an update on Alex and Ariel Hirsch's birthday. With any luck, a real chapter will be posted later tonight.

EDIT: Actually, did you know that the actual date for Midsummer is the 18th of June? Another happy coincidence where I came across cleverer than I actually am.
In Which Gideon Has a (Stupid) Idea

Chapter Notes

So, I mentioned earlier in the last author's note that Ford was going to be oblivious to the Wild Hunt's antics? Yeah, originally this plot line was going to be about Mabel and Co. trying to hide the giant army of monsters so Ford and Fidds could enjoy their date in peace. Also Pacifica and Oberon were going to have a Prank Call war? Obviously that didn't pan out.

"This is by far the stupidest idea I have ever heard in my entire life," Pacifica said to the room at large.

Mabel had to agree, but the look of determination on Gideon's face was unhesitating.

"I wouldn't expect you to know much about it," said Gideon smugly. The bowl of milk he held in his hands rippled as he began to stroll towards the front door. "But it's simple fairy custom. You put out a bowl of milk for fairies, they become your best friends for life."

"That's kittens!" said Pacifica, exasperated.

"Actually, I'm pretty sure milk is bad for kittens too," Mabel corrected, "I think it gives them a tummy ache?"

"I'm telling you, it will work!" snapped Gideon. "Once a few of Oberon's soldiers have some of this, they'll be my loyal servants, then I'll have them tear apart Oberon's army from the inside! Once the Wild Hunt's been defeated, Dr. Pines will have to respect me after that, thus giving me his blessing to take Mabel's hand in marriage!"

"That's not how that works at all," said Tyrone II, Dipper's clone.

"Hush your mouth! I'm about to save every one." Gideon pushed the table out of the way of the door, his hands shaking as he reached for the handle.

"Grunkle Ford said to stay inside, Gideon," Mabel reminded him. "You don't have to do this! This plan is dumb crazy! Drazy even!"

"It's going to work, I know it!" said Gideon, wrenching the door open wide before he could convince himself to go back.

"He's going to get eaten alive out there," said Candy bluntly as she hung daisy chains all around the room. Gideon pretended not to hear that as he walked towards the crowd of Fae nearest the porch.

The Hunt had been ordered not to attack unless Oberon commanded it, under the belief that the sheer size of the army would intimidate the smaller children into doing something rash, like running directly into the army in an attempt to escape. Ophelia, a blue-skinned water nixie, didn't think Oberon anticipated one of the children strolling up to the army to deliver a bowl of milk. She noted that human stupidity was vastly underestimated.

"H-hi there!" said Gideon in a much too cheerful tone. Ophelia stared blankly at the boy.
"I... I was just thinking y'all were probably parched, sitting out here in that thick leather armor on a
hot night like this," said Gideon quickly, holding up the bowl to the soldier. "Why don't you take
a drink of this cool, refreshing milk?"

"I'm lactose intolerant," said the Nixie bluntly. Gideon began to sweat under the soldier's dead-
eyed gaze.

"Say, I'll take that milk if you don't mind!" said a short man with twinkling eyes and pointed ears.
The fae nudged Ophelia out of the way to get closer to Gideon and the bowl of milk. His smile
was wide and easy, and he gave Gideon a friendly wink as he gladly accepted the bowl from the
little boy.

"Of course I don't mind," said Gideon unctuously, relieved that someone had taken the bait. The
fae sipped from the bowl delicately, taking his time to taste the milk before saying, "This is really
good stuff, kid. But you know what would be even better with it? Some snacks!"

"Oh... uh... I'm not sure if I brought any with me, sorry," said Gideon nervously. The grin the Fae
was giving him was making him uncomfortable. Was it just his imagination, or was the Fae's smile
getting wider?

"Oh, I think you brought plenty," said the Fae, who began to grow at an alarming rate, towering
over the small child. "After all, everyone knows that the Erlking's favorite snack is children!"

Gideon began to run towards the Shack, where the other children were calling out to him to go
back inside. However, the Erlking only had to extend one long arm towards the retreating child to
catch a hold of him. Gideon fell to the ground as the monster began to drag him across the ground
towards its gaping maw filled to the brim with teeth like daggers.

If I were a truly wicked sort of person, I think I would end this chapter right here with Gideon
getting messily eaten by the Erlking while the other children looked on in silent horror...
... But I'm not telling that sort of story, so here's what actually happened to Gideon when he got
snatched by the Erlking.

The very second the Erlking nabbed Gideon, Mabel ran out onto the porch, her grappling hook in
hand. "Gideon, catch!" she cried, shooting the gun towards the boy. The hook fell into Gideon's
scrabbling hands; Mabel began to tug on the other end of the line once the boy got a firm hold.

"Hey, let go you brat!" snarled the Erlking, yanking Gideon towards him. Mabel felt her feet
begin to slide off the porch, but still she didn't lose her grip.

"Guys, help!" she called back towards the house. Tyrone II and Candy grabbed on to the gun as
well, stepping back slowly to pull Gideon back towards the house.

"Can't we just let the monsters eat him, already?" Pacifica asked, raising an eyebrow at the
cacophony outside.

"Pacifica!"

"Ok, fine," she sighed, and she too added her strength to the human tug-o-war against the Erlking.

This wasn't enough: though the combined strength of the children was enough to get Gideon out
of reach from the creature's mouth, the Erlking's grip remained as strong as ever on the little boy.
They were at an impasse.

"Carl Sagan on a cracker, what's happening!?"

Ford had arrived on the scene with McGucket in tow.

"A monster's got Gideon!" Mabel answered tersely.

"Aw, crap," said Ford, rubbing his temples with his fingers. He turned to Fidds. "Got anything we
can use to get rid of this guy?"

"Gee, I don't think so... I ain't fixed nothing up 'cept this here harpoon gun," said Fidds, holding
up said weapon with both hands.

"Where did that come fro- okay, you know, never mind, that'll work," said Ford, taking the
harpoon from Fidds and aiming it at the Elking's heart. With one squeeze of the trigger, Ford was
able to send the harpoon flying through the air, where it met its mark with a sickening squelch.
"Aw, booger," said the Erlking, who shortly after burst into dust. Mabel and the rest were finally
able to reel Gideon in back onto the porch, to the jeers of the rest of the Wild Hunt.

"Quickly, everyone back inside, NOW," said Ford as he reeled in the harpoon. No one had to be
told twice.

"Ok," said Ford, once everyone had scrambled back inside, "What I want to know is what exactly
was I not clear on when I said no one go outside under any circumstances?" He slammed the table
back in front of the door, glaring at the children.

"It was all Gideon's idea," said Pacifica curtly. Gideon shook his head in horror at the girl,
quailing under Stanford's gaze as she spoke. "He was going to use milk to mind control the fairies or something. Yeah, I said it was stupid too."

"I was just going by what I had read about fairies, how they like it when humans leave a bowl of fresh milk out for them," said Gideon hurriedly.

Ford wondered if he was going to get a permanent six-fingered mark on his face from constantly smacking his hand to his forehead tonight.

"Okay," he sighed, "Quick lesson: that rule only applies strictly to household spirits like brownies, the kind of spirits that clean up houses and sing songs about going to work. It doesn't work on Erlkings."

Gideon scowled at this fresh humiliation, but nobody seemed to notice or care. Grenda had arrived with a box full of weapons she had selected from the bag in the living room. "Everyone take a dagger," said Ford, "Or whatever you feel most comfortable handling in a fight."

"So, nothing, since we're children," said Pacifica, rolling her eyes as she picked up a dagger with a dragon carved into the hilt.

"Iron is the only sure fire way to harm a fae," said Ford, grabbing the only remaining sword and attaching it to his belt. "I won't lie to any of you: the Hunt won't hesitate to kill any of us if we resist them, and that's if we're lucky. You have to be prepared to fight for your lives. I'll do my best to make sure it never comes to that, but if something happens to me..."

"We're going to beat the poop out of Oberon," said Mabel fiercely, holding up her own dagger.

"We're going to punch his legs out," agreed Candy, pumping her fist in the air.

"We're probably going to die, but I'll still fight this creep anyway," said Pacifica with dull resignation.

"I'm gonna beat him over the head with a chair! YEAH!!!" cried Grenda, who, in her enthusiasm, accidentally punched a hole in the wall with the gauntlet she had put on.

"And what the heck is this 'if something happened to me,' fool talk," said Fidds, grabbing Ford's hand. "What d'you think I'd do, let the kids roam wild and fend for themselves? Better yet, do you really think I'd even let something happen to ya?"

Mabel had never seen her Grunkle Ford look so starry eyed, and, if there weren't five hundred screaming soldiers about to kill them all, she would have taken photos of this precious moment.

"There's some fae coming towards the house!" cried Tyrone II, who was watching out the window.

"How many?" said Ford, snapping his attention back into the moment.

Tyrone II squinted at the encroaching fae. "...Only two..."

A sharp, piercing sound like glass being shattered filled the room. Mabel clamped her hands over her ears to block out the noise, but somehow it was louder than ever-- as if it was coming from inside her head.

*OPEN THE DOOR. WE ARE JUST HERE TO TALK*

It was over as soon as it began. Silence filled the Shack as everyone stood around it shock.
"Was that my imagination, or did we all just have an aneurysm at the same time?" Fidds asked, pulling his beard nervously.

"It's some kind of spell," said Ford, blinking at the massive headache the message had given him. It had been a thousand times worse for him than it had been for the others, the metal plate in his head distorted the deafening sound to agonizing heights. "A way for them to communicate through the unicorn charm."

"They could try using a phone like a normal, sane person would!" snapped Pacifica, who had already had enough of the fairies' antics to last a lifetime.

"I'm going out," said Ford, grabbing the harpoon gun once more before moving the table out of his way. "Remember: if anything goes wrong, head for the basement and don't come out until dawn."

"I'm going with you," said Fidds, who had grabbed from the box, of all things, a morning star.

"Dipper, Mabel, just keep your wits about you," said Ford as he left, which, he reflected, were insufficient parting words for a situation like this. It made his resolve not to die all the stronger.

The two old men walked back out onto the porch, clutching their weapons firmly as they went to meet the Fae. They found themselves facing Puck, looking as smug and insufferable as ever, but what drew their attention was the little Pooka boy from earlier standing next to him. There were shackles around his ankles and wrists, which had already chaffed and blistered the skin beneath it raw. Tears rolled down the tiny rabbit's face as he said, "T-the k-king of the land of Faerie w-would have y-you parlay with him in ten minutes t-time."

"That was good," said Puck kindly, offering the boy a handkerchief to wipe away the tears. "You did well delivering the message, little one. I'll be sure to tell Oberon how well you did. He'll be pleased."

"Iron?" said Ford, outraged. "You put your own kind in iron?"

"My master ordered the capture of the audience at the elf circus tonight and had them placed in iron chains, yes," said Puck, not looking Ford in the eye.

"It's burning that poor critter up," Fidds whispered, who swore he saw wisps of smoke coming from the shackles.

"It wasn't my idea, I told you," said Puck defensively.

"But you're letting it happen," Ford growled, "that's practically worse than doing the deed yourself."

Puck glared at Ford petulantly, resisting the urge to turn him into a giant screech owl. "Bring two of the others," said Puck after a tense beat. "He's bringing two of his best soldiers to the parlay as well as myself. He wants to meet on equal terms. Tell them to leave behind the daisy chains. We'll be waiting."

* * *

Ford had not wanted to bring any of the children at all, but all the same, he and Fidds were joined by Mabel and Grenda when they reappeared on the porch after ten minutes had passed. Grenda had gladly volunteered to come along, arming herself to the teeth even after Ford had told her parlay was supposed to be a peaceful meeting. Mabel argued that since this was technically her slumber party, it meant she was the leader, and leaders were supposed to represent their people. "Besides," she smirked, "I am a congressman as of last year, so I am the only one with any real
political power here."

"Fine," he sighed, reluctant to let any of his family near Oberon all the same, "but stay close to me and Fiddleford the whole time, you understand me?"

"We were afraid you'd be late," said Puck, eying up the four humans as they approached. He paused when he caught sight of Mabel.

"Haven't I seen your face somewhere before?" said Puck, squinting his too-wide eyes at the girl.

"Don't talk to my niece," Ford said coldly.

"Yeah, you keep your mouth shut, buster!" said Fidds, who had climbed up onto Ford's shoulders once more. The trance came over Puck again, this time ending with Puck's lips firmly stuck together as if they had been glued shut. Puck began to wildly gesticulate, sounds could be heard trying to escape from his mouth but none were distinguishable in any way. Finally, the fae simply gave up and teleported the six of them to the outside of Oberon's pavilion, a sickly green tent that reminded Mabel of mold. Puck held up one finger to the group as he ran inside the tent, leaving the others unattended.

"What was that about?" asked Mabel, raising her eyebrow at Puck's strange behavior.

"... I think I might have a theory," said Ford, scratching his chin. "But it's too soon to tell if it's right or not."

"Hey, Mr. McGucket," said Grenda, looking up at the old man perched on Ford's back, "how come you're always climbing on Dr. Pines; this is like, the third time today."

"Yeah, why's he always climbing on your back, Grunkle Ford?" Mabel teased. Ford flipped Mabel's hair over her face with one lazy flick of his hand.

"I like feeling tall," said Fidds gravely, glaring at the tent in front of him.

Mabel, once she had gotten her hair back in place, turned her attention to the Pooka child, who was still crying from his burns.

"Psst," she hissed, getting the kid's attention. "Do those things have a keyhole on the shackle? Or were those like, magically put on?"

"I... I think there was a key, actually, when Oberon locked them on," said the Pooka, "but he's got the only copy."

"Copy schmopy," said Mabel, pulling a bobby pin out of her hair. "Just take this and pick the lock when nobody's looking, it's super easy," she smiled, handing the pin to the fae boy.

"What about the others? They're trapped too!"

"Do you know where they are?"

"They're being kept in a cage not far from the pavilion," the Pooka admitted.

"Well," said Mabel, "I guess that means me and Grunkle Ford are just going to have to rescue them too once we take care of this jerkface Oberon."

"...You mean it?" said the Pooka doubtfully.

"Pinky promise!" She looped her pinky around the littlest toe on the Pooka's front paw, shaking it gently so as not to irritate the burns. The Pooka was able to smile through his pain for just a
moment.

At last, Puck returned, a look of irritation plastered across his face.

"The King will see you now," he said, lifting the flap of the tent to grant them entrance. "Please, take your seats."

A table had been set for eight in the middle of the room, four chairs on each side. Oberon sat before them in the middle, looking intimidating in his midnight black armor. Mabel could see the golden key hanging around the King's neck, glinting in the dull candle light of the room. Puck took a seat to Oberon's right, absolutely dwarfed in comparison to his leader's massive frame. Ophelia the Nixie sat on the end next to Puck, a ghost of a smile twitching at the corners of her mouth as her friend took his seat. Mabel wasn't sure what the creature at the end was supposed to be-- it was pale and featureless save for two little pinprick eyes that seemed to stare right through her. She decided to sit across from Puck, who by default looked the most human. She waved cheerfully at the fae, which took Puck by surprise for a brief moment before he himself decided to wave back. Ford sat across from Oberon, staring cool and impassively at the former King. This effect was only slightly ruined by McGucket, who was still perched on Ford's shoulders and giving Oberon the nastiest stink eye, not unlike an angry possum protecting its favorite piece of trash. Grenda took her seat across from Ophelia, both of whom began staring the other down cockily.

"Are you sure you wouldn't rather sit down in a chair?" Puck asked Fiddleford, gesturing to the seat on Ford's left.

"Nuts to your chair!" the old man spat. He tried to kick the chair over but couldn't quite reach from atop of Ford's shoulders; Ford himself decided to push over the chair for Fidds, to which the latter was grateful.

"I'm surprised," said Oberon at last, "though of course I suppose you wouldn't have known. The Wild Hunt have always been loyal allies to the rightful owner of Northwest Manor for many a generation. It's disheartening to see that friendship strained tonight."

"Yes," said Ford, arching an eyebrow at his adversary, "it must be jarring to find out that the current master of Northwest Manor has actual morals."

Puck and Ophelia caught each others' eye and began to smirk.

"You speak boldly for a man whose house is dangerously close to being overrun by an army that outnumbers you ten fold," Oberon sneered.

"Well, it does seem a bit excessive," said Ford, "sending five hundred soldiers to capture, what was it, four little girls?"

"And Gideon," piped Mabel.

"Yes, that's right, four little girls and a Gideon," said Ford, sensing that Oberon was becoming irritated. "Your banshee didn't even manage to capture my nephew who was unarmed at the time. How odd that such a feared military power should seem so... incompetent."

Mabel bit her lip nervously. Ford still didn't know that Dipper was out with Wendy, presumably safe and far away from the current terror of the Hunt. She tried to assure herself it was for the best, but even so, it still felt wrong.

"You would do best to remember that you are in the presence of a King, you sagging sack of mortal flesh," Oberon thundered, slamming a colossal hand onto the table, causing everyone to jump.
"Tell me, do you still get to call yourself King if you've been banished from your kingdom by your own Queen," Ford asked smoothly. At this, the King stood up from his chair, his helmeted face inches from Ford's as he leered at the old man.

"My king," said Puck suddenly, a bit of panic seeping into his voice, "please remember that we are here to make a diplomatic settlement; there's no need to let anger--"

Oberon's gauntlet clad hand wrapped around Puck's throat, choking the rest of Puck's speech. The king slammed his servant to the table with a loud thud as he continued to strangle Puck.

"Let him go," snapped Ophelia, trying to wrench Oberon's fingers from his tight grip. Mabel and Grenda also joined her, but if anything it just made Oberon squeeze tighter, causing Puck's silver eyes to pop. Ford tackled the king, causing Fidds to fall back on the ground as Ford tried to push Oberon off his lieutenant.

"Let your man go," Ford growled, his own arms wrapped around Oberon's enormous neck. He saw a glint of Oberon's eyes through the slot in the exiled King's helmet, as cruel, pitiless and gleaming as the eyes of a mad dog.

"Your majesty, let Puck go," he pleaded, loudly enough for the whole room to hear. This was what Oberon had wanted to hear, for he loosened his grip, allowing the girls to pull Puck free from Oberon's grasp. Puck began to gasp as the air returned to his lungs, his chest heaving with every breath. Mabel noticed the angry red bruises Oberon had left on Puck's throat and felt sorry for the Fae in spite of herself. She began to stroke Puck's downy hair comfortingly.

Ford, once he was sure Oberon wasn't going to resume attacking Puck, was at Fiddleford's side in an instant, apologizing rapidly as he pulled his friend to his feet. "I'm fine," Fidds assured him, "You did the right thing, don't worry 'bout me."

"I forget myself," said Oberon, taking his seat again at the table. He roughly snatched Puck from Mabel's grasp, forcing him back into his seat. "Please, sit. I have a proposition that ends this night peacefully, and I would have you all hear it."

Ophelia scowled murderously at her king, but said nothing as she took her rightful place at Puck's side. Puck slouched in his seat, his head lolling to the right, his eyes unfocused and bloodshot. The creature at the end had not moved during this whole confrontation, it only watched Mabel from across the table, unsettling the girl.

"I am a generous and merciful King," said Oberon, folding his hands together. "I think I have found a compromise that would satisfy both of our needs. I will take my army and leave you and your family alone for the rest of the night, on the lone condition that you surrender the other four children to me."

"Never!" cried Mabel.

"I'd never join your army, you big dumb jerk!" Grenda shouted, kicking the leg of the table, nearly breaking it in two.

"You will and you'll fit right in," said Oberon, "A girl of such massive strength and ferocity would do well in the Hunt. You might even rise up in our ranks like General Ophelia here. My shew of a wife won't stand a chance with the likes of you on my side."

"You really think I'd barter with you over the lives of these children?" Ford snarled, his face red with anger.

"I think you want what's best for your niece and nephew," said Oberon. "After all, it would be so
"Perhaps you should have just let him keep one," said the pale creature on the end. Twitching and squirming, it began to take shape right there at the table, settling only once it became a copy of Mabel, much to the latter's disgust. She had seen the shapeshifter last summer take her own form down in the bunker, and that had been terrifying enough, but something about this creature frightened her even more than that, perhaps because the creature's face-- her face-- still had the small, beady eyes from before. "I mean, he clearly doesn't care too much for this one if he's willing to risk taking her up here to see us."

"Don't insult my niece's intelligence with your lines, changeling," said Ford, taking Mabel's hand into his own. She felt something cold and metal being slipped into her hand; she noticed for the first time that the key was no longer hanging around Oberon's neck. She let go of Ford's hand, slipping the key into the pocket of her sweater surreptitiously.

"She already seems to like King Oberon's pet," the changeling drawled, "I think we should take her, don't you, my Lord?"

"I am a man of my word and I say he keeps the twins," said Oberon. "I will give you until the count of midnight to comply, human. I will have four children in my custody at that time, or I will have the house razed, both you and your companion slaughtered, and all six children in my possession. Puck will take you back to your house to prepare the others. We'll be waiting."

Puck got up from his chair, silently leading the four humans out of the tent. Just before they were teleported back to the shack, Mabel tossed the key to the Pooka child, who had already managed to get one of its paws free from the iron shackles. "Thank you!" he mouthed, and shortly after freeing himself he ran to the cage where the others were being held; he unlocked the door, freeing the other fae out into the night. At least one good deed had come from the disastrous parlay that night, perhaps even more, though the effects would not be known until much later that night.

*  *  *

"So that's it," said Pacifica, her voice cracking. When they had returned, Ford told the children the horrible choice Oberon was forcing on all of them. "He's just going to take us."

"Absolutely not," said Ford, pacing back and forth in the gift shop where they had gathered. "I'll think of something. Some alternative. I just need time--"

"Midnight's in twenty minutes," said Tyrone II, staring at the clock, "I don't think we have that kind of time."

"The daisies will buy us some time," said Ford, "But I don't think we can rely on those alone. Oberon's bound to have thought of a way to bypass that charm as well as the unicorn barrier around the house."

"Maybe we can still fight them off," said Grenda without much conviction.

"We don't have the numbers," said Ford, "I won't risk your lives on odds that steep. Our only chance is if... If I pull some sort of distraction while the rest of you escape to the bunker."

"You can't!" said Mabel, her eyes filling with tears.

"I don't have a choice, sweetheart," said Ford gently, "It's going to be fine. Fidds will take care of you kids when... when it happens. Don't worry about me."

"Will you stop saying that!?" Fidds could have smacked him right there. "What in the world is
with you trying to pass this off like it's nothing? Like anyone here is 'going to be fine' with just leaving you behind, because spoiler alert, AIN'T NOBODY GONNA BE FINE WITH THAT!"

"If we run now," said Tyrone II, "Maybe we could escape before they even know what's happened!"

"Don't tell me I copied all those daisies for nothing," sighed Candy, gesturing the the garlands of daisies that now lined every window and door frame in the Shack.

"Wait... copied?" asked Ford.

"Well, there weren't enough of the original flowers to make daisy chains all around the house," said Candy with a shrug, "So me and Dipper thought we'd use the cloning machine in the office. They still smell like regular daisies, so I guess that should be strong enough to mess them up."

Ford, for the first time in what felt like hours, smiled.
He had an idea.

*  *  *

Seconds before midnight even struck, Ford Pines led four screaming children out onto the porch, their hands tied with rope.

Puck was utterly disappointed. "Tell me," he said, hoarse-voiced and scathing, "What was it you said earlier about putting your own kind in chains?"

"Tell your master I made my choice," said Ford, his expression dark. "All of you get out."

"Grunkle Ford," Mabel cried as she ran out onto the porch, closely followed by an angry McGucket. "Please, don't do this!"

"This is the way it has to be, Mabel," said Ford, ignoring the cries of his niece's pleading friends as he handed them over to the army. "I'm sorry."

Mabel began to retreat into her sweater as she sobbed, while Fidds wouldn't even look at Ford.

Suddenly, "Dipper" appeared on the porch as well, much to Puck's confusion.

"I can't believe I ever looked up to you, you coward!" The boy glowered dangerously at his uncle.

"... Well, I'm not sure how that happened," said Puck, pointing to the boy now on the porch, "But honestly? I'm tired and I want dinner. See you around, you irredeemable piece of crap."

Puck signaled to the rest of the Hunt to make their retreat; all at once, the soldiers turned, marching towards the forest away from the Shack. Puck began to drag the children away, and perhaps that would have been the end of the night, had Gideon not stepped in the puddle of spilled milk a few yards away from the porch.

"Aw, no!"

"Gideon" began to bubble slightly, first around his feet, then his shins, until finally there was nothing left but a melted blob of what used to be a perfectly fine clone.

"Um... Okay... EVERYBODY COME BACK," shouted Puck, thoroughly annoyed at this point. Some of the Gideon-Blob had spilled onto his new shoes. Gross. "Somebody's trying to weasel out of the Master's deal."

"... Okay, time for phase two!" shouted Mabel back into the Shack.
The first to come out were the wave of Grenda clones, each storming from every door and window in the Mystery Shack like a horde of vikings. Puck took to the sky at that point, dodging a knife that one of the Grenda-clones threw in his direction. The knife pierced a Minotaur that had been unlucky enough to be standing behind Puck through the chest, dissolving it instantly. Soon others on the front end of the Hunt met similar fates, to the point where piles of dust began to form as each Grenda attacked.

"It's working," said Pacifica, who was spying from the window in the front hall, "Oh my god, I can't believe it's working."

"I can't believe that I have to stay inside and miss this fight!" said Grenda, who had laid down on the copy machine to make more and more waves of clones to send out against the enemy forces.

"Let me see, I want to look!" cried Gideon, trying to push Pacifica out of the way.

"Ugh, go back to your shame cave you troll!"

"Look who's talking, trailer park princess!"

"Snot-nosed sociopath!"

"Bottle blonde!"

Anyway.

The four outside were also fighting whatever soldiers managed to get close enough to the house to cause any damage to the barrier. Mabel, as always a crack shot, was able to take down flying adversaries like the banshees with her crossbow while Tyrone II covered her back by stabbing any encroaching monsters with one of the many daggers Grenda had selected. McGucket was unpredictable, feral even, as he swung the morning star wildly around, smashing it into monsters twice his size. Ford himself, who had spent years learning to fight while trapped on the other side of the portal, used a broadsword to cleave through the raiders, slicing and dicing through the enemies like a butcher.

Ford felt a kick to his back, however, that brought him to his knee for a moment; he rolled to avoid the swing of a sword that would have sliced off his head had he been any slower. Oberon himself leered down upon Ford, ready to kill. "I don't know how you did this," roared Oberon, swinging his sword down once more at the old man. Ford blocked the blade with his own, managing to pull himself to his feet to fight in the process.

"I don't know and I don't care," said Oberon, the sound of sword on sword clanging in the night. 
"Your little trick was merely that, a brief distraction before I destroy you!"

"Oh will you shut up," spat Ford, "You sound like a Saturday morning cartoon villain!"

"Just die already!"

"Make me!"

"Shortly," said Oberon, snapping his fingers.

Thunder began to clap as dark storm clouds filled the sky.

"Back out, Dipper," cried Mabel, realizing what was about to happen. Tyrone II didn't need to be told twice; he was able to take shelter in the Shack just as the rain began to fall.

Oberon's magic storm melted away all traces of the army of Grendas, though they had decimated a
good portion of the Hunt, about two hundred strong still remained, all the while lightning struck
down at random, nearly hitting the others as they fought. The horde began to descend onto the
house.

"Fidds," shouted Ford, still sparring with Oberon in the pouring rain, "I think it's time we did the
thing!"

"Got it!" Fidds pulled out a remote that he had been hiding in his beard and pressed a large red
button in the center.

"Hello!" shouted the voice of Candy over what sounded like an intercom, "this is a per-recorded
message from Candy Chiu, ninth grade (I got moved up this year. Very exciting)! Anyway, with
the help of Mr. McGucket, I was able to make these little grenades that, when activated, release
the fragrance of daisies! I've got a whole basket of them which I'm going to throw down once this
message is over. This is the first test, so congratulations. Most of you are probably going to die!
Candy says bye now!"

"Sir, we should probably get out of here," said Puck, who hadn't so much fought in the battle as
he had vaguely watched it from the sky.

"It is a bluff," said Oberon, continuing to fight Ford. "Ignore it!"

"That's... going to be hard, since one of the grenades just went off."

"What?"

It was true: Candy, who was now standing on the roof, had hurled a live flower grenade right into
the crowd, which exploded on contact. Aromatic gas filled the air, dissolving great swaths of the
crowd below.

"No... NO!" screamed Oberon, who could only watch as the remains of his army withered before
him.

"Sir, we should go," Puck repeated, grabbing hold of his master's arm. "Call for a retreat."

"... Fine. Teleport us out of here."

"Of course, my lord," said Puck, snapping his fingers. The entire army disappeared, including
Oberon. Only Puck and the storm remained.

Puck, grinning from ear to ear, began fervently applauding. "You really had me going for a
second, you know that?" said Puck.

"Candy, you missed one," Ford called up to the roof.

"Oh, poo, you're no fun. Happy Midsummer!"

Puck vanished.

"Yes!" Mabel cheered, throwing her fists into the air victoriously.

"Sweet doggies, I can't believe we did it!" McGucket wrapped his arms around Ford's waist,
hugging him tightly.

"We beat the Wild Hunt! We kicked their butts!"

"This was ten times better than the battle between Jimmy Frost and Rusty the Butcher on Clashing
Kings!"
"That was... incredible... also painful... oh god, everything hurts now," sighed Ford, who felt his muscles already begin to ache from the fight with Oberon.

"Come on, Grunkle Ford," said Mabel, a bright smile illuminating her face. "Let's go inside and celebrate!" 

"Candy, get inside, it's really coming down!"

"I already have!"

As the group headed back inside to take shelter from the storm, no one had noticed a small spot where lightning had struck dangerously close to the Shack, and, as a result, frayed a tiny bit of unicorn hair.

Chapter End Notes

If you're wondering why I delayed this chapter so long, you should know that I'm easily distracted and spent this afternoon in a sword fight with my sister and her boyfriend.
I wish I was joking.
In Which A Message is Recieved

Chapter Summary

So, this chapter, we're going to see a little bit from each of the current story lines, opening with Stan and Titania, then going back to the sleepover, then to Northwest Manor, and back to the sleepover at the end.

Chapter Notes

So, I started writing this fic right around the time season six of Game of Thrones started up, and usually I won't start writing a chapter until I finish watching the current episode; the Finale aired around the time I wrote this note and

OH MY GOD YOU GUYSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS
KING IN THE NORTH
KING IN THE NORTH
KING IN THE NORTH
KING IN THE NORTH
KING IN THE NORTH
KING IN THE NORTHHH

Ahem.
Moving on...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stan had done many strange things in his life, but he had to say, getting into an arm wrestling contest with the Queen of the Fairies was a stand out moment.

Greasy's Diner had all but been abandoned when they had come in, save for the late night stragglers and three goblins who were arguing with Lazy Susan at their table. ("For the last time, I'm not cooking that unicorn you dragged in here! Not after the last time!") She seemed grateful to take Stan's order, though there was some awkwardness trying to explain away Titania, who looked half his age and was still tarted up in that frilly dress.

"I'm a traveling magician," Titania lied blithely, "There's a... convention not far from here."

"A magician!" Susan cried, "Does that mean you're going a trick for us?"

"Well, I was going to pull the one where we got the cutest waitress in the restaurant," Titania lilted, "But it looks like we already have her!"

Thoroughly smoozed, Lazy Susan took their order and left, grinning.

"What in the world was that?" said Stan, raising an eyebrow.

"What? I can be charming when I feel like it," said Titania smugly, taking a sip of the coffee that Susan had poured for her.

"This is the first I've seen."
"This is the first I've felt like it."

It was true, Stan thought: Titania was in much higher spirits now that she was far away from the festival. She smiled easier, not the artificial simper she put on at the parade but an honest smile that brightened her whole face. When the food arrived, she thanked Susan graciously and ate heartily; she even offered to share some with Stan. They traded stories back and forth, Stan about his last year sailing around the world with Ford ("So there we were, in the middle of the biggest storm of the year when suddenly the man-eating sea horses attacked--") and Titania about her own adventures in Faerie ("So then the idiot ended up eating a poison apple again, and that's when the ipecac came out.") She was just wrapping up a story about the time she arm wrestled with a demonic Teddy Roosevelt when Stan began to laugh.

"What's so funny?" she asked, biting into one of her fries.

"Sorry," he snickered, "I just can't see you of all people arm wrestling anybody."

"I'm the grand champion arm wrestler in all of Faerie," said Titania haughtily.

"Oh yeah? Show me." Stan put his arm on the table, his hand outstretched.

"You're sure about that," she smirked, positioning her own slender arm near Stan's.

"Yeah, show me what you've got, your Majesty," said Stan, grinning.

"You know it's not sarcasm if it's my title, right?"

"Are ya just going to run your mouth the whole time, or are we going to do this?"

She smiled her sly little smile. "Loser pays for dinner."

She grabbed a hold of his hand then, and it begun. Stan was surprised, Titania was actually rather strong, able to match his own strength easily. They were deadlocked for a while; the goblins at the other table had taken notice and began loudly cheering on the contest. But soon, to Stan's astonishment, his arm began to droop towards the corner of the table under Titania's grip. It was just as Titania had slammed his arm into the table that Peaseblossom arrived.

"My lady!"

"HA HA HA YES, VICTORY-- Oh, hey Peaseblossom, what's good?"

The tiny fae girl had the good sense to look away from the Queen's behavior; she had a bag full of stuff that she said belonged to Stan. "It's everything we managed to rescue from what you were wearing-- they're all clean and good as new!"

"Hey, yeah, thank kid," said Stan, who hoped nobody figured out he had stolen most of what was left in the bag.

"Also, your brother called again--"

"Aw crap, what happened?" Stan had almost forgotten why he was trying to make up with Titania in the first place. What could have happened this time?

"I have him on the line; everything's all right though," Peaseblossom assured him. She handed him the walkie; immediately Stan began talking.

"Ford, what's wrong? Did something happen? Are the kids okay--"
"Grunkle Stan, it was amazing!" Mabel's voice cheered from the walkie, to Stan's intense relief. "We fought off the Wild Hunt all by ourselves! Grenda made an army of clones and destroyed everyone! Candy made flower bombs! Grunkle Ford even fought off that King Oberon jerk with a sword! It was pretty much the best thing ever!"

"Your brother fought with Oberon?" Titania's smile faded. "Sounds like it," said Stan, pulling away the walkie for a moment to speak with her. She stared down into her mug of coffee, the look in her eyes utterly morose.

"You... you okay, there, Queenie?" For some reason, seeing Titania looking so sad made Stan deeply uncomfortable. Titania looked up, her eyes wide, as if she had forgotten where she was. "... Ask him if he kicked my ex's ass."

"Um..." Stan turned his attention back to the walkie. "Poindexter, Fairy Queen wants to know if you kicked her ex-husband's ass."

"Well," said Ford, sounding completely self-satisfied, "I don't like to brag--"

"That's a lie," piped McGucket over Ford, "But he showed that no good tin bucket what fer! He ran off like Raccoon Wife on bath day! It was fantastical!"

A small, melancholy smile returned to Titania's lips. "Awesome," she whispered, taking a long drink from her mug. "Wait," said Mabel, "What's Stan doing hanging out with the Fairy Quee-- Oh my god, are you on a date? HEY EVERYONE, MY UNCLE'S ON A DATE WITH A FAIRY QUEEN; THIS IS THE BEST DAY OF MY LIFE!!!"

"Um, look at that, the uh, batteries are dying on this thing," said Stan, thoroughly mortified. "I've got to go, I'll be back soon, bye now." He hung up the walkie and handed it back to Peaseblossom.

"Your niece seems sweet," said Titania, who was picking at the remains of her dinner absentmindedly. There was a slight flush to her cheeks. "She is," Stan agreed, "gets a little over excited at times, but she and her brother are good kids. Me and my egghead brother take care of em during the summer."

"Didn't peg you as the nurturing type."

"Well, didn't peg you as the arm wrestling type," said Stan, "Speaking of, show me how you did that again."

"I hate to interrupt, but we really should be heading back to the festival soon; the plays are going to start in less than an hour," said Peaseblossom, looking over at the clock on the wall.

"The play starts when Queenie's done showing me up at arm wrestling," said Stan, dismissing Peaseblossom with a wave of his hand.

"C'mon Sweet Pea," said Titania, pouting slightly. "Just a few more minutes?"

"... I'll tell the actors to hold the show for a few minutes," Peaseblossom conceded, "But please be
mindful of the time."

"You're the best as always," said the Queen. She turned her attention back to Stan, grinning contentedly.

"Okay," she said, taking Stan's hand once more, "It's all about leverage..."

* * *

The storm still raged outside, with rain pounding on the windows of the old Mystery Shack as lighting crackled across the sky, but it was impossible to tell from the good cheer of Mabel's party inside. Ford, not wanting to take any chances, insisted that everyone move down into the lab, including the few Grenda clones that hadn't been sent outside to fight. The control room had been transformed by Mabel and Pacifica into a giant pillow fort, lifting the lab's usual gloom into a cozy, comfortable place.

The five spare Grendas were as boisterous and jubilant as the original, initiating pillow fights with everyone and everything they came across, which, at this moment, was a hapless Tyrone II. Mabel, Candy and a reluctant Pacifica had formed a braid train near Ford and Fidds, who had curled up next to each other, exhausted from the fight. The only one who wasn't happy was Gideon, who was sulking quietly in the corner, wishing this night would just end so he could leave. Ford would keep glaring at Gideon anytime it looked as if he was going to say something to Mabel; had this been any other person, Gideon would have made at least a dozen plots on how to destroy them, but the truth was that Gideon was absolutely terrified of Dr. Pines. For the time being, however, Gideon did get some pleasure coming up with villainous speeches he'd like to say to Ford.

Oh, sure, go right ahead and try to fool everyone with that kindly grandpa routine, thought Gideon as Ford draped his arm around McGucket's shoulder while they leaned against a pile of Mabel's stuffed animals, I see right through you, you vicious killer necromancer! I ain't going to let you scare me, though! You may not want to acknowledge it, but you taught me everything I know, whether you like it or not! I'll show you! No, that's not dramatic enough. I should say something more threatening, more powerful. Um... You'll rue the day you dismissed me, Dr. Pines! Oh, that's good. Really good...

"Gideon, quit talking to yourself," snapped Ford, who had heard Gideon mumbling indistinctly under his breath.

Gideon blushed. "I'm going to bed," said Gideon curtly, grabbing a blanket and wrapping it around himself like a cocoon.

"That's probably a good idea," agreed Mabel, checking the clock on her cellphone. "It's almost two, we should get some sleep."

"Aw, but the Grenda party just got started!" said the original Grenda, who had never felt more excited. Her clones nodded in agreement, tossing pillows at each other and laughing heartily at one another.

"I think it would be best if you kids went to bed," said Ford, "It's been a long night, and it's going to be daylight before we know it. I'll go upstairs and take first watch while you sleep."

"Grunkle Ford, you just had a sword fight with a giant monster!" chided Mabel, who put her hands on her hips. "You need to rest too!"

"I'm fine," said Ford, who began to climb to his feet. He winced as he straightened his back; the area where Oberon had kicked him was painful, bruised, and sore.
"Your niece is right, darlin'," said Fidds, grabbing on to Ford's arm. "You ain't in no condition to stay up for the rest of the night. 'Sides, the security system I hooked up to the house will keep out any of those monsters if they try to come back! I've got it set up that if they break down the doors, it sounds a silent alarm that'll electrocute any intruders! It's foolproof!"

It was at that moment the power went out. Fidds stood there for a few seconds, blinking in the darkness.

"... The electric's gone out. Huh. That just about rendered everything I worked on completely useless. Ain't that unfortunate. Will y'all kindly excuse me for a bit?" Fidds plodded out of the control room towards a wall that was revealed to be a secret door, leading to a hidden stairwell. ("The emergency steps in case the elevator's out of order," Ford explained. "Why did you put the emergency steps behind a secret door?" asked Pacifica. "... In hindsight that probably wasn't our best lab design idea," Ford admitted.) Ford and the kids could hear the slight pit-a-pat of McGucket's footsteps going up the stairs, until suddenly they stopped.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAARGH CONFLABBIT DANG STUPID BLURT RATTLE SASSAFRASSIN LIGHTNING IRRUMABO STERCORE FANDEN LORT DAGNABBiT ARSCHLOCH KONGE OBERON GRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR ARGHALARGHABARGALARGHA!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Fidds returned a few seconds later, cheerful as ever, as if he had not been cursing his lungs out only moments before. "Well, I guess I'll be heading to bed, then. G'night kids," said McGucket to the dumbstruck group. He grabbed Ford's hand, leading him to the air mattress by the stuffed animal pile where they were to sleep. "Fidds, somebody has to keep watch..." said Ford drowsily, yawning as Fidds collapsed on the bed.

"Grendas!" said the original Grenda, gathering her clones in a huddle. "You guys go upstairs and keep watch so Dr. Pines can get some sleep!" The Grenda clones nodded in agreement, and began marching up the steps to the main house to guard the doors.

"I... suppose that'll work." Ford yawned once more, allowing himself to sit on the mattress next to Fidds. "Just one more thing, everyone pair up with a buddy; if anyone has to leave this room to use the restroom or for anything at all, take someone with you," Ford lay down on the mattress, his eyes closing as he drifted off to sleep.

Quietly, the kids paired up, Grenda with Gideon, Candy with Tyrone II, and Mabel with Pacifica. "Why me?" asked Pacifica, settling down into a sleeping bag next to Mabel. "I'd normally team up with Dipper, but... since he's not here right now..." Mabel trailed off. She still hadn't heard from Dipper since she called him earlier that night. It was possible he was just having too much fun hanging out with Wendy to call back, maybe he was even asleep by now, but still, worry gnawed away at her mind like a hungry rat.

"... You think he's okay?" said Pacifica, still feeling guilty for telling Dipper to sneak out in the first place.

"... Yeah. Wendy wouldn't let him get into too much trouble without us," said Mabel more confidently than she felt. "They'd have called us by now if something went wrong."

"... I guess you're right," said Pacifica, burying her face into a pillow.

"I'm always right," said Mabel amiably. Shortly, she began to snuggle into her own pillow, her eyelids drooping as sleep began to take over.
It seemed as if Mabel had just gone to sleep when she was awoken by a crash of thunder high in the sky. She jolted up in her sleeping bag, everyone else had gone to sleep at this point. She shivered then, the sound of thunder still rumbling above ground. She swore she saw the ceiling shake as yet another thunderclap went off. As quietly as she could, she crawled out of her sleeping bag, nearly tripping over Waddles, who was sleeping curled up next to her. Shrouding herself in a spare blanket, Mabel crept over towards the air mattress where Ford was sleeping. In his slumber, Ford had wrapped both his arms around Fidds protectively, one six fingered hand resting on top of Fiddleford's head. Mabel shook her Grunkle's arm, waking him suddenly.

"Mabel?" he asked groggily, turning his head towards her, "What's wrong, dear?"

"Nothing really," Mabel whispered, "It's just..." She jumped as yet another thunderclap sounded above.

"... Is the storm scaring you?" he asked, sitting up slightly.

"Ha," said Mabel, "Grunkle Ford, do you really think I'd wake you up in the middle of the night just because of a silly little thing like a thunderstorm?" This time the thunder boomed so loud it actually did shake the house, causing Mabel to squeak. "Because that's totally what's happening right now, can I sleep here tonight," she asked hurriedly, wrapping the blanket tightly around herself.

"Of course you can," said Ford with a drowsy, warm smile. He turned to Fidds, who was still snoring contentedly on Ford's chest. "Fidds, scoot over; Mabel needs a place to sleep."

"Wha... erm... 'kay," said Fidds, still half asleep as he rolled over to the furthest side of the mattress.

Mabel crawled onto the mattress next to her Uncle once their was enough space. She tried to get back to sleep, but the thunder was still as cacophonous as ever; she clutched onto Ford's arm tightly with each new crash from above.

"You know, Stan used to be scared of thunderstorms too when we were kids," Ford whispered.

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"Were you?"

"... Not really."

"Oh, yes he was," mumbled McGucket. "He was still scared of em when we were roommates together in college."

"What? I was never scared of thunderstorms," said Ford indignantly.

"You are lyin' to this sweet little dumplin' and ya ought ta be ashamed," said Fidds, delighted to have remembered something as far back as his college years. Fidds pressed his ear to Ford's chest. "Listen; his heart's just beating away like a humming bird in there," he told Mabel. Mabel leaned her ear against Ford's torso. Sure enough, she heard Ford's heartbeat thud in staccato when yet another thunderclap went off.

"... Okay, fine, neither of us were fond of thunderstorms," Ford confessed as Fidds cackled in triumph.

"What did you guys do when it got like this," Mabel asked, slightly more comfortable now that...
she knew even her brave Grunkles didn't like storms either.

"Well... one time Stan just tried to drown out the sound of the storm by screaming really loud," said Ford, "But that just ended up annoying our parents, and we both ended up getting grounded. So, instead, I started reading out loud until the storm calmed down, or until one of us fell asleep."

"That sounds kinda nice, actually," said Mabel, curling up close to her Grunkle. "Too bad I didn't bring anything to read down here."

"I think I might actually have some books somewhere around here," said Ford, turning towards the cabinet by the bed. Leaning over Fidds to open the door, Ford pulled out a flashlight and a small stack of paperback books, each one worn and wrinkled. "I dug these out a few days before you kids came back," said Ford, sitting up and surveying the books now placed on his lap. "I used to read these when I was younger during my downtime.

"Let's see," he mumbled, illuminating one of the books with a flashlight, "there's The Last Unicorn by Peter S. Beagle..."

"Pass," said Mabel, sticking her tongue out in disgust.

"Still not a fan of unicorns? I don't blame you. I'm afraid the one in this book is just about as arrogant as the ones in real life," said Ford, putting the book aside. "There's also The Princess Bride by William Goldman..."

"Me and Dipper have seen that movie about a hundred times," said Mabel, "I had no idea it was a book first!"

"Wait, there's a Princess Bride movie?" said Ford, scratching his chin.

"Oh my gosh; you have to see it," said Mabel excitedly, struggling to keep her voice down, "We should have movie night sometime! You can come over and watch with us, McGucket!"

"That sounds dandy," mumbled Fidds, who was beginning to drift back to sleep.

"How about we put that in the 'maybe' pile, then?" said Ford, who was shifting over to the next book after that. "Well, how about that," said Ford, holding up a small book that had lost most of its cover from years of constant use. "I haven't read this book since I was your age, Mabel," he said, showing his niece the book. "A Wrinkle In Time. It was one of my favorites."

"Then we should read it," said Mabel; she rarely got a chance to bond with Ford like this.

"Well, all right," said Ford, clearing his throat. He opened the cover and began to read. "'It was a dark and stormy night...' Mabel listened to Ford's deep, rumbly voice as he told the tale of Meg Murray and her little brother Charles Wallace, who were looking for their missing father. She found that it was much easier to forget about the storm when Ford was reading; he invested himself in the story, creating characters and painting scenes with his voice alone, and that in turn got her invested in the story as well. If she had the energy, Mabel could have stayed up all night listening to him, but inevitably her eyelids began to droop, and soon, Mabel fell back to sleep, just as Mrs. Whatsit revealed her true form.

Ford put down the book. He reached over to the nearby pile of stuffed animals; after selecting what looked like a plush bison with too many legs, he tucked the creature under Mabel's arm before laying back down on the air mattress himself. With Mabel snuggled under the crook of his arm and Fidds snoring at his side, Stanford Pines fell asleep, completely at peace.

* * *
Wendy woke up with a jolt. She found herself in a dimly lit room; she was sitting up in a four-poster bed that was warm and cozy.

"What the hell..." she mumbled, still disoriented.

"Wendy? Oh my god, Wendy's awake!"

"Tambry?" Wendy stumbled out of the bed; all at once she remembered the disastrous break in, her kidnapped friends, a long, black knife being held to Dipper's throat. She was going to knock out Puck's teeth the next time she came across him.

"Wendy!" cried Robbie, who appeared to be huddling next to Tambry in the dim light of the room.

"I'm so glad you guys are Oka-- Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh...." Wendy cringed in spite of herself when she caught sight of her friends.

"Does it look as bad as it feels?" Tambry deadpanned.

"Ah... it... it could look worse," lied Wendy.

Robbie and Tambry looked mostly fine, as long as you ignored the fact that their torsos were now sharing the same pair of legs and hips. Tambry scowled in annoyance, as if being melded to her boyfriend was a minor inconvenience like being stuck in traffic or stubbing your toe. Robbie, however, looked as if he was both frightened out of his wits and mildly constipated.

"Did Puck do this to you," said Wendy, anger rising to its peak.

"Yeah, he said something about trying to make us work out our issues so we could stick together forever," said Tambry, rolling her eyes. "Like, did he think he was being clever, because honestly I'm not impressed."

"... Guys how are we going to use a bathroom," whispered Robbie, his eyes darting around the room nervously.

"It could be worse, I guess," said Tambry, jabbing her thumb into a far corner in the room. There sat Preston Northwest, who looked like someone who was midway between turning into a camel; his torso looked mostly humanoid, the tuxedo print t-shirt in tatters after Preston's body had been mutated, but his entire lower half was the humped body of a Dromedary camel. Preston was blubbering loudly, his face oozing snot and tears ungraciously as he begged Puck to change him back.

"Serves you right for betraying us, jackass!" said Wendy savagely.

"I just wanted a cucumber sandwich!"

"Oh, I hope you choke on your cucumber sandwich," Wendy snapped. It was then that she noticed Dipper laying on a daybed by the window, still asleep.

"The kid's been out since you guys got here," said Robbie. Wendy crossed over to the couch; once at his side she began to shake Dipper's arm, trying to get him to wake him up. Nothing happened.

"Dipper, come on, wake up," said Wendy, crouching next to the boy, "We've got Robbie and Tambry back, it's time we broke out. You just... you've got to wake up, okay?"

"Try sticking a wet finger in his ear," suggested Tambry. "That's how I get Robbie to wake up
when he's passed out."

"Yeah, that's not going to work if the kid's dead, Tambers!" snapped Robbie, waving his arms at the unconscious Dipper.

"Oh my god, Robbie, you don't just go around shouting that the kid is dead, do you know anything at all about babysitting?" Tambry retorted.

"Guys, stop fighting," said an exasperated Wendy, "Dipper's still breathing, but... God, it's like he's in a coma."

"It's a sleeping curse," said Preston, his voice sounding detached. "You'll need Puck to lift it."

"Like hell we are," said Wendy. She turned to TambRobbie. "Either of you still got your cell phones?"

"Yeah; mine's almost dead, but it'll do, I guess," said Tambry, digging her phone out of her front pocket.

"Hand it over," said Wendy. She began to dial...  

*  *  *

"Hey, wake up, I gotta pee."

Mabel blinked. Pacifica was standing over her, one slippered foot tapping on the floor impatiently.

"Yeah, just... gimme a sec," said Mabel, rubbing her eyes as she got out of the air mattress, still clutching the plushie Ford had given her. The two girls crept out of the lab without waking anyone. Once they were back upstairs and outside the bathroom door, Pacifica pulled out Mabel's phone from within her robe. "You've got like, a voice mail from that Tambry girl? I didn't open it, but it looks like she blew up your phone for a bit."

"I'll check on it," said Mabel, a bit confused. It wasn't as if she disliked Tambry, far from it, but Mabel couldn't say she was somebody who Tambry would start calling in the middle of the night. She pressed a button, allowing the voicemail to play. To her surprise, it was Wendy's voice that answered.

"Mabel, I wasn't sure who else to call, and I don't know how everything is for you guys at the Shack right now, but Dipper and I need help. We got caught by the Wild Hunt and now we're being held captive in Northwest Manor. I'm going to try to break us out, but something's wrong with Dipper--"

The message cut off.

No, Mabel thought, panic coursing through her as she clutched her phone. No, no, no, no, NO, this can't be happening!

*but it is*

Mabel jumped, it was like before, when Puck had sent his message during the siege. "D-did you hear that?" Mabel asked Pacifica.

"Um, kinda busy, Mabel!"

"Oh, right, sorry."
*i can hear you both. even over the phone. i'm using it like a normal person.*

The voice, Mabel realized, was coming from her phone, and yet it sounded so wrong. It still felt uncannily like a voice in her head, a hallucination.

*you're not hallucinating. changelings like me can hear all your thoughts. all your fears. everything. for example, right now you're thinking about going downstairs and waking up your uncle so he can go save your brother for you. how pathetic. he's going to think you're even more useless than ever. can't even save your own twin.*

"Grunkle Ford doesn't think I'm useless," snapped Mabel, her face going red.

*what? you think he loves you just cause he read you a story before bed? that just means he thinks you're a big baby.*

Pacifica slammed open the bathroom door. She snatched the phone from Mabel and said, "Hey, let's get one thing straight, the only person who gets to make fun of Mabel for being a baby is me, freak. Second, you're going with the 'your family doesn't love you enough' route? Please. Take it from somebody who's family really doesn't give a crap about, Mabel's nerdy uncles would literally crawl through broken glass to keep her and her brother safe. You and your loser boss Oberon are done for. Bye."

*tell me, how's your uncle's back doing, mabel? do you really think a man as old as he is will last long in a rematch against an unstoppable force like oberon? are you willing to gamble his life for your brother's? or do you feel like crawling back to bed and pretending this call never happened? choice is yours...*

"... I am so done with fairies, I swear," snapped Pacifica, handing the phone back to Mabel.

"We've got to rescue Dipper and Wendy," said Mabel, determined.

"... I know," said Pacifica, already resigned.

"... We're doing it by ourselves," said Mabel after a long time.

"That changeling's obviously setting us up for a trap," said Pacifica, frowning.

"That's why we're going to be sneaky," said Mabel. "You know your old house better than anyone; if we find a way to sneak in quietly, we can get the others out safely and back at the Shack in no time."

"... I guess you're right," Pacifica agreed. "But leave a note for your Uncle in case this goes wrong. I'll get our weapons and some of those flower grenades."

And so, Mabel wrote down a note for Ford. Before leaving, she slipped it in his hand, which had loosely curled into a fist as he slept.

"Look out for Grunkle Ford for me, Waddles," Mabel told her pet, rubbing the pig behind its ears as she left the basement.

When Mabel walked out the front door of the Shack, the storm had at last come to an end. The grass was wet and muddy as she walked out on the lawn, where Pacifica was waiting for her with one of the golf carts.

"Ready?" Paz asked as Mabel sat on the passenger side.
"As we're gonna be," she replied.

The drove out into the night to face the unknown.

Chapter End Notes

So, I've been kicking around this headcanon that Ford's favorite book as a kid was "A Wrinkle in Time," so naturally I had to include a sappy little scene where he's reading the book to Mabel. It comes at the cost of breaking the "Don't Name the Actual Thing This Reference is Based On Rule," but I don't mess around when I can make book recommendations. But mostly I included this scene because, aside from the next chapter which is Stan and Titania at the play, the next few chapters aren't going to have much cutesy fluff. It's about to get dark before dawn.

Side note: to prepare for that particular scene, which I affectionately dubbed "Owl and Mate Nesting With Baby Owlet," I actually started re-reading "A Wrinkle in Time." I don't think I've read that book since I was a freshman in high school. Amazing the little side tracks that come across when you're creating a story.
One of the funniest things about A Midsummer Night's Dream is the conclusion of
the Rude Mechanicals' plot line, where they perform a dreadful adaptation of
Pyramus and Thisbe. So, this is going to probably the hardest chapter, as I've got to
do my own spin on this scene that's a proper send up. Here it goes...

Ten arm wrestling rematches and one break in to the haunted convenience store for cigarettes
later, Stan and Titania were ten minutes late for the intended start of Pyramus and Thisbe. The
audience sat at their benches looking bored and restless, a few jeered at poor Peaseblossom, who
apologized profusely for the delay. When she caught sight of the Queen, Peaseblossom happily
introduced the director, and left the stage to join them.

"Thank goodness you showed up," said Peaseblossom, guiding them to their seats. "I don't know
what they would have done if they had to wait any longer. Here's your programs, enjoy the
show."

"Aw... thanks Sweet Pea," said Titania with a strained smile. Once she saw that Peaseblossom
wasn't looking, Titania tossed the program into the trash, and slumped down in her seat.

"I don't know how many times I've had to sit through this stupid play. Countless has a good ring
to it," Titania told Stan, who was eyeing the crudely drawn program with a scowl.

"Why does half the cast look like it's been crossed out in crayon?" asked Stan.

"Most of the actors this year have been dropping out," said Titania, who lit a cigarette and began
to smoke. "The director fancies himself a perfectionist. Somebody needs to tell him that this play is
just some trash my ex wrote with his buddies."

"Oberon wrote this?" asked Stan, quirking an eyebrow.

"No, no," laughed Titania, "I'm pretty sure Oberon can't even read, let alone write. Though, I
don't think Nick was much better at it. He's the reason you're wearing donkey ears right now.
They... My ex-husband and P- his servant... they put a love spell on me so I'd fall for one of their
monsters, some weaver they half transformed into a donkey named Nick Bottom."

"They put a love spell on you?" said Stan, outraged. "That's messed up!"

"It was thousands of years ago," said Titania, not looking over at Stan, "It's fine, really."

"No it's not fine," snapped Stan, hating every person in the audience at that moment. "Your
creepy child kidnapping husband drugs you, makes you fall for some rube against your will, and
these people make you sit here and relive the whole thing and you've gotta smile through it like a
paper doll the whole time? No wonder you're so angry all the time!"

"Stan," said Titania calmly, "It makes them happy. Ever since I banished my husband, Faerie's
never quite been the same. I wasn't the same. I was depressed, lonely, and yes, angry; but they
started doing this King of the Festival bit in an effort to make me smile again. It's not a perfect
solution by any means, but if my people are willing to try to make me happy, then I owe them the
same in interest."

"... I still don't think it's fair to make you sit through this," Stan grumbled, "You say the word, we walk out of this dump and drink our combined weight in mead by the wine cart."

"Not much of a mead person, to be honest," said Titania, "tastes like pickle juice. But I appreciate the offer." She tapped his arm with her fist. "I can handle it."

"Stan!"

They turned to see Melody sitting a few rows in front of them, waving.

"Mel? Where the heck is Soos? I haven't seen him since the parade," asked Stan.

"Shhhhh! My play's about to start, quit running your mouth!" hissed Jeff the Gnome, glaring bitterly at Stan.

"Ugh, you again," said Stan, rolling his eyes. "Mind your business, jerk, I'm the freaking festival king around here and I'm trying to find my friend!"

"Well," Melody said, pointing to the stage, "actually..."

"Oh my god," said Stan, staring dumbfounded at the stage.

"Told you it was stupid," whispered Titania.

Soos stood on the stage, dressed in a suit made of stones, twigs, moss, and the petrified corpse of Bill Cipher. The Jimmy Frost wig had been spray painted a dusty gray, and a little bird's nest with actual baby birds poking out rested at the crown.

"In this same interlude it doth befall that I, one Soos by name, present a wall..." said Soos confidently, spreading his arms wide.

"... Why is Soos a wall," asked Stan, "Why this? Why anything?"

"It's the wall that's keeping the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe apart," explained Titania.

"Soos got roped into helping with the play when the actor playing the wall quit," Mel explained.

"... Why do they need an actor to play the wall in the first place," asked Stan.

"I said be quiet!"

"Eat a booger, Jeff!"

It was then that a very unamused Mustardseed made her entrance as Pyramus. Dully, she began to recite her lines, "O grim-looked night. O night with hue so black. O night, which ever art when day is not. Look. It's night. Literally my next few lines are about how very nightly this night is. Because this play assumes you're all stupid and can't tell it's supposed to be night. Anyway, where the heck is my girl Thisbe? I shall look through the chink in this wall to spy if she is there."

Soos held out his hand, making a circle with with his fingers. "Here ya go, dood!"

"Thanks guy," said Mustardseed-as-Pyramus, peering through his hand. "Alas, I see her not! Oh wicked wall!" Mustardseed slapped Soos in the face.

"Ow! That hurt!"
"Cursed be thy stones for thus deceiving me!" Mustardseed slapped Soos again. Nothing happened.

"... I said, CURSED BE THY STONES FOR THUS DECEIVING ME!" Mustardseed shouted once more, slapping Soos repeatedly back and forth across his face.

"Please come out, it's your cue!" shouted Soos, wincing in pain.

"Mustardseed, would you ease up on the slapping," said Titania, trying and failing to sound stern, as she kept giggling with each slap her servant landed.

"I'm here!" said Thisbe, played by Moth. She skipped out onstage in a flouncy dress, waving and smiling at the audience. She stood on the opposite side of Soos, took a big breath, and immediately ran offstage again.

"And she's gone," said Stan, "does that mean we can leave?"

"No," said Titania, "there's still ten minutes left to this play."

"This is worse than the time I had kidney stones," said Stan, slapping a palm to his face.

Moth was pushed back onstage; she stared dumbstruck at the audience, completely at a loss.

"I... I forgot my line," she confessed, staring down at her tiny green feet.

"Psst... Moth... It's 'O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans for parting my fair Pyramus and me,'" Titania stage whispered from the audience.

"Right," said Moth, fluttering her green wings, "what Tanya said!"

"Now you have to say it!"

"Oh yeah," said Moth. Turning to Soos, she kicked him and cried, "Hey get outta my way you stupid wall, I wanna see Pyramus!"

"Ow! Who knew acting was such a painful career," moaned Soos, rubbing his bruised leg.

"My love, we shall meet together at Ninny's tomb!" said Pyramus, ceasing her assault on Soos' face.

"Kay, that's cool!" said Thisbe, who began fluttering in the air excitedly.

"Aces. Later," said Mustardseed-as-Pyramus, trudging off the stage.

"You know," Stan whispered to a giggling Titania, "You'd think Thisbe could just fly over the wall, then they wouldn't be separated, and we could end this crap already."

"Okay, that's it buddy," snapped Jeff, turning in his chair, "I've had just about enough of you!" Jeff the Gnome jumped from across his seat and kicked Stan right in the face.

"Hey, look, a riot!" cheered one of the audience members, and soon, other people began brawling around the stage as the actors continued their show. One particularly rowdy ogre jumped onto the stage and tried to tear down Soos-the-Wall, chasing poor Soos all over the stage until Melody intervened with her war hammer.

"Does this mean we can stop the show now?" Moth asked Cobweb, who was playing Moonshine.
"Don't ask me, dear," shrugged Cobweb, "I'm just the special effects."

"I've got an idea that'll calm everyone down, though," said Peaseblossom, who ducked as Jeff the Gnome was tossed across the room. "Release... the Lion!"

Indeed, in an effort to make this performance the most memorable adaptation of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the director went all out and hired an actual lion to play the creature that inadvertently caused the lovers' doom. Unfortunately, rather than a full grown beast of terror, the lion was a small cub, newly weaned from its mother. It plodded across the stage and mewed at the audience, recapturing the brawler's attention as well as their hearts. I don't know if you've ever heard the sound of two hundred fae squeeing over a kitten before, but I assure you it is one of the shrillest, silliest sounds you will ever hear.

"I think that gnome friggin broke my nose," mumbled Stan, trying to stave off the blood pouring from his face with his shirt.

"Hold still," Titania commanded. Gently taking Stan's face in her hands, Titania pecked Stan's forehead with her lips. The blood ceased to flow, the pain fled, and Stan's nose managed to snap back into place, good as new, or as good as it was going to get I suppose.

"Uh... thanks, I guess," said Stan, surprised that the Queen had kissed him yet again that night.

"You're welcome, I guess," Titania smirked, pinching Stan's cheek.

By the time they returned their attention to the stage, Pyramus and Thisbe had already had their dramatic death scene, the lion cub was lolling lazily around the stage, and Soos stood in the middle of the stage looking bemused.

"Alas, only I, the wall, remain," said Soos, bowing his head solemnly.

"Not so!" cried Mustardseed, getting to her feet, "For you see, Pyramus and Thisbe's feuding families put their conflict aside and tore down the wall that had obstructed the two deceased lovers."

"Die, thou treacherous wall, die!" cried Moth, stabbing at Soos with a retractable knife.

"Oh I am slain!" Soos fell to the floor with a thump.

"And thus, our most lamentable tragedy is at an end... at freaking last," said Mustardseed, already pulling the Pyramus costume off.

The applause was thunderous as the actors each took their bows, though it should be said that everyone was tired and foolish from all the festivities that night and were not entirely of the right mind.

"Well," said Titania with a smile, "I can honestly say that was my favorite production of *Pyramus and Thisbe* to date."

Soos peeled the wall costume off, holding it warily away from himself. "Anyone know where I can leave this?" he asked Mustardseed.

"Just toss it in the garbage," said the Fae, who was tearing the fake mustache she had worn as Pyramus into tiny shreds. "There's one by the stage."

"I'll take care of that for you, friend." said Cobweb, lifting the wall costume with more strength than her delicate frame suggested.

"Into the trash, into the trash, into the trash!" Moth chanted, following Cobweb as they journeyed...
to the garbage together.

Soos reunited with Melody and Stan, grabbing both into a bear hug. "You know, I think I might
look in to doing more shows like this-- we could do little performances at the Shack once a
week!"

"Or we could do literally anything else with our time," said Stan, rolling his eyes.

"Excuse me," Melody asked Titania, "I hope you don't mind me saying, but that outfit is
gorgeous! Do you mind if I took your picture." She held up the camera she had brought along to
the fair.

"Come to think of it," said Stan, "I don't think Mabel would ever forgive me if I met a real live
Fairy Queen and didn't get her picture."

"Well, who am I to disappoint my admirers," Titania shrugged. "C'mere Festival King, let's do
this."

They agreed to take three pictures; in the first, Titania and Stan simply smiled, in the second, they
made doofy faces into the camera; the typical sort of pictures. It wasn't until the third picture that
Stan had a flicker of inspiration. Just as Mel was about to take the third photo, Stan planted a kiss
right on Titania's cheek.

"That's pay back for smooching me earlier at the parade!" he smirked.

He expected her to slap him, like so many others before, but Titania merely blushed. You know, he
thought, she actually does look kinda... cute when she's happy.

"Well," said Titania, doing her best to regain her composure, "That was certainly--"

But what it certainly was we will never know, for at that moment the Pooka child arrived,
dragging his father the glass blower towards the humans with a grin on his face.

"Look dad, there he is! That's one of the humans who saved us!"

"What?" said Stan, confused.

"Woah, you got super fat since then!" The Pooka child began to prod Stan's belly with one of his
paws.

"Flopsy, stop bothering that man at once," said the Pooka's father. The glassblower turned to the
Queen, his expression grave. "Your majesty, my son says the Wild Hunt held him and a bunch of
others captive! They even threw him in iron chains!"

"I'm tough, I can handle it, Pa," said Flopsy, exposing the burns on his wrist with a nonchalant
wave of his paw.

Titania's eyes were wide at the sight of the Pooka's blistered flesh. There was something so utterly
wrong about seeing her look so terrified, Stan thought.

"He... he hurt your son?" It was almost too quiet for anyone to hear.

"I'm fine, I told you guys," said Flopsy, who was afraid he had gotten in trouble for upsetting the
Queen.

"No," she said, her voice quivering with rage, "don't ever say it's fine. When someone knowingly
hurts you this maliciously, my child, it's completely unacceptable, no matter what."
"What are we to do?" asked the Glassblower.

"We're gonna fight him, that's what," said Stan.

Everyone turned to him. "Stan, it's not that simple," said Titania, grabbing his arm. She was close to tears. "He's a vicious butcher, he'd tear through my people like paper. I can't ask them to lay down their lives for a suicide mission."

"That's why you got to fight him," said Stan, "Nobody messes with our people and gets away with it!"

She really was crying now. Without saying a word, Stan shooed the others away; once they were gone, he wrapped the Queen in a secure hug.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, "you must think I'm a great fool, crying like this."

"Don't apologize," he said, stroking her hair. "He hurt you real bad, didn't he?"

"... Yes. He hurt me. But worse than that he hurt my loved ones, and I couldn't do anything to stop it."

"... We're going to destroy that guy."

"He has an army," said Titania, pulling away.

"So what?" said Stan, smirking. "With your crazy magic, my strength, and, once we stop by and get him, my brother's brains, we'll be throwing dance parties on that guy's grave for years to come. What d'ya say, Queenie?"

It felt like forever, but eventually a determined smile returned to her face. She nodded her head.

"It's decided," Titania said. "We're going to war."
In Which We Revist the Dreamscape

Puck was limping down the halls of Northwest Manor when he came across Ophelia.

"What did he do to you this time?" sighed Ophelia, staring at her disheveled friend. The bruises on his neck had become a dark purple since they lost the battle at the Shack, and it appeared a great chunk of Puck's hair had been torn from his scalp since then.

"It matters not," said Puck dismissively.

"Yes it does matter," said Ophelia, pulling aside one of the house elves that were cleaning up the mansion. "Get some bandages and disinfectant, now." The elf nodded, vanishing with a snap of its fingers and reappearing with a first aid kit.

"I'd have Fleance take care of this," said Ophelia, taking some cotton balls and rubbing alcohol and applying it to Puck's bleeding wounds, "he's awake but he's still pretty out of it. I think he's got a concussion."

"Poor Fleance," said Puck, wincing at the sting of the rubbing alcohol, "He never was meant to be a fighter."

"He's lucky he wasn't at the battle," said Ophelia gravely. "barely any of my newer recruits made it back; I don't think I've ever been this humiliated. Such a waste."

"Oberon's never been much of a tactical genius, I think it's safe to say," said Puck, his eyes darting around the room nervously. It wouldn't do to have his master hear himself being criticized, especially when he was already in such a foul mood. "I think his grand idea was to have us set fire to the house and burn the kids out? I think he forgot about that once he summoned the storm. In any case, he's... unhappy that my parlay idea didn't pan out."

"... I'm thinking about leaving the Hunt," said Ophelia, wrapping a bandage around Puck's head. Puck was quiet. "I won't risk any more of my soldiers at this madman's commands; re-taking Faerie is a pipe dream and we're just indulging his delusions at this point." She looked him right in the eye. "You should come with us."

"... You know I can't," said Puck with a slight crack in his voice. "I'm bound to him for as long as he lives. That was the arrangement he made with his 'friend.' I can't help you leave."

"Maybe not tonight," said Ophelia, stroking Puck's soft hair, "But soon, I promise. I'll find a way to free you. For now I'll be carrying out his orders so he won't get suspicious, but I won't rest until we no longer have to serve this tyrant."

"Orders? I thought we were calling it a night," said Puck, confused. "We've got less than half our men left."

"It's a small mission," said Ophelia, "I'm supposed to head back to that Shack with the Nucklavee to take back those kids. I think he also mentioned wanting the old man's head on a silver platter."

"He always did love his cliches, our Oberon," said Puck wryly.

"It's too bad he wants him dead," said Ophelia, "If he were a bit younger, I'd have him join up with us. I could use someone with actual brains fighting for me."

"It is what it is," said Puck. "Try to make it quick, at least, and not in front of the kids if you can help it."
"I don't play with my kill," said Ophelia solemnly. She gave Puck a gentle hug before turning to leave. "I'll see you soon, Puck. Keep your chin up for me!"

Puck continued to walk down the hall once she had gone; he had other things to do that night, loose threads and brick-a-brak that needed tending to. He passed by a group of Brownies that were trying to hang a tapestry on the wall, he stopped once he caught sight of a familiar geometric shape. "What ever are you doing with that eye sore?" Puck asked, quirking his hip to the side.

"Oberon found this laying somewhere in a spare closet," said a timid little Brownie, its furry face trembling as it spoke. "He said we should hang it somewhere with the dignity it deserves."

"Well, I did hear a rumor that the downstairs restroom was out of toilet paper," said Puck, yanking the tapestry down off the wall. He rolled it into a tube and handed it to the brownie, all while smiling his wolfish smile. "I think this ought to do nicely, thank you!"

"As you wish, Puck," said the Brownie, smiling back at him.

Puck, tied to his master as he was, did look for small acts of rebellion every now and then. He patted the Brownie on the head before turning a corner towards the guest bedroom. He jumped when he saw a toddler with dark curly hair pacing by the door. The eyes gave it away once Puck caught sight of them, but all the same he was unnerved.

"Change back," he sneered at the Changeling disdainfully. "You know that's in poor taste."

"If you say so," said the Changeling. It morphed into the doll-like copy of the Pines girl it had made earlier at the parlay. "Look, now I'm your little friend. 'Tra, la, la, look at me, I'm a cute little girl who likes stupid things like rainbows, cupcakes and Puck!'"

"Do you have some reason to be here, other than getting on my nerves," asked Puck, folding his arms against his chest.

"I want to go on the mission with Ophelia," said the Changeling, swaying back and forth with its arms behind its back.

"If Oberon wanted you to go he would have already assigned you along with the others," Puck said, dismissing the Changeling with a roll of his eyes. "Now bug off. Go boil a bunny or whatever it is you like to do in your spare time."

"I think Oberon might have wanted to know if you were keeping one of the Pines kids hidden in the mansion this whole time," said the Changeling, looking up at Puck with a vicious smile. "Maybe that little disaster earlier could have been avoided if we used them as a bartering chip. Oh well. I'm sure one out of six will be acceptable, I'll just go tell him--"

"Okay," said Puck, trying not to panic as he stopped the Changeling from leaving. "Go meet with Ophelia and tell her I gave you permission to go. Just... keep that to yourself."

"Thank you, Pucky," giggled the Changeling. It gave Puck a little curtsy before skipping off to find Ophelia. What fun it was going to have...

Puck shuddered once the Changeling had left. He had seen many terrible things in his lifetime, even created a few terrible things himself, but the Changeling truly unnerved him. Its penchant for kidnapping children and shapeshifting powers had made it a logical addition to Oberon's army, but it was its uncanny telepathic abilities that really frightened everyone. If it knew about the Pines boy being held in one of the guest bedrooms, did that mean it also knew about Ophelia's plans for rebellion?
He'd worry about it later. If it came down to it, Ophelia was just as strong and powerful as the Changeling. If it became a threat, Ophelia could dispatch of it, surely.

He snapped his fingers, summoning a cart loaded with hot food from the kitchen. It had been hours since the others arrived, surely they were hungry enough by now.

He opened the door quickly, pushing the cart in with a smile on his face. Preston was still weeping by the fireplace like some whiny Byronic hero in a poorly written Gothic novel, while Robbie and Tambry were sulking on the couch next to an unconscious Dipper.

"Good evening, everyone!" Puck said cheerfully. "Is everyone comfortable, I hope?"

Robbie made a rude hand gesture.

"Splendid!" said Puck, ignoring this slight. "Now, I've brought some food from the Midsummer feast; we don't usually have this many leftovers, but we've had some... last minute reductions in staffing tonight, so, better for you guys, am I right? Oh, don't pout," he turned to Preston, who was absolutely braying at this point. "Here, have this blackberry clafouti, Titus just finished baking it an hour ago, it's still warm. The Hunt doesn't get to eat like this every day, so I say tuck in!"

That was when Wendy hit him with a vase.

She had been hiding by the door, and as soon as Puck fell to his knees she grabbed one of the pokers by the fireplace and held it across his chest, binding his spindly arms to the side.

"Really now!" said Puck, wincing at the uncomfortable heat from the iron. He gestured at the fallen clafouti that now lay splattered on the floor. "You are ruining dinner, you know!"

"You put some kind of sleep spell on my friend," Wendy growled, pressing the poker tighter against Puck. He cried out, the heat became unbearable, even through his armor. "You're going to take it off him. Then, you're going to undo the curse you put on Robbie and Tambry." After a few seconds of silence, Wendy added, "And Mr. Northwest. Even if he doesn't deserve it."

"Ow, okay, okay, yeesh! Don't have a crap attack," sighed Puck. Wendy let go of the poker, allowing Puck to crawl from out of her grip. "It's a bit unusual," he knelt next to Dipper, still deep in a cursed sleep. "Usually the sleeping charm doesn't last this long. Luckily there's several ways to undo this. Just... give me a moment. And watch the door, don't let anyone come in. I was going to reveal my plan to use teens instead of kids for our army tonight, but I'm afraid that Oberon's sick to the teeth of my ideas at the moment. So, best not let him catch us, or else we're all dead."

"Just wake him up," said Wendy, leaning against the door, poker still in her hand.

"Since you asked so nicely," Puck snipped. He closed his eyes. He had not done this trick in many years, but it's a bit like learning to fly, he supposed. You never quite forgot once you knew what to do.

When he opened his eyes, he was no longer in the guest bedroom at Northwest Manor. He was in the middle of a Dreamscape— a nice one too, thought Puck. It looked like a warm summer evening out in the forest, with fireflies illuminating the twilight and the scent of wood smoke heavy in the air. A few feet away he saw Dipper sitting on a log by a bonfire, little salamanders crawling around his feet. Puck teleported to his side.

Dipper's head drooped as he listlessly fed the salamanders marshmallows from a near empty bag, completely miserable.

"I know they look cute now," said Puck, startling the boy with his sudden presence, "But those
things are a complete nuisance. They get to be about ten feet long and start burning down entire forests if they go unchecked. Horrid little beasts."

Dipper sighed. "What do you want?"

"I'm here to break the spell," said Puck, taking a seat next to him on the log. "You should have woken up by now. Lightweight. I'd advise not getting put under a sleep spell again if you can avoid it."

"Who's fault is that," snapped Dipper. The boy sighed again. "I guess it's mine. I snuck out and got everybody kidnapped. My Uncle was right. I really did think I was too good to listen to common sense."

"... Don't beat yourself up about it," said Puck, tossing a fallen leaf into the fire. He watched it curl and wither in the flames before it dissolved completely into ash. "If the world were fair, you wouldn't have to worry about hordes of monsters coming to take innocent children and lovelorn teens away from their families on a lovely night like this. It's just a wretched situation no one has any real control over."

"... Why do you do that?" said Dipper, raising his eyebrow at Puck.

"Do what?"

"Half the time you act like some psycho trickster," said Dipper, "and the other half you act like you're actually a decent person. I'm having a hard time trying to decide which one is actually you."

"I assure you, I am most definitely not a decent person," said Puck with a hint of bitterness. He turned to Dipper and smiled. "That's neither here nor there, really. Your red-headed friend is probably going to skewer me if I don't get you out of this mess. So, we better start walking."

"Walking?" asked Dipper.

"Walking, yes," said Puck, leaping gracefully to his feet. Dipper stumbled after Puck, who was gliding into the thick of the forest. "We need to find the area where the dream is weakest. Once we get there, you should be able to wake up normally. This is one of the longer ways to break the spell, but the quickest alternate is kissing the sleeper, which-- no offense-- isn't going to happen. I mean, maybe if it was your hot Uncle--"

"Oh my god, please stop talking now," said Dipper, covering his ears with both hands as he followed Puck deeper into the woods.

"Fine, I won't say another word about my desire to kiss your dashing Uncle again," Puck smirked as Dipper groaned in annoyance. "It's irrelevant, in any case. His heart belongs to another. Watch your step."

They had come to a stream where a great pine had fallen across the water, creating a bridge to the other side. Puck lifted an ambivalent Dipper up onto the log, urging him to cross over. It was then Dipper noticed the bruises.

"What happened to your neck?" he asked, wincing at the deep purple fingerprints that encircled Puck's throat.

"Once again," said Puck, shuddering slightly, "we are discussing an irrelevant topic. Hurry up, now. Don't fall in."

Dipper gingerly stepped forward on the trunk of the tree, with Puck flying close behind him.
"However," said Puck once Dipper safely on the opposite river bank, "while we're on the subject of necks... I guess I should apologize for that business earlier. Your friend would have killed my staff with that iron ax if I hadn't found a way to stop her, you know. Well, I suppose anyone could be killed with an ax. But death by iron is a messy business, and I think it would be cruel to make the house elves clean up the ashes of their fallen companions."

"What do you mean, ashes?" asked Dipper. He noticed as they went further into the forest that the details became dark and blurred, more like the hazy idea of a forest than a real one.

"Ah, I forget, you've been missing out on a lot of the action," said Puck, grinning as they got closer to the end of the dream. "Iron is absolutely toxic to Fae. Touching it alone can cause burns and scars on our flesh, and if we're stabbed or chopped with a weapon made of iron... Well, it's quick at least. Almost instantaneous."

Dipper caught sight of a light in the distance. "Do you think that's the way out?" Dipper asked the Fae.

"It is," Puck confirmed with a nod. "Race you there?"

Dipper frowned at Puck for a moment, but smirked as he said, "Okay, but you can't fly or teleport to the end."

"Just as well," said Puck, settling his two feet on the ground as his wings disappeared into his back. "You and your stumpy little legs don't stand a chance."

"Whatever," said Dipper, who began to run.

Puck leaped after the boy, quickly outpacing him in a manner of seconds. He probably would have made it to the end easily if he hadn't tripped.

"Motherff-- ah, I mean, oh dear," said Puck, lying face down in the dark. "You okay," asked Dipper, who had stopped once he heard the Fae thud against the ground.

"No, and wipe that smug look on your face, it's only cute when I do it," said Puck as Dipper helped him to his feet. "What in the world did I trip over--"

They both saw the statue then. Its hand lay outstretched, waiting for someone to grasp it. Dipper knew it couldn't hurt anyone, that Bill had been dead for almost a year now, but still he couldn't look at it for too long.

"I had hear rumors that he'd been destroyed," whispered Puck. Dipper saw that his hands were shaking. "Yet I couldn't allow myself to believe it."

"... You knew him?" asked Dipper.

"Unfortunately."

"... Let's just... let's just go," said Dipper, deeply uncomfortable that even Bill's statue was still appearing in his dream.

"Of course," said Puck with a hollow laugh. "Look at the pair of us, trembling before the mere shadow of a ghost, a being long decayed in the ground." He did not turn to the light just yet, though. Striding over to the statue, Puck knelt down and spat directly into Bill's eye.

"Let's go," he told Dipper, wiping the remaining spit from his mouth. Together they walked directly into the light...
... and woke up back at Northwest Manor.

"Dipper!" Wendy cried, dropping the poker as she ran to the boy's side.

"Ugh... why does it feel like I was stabbed in the skull?" said Dipper, cringing at the now massive headache gnawing away at him.

"Sleeping spells leave the worst hangover," said Puck, summoning a glass of water. "Drink up, kid. You'll feel better once you're hydrated."

"Um... not to interrupt this touching reunion," said Tambry, drawing their attention back to the rest of the room, "But could you change us back already? My back is starting to hurt."

"I just want to be normal again! And also wealthy, but I settle for normal at the moment!" whined Preston.

"All right, just give me a minu--"

Puck didn't have a chance to finish his sentence when the door slammed open. Oberon strode into the room, the ground trebling as each foot landed with a stomp. The king glared down at the scene all around, particularly focusing on Dipper, who began to scramble off the couch to his feet.

Suddenly, Oberon grabbed a hold of Puck and slammed him into the wall. "You had him?" snarled Oberon, taking a handful of Puck's hair and pulling his head back. "This whole time you had him? I didn't want to believe the Changeling when it told me, but this... Do you know what your incompetence has cost me tonight, you useless--"

"Let him go!" snapped Dipper, sounding braver than he felt.

Oberon was just about to turn his attack on the boy right as the dragon came bursting through the window.
In Which All Hell Breaks Loose

Chapter Notes

This chapter be jumping back and forth from Northwest Manor to the Mystery Shack, and I won't lie, it's probably going to be a mess because I've got a lot planned. We're only four chapters away from the end, everybody!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It has come to my attention that I should probably explain why a dragon started barging in through the windows of Northwest Manor at the end of chapter seventeen.

Here's what happened:

The golf cart, which had outrun hordes of angry gnomes and performed countless stunts with Soos in the past, completely broke down just two miles away from Northwest Manor.

"You've got to be kidding right now!" Mabel banged her head against the dash; it would take an hour to walk all the way to the manor, and they simply didn't have the time.

"Um, we've got a bigger problem," said Paz, pointing down the road. Three figures on horseback could be seen stampeding towards them in the distance.

"Get the cart off the road," said Mabel, scrambling out of the golf cart. Pacifica grabbed the bag of weapons she had stolen from the house and joined Mabel in pushing the golf cart into the woods. Once it was hidden out of sight, they took shelter inside of a hollow tree, praying no one had saw them. The sound of hoof beats crunching down against the gravel echoed in their ears.

"I swore I saw something down here," whined a deep, gutteral voice, just feet away from where the girls were hidden.

"It's not important," said another, this voice sounding feminine and stern. "We're carrying out an assassination, we can't afford to get side tracked right now."

Pacifica peeked out of her spot to get a quick look at the strangers.

"I don't believe it," she whispered, immediately pulling her head back before she could be seen.

"What?" Mabel hissed, panic shuddering down her spine.

"One of those freaks is riding my pony!"

"That's what you're worried about?"

"Well, no," muttered Paz, her face reddening, "but still, I find that insulting!"

"Do you know if they're gone yet?"

As if on cue, the three riders took off again, leaving the two girls alone in the dark. Paz looked again, to make sure they were gone. The good news was that the strangers had left. The bad news was that there was now a wyvern staring back at her.
Too terrified to scream, Paz jumped back into the hollow, shaking as she pressed against the interior of the tree.

"What was it," said Mabel, grabbing the other girl's arm.

The beast crawled to the other side of the tree to meet the girls, its head quirked to the side as it inspected the two. Suddenly, it lunged at Pacifica, sniffing the poor girl until it began to lick her face with its long, forked tongue.

"Ewwwww, it's trying to eat me!" she cried out with a cringe.

"No it's not," said Mabel, laughing in relief. She recognized it at last as the wyvern from this morning; it seemed like forever ago that she had woken up to find it sleeping on the lawn. Gingerly, she reached out to pet the wyvern's head. "Grunkle Ford says they're nice! Well, mostly nice. This one must like you!"

"It likes me. The horrifying dragon likes me," Pacifica said weakly as the wyvern purred at Mabel's touch.

"Maybe because you're both kinda cranky sometimes," Mabel suggested, crawling out of the hollow now that she knew she was safe.

"I am not cranky!" snapped Pacifica, clambering after the girl. The wyvern followed Pacifica, bounding along by her side like a friendly St. Bernard puppy. "Sit!" said Pacifica to the miniature dragon. Tilting its head to the side, the wyvern sat down on its hind legs, its tail curling around to its front demurely.

"Aw, it does tricks!" said Mabel, delighted by the mystical creature. She picked up a stick that was laying on the ground. "Fetch!" she cried, tossing the twig into the air. The wyvern spat out a small burst of flame, engulfing the stick and burning it into ash before it hit the ground.

"Close enough!" cheered Mabel, patting the wyvern on the nose.

"Hmmmm..." said Paz, rubbing her chin. "Roll over," she commanded, twirling her finger in front of the wyvern's face. Obediently, the creature tucked its wings behind its back and rolled back and forth on the ground before gracefully getting to its feet again. "I guess it isn't completely stupid," Pacifica conceded. Warily, she stroked the wyvern behind its horns; it sighed contentedly at Paz's soothing touch.

"Wait," said Mabel, a smile blooming on her face as she was struck with inspiration, "Pacifica... Do you think it would let us fly on its back?"

"You're out of your mind!" said Paz, gesturing to the placid wyvern with a wave of her hand. "Tricks are one thing, but there is absolutely no way I'm getting on the back of that... thing!"

And so, the two girls found themselves soaring across the night sky on the back of a wyvern. Paz clutched on to the wyvern's neck for dear life, petrified of what could happen if she let go. Mabel beamed as she took in the sight of the forest below; she could see everything from the Mystery Shack all the way to Northwest Manor. It was exhilarating; with the rush of the wind blowing through her hair as the wyvern glided closer to the mansion, Mabel almost forgot what had brought them there in the first place.

"Don't worry Dipper, we're coming for you!" she cried, pumping her fist in the air.

* * *

The ground was muddy and soft when Ophelia arrived with the Nucklavee and the Changeling at
the Shack. It would have been better if it was still raining, she thought as she strode towards the little house, but she could work well with a damp environment. She dismounted from her horse, her webbed feet squishing in the muck to her immense satisfaction.

"My lady," said the Nucklavee hoarsely. She turned to look at the creature, a hideous monstrosity that looked a bit like a centaur, but with no skin to cover any of its pulsing muscles. "The charm seems to have weakened."

It was true. There seemed to be something in the air, a shimmer right by the front porch, where the magic protecting the house seemed to be decaying.

"First thing's first," said Ophelia, gesturing to the Nucklavee. "We need to take out the flowers lining the house."

"As you command," they groaned. The creature's bloody chest expanded as it inhaled the air deeply; it exhaled a toxic smelling gas that withered and rotted the delicate white flowers all around the entrances. Soon, nothing remained of the flowers at all, it was as if they had never existed in the first place. With the flowers disposed of, Ophelia approached the side of the house, kneeling down to the foundation, where she spotted a strand of unicorn hair that was straining to stick together. Pulling out her knife, Ophelia snapped the hair apart with one quick flick of her blade.

"Stay outside the house and hold guard," Ophelia told the Nucklavee. "Don't let any one who tries to leave the house escape."

"As you command," repeated the Nucklavee.

The changeling, still disguised as the Pines girl, hopped off its pony and ran towards the porch, pulling at the door in vain.

"It's locked," said the Changeling, pouting at this inconvenience. It wanted to play now!

"How astute of you to notice," said Ophelia, rolling her eyes. She had no idea why Puck would order the Changeling to come along on this mission, given how much it liked to play with its victims. This needed to be quick and clean, she didn't have time to indulge the Changeling's liking for head games.

"Stand back," she commanded of the creature, and reluctantly, it obeyed. With one flick of Ophelia's wrist, the water that had been laying in puddles around the house formed into a giant ball floating in midair. Ophelia used the stream to blast open the door, tearing it off its hinges and tossing both the door and the table blocking it to the opposite side of the room.

The Grendas, being alerted to the noise, ran towards the front door, where Ophelia still held the water aloft.

"Attack! Attack!" They screamed, rushing towards the water nixie.

"Oh no," she sighed, "What shall I, a creature that has magical control over all bodies of water, ever do against a mob of water soluble clones?" She used the water as a whip to blast the clones away, melting them where they stood. She forced some of the water into a canteen she kept at her hip, to use later if necessary.

"You know," said the Changeling, "We could have used one of them to find out where they're hiding."

"It's not hard to search a house this small," said Ophelia, annoyed by the little brat.
It was even less hard, Ophelia thought, when one of the children came bursting out of a hidden door near the living room. Gideon, who was still too groggy to notice the two Fae or the melted remains of the clones, pattered into the kitchen for a drink of water, forgetting to shut the door behind him.

"Stay upstairs," said Ophelia to the Changeling. "Don't let the kid walk in on the job. That's an order."

"Whatever you say," said the Changeling, lazily examining its fingernails as it spoke. It watched Ophelia disappear through the hidden door, her footfalls barely making a sound as she descended down the hidden staircase. Once she was gone, the Changeling skipped into the kitchen.

Gideon almost dropped his bottle of water when he turned to find Mabel standing inches behind him. He couldn't make out her face in the dark of the kitchen; the electricity was still out, but it was her, unmistakably.

"M-mabel," he laughed nervously. "Golly, ya nearly scared the bajeepers out of me, marshmalla."

"I couldn't sleep," said Mabel, her voice sounding strange. She grabbed his free hand, clutching it tightly in her own. "I'm scared. You'll keep me safe, won't you?"

Gideon flashed a beaming smile. "Ya finally came around," he said smugly, chugging the water down in one gulp before tossing the bottle into the trash. "I knew you would. Your Uncle won't approve yet, but we'll find a way to work it out."

"Oh," said Mabel, leading Gideon out of the room, her grip tightening uncomfortably as she pulled on his arm, "That won't be a problem for much longer."

"My," said Gideon, flinching slightly as she tugged him along, "I do appreciate your optimistic, if, ah, cryptic sentiments."

"Gideon," whispered Mabel. They were standing at the threshold of the hidden staircase. Gideon blushed; he still couldn't quite see her, but he could feel that she was very close.

"I want to show you something..."

* * *

The mansion loomed before them, every window aglow with warm light, a deceptively cheerful sight.

"Where are we going to land?" asked Mabel; the wyvern was zooming towards the mansion with no sign of slowing.

"We're not going to land! We're going to crash!" said Paz, looking up briefly to see that they were headed directly for one of the windows.

"Oh, crap!" cried Mabel, bracing herself.

The wyvern went through the window feet first, glass and wood shattering around them as it burst into the room. It pounced immediately on Oberon, pinning him to the floor, throwing its head back as it roared.

"Um... Surprise!" said Mabel with a sheepish grin.

"... Okay, we'll take it," said Wendy after a beat. "Everyone, run!"

Preston was the first to storm out of the room, his hooves clacking on the marble floor, with
Preston was the first to storm out of the room, his hooves clacking on the marble floor, with Robbie and Tambry close behind, flailing awkwardly as they tried to figure out how to run in their current predicament.

"I'll have you all flayed alive for this!" snarled Oberon, struggling to push the wyvern off of him as the humans made their escape.

"You're a stupid butt face," snapped Mabel, sticking her tongue out at the supine Oberon. The Wyvern growled at Oberon, bearing its razor sharp teeth in warning.

Wendy was almost at the door when she spotted Dipper kneeling at Puck's side. Puck had slumped against the wall, lying there like a battered rag doll.

"What are you doing," she hissed, "we've got to go!"

"I know," said Dipper. He pulled Puck up, leading him towards the door. "You're coming with us," he told the Fae.

"I can't," said Puck, jumping away from the boy with a jolt. "Just go without me!"

"But--"

"GO!" snapped Puck. Dipper felt a force push him out the door, sliding him across the marble floor. The Wyvern chose then to leap off of Oberon, the girls clutching to its back as it bounded out of the room. "Dipper, come on!" said Mabel, pulling her brother onto the back of the wyvern as they left. Wendy was running at the wyvern's side, the metal poker back in her hand, ready to strike.

As they disappeared down the hall, Dipper looked back one last time to see Puck, his doleful eyes wide with fear, being descended upon by Oberon.

"You've gotten on my last nerve tonight, Puck," Oberon thundered, tossing the Fae across the room. "But," whispered Oberon, his tone dangerous and low, "You're going to make it up to me."

It was then Puck felt his eyes roll back in the trance.

"Please," he begged, though he knew it was hopeless. "I don't--"

"Go," said Oberon, magically compelling Puck to fly towards the door. "Follow them and capture those twins; if the others try to interfere, kill them. If you fail me, you will suffer."

"As you command, my lord," said Puck dully, tears streaming down his bank face as he flew after them.

*  *  *

Ophelia found the old men curled next to each other on a mattress, both snoring softly. The new master of Northwest Manor was resting his head on the target's chest, just above the heart. She had not necessarily been told to kill the smaller one, but it would be unspeakably cruel to let the one wake to the others corpse. Opening the lid of the canteen, she summoned a stream of water, freezing it into a long, sharp icicle. She held the tip of the spike three inches from McGucket's temple

It would just take one, quick strike. There had to be something peaceful, beautiful even, about dying in bed with the one you loved. At least, that's what she told herself.

Just as she was about to strike, two things happened at once. Firstly, Gideon, along with "Mabel," had arrived through the hidden door. Gideon took one look and screamed, waking everyone with
a start. The second, Waddles rammed into Ophelia's legs with a squeal, knocking her to the ground.

Ford shot his arm up to catch the icicle before it could pierce Fiddleford. He tossed it to the side, shattering it against the wall as he jumped to his feet.

"Get away, you stupid pig!"

Ophelia kicked Waddles away, flipping to her feet only to have Ford grab her by the throat and slam her against the wall.

"Dipper, take the others and hide!"

The clone didn't need to be told a second time. Grabbing Grenda and Candy by the hands, the boy led the others up the steps, with Gideon and Mabel close behind. He only looked back to see the nixie kick Ford in the chest, forcing him to fall back against the control panel with a thud!

As they reached the top of the secret stairs, Candy asked, "How'd they get in?"

"They must have found a way to break the charm!" said Tyrone II, noting the gaping hole where the door had been. He caught a glimpse of something scarlet and hulking pacing out front.

"Upstairs," he cried, leading the other four up the staircase to the attic. It wasn't the perfect hiding spot, but it was the best they could afford at the moment. When they reached the twins' attic bedroom, Tyrone II opened the door, ushering everyone inside.

"I'm going back down to help Ford," said the clone, trembling though he was. "Make a barricade with as much furniture as you can, we might be able to hold them off til sunrise if they can't reach us!"

"Good luck, Dipper!" cried Candy, bowing her head solemnly.

"Take this!" said Grenda, pulling out one of the largest knives she'd been keeping hidden in her pajamas. The clone took the weapon, holding it above his head as he descended the staircase once more.

As soon as he left, the two girls began to move the beds towards the door, blocking the entrance. Mabel did nothing but stare out the bedroom window, her back towards her friends as they worked. It was just then that Gideon realized they were short one person.

"Mabel... where's Pacifica," Gideon asked. She shrugged, still facing away from the others.

"... Hey, yeah," said Grenda, scratching her head. "Wasn't she paired with you?"

"Do you think they already took her?" whispered Candy, her eyes darting around the room.

"I dunno," said Mabel, still not looking at them.

"Maybe we should send somebody out to look," said Grenda, eyeing the blockade and wondering if she could lift both beds at once.

"Are you crazy," hissed Gideon, "We can't put out own lives at risk just because she decided to wander off!"

"It doesn't matter," said Mabel; Her voice was flat, devoid of any emotion or interest. "I mean... if you want her here so badly... I guess I can make that happen."

The other three stared at the silhouette of their friend, confused by her words.
"Sugar bean... you're not making any sense," said Gideon, placing his hand on the girl's shoulder. He immediately regretted it. Instead of the soft fabric of her sleep shirt, Gideon felt something like slime shift under his touch. He yanked his hand away, seeing that the entire left side of Mabel began to bubble and grow, shifting and twisting until it formed something only vaguely shaped like a human. This growth seemed to break away from the original with a snap, it stumbled and twisted around the room in a circle before it presented itself to the others: an imperfect copy of Pacifica with bead-like eyes.

The kids stood there, too shocked to move as the Changeling turned to face them at last, its own face warped and laughing. Oh, this was just perfect, it thought, as more copies began to form, mimicking the children cowering before them.

"Isn't this just fun?" said the Changeling, the copies moving their mouths together as it spoke. "I never get invited to these kinds of parties, you know? The others in the Hunt don't like me. I don't really like them too much either, to be honest. But I get to play all kinds of games when I'm with them. I like to call this one Deep Dark Fears; it's when I tell my victims which one of their deepest fears are actually true..."

"You'll never take us!" snapped Candy, grabbing the knife she had chosen from her pocket.

"Take you," drawled the Changeling, its Candy form leering at the original. "There's not going to be anything left to take back when I'm through. I'm going to absorb you, then I'm going to take your place, and, let's be honest, nobody is going to care when I do."

"Liar!" snapped Grenda, slicing at the Pacifica-Changeling that had been encroaching towards her. It dissolved into ash, but it was reabsorbed into the Changeling, bulking the others so they towered over the children.

"Don't you think your parents would want a normal daughter with a normal voice? One that doesn't bench press boulders and refrains from wrestling with Manotours?" sneered the Grenda-Changeling; its voice was a cloying little giggle like poisoned honey.

"I AM A FEMININE DAFFODIL AND YOU ARE A WEED IN MY GARDEN!" Grenda headbutted the clone, pinning it to the ground as she stabbed it in the throat.

"Wouldn't boys like you more if you weren't always making creepy little inventions and acting too smart for your own good?" the Candy-Changeling asked the girl, grabbing hold of her face with its sticky hand.

"Boys are nice," agreed Candy, but as she did so she stabbed her Changeling in the gut with her knife. "But honestly, robots are just better."

"Well," said the Changeling, cornering Gideon against the closet door. The boy cringed as the Changeling's versions of himself and Mabel grabbed both his arms. "You can't lie to me, Gideon," whispered the Gideon-Changeling, its goo like hands engulfing his arm like mold, "I can read your thoughts, and you know what? It's all true. Nobody like you, and no one ever will."

"Y- yer lying," squeaked the boy, desperately trying to pull away from the Changeling.

"Oh no?" lilted the Mabel-Changeling, "Let's see. Oberon didn't even think you were good enough to be a soldier in his army. You were just going to cook and clean and who knows what else for the Hunt if you hadn't lead us here."

"And that's just a start," added the Gideon-Changeling. Spittle sprayed against Gideon's face as it hissed in his ear. "Your own parents don't even like you, not really. You were so bad you made your dad fry his brain and you drove your mama insane. Why couldn't you have just been a good,
sweet little boy?"

"Get off him!" snapped Grenda, running towards the Changelings as Gideon became further ensnared. Before she could even reach them, a tendril shot from the Gideon-Changeling's back, pinning Grenda to the opposite wall. She too began to be engulfed by the Changeling's body. Another tendril went after Candy, who ducked behind a mattress to avoid being captured.

"Too bad your prison friends aren't here to protect you," said the Changeling, pinching Gideon's cheek. "Because their the only friends you could ever possibly hope for, a bunch of violent criminals. You really are one messed up little kid. Everything will be so much nicer once I'm you."

"It won't be so bad," whispered the Mabel-Changeling, "Who knows, Mabel might actually tolerate you once I take over."

"You won't even have to worry about the fact that everyone in her family hates you," agreed the Gideon-Changeling, "Ophelia had probably already killed her Uncle downstairs-- Ooooooh, that reminds me, the Author thinks you're a pompous little turd, don't forget that-- and her real brother has already been captured by the Hunt. I don't know about the other one. He's probably going to be too sad his brother's a headless corpse and his nephew's missing to be too much of a nuisance."

Gideon's entire body had been ensnared, only his head stuck out of the warped mess that was the Changeling. I'm going to die, he thought. I'm going to die, I'm going to die, I'm going to die, I'm going to--

"Please quit repeating your thoughts, it's really annoying," sighed the Changeling. Its Gideon and Mabel forms had warped and fused so much that it was hard to recognize them as anything even close to human.

Gideon reached for a knife kept in his pocket; furiously, he sliced at the Changeling, over and over and over again, burning the creature with each slash of the knife.

It wasn't enough; the Changeling was now much too strong. Gideon felt himself being pulled further into its depths, to a place he knew he would never return from.

Perhaps this would have been the end if Candy hadn't chosen this exact moment to detonate her last flower grenade.

The Changeling screamed-- a horrible sound-- as the floral gas filled the small room, its body began to dissolve like cotton candy doused in water. Grenda fell to the ground once the tendril that had held her completely dissipated.

"Grenda, are you okay?" asked Candy, crawling out of her hiding spot. Gideon lay on the ground as well; not a trace of the Changeling remained once the gas cleared.

"You know," said Grenda, "It was kinda like the time we put silly putty on my face and couldn't get it off for like, two days."

"Gross," said Candy, pulling her friend to her feet.

They saw Gideon still laying on the ground, curled in a tight ball. He was shaking.

"... Gideon?" asked Grenda, who thought she heard the choked sounds of sobs as she approached the boy.

"... It is gone now," said Candy, pulling the boy up by the arm. "It can't hurt you again."
"I'm fine!" Gideon snapped, his face red and puffy. "Mind your own business!"

He grabbed a knife that had fallen to the ground when Grenda had been thrown across the room.

"If y'all will excuse me," he sniffed, clutching the knife in his chubby hand, "I'm going to destroy every monster that dared show its face in this house!"

The two girls smirked. Grenda pushed the beds out of the way once more, slamming the door open as she and the others began to run back down the attic stairs.

* * *

The wyvern had caught up with Preston, Tambry and Robbie just a few feet down the hall. Tired of flailing around, TambRobbie had climbed onto Preston's camel back, which, Dipper and Mabel agreed on later, was still only about the third strangest thing they had seen that night.

"Dad?" asked Pacifica, her eyes widening at her father's transformation. "What happened to you?"

"He tried to sell us out to the enemy for his own personal gain, then ended up becoming horribly disfigured by a powerful magical being for his trouble," said Wendy, kicking down one of the doors that had been in their way.

"Oh my god, Dad, AGAIN?!

"We can bicker later," said Dipper, noticing the horde of guards headed their way. Oberon must have sounded the alarm.

"Um... go left!" cried Paz, pointing towards a hallway that branched off in two different directions.

"No, right, that leads back to the front hall!"

"Dad, that's probably where they're waiting for us!"

"Well, that way is the dining room, that's where they hold the dinner party! You'll be surrounded, so HA!"

"Guys!" snapped Dipper, "They are gaining on us, we don't have time for this!"

"Split off!" said Mabel, and, once they reached the fork in the hall, Preston and TambRobbie headed right while Wendy and the kids went left.

"Ugh... I can't believe that guy," said Paz, slapping her palm to her face.

"I think we've got bigger problems," said Wendy, pointing ahead of her. A wall of ogres leered before them, ready to snatch them up.

Paz had an idea. "FETCH!" she screamed. The wyvern spat a firebolt at one of the Ogres, setting them aflame. The other soldiers forgot the children to tend to the burning monster. The wyvern leaped over the crowd, bursting through the doors into the next room, where, as Preston had warned, the Wild Hunt had gathered for a great feast.

"Hey, it's those kids!" snarled a Red Cap, brandishing a chicken leg like a cudgel.

"Let's eat them alive!" snarled a headless creature with a giant mouth across its torso. The Hunt rose from their seats, pushing the group back against the door.

"Back off!" Mabel shouted, pulling out a flower grenade. "Anyone tries to mess with us, we'll just
use this and turn you all into monster soup! Chunky monster soup! The kind with celery! Everyone hates celery! What I'm saying is that you're all just celery and you're also about to be monster soup!"

"If you had left it at monster soup, that would have been a much better quip," said Paz, relived that the monsters were recoiling at the sight of the grenade.

"Ah, let her do her thing," said Dipper, beaming at Mabel. He wasn't sure why the monsters were afraid of what looked like a glass stink bomb, but was sure Mabel knew what she was doing.

Just when it looked as if escape was guaranteed, Puck materialized into the room, his eyes stark white and rolling. Wordlessly, he plucked the grenade from Mabel's hand. He transfigured it into a white dove that took flight, gliding around the room and dispensing bomb-like droppings on anyone unfortunate enough to be standing beneath the winged rat.

Puck nabbed both Dipper and Mabel, snatching them rudely off the wyvern without so much as looking at them.

"No you don't!" cried Wendy just as Puck was about to snap his fingers. Holding on to Paz's arm for support, Wendy grabbed Puck by the hair just as he cast his teleportation spell. Later, Wendy would go on to say that teleportation felt similar to the way sand shifts under your feet at the beach when the tide pulls back into the ocean. Paz, who was also dragged along for the ride, added that she was unable to poop for a week after the incident.

They found themselves in a cavernous room that smelled of motor oil and metal. The skeletal base of some unknown machine dominated most of the room, but around every corner were tools and engines, screws and chains, whirring, buzzing devices scattered across every surface imaginable. Under ideal circumstances, the discovery of McGucket's workshop would have lead to a day of exploration and wonder.

Puck, however, tossed the twins to the floor; reaching for his knife, he stabbed at Wendy, who was only just able to dodge the attack at the last minute. Wendy kicked Puck's legs out from under him, but the Fae was quick to recover. He began to fly across the room, pulling a large metal pipe from the pile of scrap metal near the giant machine.

"Please," Puck gasped, swinging the pipe at Wendy, who jumped out of the way before he could land the blow. "I don't want to hurt you, but Oberon has ordered me to kill anyone who interferes with the twins' capture. Please, just go."

"I'm not letting you take my friends!" snapped Wendy, grabbing the pipe from his hands and tossing it across the room. It landed with a clang against the opposite wall; Puck, his hands burning from the pipe, summoned the knife again.

"Take this!" shouted Paz to Wendy, handing her the knife she had chosen during the siege at the Shack. Pacifica didn't dare order the wyvern to attack, lest the whole room become consumed with flames, killing them all.

Wendy blocked Puck's blow with one arm, swiping at him with the knife held in the opposite hand. The Fae jumped back, the tip of the blade had only just missed slicing his stomach.

"I don't want to do this," begged Puck, tears streaming down his face as he went in for another attack.

"Then stop!" cried Wendy. She kicked Puck in the chest, the force of the blow sending him across the room.

"I can't," he said, his voice no more than a whimper.
He was just about to leap at the girl again when suddenly, a great chain caught him across the chest. The pain was searing as Dipper and Mabel ran in circles around him, wrapping him just tight enough with the chain so that he was unable to move.

"Sorry, sorry, sorry," whispered Mabel, once the Fae was bound to the floor.

"Let's just get out of here," cried Paz; the sight of Puck writhing on the floor in agony was the most disturbing thing she had seen since Weirdmageddon last year.

"It won't help," said Puck miserably, his eyes still rolling like a mad dog's. "I won't be able to rest until I've caught you kids. He's made sure of that... You have to finish this."

"What are you saying?" said Dipper, though he had a nasty feeling he knew what he meant.

"... I told you what iron does to Fae, Dipper," said Puck, a weak, joyless smile spreading across his face. He stared plaintively up at Wendy, the knife still clutched in her hand. "You have a knife. You need to use it."

"No!"

"It would be a relief," said Puck, ignoring the looks of horror on the quartet's faces. "Honestly... a lifetime as a slave to Oberon and whatever bozo lives in Northwest Manor... It's no life worth living at all. Anyone who I ever cared for, Tanya... Daya... Mercutio... Ophelia... all either dead, or they hate me or would be just better off without me. Please. I just want peace."

"... Wait," said Dipper, pulling out his cellphone from his vest pocket.

"What are you doing," asked Mabel, crouching next to the pitiful creature bound on the floor. As she had done during the parlay, Mabel stroked Puck's hair, soothing him through his pain. Puck might have been an enemy, but she had never felt sorrier for another living being in her entire life.

"... I have a crazy idea," said Dipper, taking a deep breath as he began to dial a number, "But, we're going to need some help..."

* * *

Once it became clear to Ophelia that Ford wasn't going to go gently into the night, her attack methods became brutal. When he had fallen against the control panel, she delivered several hard kicks to his chest; she swore she heard the snap of one of his ribs cracking during the assault.

Ford grabbed her by the foot just as she went in for the final blow. He swung his arms, tossing her into the glass window behind them. Glass shattered as she was flung into the chamber where the portal one stood.

He was in great pain, but all the same, Ford was on his feet, ignoring the agony as best as he could. Poor Fiddleford had been petrified with fear during the attack. The old hillbilly was pressed against the wall, his chest heaving as he panicked in silence. Ford reached out to his dearest friend.

"Come on," he gasped, the pain in his torso knife sharp as he spoke, "We have to go, now!"

Shaking, Fidds grasped on to Ford's large, calloused hand. Pulling Fidds to his feet, Ford began to lead them out of the room, though he had no idea where they could take shelter now that the Shack had been breached. He caught a glimpse of Dipper at the foot of the hidden stairs, a great knife clutched in his hands.

"What are you doing?" shouted Ford, "Leave, now--"
A watery coil wrapped around Ford's waist, squeezing him painfully. With one great tug, Ford was yanked out of Fidds' grasp, dragging him through the broken window and out of sight.

"Grunkle Ford!"

"STANFORD!"

Ford was whipped across the room, slamming into every wall as Ophelia manipulated the watery stream to her will. She slammed him hard against the ground, a pained groan escaping Ford's throat as she released him from her grasp. He struggled to get to his feet, but Ophelia was already leering over him, another icicle clutched in her hand.

"You're a tough old man," she admitted, her arm raised to strike, "and I don't think you deserve this, not one bit. But I have my orders, and it doesn't suit me yet to disobey them. If it helps... I'll make sure your kids aren't harmed by Oberon when we take them."

"It doesn't," coughed Ford, bracing himself for the final strike.

"I didn't think it would," she agreed solemnly. She threw the icicle directly at Ford's heart.

It missed.

The boy had come seemingly from nowhere, leaping in front of his Uncle and taking the blow from the ice for him. Ford could only scream as Dipper collapsed in front of him, shuddering in the dirt where he fell. Adrenaline coursed through the man, he couldn't feel the pain in his chest, nor the tears stinging his eyes, just hate, a feral desire to tear Ophelia apart.

He lunged at her, but this was a mistake: she encased his head in water. One desperate gasp for air was all it took to fill his lungs. He coughed and sputtered, but nothing could remove the spell she had cast on Ford. Everything began to go dark...

Ophelia watched as the man went limp, feeling neither joy nor pity. The hard part was over. With a splash, she released her watery grip on Ford, his body falling to the ground in a disorderly pile. She waved her hands, the water froze into an icy scythe, sharp enough to slice the fur on a chinchilla. All she needed now was Oberon's grizzly trophy.

She felt it from behind: an exhilarating shock that made her very bones shake, it brought Ophelia to her knees. The scythe shattered on the ground, useless. She looked up to find Fiddleford McGucket glaring down at her, his hand inches from her face. He was wearing some kind of ill fitting glove with six fingers, something around the palm glowed an eerie blue light that reeked of ozone.

"You have magic," she whispered.

"I have an electric glove that shoots 50,000 volts and half a mind to kill you dead if you don't get away from my beau right now!" growled Fiddleford, his shoulders hunched like that of a cat about to pounce on a particularly irksome mouse.

"Go about your business," said Ophelia, dismissing him. "I have no quarrel with you. Only a job I need to complete."

"The hell you have so got a quarrel with me," spat Fidds, slamming a fist into her chest. The shock this time blasted her across the room, away from Ford and into the opposite wall. Fidds stood between them as Ophelia struggled to her webbed feet.

"I mean it," he cried, brandishing his fist at the nixie, "if'n ya don't get outta here and leave us alone, I'll... I'll kill ya, yeh rotten tuna fillet! Ya hear me, scram!"
Ophelia stood before the man glaring at her; she could sense his own fear though his words were full of unquavering fury. All the same, the job was done. She had no reason to linger. Wordlessly, she ran from the chamber, the sound of her footfalls echoing long after she was gone.

Fidds turned back to Ford and the boy, both were lying on the ground, unresponsive. He hesitated, unsure who to help first, but saw some slight movement from Dipper. He crouched to his side, turning him over to see the icicle still buried in his chest. Perhaps there was a way to push it out, like an arrow bolt, perhaps he could still be saved.

It was at these thoughts that Fidds noticed that the boy-- oh my god-- the boy was melting. "What in tarnation," he cried, pulling his hands away from the thing that looked like Dipper.

"Dipper" opened his eyes, a pained, embarrassed smile on his face. "Er... you probably guessed already that I'm not the real Dipper," Tyrone II said, his torso melting into a liquid puddle before a horrified Fidds.

"Where is he," said Fidds, wincing as the legs and arms liquified as well.

"That's not important," cried Tyrone II with his last breath, "Save my uncle while there's still time!"

The clone was gone, a small puddle was all that remained.

Fidds crawled to Ford. His mouth was open and slack, his normally wild, fluffy hair was damp and lank, plastered down against his face. With no little effort, Fidds sat Ford up in his arms, cradling the man as he tried to shake him awake.

"C'mon," he mumbled as Ford's head lolled to the side, "Don't... don't go, please? Ford... Ford, you know I hate being in this room by myself, now wake up! See! Ya see? I start remembering things better when we're together... and I know some of em ain't good, but lots more of them are! Please... come back. Please." Tears welled up in Fidds' eyes as he held Ford's unconscious body tightly to his own. "Please, Ah... Ah. was just startin' ta feel normal again... Everything was feeling like it was all supposed to be this way. Just... just come back, PLEASE!"

Impassioned by his speech, Fidds got carried away and slammed one gloved fist into Ford's stomach, the force of the amplified glove expelled the water in Ford's lungs. Ford sputtered back to life, his chest heaving as he desperately took in gulps of fresh air.

"Stanford!" cried Fidds, crushing Ford into a warm hug.

"Ow!"

"Oh, sorry!"

"It's all right," said Ford, sitting up on his own, one hand resting on Fidds shoulder for support. "She really did a number on me, didn't she?"

"Ah thought I'd lost ya for a hot second," agreed Fidds, gently cupping the sides of Ford's face with his hands as he spoke.

Ford's face crumpled at this sweet gesture.

"Fidds," he choked, "Dipper... She just struck him down right in front of me..."

"Um," said Fidds, staring at the clone puddle that lay only two feet away, "about that--"

"Domi-nique -nique -nique s'en allait tout simplement, routier, pauvre et chantant..." The song
blared from Ford's pocket, a strange, vibrating sensation disrupting his train of thought. Ford had barely used the phone since he had gotten it, only the kids and Stanley knew the number. He reached into his pocket, retrieving the little phone that Mabel had decorated with kitten stickers when he wasn't looking. He hadn't the heart to take them off.

"Hello?"

"Um, hey Grunkle Ford," Dipper said all too casually on the other line, "Um... sorry to wake you up, but, I might have... snuck out of the house without your permission to hang out with Wendy. I'm... I'm sorry. I know I broke the rules, and you have every right to be angry with me, but I kinda need your help with something."

Ford made a face that wasn't quite relieved nor angry; if one had to describe it, it was the sort of face one would make after eating an entire lemon bite by bite with the peel still attached.

"Um," said Dipper, who was looking at the writhing form of Puck with increasing alarm, "actually, if you could put McGucket on the line, that would actually work better. He's not around, is he?"

Ford, still not answering Dipper's request, handed the phone to Fiddleford.

"It's for you," he croaked, and with that, he collapsed on his back, quite sure he was going to die from an early heart attack if things continued at the rate they were going.

"H-hello?" said Fidds, just as confused as Ford began rocking back and forth slightly on the floor.

"McGucket!" cried Dipper, "I need you to do me a favor-- let me get you on speaker-- can you hear me?"

"Um... yeah? Listen, what's this about; your Uncle and I have a pickle of a dilly going on at the house right now, we don't got time to be playin' games."

"I swear I have a point," said Dipper, holding the phone by Puck's ear. "I need you to say, 'Puck, listen to me.'"

"What now?"

"Please!"

"Um, alrighty then," said Fidds, at a loss to what any of this could mean. "Puck... listen to me."

Puck stopped squirming, perking one pointed ear at the phone when McGucket spoke.

"Dipper, what the hay am I supposed to be saying right now," said McGucket into the phone. "And what are you doing playing around with that no good Puck whosit?"

"I need you to test out this theory, give Puck a simple command like... like blink your eyes twice in a row, or something," said Dipper.

"Well, okay... Puck... um... wiggle yer eyebrows er somethin'... Not sure why..."

Puck's eyebrows wiggled.

"How do we know he's not faking," said Paz, scrutinizing the Fae as he waggled his eyebrows up and down.

"He isn't," said Mabel, the memory of Puck's mouth sealing shut playing out in her mind. "McGucket told him to keep his mouth shut during the parlay tonight, and he literally couldn't
open his mouth afterwards. Whatever mind control powers Oberon has on Puck, McGucket has the same ability!"

("How in the world did Mabel get out too???" snapped Ford, clamping both hands to his face in frustration. It was then that he noticed the sticky note attached to his hand. Dear Grunkle Ford, gone off with Pacifica to Northwest Manor to rescue Dipper from the Wild Hunt. If we don't die, we'll be back soon. I'll bring back those irregular jellybeans you like from the store if we have time. Love, Mabel. Both sweet and frustrating.)

"That's incredible," said Wendy, "and also a bit creepy."

"Okay, I have one last idea," said Dipper, kneeling down close to the Fae. "I need you to tell Puck that he should do whatever he feels is the right thing to do from now on. That he doesn't have to listen to Oberon or anyone else again as along as he follows that order."

"Are you sure that'll work?" asked Wendy, the knife still held loosely in her hand. She didn't want to use it, but this plan seemed too crazy to work.

"We have to try," said Dipper.

"Why... why are you doing this?" whispered Puck.

"Because not even you deserve this," said Dipper solemnly.

Fidds took a deep breath. "Puck... I want you to do what you think is right from now on," he said slowly, still unsure what was supposed to be happening.

He heard screaming on the other line, a shrill, otherworldly sound that sent static through the other line. Oh god, what had happened? Had he accidentally killed them all?

"Fidds, what's happening?" cried Ford, wincing as he sat up.

"Ah, I don't know!"

"Don't worry," laughed Dipper on the other line. The two old men sighed in relief. "It... it worked!"

Puck's eyes had returned to normal, the trance was broken.

"Would any of you mind getting these chains off me?" asked Puck meekly. "They actually do burn quite a bit."

Mabel untangled Puck from the metal chain, freeing him at last. "I just need one more test to be sure," said Dipper. "Try giving Puck an order now, McGucket."

"Like what?" said the old man.

"Tell him to punch himself in the face!" said Wendy, who still didn't like Puck any more than she could throw him. Perhaps that isn't the best analogy, because theoretically, Wendy is probably strong enough to toss Puck halfway across town should there ever be a need to do so. However, who am I to turn down a well used cliche?

"Oh, hush," snapped McGucket, " Ain't no way yer gonna get me ta say 'Puck, punch yerself in the face--' aw, dang it!"

"No," said Puck, a truly happy smile on his face at last, "No, I don't think I will actually. Thank you for the suggestion, though."
"Hooray! You don't have to be a total creep anymore!" beamed Mabel, pinning both of Puck's arms to his side as she tackled him into a warm hug.

"Aw," laughed Puck, gladly returning the hug, "you're just a snuggle bug, aren't you?"

"Kids," said Ford over the phone. Dipper and Mabel froze. They knew they were in for it now...

"I don't want you to worry about anything at this moment other than getting home safely," he said, a slight crack in his voice as he spoke. "I'd run over to get you both in a heartbeat if I weren't injured right now; don't bother asking how that happened, we don't have the time. Please, be careful."

"We promise," said the twins. It was at that moment that the phone's battery died, cutting Ford off from any further contact.

"I'm a terrible Uncle," he said, a sob catching on his throat.

"There ain't no accounting for the crazy ideas kids come up with, Darlin'," said Fidds, who gingerly pulled Ford to his feet. The power flickered to life at last, illuminating the lab for the first time in hours. Ford leaned against his dearest friend, the agony in his chest was searing. Fidds led him to the elevator.

"Let's check on the others for now, and we'll get ya somewhere you can rest."

* * *

"Do you think you can teleport us back home?" Dipper asked Puck. He wasn't sure if the fae would even be willing to help him, his experience with the supernatural had always shown that mystical creatures could be ungrateful jerks at certain times.

Puck, for all his flaws, was not an ungrateful jerk.

"I'm not sure if I can get you that far," said Puck, shaking as he got to his feet. "Iron exposure can weaken magical abilities, but I can at least get you off the grounds."

Trembling, he snapped his fingers, only getting them as far as the main hall. It was miraculously empty. "Looks like a clear shot," said Puck, unlatching the front door. "Hurry on home, humans, Oberon will soon be bearing down on us all if you don't get moving."

"Are you going with us?" asked Mabel.

"I'll take my chances in the woods for now," said Puck, giving the girl a small wink. He lifted her up onto the wyvern's back behind Pacifica. "I'd suggest splitting up and meeting somewhere safe. It sounds like your Uncle survived Ophelia's assassination-- er, sorry about that, not my idea-- so I'm assuming the Shack is relatively safe. Sunrise is only a few hours away, that should be when the rest of the hunt has moved on from this place. I don't think I'll be joining them. Fret not, we'll see each other soon, I'm sure."

"Um, yeah," said Pacifica, impatiently drumming her fingers on top of the wyvern's head. "We better see you again, somebody has to change my dad back to his normal, horrible self. He's embarrassing enough as it is, I can't have him running around town as a camel on top of everything else."

"Speaking of," said Wendy, "I wonder if the others made it home already?"

"GET OUT OF THE WAY, PEASANTS!"
Preston Northwest galloped into the main hall, TambRobbie still clinging to his back. The remaining members of the Wild Hunt followed soon after, hags and banshees swarmed the air while the ogres and other grunts bore down on them, their weapons drawn. Oberon himself entered the hall, each thunderous footstep echoing as he approached his quarry.

"Well done," said Oberon, leering at Puck. "I must say, despite your constant bumbling tonight, you somehow managed to capture the most out of the entire Hunt this Midsummer. I'm impressed. Now, step aside so I may collect our new recruits, my dearest Puck."

"... You know, I used to think mortals were mad fools when I was younger," said Puck, puffing out his chest. "But you... you are the biggest, maddest fool I have ever had the misfortune to encounter, and you are a dense, brain-addled dunce if you think for one second I'm going to take my orders from you any longer."

The Hunt froze; no one was paying attention to the humans. Had Puck taken leave of his senses? Oberon would surely kill him for his defiance!

"I am your master," spat Oberon, "you will obey me until the day that I die!"

"Perhaps it's time that day came to pass," said Puck. He cast a spell that sent Oberon flying back into the staircase, splintering the wood where he fell. He was quickly getting to his feet, however, and Puck knew he didn't have enough power to keep him at bay for long.

"Run," he told the kids, "I'm going to hold him off."

"You don't have to do this!" said Dipper. He knew there was little chance Puck would survive this fight.

"On the contrary," said Puck with his usual cocky smile. "I have never wanted to do anything more in my entire life. Now, do me a favor, and make sure I don't die in vain. RUN!"

Dipper felt Wendy grab hold of his arm, hoisting him on to Preston's back along with Robbie and Tambry. He only caught a glimpse of Puck lunging at Oberon before they were out the door and onto the grounds.

The wyvern blasted the gates out of the way with a fresh burst of flame, leaving them a clear path for escape.

"I cannot believe we made it!" said Paz, pumping her fist in the air.

"... I can't believe after all that, we still couldn't save him," said Mabel, crestfallen.

"Who cares," snapped Preston, "He didn't even bother to change me back! What kind of half baked heroic sacrifice was that?"

"If you could like, not talk for the rest of the evening, that would be deeply appreciated," said Wendy. She wasn't a fan of Puck, but even she appreciated what he had done to help them escape.

"We've got a bigger problem!" cried Dipper, pointing behind them.

It wasn't Oberon, but a murder of Banshees flying towards them, cackling and jeering as they gained on the fugitives.

"We've got this," said Mabel, reaching for the weapons bag and pulling out a handful of flower grenades, "You guys keep going!"
Paz ordered the wyvern to take to the air; its wings beat furiously as it went to meet the hags head on.

"FETCH! FETCH!" snapped Pacifica, and the wyvern breathed fire and brimstone at trio of banshees, blasting them out of the sky. Mabel lobbed grenade after grenade at their assailants, destroying many, but it seemed as if they would never go away.

"I can't see the others anymore," said Paz, stabbing a Banshee that had gotten too close with one of the knives left in the bag. It dissolved in midair, bits of ash getting on her nightgown. Just great.

"Maybe we should fall back then?" said Mabel, who had just used the last grenade in the bag. Only five Banshees remained. One was flying right at Paz, one decaying arm outstretched to snatch her off the back of the wyvern. Mabel lunged at the hag, stabbing her right in the eye, but in her efforts to protect her friend, Mabel's foot slipped, and suddenly she was falling.

"MABEL!"

Paz lost sight of the girl once she had fallen, oh god, oh god, what do I do? The Banshees dove after the weaker prey. Pacifica found Mabel at last, the girl's arms flailing as she tried to grasp anything that could stop her fall. Two banshees caught an arm each, stopping her descent to the forest floor. Paz could only watch as they dragged her friend back towards the mansion.

"MABEL!"

"Don't worry about me! Get back home to my Uncle! We'll figure something out!"

"But--"

"GO!"

For the second time that night, Paz sobbed as Mabel was dragged further and further away until she was but a pinprick in the horizon. The wyvern flew them away, back to the Mystery Shack, where Paz dreaded having to explain what had happened.

* * *

"Now just sit here," said Fidds, gently placing Ford on the recliner in the living room. "I'm calling you an ambulance, you've got a broken rib and who knows what else that water witch did to ya that needs medical attention."

"I've had worse," sighed Ford, relieved that he didn't have to stand on two feet anymore.

"You say that again I'm gonna warsh yer mouth out with soap," said Fiddleford, draping a blanket over Ford's lap.

Candy, Grenda and Gideon burst into the room just then, all three holding up the harpoon gun Fidds had created earlier.

"And where the Sam Hill have you three been?" snapped Fidds a little more harshly than he intended.

"We got the power back up and running!" said Candy cheerfully.

"We defeated the Changeling that broke into the house and tried to eat us!" said Grenda, just as chipper.

"I shot a monster with this harpoon gun!" said Gideon. He neglected to mention that he had been aiming for Ophelia and not the Nucklavee, but he was going to take whatever victory he could
aiming for Ophelia and not the Nucklavee, but he was going to take whatever victory he could scrape out of this night.

"Changeling attacks are some of the most psychologically strenuous attacks anyone can face," said Ford, smiling at the trio. "I'm proud of you all."

"Really?" said Gideon, his eyes lighting up.

"Shut up, Gideon."

"Too late, ya already said it!" said Gideon, pumping his fist in the air in triumph.

"... Hun, I don't wanna alarm you, but there's some kind of winged lizard that just landed on the front yard," said Fidds, peering out the window.

"It's Pacifica!" said Grenda, looking out the window as well.

"I always knew she was secretly a lizard," muttered Candy.

"No, I mean, she's on the back of this awesome dragon looking thing!" said Grenda, who had not-so-secretly wanted a pet dragon since she was about three years old.

"... And she's alone," said Fidds quietly.

"... Didn't the note say that Mabel was with her?" said Ford, a cold feeling growing in his stomach.

Paz entered the room with a look of deepest remorse etched into her face, confirming all of Ford's worst fears.

Chapter End Notes

.... I just realized how long this thing is. It's probably the longest entry in the entire fic. Of course, quantity does not mean quality. Leave as much constructive criticism as possible.
Once this is published, I'm going to take a few days off writing to finish reading Journal 3 (so far it is great! I've only written a minimal amount of snarky comments in the margins, always a rarity!), then it's back to work.
Cackling, the dirty hags dragged Mabel before Oberon, who was pacing in the main hall of the mansion. There was no sign of Puck.

The exiled King took one look at Mabel and snarled.

"One?!" He grabbed one of the banshees, shaking her like a battered toy in his massive hands. "I send you out to retrieve these brats and you dare to come back with only one?!"

"W-we were attacked by their wyvern, your grace," hissed the Banshee weakly, her head rolling side to side as he shook her.

Oberon threw the Banshee across the room. She flew away, fearful of what Oberon might do if he caught her in his grasp again. "Traitors and fools," he bellowed, storming about the room in a fury, "How did I end up so surrounded by traitors and fools!" He paused his tantrum to look at the girl once more.

"Throw her in the cellar til dawn," he said dismissively. "Pray that Ophelia succeeded in her mission, or I'll have all your heads boiled on a spike!"

Mabel wondered if he meant to say 'boiled in oil' or 'impaled on a spike,' and had accidentally mashed the two together in his rage. There was little time to speculate over Oberon's language skills, however, the Banshees were dragging Mabel out of the warmly lit hall towards a flight of stairs that led to the basement of the mansion. She struggled to pull away, scratching and kicking all the while she was lead down the stairs.

"You can't trap me here forever!" she cried, kicking one of her captors in the shins once they reached an old wooden door with a heavy lock. They mimicked her in mocking little shrieks, "You can't keep me here forever," just as they threw her into the cellar. Mabel heard the door slam behind her, the click of the lock, and suddenly, all was darkness.

She wasn't alone. As her eyes adjusted to the gloom, she could make out a slim figure that had its arms and legs shackled, one silvery eye glowing as bright as the full moon.

"You're alive!" she said, rushing to Puck's side once she recognized him. Alive, yes, but badly battered: Puck's other eye had swelled shut, the flesh as dark as the bruises around his neck; he had been stripped of his armor, the chains seared against his unprotected skin. He gave Mabel a weak smile, quite a few of his teeth had been knocked out, leaving his mouth a bloody ruin.

"You silly thing, you were supposed to escape," he chided her gently.

"Please," she grinned, reaching into her hair to dig out another bobby pin, "I can break us out of here in no time. If not, then my Uncles are going to bust in any minute to rescue us, I'm sure of it."

"Did the others manage to escape, at least? I don't fancy having half my face ruined for nothing, you know," he sighed, wincing as the iron on his wrists began to leave blisters.

"I think so," said Mabel, trying to find the keyhole on Puck's manacles. She felt the pin sink into the right cuff with a click, she turned the pin back and forth trying to undo the lock.

"It'd be better if we had the key," said Puck, "Oberon noticed that the golden key for the old
chains had been stolen when he locked me away. That's how I became the cyclops you see before you. Unluckily for us, he has another set of iron chains with an entirely new set of keys, so it looks like the two of us are stuck.

There was a clack as Mabel finally unlatched the right lock on Puck's wrist. "What were you saying?" she smirked as she set her sights on the left manacle.

Puck chuckled.

"You Pines are too clever by half," he said, cringing at his ruined wrist once he caught sight of it. "What a shame I couldn't befriend your lot sooner."

Puck noticed something shifting in the shadows. He froze as a large creature began to creep towards them. "Mabel," he said softly, holding her hands to stop her from working further. "I... I need you to listen to me. When you turn around, you must promise me that you won't scream."

"... Why would I scream?" she asked nervously. Mabel could tell from where Puck was staring that there was something right behind her.

"We have company," he whispered. "I promise, he won't hurt you. However... thanks to me, he has a very alarming appearance to those who haven't seen him before. I assure you that he's gentle, he won't hurt anyone unless Oberon's around to command it."

This last statement did nothing to calm the growing unease the girl felt. Mabel braced herself and, gulping, she turned to face the thing behind her.

If Puck hadn't told her not to, Mabel certainly would have screamed, even now she felt like screeching at the beast that stood before her. It towered over both of them, its massive shoulders slumped against the ceiling. It had sparse patches of fur all over its body, long, bony fingers that ended in sharp black claws, but most startling of all were its eyes. They protruded from the pinched, elongated face, shining, luminescent yellow orbs that pierced through Mabel with its gaze. They were sickeningly familiar, she half expected it to start cackling and call her Shooting Star...

Puck held out his free hand, allowing the creature to sniff his fingers. "Daya," he whispered.

"What?" asked Mabel, shaking.

"His name is Daya," said Puck slowly as he reached up to stroke the beast behind one of its large, protruding ears. "He's... he's my nephew."

"Your nephew," Mabel repeated in disbelief. Well, they did have similar eyes, she admitted, but Mabel was still at a loss to how this thing could be related to Puck.

"Not by blood, certainly," said Puck. "I never had any blood relatives, as far as I know. But Tanya always had a soft spot for adopting lost, broken things."

"Who's Tanya? You mentioned her earlier when... when we caught you," said Mabel, still upset over the incident where Puck had begged her friends to kill him. She couldn't bring herself to think about what they might have had to do if Dipper's plan hadn't worked.

"... Queen Titania the Valiant of Faerie," he sighed, "Known by her friends and loved ones as Tanya... I suppose I forfeited the right to call her by her nickname when I captured Daya under Oberon's orders. Daya was just a child before he became this beast you see today; Tanya had adopted him under her care. She loved him dearly... and so did I, now that I think about it. He was sweet-natured and trusting, it was easy to feel protective of him."
"But the King felt differently. Oberon became jealous, mostly because he could never produce an heir with Titania himself, and worked tirelessly to pluck him away from her at any opportunity. He got into his head that he would become his champion fighter, a vision he had seen in a dream, he said."

"Oberon has visions?" asked Mabel. The King didn't fit the mold of a psychic.

"I know it seems unlikely," said Puck, "Oberon is exceedingly dull-witted, his mind is barely fit enough to read, and yet, he claimed to have visions every night about a 'grand destiny' where he would conquer all of Faerie and many different worlds beyond that realm.

"Tanya always attributed it to madness, these visions. I had my own theories, but, fool that I was, I kept my opinions too myself until it was too late. When he had the prophesy about Daya, Oberon hatched a plan to humiliate Tanya, drugging her with a love potion that kept her dazed and confused while we took the child from the nursery. I tried to argue, Daya was only two, what could you possibly do with a knight who had only just learned to walk?"

"He laughed at this, and ordered me to turn Daya into a monster, one that could destroy all his enemies should he give the order." He waved his arm at the monster standing before them. "And so, that's how Daya came to this state."

Puck was shivering.

"It's not your fault," said Mabel, "you were under mind control. You couldn't have helped what happened."

Puck laughed bitterly. "If that were it, child, then I wouldn't have have this tremendous guilt weighing on my conscious night after night. The truth is, I am, and always have been, a coward. I arranged that ill-fated parlay in the hopes it would inspire your Uncle to kill my master, and look how that turned out. I'm a rather clumsy chessmaster, trying to pick fights and manipulate others into doing my bidding.

"Too frightened and cowed to fight Oberon head on, I hatched an awful plot: I turned Daya into this creature, a beast that would hopefully attack Oberon on sight, one that shared my hatred for the King... Alas. Daya, even in this form, is just a sweet, gentle child." Daya crept closer to the duo, sniffing tentatively at the captives before curling next to them to rest again.

"Even in this form," said Puck, a tear from his unmarred eye trickling down his face, "he still refused to fight. When Oberon saw how demure his new beast was, he cast the mind control curse upon him, putting the boy under his thrall just as I was. Tanya, alongside her new love, had tried to rescue the boy, but Oberon set Daya to attack them. Had Tanya been a little less clever, she probably would have perished alongside her lover that day. She invoked a power beyond my own understanding; we were pushed out of the realm of Faerie, unable to reach the dimensional gate that would let us back home. Oberon and I, along with Daya, traveled the world, trying to locate the other gates back to Faerie, while building his army that he said would supplant Titania's reign... what a joke... what a stupid joke..."

He was sobbing. Puck curled into a ball, his head tucked into his chest. "I'm sorry," he said so softly that it could barely be heard, "I'm so, so sorry Daya..."

Mabel hugged him, the only thing she could think to do. "You messed up," she whispered, "but that doesn't mean you have to keep messing up. When we get out of here, we can still make this right."

"Daya's still under Oberon's control," sniffed Puck. "Even if I somehow manage to turn him back to his original form, he'd still be a slave to Oberon's will. Besides, he's lived centuries trapped in
this form. I can't even forgive myself for putting this child through that."

They could hear the sound of thunderous footfalls descending down the stairs. The lock on the door clicked; there was a blinding light as the door was flung open, and Oberon was in the room with them. Daya woke, took one look at the king, and, hackles raised, began to snarl.

"Sit down, you stupid beast," Oberon commanded. Daya's eyes suddenly had the glazed, white look that Puck's had whenever he was under the mind control spell. Demurely, he stopped growling at the king, and Daya sat. Oberon towered over his two captives, a glowing lantern clutched in his left hand. Mabel could just see in the dull lighting a delicate silver key dangling from his neck on a black leather cord.

Puck looked away as the king knelt down beside him, but soon felt a slight sting as Oberon's gauntlet-clad hand cupped the side of his face.

"Puck," said Oberon, his voice as soft as snowfall. He hung the lantern on a hook "Darling, dearest Puck... why are you acting out against me now? I know I've been... agitated this night, and yes, I've taken that out on you, but it's only because we are so close, Puck... so close to my destiny being fulfilled. I shall be the strongest ruler in this world and all worlds that have been and will be."

Mabel cringed as Oberon took Puck's shackled left hand, tracing a finger over the metal cuff encasing his captives wrist. "I can forgive you... just swear your allegiance to me, and I will forget this ever happened. You are the key to my grand destiny. That's why you belong to me."

Puck laughed mirthlessly, a hollow, unpleasant sound.

"You have no grand destiny," Puck spat, "anyone who would ever consider you as a possible candidate for supreme ruler of the universe would be completely daft or just plain lying. You're an ignorant brute with hardly any brains to fill an acorn cap, unworthy to even clean the algae off the Axolotl's frills."

Oberon slapped him.

"Since you fail to yield to me," the King thundered, "You shall be beheaded in front of the Hunt in an hour's time, as an example to all who would make the fatal mistake to cross me the way you have tonight!"

"You won't get a chance!" piped Mabel, drawing the King's attention. "My Grunkles are going to be here any second and they're going to take you down!"

There was an uncomfortable silence after she spoke. Then, Oberon grabbed her by the front of her shirt, pulling her off the ground only inches from his helmeted face.

"Put me down!" she cried, kicking and squirming in Oberon's grasp. The King ignored her. With his free hand, he removed his helmet.

His face was covered in blackened sores, he had barely any hair left, though she could see little ginger-colored patches hanging in little sprigs along the crown of his skull. His eyes were the worst of all; she could hardly see his yellow eyes through swollen, inflamed flesh.

He smiled cruelly at her, revealing thin, broken, and decaying teeth.

"Your Uncle is dead, little girl. I had my assassins take him down in the night while you were here playing the hero. Before we depart this wretched town, I'll have my monster feed on his corpse, and I'll make you watch. But have no fear. I'll let you keep the head."
He dropped her to the floor with a thud. Grabbing the lantern, he stormed out of the room, slamming the door with a thud.

"Mabel," said Puck, crawling to the child once Oberon was gone. She was looking down, her hair obscuring her face as she shivered from the floor. "I'm sorry he did that, please, don't worry, I'm sure your Uncle is fine, he was fine when we talked to him a half hour ago, don't believe a word of it--"

She laughed. In her hand she held the silver key that had been dangling from Oberon's neck.

"You know," she smirked, unlocking the remaining chains around Puck's wrists and ankles, "He really does need to stop keeping these hanging around his neck."

"You devious, brilliant little vagrant," said Puck, scooping her up into a hug once he was unbound.

"Now we just have to find a way to get out of here," she said, breaking the embrace. "Do you think you have enough magic left to teleport us out? I don't think this key works on the lock on the door."

"I... I can try," he said. He turned to Daya, who was still crouched on the floor in a trance.

"I promise," he told the creature, "I'll be back for you. I'll try to make this right."

He snapped his fingers; he and Mabel vanished.

* * *

"Are we there yet, are we there yet, are we there yet, are we there yet, are we there--"

"Moth, if you don't stop asking that over and over I'll have your mouth taped shut for the rest of the evening," sighed Titania, rubbing her temples as she lead the ragtag group she had recruited to battle the Wild Hunt. It was almost a pittance-- her four servants, a handful of shopkeepers like the glassblower, the tiny candy village that lay outside the Midsummer fairgrounds, and of course, Stan's own group. She had never been against such unlikely odds, and she had once been the fairy godmother to a line of brain-dead, vapid princesses who couldn't even spell the word 'orange.'

"D'ya have any tape?" asked Moth sweetly, perching on top of Titania's rosy curls like a nesting bird.

Once again, Titania sighed. "No, I suppose I don't," she deadpanned.

"'Kay, are we there yet," Moth resumed, kicking her feet in the air as they marched through the woods.

"Somebody take her, please," said Titania, throwing up her hands in frustration.

"How about you walk with me and Mel, little dood," said Soos, plucking Moth out of Titania's hair.

"Mustardseed, help, the wall has betrayed me!" Moth fluttered her wings rapidly as Soos carried her away. Mustardseed ignored her.

"Aw, she's so cute," said Melody; this complement got Moth to calm down significantly.

"Yeah, but don't let her near your shins... She will hurt you," whispered Soos as Melody continued to coo over a self-contented Moth.
Stan sided next to Titania once she was alone again. "So... whatcha thinking, Queenie?" he asked her.

She smiled at him wryly. She was growing to like that nickname. "Well, I'm trying desperately not to think about this fight coming up," she confessed. "Oberon's one real talent is his ability to fight. I've seen him raze cities and crumble empires out on the battlefield, but we were younger then, and he hadn't been completely taken by madness yet... It's hard to say what the outcome will be, but as we have on our side about a tenth of what he has, it still looks bleak. If we lose, everyone here will most likely die, the people of this town will be at the mercy of his Hunt's cruel sport for the rest of time, and finally my ex will most likely take over Faerie by either killing me or forcing me to marry him again, thus plunging the land into an eternal darkness."

"Okay... let's say we win this," said Stan. "Gimme something to fight for, here."

"Well," she said, taking a deep breath. "That monster will be dead, for one."

"Okay, starting out strong, keep it going!"

"My people will no longer have to live in fear that Oberon will one day roll in to invade their home," the Queen continued, her confidence building with each word. "I could finally have closure about... about what happened between us. Please don't ask me what that was I'm... I'm not ready to talk about it just yet."

"Okay, then skip it," said Stan, putting an arm around Titania's shoulder. "What else do we get if we win?"

"... Well," she smiled again, leaning her head against his shoulder. "If we win... I could keep the gate to Faerie open for longer than just tonight."

"... Wait, what?" he said, blinking.

"Well," Titania said, "There are many different dimensional gates in this world that lead to my Queendom. Some open randomly with little sense or reason as to why it happens, and there are some, like the one here in Gravity Falls, that I have control over. It will open on it's own on this night automatically without my prompting, but in the past, I could keep it open for months, even years. I had to close it when Oberon claimed this land as his hunting grounds. But it would be great to keep the gateway open, think of all the families that have been separated for so long, all the friendships that could form between our worlds."

"Friendships, huh," Stan smirked.

"I guess you're not completely terrible," Titania conceded.

"Yeah, well, I guess you're not a total pain in the ass," he said, squeezing her in a brief, one-armed hug.

"Thanks."

"You're welcome."

"Um," said Mustardseed to Stan, "your house isn't the little cabin in the woods with all the tacky tourist stuff plastered all over it, by any chance?"

"... It is," said Stan, tensing up. "Why do you ask?"

But he had already seen it. The yard was in shambles, discarded weapons scattered every which way, and, though there was a light on in the living room window, the front door had been broken
down, the obvious telltale of a break in.

"When was the last time you heard from your brother," asked Titania, her eyes wide with fear.

"Four hours," said Stan, who was already rushing towards the house. Titania, along with Soos and Melody, followed close behind. His chest was heaving when he reached the porch, he barely even paid attention to the wyvern that was resting on the wooden planks. Panicked, Stan began to pace around the front room, calling out to his family.

"Kids! Ford!"

"Dr. Pines? Mabel? Dipper?" Soos had joined him, just as scared as Stan was. If anything had happened to them...

Candy poked her head out from the living room door. "We're in here... most of us, at least," she said dolefully. This did nothing to calm the two down.

It was a gloomy sight to behold: Ford was sitting in the recliner, looking as if he had just been hit by a bus. His face was covered in bruises and cuts, his hair matted; on top of that, he was taking short, shallow breaths every few seconds. Ford covered his face with one hand, the shame was too great to bear. McGucket held his other hand, patting it consolingly as Ford brooded in silence.

"Sixer, what happened?" asked Stan, nearly tripping over an inconsolable Pacifica, who had curled into a fetal position on the floor. He was at his twin's side, kneeling on the other side of the recliner to hear the whole story.

"Pacifica got the twins kidnapped," piped Gideon, who was sitting beside the TV. This earned him a well earned slap to the back of the head by Candy and Grenda. Pacifica wailed even louder.

"I... I failed," said Ford, sliding his hand down his face listlessly. "I tried to protect them, and once again I failed."

"They snuck out of the house while we were sleeping and ended up getting captured," explained McGucket. "Some kinda water witch broke in, near about killed us both just to catch the others. We managed to fight em' off, but now we don't even know where Dipper might be, heck, the kid mighta even escaped, but we know that Mabel's been taken back to the mansion by the Hunt."

Titania approached Ford and McGucket, her eyes kindly and sparkling as she said, "Wow, you look like crap that's been trod upon by flaming hot garbage."

"She has such a way with words," whispered Soos.

"Yeah, and all the bedside manner of a brick to the face," said Stan. He gestured towards his injured brother. "Think y'can fix him up Queenie," he asked.

"Of course I can," she said, lifting Ford's chin up so their eyes met. Gently, Titania pushed back Ford's damp hair away from his forehead so she could plant a delicate kiss upon his brow. The spell was instantaneous; Ford's ribs knit back together, the pain in his chest and back vanished, the bruises all along his arms and face faded away.

"There we are, good as new," said Titania brightly. She caught sight of Fiddleford, who glared at her through narrowed eyes, his lips pursed as he wove his arms tightly around Ford's bicep.

"It's just a healing spell," she explained with a sheepish grin. "Nothing more. We're going to need everyone in top shape if this plan is going to work."

"What plan?" asked Grenda, still in awe of the real, live Fairy Queen standing before her.
"To defeat Oberon, naturally," Titania said warmly. She couldn't give away any sign of her own doubts, not with all these children about. "We have to figure a way to get past his army and rescue the captives. It won't be easy-- you've battled Oberon before, he's got hundreds--"

"A little less than that after earlier tonight," smirked Ford, a look that both Stan and Fidds returned.

"But, the Wild Hunt is only loyal to a strong leader," said Titania, "and, that means our main goal is to take down Oberon. I propose that we put their base under siege, drawing out his defenses to fight, while a small task force sneaks inside to rescue the hostages."

"Those punks kicked me out of my own house and haven't given me or nobody a moment's rest since," said Fidds, his hands on his hips. "I'll tell ya exactly how to break in!"

"Excellent," said Titania, "So, that'll put you, me, double trouble here, and Peaseblossom--"

"Why Peaseblossom?" asked Melody, casting a doubtful eye on Titania's amicable assistant.

"The girl is an ice-cold war machine," said Titania earnestly. Peaseblossom giggled daintily at the Queen's compliment. "Together, the five of us will infiltrate their base, and then, once the children are safe... I'll have to kill Oberon myself to stop this madness."

"... Oh," said Ford, shifting uncomfortably in his seat.

"I know," agreed Titania, her tone solemn, "it's a difficult moral situation, having to take the life of another living being--"

"Actually," corrected Ford, "I was thinking I would be the one to kill Oberon? He did send assassins after me and kidnapped my niece and nephew, after all. I need some closure on this matter."

"Wait, can I kill him?" said Stan, raising his hand in the air, "I've been running around playing dress up in the woods all night, I've got to do something that isn't sugar coated fairy tale nonsense."

"I WANNA SMASH THAT NO GOOD TURNIP DRINKIN' SON OF A SHEPHERD IN THE FACE!" snapped Fidds, pounding a fist into the palm of his hand.

"Okay! We can all kill him at once," said Titania, throwing her hands in the air, "I'm sure that's a thing we can all do together!"

Just then, Abuelita arrived, shuffling past the open door and glaring at the group gathered in the living room.

"I just want everyone to know that I'm not cleaning up this mess," she said, prodding the broken front door with her toes. "And I'm not feeding all these people at breakfast either. Anyway, the kids are outside playing with some camel demon, just thought I'd say something about it before I go to bed."

"The kids?" said the Stans, both bolting to their feet and running to the front door.

"... Camel demon?" asked Soos. Abuelita shrugged.

The wyvern was sniffing at Preston suspiciously, unsure if they wanted to try and eat something that smelled this foul. "Get away from me, you beast!" said Preston, rearing back on his hind legs.

"You idiot, we're still on your back!" snapped Robbie as he, Tambry and Dipper fell in a pile on
The wyvern turned up its nose at the cameltaur in disgust, plodding away towards the porch where the other Fae had gathered.

"Hiya!" waved Flopsy the Pooka to the group as Wendy helped her friends get up from the dirt.

"Um... Hi?" said Wendy, wary of any Fae at this point no matter how friendly they seemed.

Stan and Ford arrived on the porch, pushing their way through the crowd to get to the kids. Dipper took a deep breath and looked Ford in the eye, knowing he was pretty much elbow deep in trouble now that he was safe at home. He did not, however, expect to be scooped up in a tight hug by his Great Uncle.

"You are grounded," Ford said, tears flowing down his face as he rested his chin on his nephew's shoulder.

"I know..." said Dipper, patting his Uncle on the back, slightly confused.

"It's been a long night," explained McGucket, who had joined the others along with Titania and Soos.

"Mabel's been kidnapped and we're about to break in to Northwest Manor to kill an ancient evil fairy king," said Stan, as if he were talking about a particularly inconvenient change in the weather. "Anybody feel like joining us."

"Pass," said Tambry, "We just got back from that hellhole, I don't really feel like revisiting anytime soon."

"Allow me to fix up your, ah, problem at the very least," said Titania, waving her wand at the conjoined couple. It was a difficult, sticky process, but, surely enough, Robbie and Tambry's bodies separated.

"Thank god," said Tambry, kicking her legs up like a showgirl, her face as deadpan as ever.

"Say, would you mind changing--" Preston started to say, but the wyvern growled over him, chasing him away from the Queen as she surveyed the small group.

"Right," Titania said, addressing both humans and Fae alike. "Anyone who wishes to join the fray, please volunteer now; we don't have much time before sunrise."

Though it was met with resistance from all the adults present, all the kids, even Gideon, agreed to go along with the mission. Wendy also volunteered, though both her friends agreed to stay at the Shack with Soos' Abuelita.

"This isn't a game," Titania told them, "you must treat this fight seriously or else face the wrath of Oberon."

"They're strong kids," said Ford, "I wouldn't have been able to hold my own against the Wild Hunt for this long if it weren't for their courage and talent."

"Aw, thank you," said Gideon.

"Don't interrupt me when I'm talking."

"If anything goes wrong at all, you must flee," Titania continued. "I could never forgive myself if Oberon hurt any more children because of my failures."

"We won't let you down, Miss Queen of the Fairies," said Candy, earning her a gentle pat on the head from Titania.
"Guess we better head on over now," said Stan, noticing that the sky was getting a little lighter as the hour passed.

"I... I just have one thing to add before we go," Ford blurted out before he could stop himself. He sounded as if he was addressing the group at large, but it was Fiddleford, only Fidds, whom he was looking at. He took both of his dearest friend's hands into his own. "If... if something happens out there to me--"

"Are you really going to do this now?" said Stan, rolling his eyes.

"When else am I going to get to do this Stanley," said an agitated Ford, "now shut up, before I lose my nerve!"

He continued to speak gently to Fidds, "I just want you to know..."

"Yeah?" said Fidds, his eyes aglow with excitement.

"I--"

"Yeah?!"

"I--"

"Yeah?!?!"

"Oh my god, Sixer, just spit it out," said Stan, barely containing his laughter, "We got things to do!"

"I said quiet," snapped Ford, squeezing Fidd's hands a little too roughly. Gazing into Fidds' blue eyes, Ford suddenly cried, "Aw, hell, Fiddleford, I just wanted you to know how horrendous I am at talking about my feelings."

He crashed his lips against Fiddleford's, the impact absolutely explosive. A hush fell over the crowd when Ford pulled away; Fidds looked dazed, as if he had been blinded by a flash of resplendent light.

"I... I'm sorry, I don't know what came over me," said Ford, his cheeks going bright red. How could he have embarrassed him like this, in front of all these people?

This shame lasted about two seconds, as Ford was nearly knocked over when Fidds, throwing his arms around Ford's neck, began planting little, whiskery kisses all over his face.

The reaction was cacophonous: some, like Soos, Candy and Grenda, cried "awww;" others, like Wendy, whooped and applauded. Even Stan, who loudly reminded everyone that they didn't exactly have time for this sort of thing, gave his twin a thumbs up.

"Wow, I missed a lot while I was away," said Dipper, who was happy for Ford even if he was a bit confused, "Mabel's going to be so ticked she missed this."

"... You know that McGucket probably hasn't brushed his teeth in like, thirty years," Gideon stage-whispered.

"You shut your mouth," hissed Pacifica, who was being comforted by the wyvern. "I can't believe it... she was right, this is actually really cute."

"All right, all right, let's settle down everyone," said Titania, drawing attention back to the task at hand. Fidds smooched Ford one last time on the lips before pulling away to listen. "I'm going to
teleport us to the Mansion. Everybody hold hands... that's the ticket... and," she said, raising her wand high in the air, "Here... we... GO!"

The Queen sliced her wand downwards, and they all vanished without a trace.

Chapter End Notes

All right everybody; this is it: A Midsummer Nightmare only has two more chapters until it's completed.
So, I'm going to propose something: I'm going to publish chapters twenty and twenty-one side by side as something of a two part finale for this fic. Unfortunately, that probably means that it's going to take a bit longer for it to be finished, but, we've stuck it out this far, and that means I want this fic to end on the highest note imaginable. Writing this fic and seeing your comments on each update has seriously brightened my day, I want to thank you guys so much for being great.
In Which Things Are At Last Put Right

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It had not been a smooth mission. Yes, Ophelia had drowned the target, but she had left behind the body. She was prepared to let Oberon chew her out for this misstep. However, when she had went after the children, they had fought her off with iron weapons; the white haired one had even managed to slay the Nucklavee during the scuffle. Ophelia had no idea where the Changeling was. Good riddance in all honesty. She had distrusted the creature since the start, and, had it not disobeyed her direct orders and kept the boy away from the basement, the children would have been already captured and the Nucklavee still alive.

Ophelia approached the front door, ready to deal with whatever bile and vitriol the exiled King would throw at her. If it came to violence, she knew she could win a fight. Though it was forbidden to suggest it out loud, Oberon was in poor health. It was rumored that he wore his armor at all times to cover his increasingly deteriorating body; if it were true, she could exploit that.

She opened the door, and there he was. The king paced around the room while keeping several banshees held aloft with magic, a pit of iron spikes lay beneath them. The old crones struggled against the binding of the spell, but it was worthless, they were trapped.

"What is this," said Ophelia, outraged by the needless cruelty of it all.

"They have failed me," said Oberon simply. "Everyone tonight has failed me so completely, General. I would have them punished for their incompetence. How I punish these hags is all up to you, however. Tell me, how did the mission go? Did you kill our enemy like I asked you."

She froze. Ophelia could handle Oberon raging at her. She couldn't abide him torturing her soldiers.

"Answer me," he thundered.

"The Pines man is dead," she said at once, "I drowned him."

"Impressive," said Oberon, "Or it would be if you had any proof. Where is the head I asked for?"

"Left it," said Ophelia, gulping. The banshees struggled and screeched even harder.

"You left it," sneered Oberon. "Just like you left the children behind, I see. Tell me, Ophelia, I thought you were intelligent. What part of the kidnapping mission didn't you understand, the part where you were supposed to actually kidnap children or the part where you made doubly sure my enemy was dead? Fools, all of you. If you weren't so powerful, Ophelia, I'd run you through with my sword this instant. The others aren't nearly as fortunate. Goodbye, girls. Ophelia has failed us both, I'm afraid."

With almost lazy indifference, Oberon slammed his hand down, shoving the banshees into the spikes. They exploded into ash with pained shrieks, Ophelia could only watch as they evaporated before her.

"They were our sisters-in-arms," she cried, "How could you do this?"

"Easily," he snapped. "Just be grateful it isn't you tonight."

It was then that she noticed the absence of Puck. She had seen Oberon rail against his prized
servant whenever he had taken to these violent moods. Could Oberon have done something that would have incapacitated her friend?

"Where is Puck?" demanded Ophelia of Oberon.

"Puck has turned traitor and committed the foulest of treason," said Oberon to his General. "He will be held in his cell until the end of this hour; I will execute him, as he deserves."

"I did not risk my life," snarled Ophelia, clenching her fists as she spoke, "and lose so many good soldiers tonight fighting your battles just so you could slaughter more of our own!"

"Had you all been good, loyal servants," he bellowed, "I wouldn't need to punish you so!"

Just then, a swarm of brownies scurried into the hall from the cellar. One, a horrified, shivering creature holding a chocolate cake, gave Oberon a trembling little curtsy before saying, "Your majesty, we went down to the cellar to offer Puck his last meal-- and he's gone! He and the Pines girl escaped!" Ophelia couldn't help but notice the glee hidden in the statement; Puck was very popular with the younger, weaker members of the Hunt.

"What!" screamed Oberon, stomping around the room in outrage. "How could he-- how dare he-- Nevermind. He can't have gotten far, the iron bindings should have weakened him enough that he can't travel far by magic. We'll just have to search the house and grounds."

"Sire!" The front doors of the mansion opened wide, one of the sylphs, Ganymede, flew in from the yard, a look of apprehension etched upon their face. "A mob has formed outside the gates, demanding to be let in to fight."

Oberon groaned. He didn't need this right now. "Who would dare be stupid enough to challenge me to a fight?"

"Well... Your ex-wife, actually," said Ganymede. The sylph shared a look with Ophelia, who was already weighing several options as the king raged.

"Whether she wants to admit it or not, she's still my wife," snapped Oberon. "I think it's time I reminded her who she belongs to. Ophelia! This is your chance to redeem yourself. Lead the troops out to the gate, put every fool who joined Titania's cause to the sword, then bring her to me, alive. I will look for the traitorous Puck in the meanwhile. Dismissed."

Oberon stomped out of the room, drawing his sword as he left.

"Well," said Ophelia, nodding her head to Ganymede. "You heard him. Sound the alarm. We're going to meet with the Queen."

* * *

They approached the gates, Ophelia's one hundred soldiers, much less than there had been at the beginning of the night, but still more than Titania had brought.

"Remember," said the Queen to the children, "If the fight leaves our favor, run. Those that won't kill you on the spot will bring you to Oberon. Both are pretty terrible fates. I'm going to argue that the latter is worse, however. Don't try to play hero."

"Is every adult here going to lecture us like we're five," grumbled Gideon.

"You tried to use mind-controlling milk on the Hunt," retorted Pacifica.

"I still say it coulda worked," mumbled Gideon.
"Both of ya shut up, they're here," said Stan, clenching his fists.

Ophelia stalked towards the gates, Ganymede and another sylph opened the doors to let her through to meet with the enemy. She spotted a perfectly healthy and alive Ford glaring at Ophelia from the crowd with McGucket at his side, the latter hissing and spitting at her like an enraged ferret. Ophelia sighed. "Really not my best work, that job," she said, though she was surprised to find herself relieved that the Pines man had survived. "State your business."

"Firstly," snipped Titania, "You'll do best to drop that tone. Secondly," she cut her wand through the air, her golden gown transforming into shimmering gold-plated armor in an instant. "My business is that I'm the Queen, the defender of every citizen and friend of Faerie, and I intend to make Oberon pay for his crimes against my people. Stand aside, or face our wrath."

"I see," said Ophelia, her eyes narrowing as she examined the Queen. She then turned to the other members of the Hunt. "You heard her. Stand aside, troops."

There was a shocked pause on both sides, but, eventually, the Hunt did as Ophelia commanded. "He's all yours," said Ophelia, winking at the Queen. "Do me a favor and break a few of his bones for me? For my friends' sake."

"Um... Thanks?" said a bemused Titania.

"Anytime your majesty," said Ophelia.

"... Right," Titania turned back to the troops. "Everyone: stand guard while my task force infiltrates the mansion. Be prepared to retreat if we fail."

The Queen strode past the troops, followed by Stan, Ford, McGucket, and Peaseblossom. Fidds was still glaring daggers at Ophelia, but she ignored it. They had more important things to worry about, surely.

For a moment, the former enemies stared at each other blankly. How awkward was that, having to sit quietly and wait for the grown-ups to sort out the mess?

"So... what are we supposed to do now?" asked Grenda.

"Well," said Ophelia, "We wait for them to duke it out-- and, not to disrespect Her Majesty, but if Oberon wins against them I'm putting a sword through him myself. But, until then... I guess we'll just have to get comfortable."

"Um... anybody caught up on the last episode of Storm of Clashing Kings?" asked Soos, not sure what else to say.

"I don't know what that is," Ophelia deadpanned.

"Oh man," said Soos excitedly, "are you in for the ride of your life..."

*  *  *

"Are you sure you don't want to call for more back up?" Peaseblossom asked the Queen. They marched across the lawn, the stars twinkling above them as they approached the main entrance.

"It would probably be for the best," agreed Ford, "Surely those can't be all of Oberon's army out by the gates, and besides, we have no reason to trust the others to stay loyal to us."

"That's why we need most of our troops out there with them," countered Titania. "If this is some kind of trap, where we bring all our troops into the mansion to fight, even if we win against
Oberon, we'll still be surrounded by the Hunt. If they try to make a move, our side can still fight, or, at the very least, be able to escape." They paused before the front doors. "Is there any other way to get into the mansion without being detected?" she asked McGucket.

"Well," said Fidds, "I did find a secret tunnel under a tree out here a few weeks ago. That'll probably get us in without being caught."

"How do we know he hasn't already thought about that?" said Stan, "If he gets us caught in a small, confined space, we're dead."

"Well," said Pacifica, who suddenly appeared with Dipper and the Wyvern behind the group, "You could always just use the back entrance through the greenhouse."

"It's less predictable, and we would have more cover," added Dipper, who was smiling all too innocently.

The five adults snapped their heads towards the kids.

"Oh no," said Stan, grabbing both kids by the scruffs of their necks, "No, no, no, no, both of you, back at the gates." The wyvern began to growl and snap at Stan's ankles as he began to walk the kids away from the mansion. "Cram it, ya stupid lizard!" Stan barked at the wyvern, who whimpered under Stan's glare.

"Dipper," said Ford as calmly as possible, "I know I'm not exactly an expert at child care, but I'm pretty sure being grounded means you're not supposed to go on dangerous rescue missions... right?"

"Look, I know I messed up sneaking out," Dipper pleaded, "but Mabel rescued everyone tonight, I have to do the same for her!"

"Besides," said Pacifica, trying to sound as dignified as possible while being carried away like an ill-behaved puppy, "I've lived here for most of my life, I know all sorts of secret passages and hiding spots we can use while sneaking around. Plus, I have a dragon. I don't know about you, but that sounds pretty useful, don't you think?"

"I've lived here for months, little lady," chastised McGucket, "I think I can get us around just fine, thank you!"

"Yeah, how many times did you have to call the cops because you got lost wandering this place? Was it ten? Twelve times this year?" Pacifica raised an eyebrow smugly at the old man.

McGucket bit his lip. "It was fifteen," he admitted, folding his arms across his chest petulantly.

"I understand that you want to help," said Titania diplomatically, "but--"

An arrow whizzed past the Queen, nearly striking her. It sank into the ground in the middle of the group, and was soon joined by multiple other arrows, each one only narrowly missing the targets.

"Archers on the roof!" cried Peaseblossom. She began to lob spells at the oncoming arrows, transfiguring the deadly weapons into harmless flowers. While this was happening, the front doors burst open: a few remaining ogres from the feast staggered out, and, catching sight of the intruders, broke out the cudgels, ready to strike the nearest enemy.

"Enemies at the door!" said Titania, aiming a spell at one of the encroaching monsters that sent them flying across the lawn.

One of the Ogres made the mistake of trying to snatch Dipper out of Stan's grasp; the old man
headbutted the creature, forcing him to the ground.

"Pain in my freaking as-- neck," snapped Stan, letting the kids go so he could attack the ogre unimpeded.

"Kids, take cover now!" said Ford, whipping out his gun to shoot a few of the archers still unloading out into the yard.

"There is no cover!" cried Pacifica, "Head to the greenhouse!"

A Redcap grabbed her from behind; thinking quickly, Paz cried "Fetch!" The wyvern shot a firebolt at her master's would-be abductor and the Redcap screeched, letting go of the girl as it tried to put out the flames engulfing his clothing. Once Pacifica was freed, she lead the task force around the side of the house, directing them towards the greenhouses all while the archers continued to shoot.

They were able to reach the safety of the greenhouses just in time, one of the archers had almost struck Stan through the neck just as he shut the door behind them.

"It's a mess in here," said Pacifica disdainfully. It was true that the potted plants had all either withered away or grown wild, clearly no one had been down to tend the plants in quite some time.

"I haven't had the time to garden, I have robots to build!" said McGucket, still shaking from the recent attack.

"That's not our concern at the moment," said Titania, scanning the perimeter through the windows. The remains of the horde were headed their way, they had lost the element of surprise. "We need to find a way to get past the horde and into the house. Peaseblossom, is there anything you can work with here that will give us a head start?"

"I think so," said Peaseblossom, catching sight of a bag of seeds on a nearby shelf. Reaching into the bag, she found a few round, pockmarked seeds and, grinning, Peaseblossom placed the seeds all over the ground.

"When they get through the door, the rest of you lot, make a run for the house," she told the group.

"Good luck, Sweet Pea," said Titania, smiling graciously at her most loyal servant. The ogres and other beasts were already breaking down the door, just as the door cracked, Titania lobbed a spell that took out at least two of the attacking monsters. Once they were down, she lead the others out of the hothouse, leaving the soldiers alone with Peaseblossom.

One of the older Ogres took one look at delicate, sweet Peaseblossom and screamed like he was being murdered with an ax.

"It's General Peaseblossom, the Corpse Flower of War!" All the older veterans of the Hunt began to panic, while the younger members simply scoffed.

"The Corpse Flower is a myth," said one of the fae, an arrogant little dwarf with a large ax. "Even if they were real, then they certainly wouldn't be this little goody two-shoes here. Let's cut her down."

"Now really," said Peaseblossom, rolling her eyes at the enemy troops. "That is such a stupid name; Amorphophallus Titanium isn't a particularly vicious flower at all-- it's only a very smelly one. Now... if you were to say Drosera Glanduligera... that'd be quite different." She snapped her fingers; the seeds planted around the greenhouse began to grow at an alarming rate, forming giant, tentacle-clad plants all around the Hunters. "Drosera Glanduligera is a carnivorous plant with a
unique dual trapping mechanism. It's a bit like...

The arrogant dwarf's chainmail snagged against the thin tentacles on one of the plants' green pods, slamming him into the green maw where they would never return.

"A bear trap!" Peaseblossom giggled as her enemies began to panic, the demented plants encroaching even closer, leaving no room to escape. "I just love their versatility," she continued, "I don't think you're going to feel the same way, unfortunately."

She was still smiling as the Hunt's screams echoed throughout the night until they stopped all together.

* * *

Oberon stormed into the cellar, where not a trace of Puck or the Pines girl could be found. All that remained was the Beast, its eyes still glazed over as it lay subserviently on the floor.

"Get up," snapped Oberon; listlessly, the Beast obeyed. "We have work to do," Oberon hissed, guiding the creature out of the cellar. "Your mother has decided to pay us a visit."

* * *

"So it turns out," Soos told the slightly bored troops outside the mansion gates, "Neduardo wasn't Jimmy's dad after all; he was actually Ned's little sister Lacy's kid by Dennys' big brother Rodney. L plus R equals J! Who woulda ever guessed?"

"I did," said Wendy, who was playing with a piece of her hair.

"Same," replied Melody.

"... Okay," said Soos, trying to move the conversation forward, "Maybe a few people were able to guess--"

"Actually, it's been a pretty common fan theory ever since the first book was published," Melody corrected.

"Honestly I have only been half paying attention to this whole conversation," said Ophelia, "and even I was able to guess that was Jimmy's backstory."


Suddenly, a strange ogre with a bandaged head began hobbling towards the gates.

"Oh no, an Ogre!" cried one of the shopkeepers from the Midsummer Festival.

"Samantha, we are ogres," snapped another shopkeeper, slamming a horned hand to her face.

"It's just Fleance," said Ophelia, "Let me sort this out."

"Hey Ophelia," slurred the confused Fleance, "Aren't those supposed to be the enemy at the gate?"

"Well... yes, I suppose they are," said Ophelia.

"Then... um... why aren't we attacking them?" said Fleance.

"You shouldn't be attacking anyone in your condition," Ophelia chided the ogre. "Go back to the infirmary. You need rest."
"Yeah... but how come you ain't attacking em though?" asked Fleance once more.

"Um." Ophelia began to sweat. She wasn't sure Fleance would understand her reasoning for turning against Oberon in his current state. So, she came up with a quick lie.

"It... it's because they're all really dead," she said flatly. "We've already defeated them. These are their ghosts. They're now telling the troops ghost stories. Because they are ghosts." She shot Titania's army a quick look, and everyone, from Soos to Wendy, Candy and Grenda, even Flopsy and Gideon, began wailing mournfully in a desperate attempt to sound like ghosts.

"Oh," said Fleance. "Well... I guess that's all right, then... I should... Probably lay down..."

Fleance collapsed on the ground, not moving from his very comfortable spot in the dirt.

"... Well, anyway," said Soos, as if a giant ogre hadn't just passed out in the middle of the lawn, "Queen Dennys then sends her army of dragons to Dragonsbane-By-The-Sea, and--"

You get the idea.

* * *

The task force entered the kitchen, where they were greeted by twenty or so frantic brownies scrambling around the room like kindergartners on a sugar high.

"Hey, excuse me!" snapped Stan, drawing attention to himself.

"Humans!" cried the brownies, terrified of the giant intruders.

"Who cares anymore?" snapped a grouchy looking house elf, who was prodding a slice of cake sadly with a fork. "Oberon's probably going to slice off Puck's head at any moment, what do a few no-good human punks matter?"

"Puck's still alive?" said Dipper, approaching the bitter creature on the table.

"No thanks to you," snapped the elf, "Stupid boy; lost his damn mind trying to save a bunch of snot-nosed kids."

"That's certainly a new development," said Titania bitterly. "Puck's made it very clear he'd put his own life over the safety of innocent children."

"Shows what you know, missy," snapped the elf.

"Watch your attitude, ya little punk," said Stan, glowering at the elf.

"Oberon would have snuffed him out by now if he hadn't tried to escape with the human girl," said the Elf, ignoring Stan's glare, "it's only a matter of time before he catches them both. They're both as good as dead."

"Do you have any idea where they might have gone," Titania's voice was civil, but her eyes bore into the Elf as if she could impale him with her gaze alone.

"I ain't telling you squat, you crazy broad," sneered the elf, "If you hadn't kicked Puck out of Faerie in the first place he wouldn't be in this mess."

"You talk to her like that again I'm going to toss you in the garbage disposal," warned Stan, slamming his fist on the table. The cake was knocked over on its side from the impact, causing the elf to curse and bang his fork against the table.
"Crazy broad, crazy broad, crazy broad!" screamed the elf. Yeesh, calm down, buddy.

"Stan, really," said Titania as Stan grabbed the elf by the ankle, dangling him upside down and walking toward the sink. "He's a little turd, but we really don't have to waste our energy on them. Let's start looking for your niece, shall we?"

Ford suddenly got an idea. Grabbing a bowl from one of the cabinets and reaching into the fridge for a jug of milk, Ford poured the milk into the bowl and offered it to the brownies. They happily swarmed around the china bowl, lapping up the milk like hungry kittens. "Now," he asked politely, "By any chance do you know where Puck could have gone with my niece?"

"There's a library where Puck likes to hide sometimes," piped one of the creatures, "It has one of those false bookcases that leads to a secret passage when you try to pull one of the books off the shelf. He loves that thing! He could have hid there!"

"I know where that is!" cried Fidds, nearly smacking the wyvern in the face as he tossed his hands in the air in excitement. "It's right outside mah bedroom, let's go!"

"Well, hurry up!" snapped the elf, whom Stan had tossed into a nearby trash bin. "Oberon's going to find them eventually, maybe if you get there first he'll forget all about him and go for you jerks instead!"

"And I thought Jeff was unpleasant," muttered Dipper.

"We've no time to lose," said Titania, following McGucket out of the kitchen door into the main hall. "The sooner we find your sister, the sooner we can get you kids out of here and... and finish this for good."

* * *

Fidds paused when they passed his bedroom-- it had seemed almost a lifetime ago that he had woken to the sound of a break in, but it had only been the morning before. A part of him just wanted to collapse back into bed, to sleep through the chaos until it was all over. But, Fidds remembered how much pain Oberon had put him and his friends through, how he had almost lost Ford. It was clear that he wasn't going to get any rest until Oberon was out of their lives for good.

"Everything all right?" Ford put a warm hand on Fidds' shoulder.

"Just thinking 'bout taking a long nap once this is over," he answered. Fidds grabbed Ford's hand and briefly kissed it before leading the group to the library.

"It's going to take some time to get used to that," whispered Stan to Titania, indicating Ford and McGucket with a wave of his hand. "You know I saw that guy turn a dumpster into a fully functioning RV? Drove it around town and everything for weeks. Stunk up the place; we had to throw it into the Bottomless Pit. This is the man my brother has chosen to love."

"Let's hope you get all the chances in the world to get used to it," said Titania, hooking her arm around Stan's bicep.

"Well," said Stan, smirking, "I guess if I can get used to you, I can get used to anybody."

"Ha, ha, hilarious," she snarked.

"Got ya to smile," said Stan.

"Coincidence."
"Hey Dipper," whispered Paz.

"What's up," he asked, poking his head through the doorway of the library. There were quite a few beautiful, leather bound books stacked upon mahogany shelves. Dipper wondered if any of the Northwests had ever taken any of these books off the shelves, but didn't voice this in case Paz took it as an insult.

"I just want to say-- by the way, if we survive, I'm going to deny it like crazy," said Pacifica, "But... You and Mabel... You're both like, my only real friends, and I'm sorry I got you into this mess in the first place."

"Don't worry," said Dipper, giving the girl a small smile, "We're going to fix this."

"Now, the fake shelf is one with a really big book that looks like a Dictionary or a Bible," said Fidds, who began tearing random books off the shelf in case they were the switch. "Start pulling books off, one of them has got to be the handle to the fake door."

"Poor Mabel," said Ford, pulling a large copy of The Complete Sherlock Holmes off a shelf. "I can't imagine how scared she must be, hiding all alone in some secret room hoping Oberon doesn't barge in at any moment."

"Puck, put that vase down," Mabel chided for what felt like the twelfth time in ten minutes. Puck had barely been able to get them out of the cellar; he had only been able to teleport them as far as the library, where he had tucked Mabel and himself into a hidden chamber behind a bookshelf. There, they found all sorts of old artifacts that featured Bill terrorizing people and generally being a major jerk. Puck kept wanting to smash a large vase that featured a violent scene of a man setting himself on fire with Bill leering in the background. "You're going to make too much noise."

"Oh... I know," said Puck, pouting as he gingerly placed the vase back on the ground. "But I just really, really want to break his triangle face into a billion pieces, you know?"

"Heh... yeah," she smiled sadly. "So... What did he do to you?"

Puck laughed bitterly. "My dear child," he said, tousling the girl's hair as he sat down next to her, "I could write a series of novels about all the crap that acutely irritating monster put me through. For the moment, let's put that to the side and just try to survive the rest of the night."

"How long do you think Oberon and the rest will be out looking for us," asked Mabel.

"Not much longer," said Puck. "Once sunrise hits, they'll have to leave this house and move on to the next Hunting ground-- perhaps the Isle of Skye or Florida, one of the geographical weirdness magnets that lead to Faerie. Something about this land always wants the Hunt to leave. Can't imagine why, we're all such a delightful bunch, as you've seen."

"... Do you really think my Grunkle's still alive," Mabel asked meekly. Oberon's disturbing comments in the cellar had frightened her. If Grunkle Ford was really d-- If what Oberon said was true...

She hadn't even said goodbye.

She only left a note.

Puck flushed at the question. Ophelia wasn't one to leave survivors, however, they had talked to him quite recently. He wasn't sure what to tell the girl. So, he said nothing.
There was a banging sound outside the chamber, and Mabel could make out a voice that sounded distinctly like Stan swearing on the other side of the door.

"Hot Belgian Waffles, I think I just broke my foot!"

"You stubbed your toe on a copy of *Good Omens*, I think you'll live."

"Dipper, you're grounded another week."

"Oh, come on!"

"My family's out there!" Mabel perked up, and almost called out to her brother and uncle just as Puck put a hand over her mouth.

"We don't know it's them for sure," warned Puck. "That creature you saw at the Parlay? That was a Changeling, and they can read minds and take the form of friends and loved ones, sometimes all at once. It could be a trap to get us out."

"Mabel!" This time it sounded like Ford. Mabel felt like crying, despite Puck's warnings she hoped it was still him. "Mabel, please come out. You're not in trouble, we just want to get you home."

"I want to believe them too," whispered Puck. "But we've got to have proof that it's really them."

"Puck." Tanya's voice was sharp as the blade of a guillotine. "If you're keeping that girl from her family for some kind of cruel joke, I'll have Peaseblossom feed you to one of her carnivorous plants. Don't test me."

"... Yeah, that's really Tanya," said Puck, releasing his grip on the girl. "Don't worry," he told Mabel, "If it turns out I'm wrong, I've got your back." He flashed a snaggletoothed smile and grabbed the vase once more, this time brandishing it as a weapon. Mabel rushed towards the fake door, pushing the switch to flip to the other side.

"This is stupid," grumbled Stan, kicking over a cushy chair by the fireplace. "Let's just knock down some shelves and get her out of here now!"

"She wouldn't have stayed hidden with all of us calling to her," said Dipper, pacing around the room fretfully.

"Perhaps she isn't here after all," Ford sighed.

"We can't give up!" said Fidds, slamming his fist on a coffee table. "Ow! Um, Ah mean-- we didn't get this far just ta turn tail and mope now! She's gotta be around here somewhere!"

"Hiya, McGucket," Mabel greeted the hillbilly cheerfully.

"Not now, Mabel," said Fidds, shooing the girl away with a wave of his hand, "Anyway, it's like I was saying-- heywaitjustonesecond-- MABEL!" He picked up Mabel over his head and cried, "Hey, lookit who I found!"

Dipper was there first; he hugged his twin and joked, "We have got to stop getting kidnapped every summer, this is exhausting."

Mabel burst into tears when she saw Grunkle Ford alive and well. Throwing her arms around his neck, she cried, "He told me you were dead."

"He wishes," said Ford, vowing to punch Oberon in the throat the next time they met. Nobody
should ever get away with making Mabel cry.

"Oh hey look, it's Stan, who I haven't seen in several hours, how are you Stan?" Aw, I'm just
great Pumpkin, don't worry about me," said Stan, doing a poor imitation of his great niece in an
effort to cheer her up. He was successful.

"Stan, Stan, Stanstanstanstan STAN!" Mabel practically leapt off Ford to hug Stan, nearly
knocking the wind out of him when she squeezed him around the middle. Titania smiled, the sight
of Stan comforting his Great Niece warmed her heart to the core.

"Ugh, it's so cutesy you practically want to barf," said Pacifica, who was in truth a little jealous
that Mabel's family cared for her so much.

"Actually," said Titania, patting Pacifica on the head, "I think it's just the right amount of cute."
Pacifica could have sworn she heard the Queen's voice quaver just a bit.

"Tanya."

Titania snapped her head towards Puck, the warm affection she had felt icing over in an instant.

"You look like crap," she said bluntly.

"... I feel like crap," he admitted. The Queen glared down at him, her hand clenched tightly
around her wand, as if she wanted nothing more than to blast him away. "You have every right to
be angry," Puck started, but the Queen simply stomped away.

"You're right," she thundered, looking positively murderous, "I'm still very angry. But I don't
want to hear it." She stormed out of the library. "We need to get the kids out of here, now. I'll deal
with you as soon as I've taken out your master."

"He's not my master anymore," said Puck quietly.

Titania was already gone.

"... It's just going to take some time," said Dipper, patting a crestfallen Puck on the arm as the rest
of the Pines family followed after the Queen. "Don't give up."

"Thank you," said Puck, who was trying not to cry. He had just stepped out of the library when
suddenly, he felt himself being slammed against a wall, his throat tightening as a set of fingers
closed around his throat.

"Caught you," sneered Oberon, slamming Puck's head against the wall so hard it made his ears
ring. "I'm going to tear you apart, you know that? I don't care if you die. I just want you to hurt."

"Leave him alone!"

Mabel shot her grappling hook at Oberon's head, knocking his helmet off his hideous head with a
thud.

"You little brat," Oberon roared. He dropped Puck to the floor, kicking him aside to get to Mabel.
Just as he was about to strike, Oberon felt a fist slam against his jaw, cracking several of his
already fragile teeth upon impact.

"You try to lay a hand on her again," said Stan, looking absolutely murderous, "they're going to
have to carry you out of here in a mop bucket."

"Impossible," said Oberon, his inflamed eyes widening at the sight of this new adversary, "I had
you killed."
"Nope."

Ford drew his sword, pointing it at Oberon's throat. "Ready for a rematch?" he asked.

Oberon drew his sword as well, his disfigured face contorted with rage.

"I'll have you both dead in three swings," said Oberon, slicing at Ford, who blocked the blow with his own blade, and it begun. Up and down the hall they circled around each other, the sound of iron clashing against iron echoing throughout the mansion.

While Ford and Oberon fought, Titania aimed a blast of deadly magic from her wand at her ex-husband's heart, the spell merely bounced off his breastplate, blasting a hole through one of the walls as it ricocheted off his armor.

"... I don't believe this idiot," snapped Titania, nearly breaking her wand in two as she clutched both ends of the scepter in her hands.

"What's up," said Stan, who was following the fight closely, ready to step in should his brother falter in any way.

"He's wearing iron armor," said Titania, "That's why his face looks like a moldy couch that's been left out on a street corner! He's practically decaying from the exposure!"

"But that's good, isn't it?" said Dipper. "That probably means he's weakened enough that we can take him out!"

"That's the thing," said Titania, "As long as he's wearing the armor, he's immune to any magic attacks-- I can aim for his head, but I don't want to risk hitting your uncle instead. We've got to get him out of the armor soon or it's curtains."

"Don't think I haven't forgotten about you, wench," Oberon called out to Tanya, nearly slicing through Ford only to be blocked by the last second. "Once I'm through with your goons, I'm going to carve your pretty little face into ribbons."

"Okay, you know what buddy," said Stan, unsheathing the rapier he had carried at his side, "Just for that, I'm going to kill you myself; that was just gross." Stan began to run towards the fray, screaming as he aimed his sword at Oberon's neck.

"Stan, get back," cried Titania, "You've got the wrong kind of sword!"

"What's wrong with my sword?" said Stan, eying the slender blade in his hand.

"That's a rapier, not a broadsword," said Ford, who kicked Oberon in the stomach, pushing him back down the staircase into the main hall. "It's too small to go against Oberon's!"

"... Why do you have to throw me under the bus like that," said Stan, annoyed.

"Trust me," whispered Titania, "You're still probably much better at wielding a sword than Oberon ever could hope. But, regardless, as long as he's wearing that stupid metal deathtrap, he's pretty much invincible."

"I think I know a way we can get him to come out of his shell," said Mabel, giving Pacifica a meaningful look. Pacifica smirked; turning to the wyvern, she cried, "FETCH!"

The wyvern blasted Oberon with its flame breath, engulfing the king. As the flames heated his armor to intolerable temperatures, Oberon peeled his armor off at once, revealing a hulking body
covered in sores much like the ones on his face.

"You fools," snarled Oberon, with a wave of his hand, he summoned a cage that trapped Dipper, Mabel and Pacifica... that only lasted for about ten seconds before it flickered away into oblivion. Titania flew at her ex-husband, casting a spell that threw him across the room with a sickening thud.

"Fools, all of you!" screamed Oberon, "I am destined to rule this world and all worlds that have ever been!"

"That has to be the stupidest thing you've ever said," sighed Titania, her eyes glowing blue with magical rage. She wrapped a chain around Oberon's torso, binding him to the wall.

"It's true," Oberon growled, thrashing against his restraints. "I was chosen by one of the gods themselves-- a being of untouchable wisdom beyond mortal knowledge! He chose me! He chose me!"

"Oh my god, you have got to be kidding me," said Ford, slapping the palm of his hand to his face.

"... Are you seriously talking about Bill Cipher right now," said Dipper, rolling his eyes. "Cause... he's dead, dude."

"... What," said Oberon, his voice almost inaudible.

"Yup," said Stan smugly. "Me and my brother took him out at the end of last summer. That was a good day."

"... LIES!" cried Oberon. Snapping his fingers, he lifted the Pines family and friends in the air, they struggled against this magical binding, hoping to get free, but Oberon wouldn't relent.

"Put them down," said Titania, annoyed by her ex's antics, "You don't have enough magic to maintain that spell in any case."

"... I know," said Oberon. With one flick of his wrist, he flew his captives over the bed of spikes he had set out in the main hall. Titania froze, in her fear she lifted the spell that bound Oberon to the wall. The king jumped up, grabbed his former Queen, tearing her wand out of her hand and forcing her to watch as her friends hovered precariously over their potential doom.

"I know how much you love your pets, Tanya," Oberon whispered in her ear, to her disgust, she felt Oberon's tongue glide over her earlobe as he spoke. "Now. Be a good girl and call off your troops. I'll let you keep them if you want, just give in to the rest of my demands. You'll let me back into my Kingdom, and you'll be my obedient wife once more. I'll forget all of this ever passed between us. Otherwise, I'll kill them all. Your choice."

She could see the spell already flickering, at any moment, they could fall. Titania turned to face her ex husband, about to curse him into oblivion, when she saw Puck hovering a few feet behind Oberon, a knife grasped firmly in his hand, ready to strike at the back of Oberon's throat.

"... Okay," she whispered, hoping he would believe her lie, praying he wouldn't turn around. Oberon smiled. He waved his hand to the side, flicking the humans and their wyvern across the room away from the bed of spikes. "I'll do as you say. I'll be your wife again."

"Hmmmnnnn..." said Oberon, grinning like a madman. He was staring just a few feet beyond Titania's shoulder. "On second thought... what use to I have of a Queen who can't even give me a proper heir? I've honestly preferred the single life."

Puck saw Daya creeping from the shadows, ready to pounce on Titania at Oberon's command.
Just as Oberon gave the order to kill, Puck teleported himself between Titania and the beast, taking the full brunt of the attack.

"Puck!" cried Dipper, Mabel, and, to her own surprise, Titania. Enraged, Titania turned on Oberon, he tried to grab her throat, but, grabbing both of his wrists, she hurled him over her shoulder, slamming him into the bed of spikes.

"N-no," Oberon stuttered, "I... I can't die... I'm supposed to have a desti--"

With an unceremonious poof, King Oberon exploded into ash.

"Holy crap, that was amazing," cried Stan, clapping Titania on the back. She ignored him, all she could stare at was Puck, lying on the ground before her, where Oberon's beast had attacked. She was joined by the others, Ford took one look at Puck's wounds and knew it was a lost cause. The creature was weeping at the sight of Puck's blood on his claws.

"H-hey," Puck said, his voice hoarse. He reached a trembling hand out to Daya, stroking the creature's ear in an effort to comfort him. "Shhhhhhh... none of that. It's okay, it... it's okay... You didn't mean it... it wasn't you... it wasn't your fault..."

It wasn't fair, Dipper thought. After all Oberon had put Puck through, even in death, he had managed to hurt him.

Titania knelt down beside Puck, her expression unreadable as she stared at her dying former friend. "I'm sorry I hurt Daya," Puck told her, his focus blurring as he tried to look her in the eye. "I'm sorry I hurt you both. I regretted it my whole life. I'll understand if you never forgive--"

"Oh, just shut up!"

Tears flowed down Titania's face as she kissed Puck right on the forehead. The blood stopped flowing and Puck's wounds were healed, not just the gashes the beast had inflicted on him under Oberon's command, but the bruises, the broken teeth, even the burns from the iron shackles. It was as if he had never been harmed at all.

Puck sat up, shocked.

"But why," he asked.

"... Because even you don't deserve to die like that," said Titania, wiping away her tears.

"... I need to try something," Puck said after a long pause. He stood up, taking a trembling step towards the beast, still weeping over what it had done to Puck under Oberon's command.

"There, there," Puck told the creature in a soothing voice, "Don't fret..."

Puck's eyes began to glow, shimmering like moonlight upon the ocean. Placing a hand on the creature's head, he whispered an incantation over and over, with each word, the creature's form began to morph and glow.

"What's he doing," asked Fidds, in awe of this bizarre sight.

"Honestly, I haven't been able to follow half of what's been happening tonight," admitted Stan.

At last, there was a powerful burst of light, then suddenly... the creature was gone. Standing in its place was a little boy, no more than two years old, his hair a wild tangle of dark curls, his brown eyes wide as he took in his strange surroundings.

Titania gasped, clamping a hand over her mouth. It was impossible.
It was Daya.

Chapter End Notes

I'll be posting the last chapter later tonight, I have to compose all my thoughts about this fic and all of you guys and all this gushy stuff, I want to give this story the proper send off it deserves.
Stan found Titania holding on to her son, looking down at the boy as if nothing else in the world could matter more. They had arrived back at the Shack once Oberon was defeated; Titania had sobbed the whole time when she was first reunited with the child, and needed time to compose herself. Deftly, Peaseblossom proposed that the troops should report back to the Mystery Shack, where the Queen would make an official statement for her people. The boy, Daya, had wrapped his chubby arms around the Queen's neck, his cheek pressed against her collarbone as he slept.

"Cute kid," said Stan, startling Titania for a moment. When she looked at him though, she was beaming.

"I never thought I'd see him again," she said softly, stroking Daya's curls with one hand. "My son. My beautiful child..."

Tears were steadily flowing down her face as Stan draped a comforting arm around the Queen. "He's been trapped with Oberon for so long," she sighed, wiping away tears with a free hand. "Who knows what sort of terror he's seen? How is that going to affect him later in life?"

"He's got his badass momma looking out for him now," said Stan, rocking Titania as he held her. "That's a pretty good start, I think." She was smiling again, the Queen nuzzled against his shoulder as his grip on her arm tightened ever so slightly.

"And... this is just some stupid idea Soos came up with, blame him if you hate it," said Stan, not fooling anyone present, "but... Dipper and Mabel, they're a bit older than your kid, but maybe spending time with other munchkins might be good for Daya. If you two, ya know, wanted to visit again, that is."

"Yes," said Titania, hugging Daya gently against her chest. "That does sound nice... for the kids."

"Yeah, of course, the kids," said Stan hurriedly, scratching the back of his head.

"Naturally," agreed Titania, going slightly pink.

Peaseblossom approached the two of them just then. "My lady," she said gently, "your people are waiting for you to make a statement."

"Of course," said the Queen, pulling away from Stan. Still clutching Daya, she said, "It's just... I don't want to let him go."

Peaseblossom smiled, reaching her hands out toward the Queen. "It's all right, Tanya," she whispered. "I promise, he'll be right here when you get back." Titania nodded, and, after a moment of hesitation, she kissed Daya on top of the head and reluctantly handed him over to Peaseblossom. She turned to Stan, a cheeky grin back on her lovely face.
"You ready?" she asked him, extending her delicate hand towards him.

"Eh, I got nothing better to do," he shrugged, enveloping her hand with his own. Together, they walked out into the front yard to face the crowd gathered outside the Shack. The audience roared with applause: Fae of all shapes and sizes, from Flopsy the Pooka to Ophelia and the other reformed Hunters were cheering and stomping, absolutely reveling at Oberon's defeat. True to their word, Mustardseed, Cobweb and Moth had constructed a pinata made from the King's discarded armor and were hanging it up by the totem poll; Mustardseed was already practicing her swing with a fallen cudgel she had stolen from an enemy soldier. Puck was gazing up at Titania, hoping to catch her eye, but Stan couldn't tell what she was thinking about her former friend now that the battle was over. At last, Stan caught sight of them: his family was waving at him near the front of the crowd, and, after a silent plea to Titania, he let go of the Queen's hand to rush towards them. He crushed Dipper and Mabel into a bear hug, and in turn, Ford, Soos, Wendy and even McGucket hugged them as well.

"My friends," said Titania, her voice melodious as she addressed the crowd. "At last, at long last, our ever present enemy, the traitor Oberon, is slain, and his Wild Hunt disbanded. We will not waste a large amount of breath over him, he has terrorized us all during his life, may we be ever free of him now that he is finally dead.

"I have much to discuss with you all," she continued, silencing the cheering crowd who were still celebrating Oberon's demise, "Starting with the fate of the former Wild Hunters who joined our cause against this tyrant when the time came. We are most grateful to them, their alliance towards us has saved a number of lives that could never be replaced. For this, we thank them.

"However," she added, "We must acknowledge that one good act alone does not clear all sins. It will take time for our trust to rebuild in those who were once our enemies. It is with a heavy heart that I must say that their banishment from Faerie is still in place. However," she looked at Puck then, if only for a moment. "However," she repeated, "This will not last forever. If, by the next Midsummer Festival in a quarter century's time, they have proven themselves worthy of our trust again... They will be admitted back into our home with open and welcoming arms."

There was some grumbling from the former Hunters, but, at Ophelia and Puck's insistence, they clapped all the same. Dipper and Mabel looked over at Puck, who turned to the twins and gave them a sad smile. "It's more than I deserve," he assured them. "Though, honestly, it's going to be hard to find something to do for twenty five years in the meantime. Perhaps I'll start living in squalor and I'll finally get around to writing that symphony..."

"That's a stupid idea," said Mabel, shaking her head. Dipper nudged McGucket with his elbow.

"Do you think you could help him out, maybe," whispered Dipper. "He's kind of creepy, but he's actually not that bad of a guy. All he needs is a chance."

Quietly, McGucket stroked his beard, scrutinizing the Fae with narrowed eyes. Suddenly, McGucket shouted, "Ah have conveniently forgotten to staff my enormous mansion in the entire year that Ah have owned it!!" Jabbing a finger into Puck's chest, he cried, "As long as ya don't try to kill nobody, you can help me around mah house, I'll pay ya and everything!"

"Thank you," said Puck, taken aback by the old man's offer. "I owe you a debt of gratitude in any case; without you, I would have never been freed from Oberon's spell."

"Just as long as ya don't cause too much trouble," Fiddleford warned him.

"Why, I would never," said Puck, just as Preston skittered by, begging any of the other Fae to change him back into a human.
"Please, I just want to wear pants again!" Preston sobbed as Mustardseed chased him away with her bat.

"Well... at least, not after tonight," Puck admitted sheepishly.

"Now," said Titania, turning her attention to the Pines family, "Tonight's victory would have never been possible without the brave Pines family and their friends, whom Oberon foolishly thought he could he could harass without consequence. Without them, tonight's victory would have never come to pass. We shall always consider them friends to Faerie, and nothing we could give them will ever come close to a proper repayment... except for this load of treasure that we're awarding them."

Titania flicked her wand, summoning chests of gold, jewels, rare and ancient tomes of magic, magical clothes like seven league boots, invisibility cloaks, magic pants that made you look ten pounds lighter, even a table cloth that, when unrolled, served a never ending breakfast buffet. All of this she gave to the Pines, who were, frankly, geeking out like a bunch of dorks over the boon.

"Hmmm," said Soos, examining a gold coin the size of a coaster, "I wonder if this is real gold, or fairy gold that disappears after a while." He bit into the coin, chipping one of his teeth. "Real," he concluded, "Real, painful, and oddly delicious gold."

"Dipper, look at me! I'm a floating head!" said Mabel, draping an invisibility cloak around her shoulders, everything below the neck vanishing with one swish of the cape.

"Incredible!" said Ford, flipping through one of the books, (Jimmy Frost and the Blustery Winter's Day: Book Six of the Storm of Clashing Kings series by Jorge R.R. Martinez) "This is from the Library of Possibilites-- books that were never written but only in the minds of the greatest authors! I thought it was a myth!"

"It makes bacon pancakes!" cried Stan, unrolling the tablecloth to find a hot, steaming plate of maple-syrup soaked goodness. "Oh my god, this is the happiest day of my life!"

"If you're quite done?" said Titania, raising an eyebrow at Stan as he drooled over the pancakes.

"Ah, just let me eat my dang pancakes, lady!"

"You would dare backsass the Queen?"

"Is the Queen gonna let me eat my pancakes in peace?"

"You are insufferable," she said lightly, smirking as she returned her attention to the crowd. "I have one more bit of business to discuss with you all before we disperse," she announced. "For centuries, ever since we moved the Midsummer Festival to this location, I have only let this gateway between this world and Faerie open once every twenty five years. Now that Oberon isn't a threat, I shall be keeping the gateway between realms open, in hopes that it will start a new age of friendship and peace among our worlds!"

"Are you sure that's safe," whispered Ford. "We haven't exactly had a great history with open interdimensional portals."

"If anything tries to mess this up, we'll show 'em who's boss," answered Stan, which would have been a lot more comforting if he wasn't speaking through a mouthful of pancake.

Just peeking over the horizon, a sliver of gold began to shine; the sun was beginning to rise.

"And so," said Titania, smiling warmly, "another Midsummer comes to a close. Now that the ceremony has ended, I invite you all to wander this place, take in its sights, befriend a stranger."
Treat this land with the same courtesy we would offer upon our own home. In short: don't screw this up. I wish you a good day to all!"

Once again, Titania waved her wand into the air, illuminating the sky with brilliant fireworks to the cheers of all around. Soon though, the Fae began to scamper off, leaving off into the woods, or, in some cases, heading into town. After a while, only a few Fae, including Titania, remained.

The Queen approached Stan, who was still picking at his plate.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything," she said, rolling her eyes at him. "Did you need some privacy with your breakfast? A room maybe? Perhaps a secluded cabana in Maui?"

"Yeah, yeah, what do ya want," said Stan, tossing his empty plate into the garbage.

"Well, if you must know," Titania said, folding her arms across her chest, "Traditionally, I'm supposed to give the Festival King some kind of lady's favor-- something useless like a handkerchief or a hair ribbon, an outdated custom left over from my parents' generation. Stupid, really. But..."

Titania waved her hand over to her servants, who were all at once at her side. Cobweb retrieved from her pocket a large, golden amulet with carvings of the sun and moon etched upon the medallion.

"It was my Father's," said Titania, putting the amulet around Stan's neck. "One of the most powerful magical amulets to have ever been crafted, offering protection to whoever wears it. So, you know. Don't pawn it."

"I wasn't gonna!" snapped Stan, who, in all honesty, did wonder for a second how much a magical medallion would fetch at an auction.

"Really?" said Titania, blinking. "I would totally have pawned it."

"You just said--"

"Oh, hush, just take my Father's ugly necklace," she laughed, throwing her arms around Stan's neck. He in turn scooped her up, squeezing Titania in his arms.

"I must be off," said Titania, breaking away from Stan after a long time. Queen Titania turned to Peaseblossom, who handed Daya gently into her arms.

"Guess I'll see ya around, Queenie," said Stan, who felt somewhat hollow now that the Queen was leaving.

"... Tanya," she said, quietly.

"What?"

"Tanya," she repeated, her face flushed as she clutched Daya close to her chest. "You may call me Tanya."

At these words Tanya turned away, her entourage in tow, retreating back into the woods beyond the Shack. She turned back one last time to look at Stan, smiled, and vanished through the trees.

The melancholy pit in Stan's chest remained, but it was joined by a warm, pleasant sensation that filled him to the crown of his head. He didn't reflect long on this, however: from the corner of his eye, he caught Ford and Mabel trading smug smiles with each other.

"Wipe those damn pie-eating grins off your mugs," he snapped, donning his usual scowl at the
"Wipe those damn pie-eating grins off your mugs," he snapped, donning his usual scowl at the two of them.

"Grinning? Who's grinning," said Ford, quite clearly grinning at his twin. "Mabel, are you grinning?"

"Noooooooo Grunkle Ford," said Mabel, giggling. "I'm not grinning!"

"Of course not," Ford winked, "I mean, smirk? Yes. Simper? Maybe. But grinning, never!"

"The very idea!"

"Aw, cram it," said Stan, tapping Ford's arm with his fist. "Let's get this stuff in the house, I dunno about you clowns, but I could go for another round of pancakes after tonight."

"I suppose I better be heading back to Northwest Manor," said Puck, strutting away from the group. "I'll be spending the day repairing all the damages from the battle, I'll send word once it's fit for human habitation again. Toodles."

Preston wailed once more, his camel-hump quivering as he stomped around the yard in a tantrum. "IS NO ONE EVER GOING TO CHANGE ME BACK?!?"

"Oh yeaaaaah," said Puck, smacking the side of his head, "I should probably take care of that..."

"Why'd ya do that to him fer in the first place?" asked Fiddleford.

"Well," said Puck, tugging at a loose lock of his hair, "it was payback for all those times he and his ancestors bossed me around while I was Oberon's slave.. that, and he sold out the kids over tea and cucumber sandwiches. I mean, my cucumber sandwiches are pretty spectacular, but come on, that's just tacky, even by my standards."

"Also," added Wendy, still glaring at Preston the Cameltaur, "he tried to steal the deed to your house when Dipper and I first got there. Total creep."

"Hmmm," said Fidds, staring intently at Preston. "He did all that, did he?"

"I'm afraid so," Puck admitted. "When should I restore him to his original state?"

"... I'd give it about a week or two," said Fidds with a wicked little smile.

Puck beamed, his teeth glinting in the early morning sunlight.

"You and I," he said, giving Fiddleford a small hug, "we are going to get along splendidly."

* * *

Preston managed to find a shimmer of hope when he offered to give Robbie and Tambry a ride home on his back. "Maybe I could start charging people for camel rides," he mused. "Twenty five dollars per person, an extra fifteen if they're fat or smelly. Yes, yes, I could get my fortune back by the end of this month with a business model like that! It's brilliant!"

Sure, buddy.

Incidentally, Robbie and Tambry seemed to have made up over their argument earlier in the night ("You know," said Robbie, wrapping his arms around Tambry's waist, "being forcibly grafted to you for a solid eight hours wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. I mean, I wouldn't wanna do it again--"). I think we can all agree, however, that no one, not even I, the narrator, was particularly invested in that story line. Good riddance, you glorified plot devices.
Now, to focus on the characters we actually care about.

Once the treasure was promptly stored away, the Pines family and their friends rolled out the magic tablecloth to enjoy a fine breakfast. This early morning feast was cut short, however, when Ford passed out in his bowl of oatmeal.

"Darlin', are ya all right?" asked Fidds, nudging Ford's arm with a spoon. Ford jolted up, bits of oatmeal coating the side of his face.

"What happened?" he mumbled.

"You're... kinda wearing your breakfast," said Dipper, offering his Great Uncle a napkin.

"Must've dosed off," said Ford, yawning as he wiped his face clean, "Sorry... won't happen again..."

Not ten seconds later, Ford fell face first into the oatmeal again, snoring noisily into the bowl.

"Okay, maybe it's time you went to bed," said Stan, pulling Ford out of the cinnamon-apple flavored goop by the scruff of his neck.

"I don't need to go to bed," Ford slurred, his eyelids drooping, "Let me live my life, Stanley."

"Nope, bed," said Stan firmly, hoisting Ford out of his seat by grabbing him under the arms. "Kids, help me get this nerd to his room." Ford made a sound like an angry cat as Dipper and Mabel each took one of Ford's feet to carry him out of the kitchen.

"You know," said Soos, yawning himself as he looked at the clock on the kitchen wall, "I think we'll just keep the Shack closed for the day. Defeating an evil overlord is a real drain, y'know?"

"Yeah, I start shambling around like a zombie when I've gone the whole night without sleep," said Melody, rolling up the tablecloth.

"As someone who spent a few hours as a zombie, I can agree that probably isn't a great way to spend a workday," said Soos. "Let's get some sleep."

"If it's all right with you guys," said Wendy, "I'll just crash here. I don't feel like making the walk all back home."

Everyone agreed to sleep the day away at the Shack, each departing the kitchen to head to a different part of the house to rest. It had been a long, stressful night. They deserved to rest.

* * *

Stan and the kids placed Ford on the couch in his room, against his drowsy protests that he wasn't tired.

"Any particular reason you're always acting like you're allergic to sleep?" said Stan, removing his brother's boots so he wouldn't track mud onto the furniture.

"Waste of time."

"You're exhausted," Dipper said, propping up Ford's head with a few pillows. "Take some time to rest, you've been through a lot today."

"As an official U.S. Congresswoman," said Mabel, placing heaps of blankets over her Uncle, "I hereby declare that it is illegal for you to get out of bed-- um, couch-- until you've gotten at least eight hours of sleep! No exceptions!"
"Well," Ford yawned, "I suppose if the government is going to get involved..." With a slight smile on his face, Ford sunk into the pillows beneath him as he drifted off to sleep at last. Stan took off his brother's glasses, placing them on an end table. Mabel patted Ford on the head while he slept until Dipper pulled her away.

"We should go," Stan whispered, ushering the kids out the door. "He doesn't often let himself snooze like this." He yawned, stretching out his arms as he left the room. "I could sleep too, now that I think about it," he sighed, kicking the ridiculous shoes he had gotten at the festival off his feet. "Hit the hay, kids. I'm going to bed."

"Night Stan!" said Mabel, scampering up the steps as Stan headed to the living room.

"Technically speaking it's morning," said Dipper, following closely behind his sister.

"It's like a vampire sleepover!"

"Ugh... I'd say we take at least a twelve hour break from anything supernatural," said Dipper, exhausted.

"Is that even possible in this town?"

"Probably not."

Once the kids had disappeared up the steps, Stan headed towards the living room. He didn't feel like making the trip all the way to his room. He might as well crash on the recliner.

Stan lay back into the chair, pushed his glasses up to his forehead, and, slowly, he draped a blanket over his gut. He pulled the amulet Tanya had given him off with his right hand. Clutching the golden amulet, he began to lazily turn the medallion over and over, eyeing the crude engravings on each side.

"Ugliest thing I've ever seen," he murmured contentedly.

He was still holding it as he slept.

* * *

"You know, I just thought of something," said Soos to Melody once the two of them were snuggled in bed. Soos' mouth was smeared with chocolate; in addition to Titania's boon, the candy village whom Soos had befriended offered him a lifetime supply of candy, much to his delight.

"What's that?" Melody asked.

"Everything that happened tonight would probably be a good story for a book or a movie," Soos yawned, wrapping his arms around her as he spoke. "Or, y'know, maybe even a hip-hop inspired musical with a racially diverse cast and crew."

"Sounds like you've still got the drama bug," Melody giggled, the idea of Stan rapping too ridiculous to put into words.

"The stage has called out to me, and I must answer it one day," Soos said gravely, "but seriously, think about it. We could call our show, um, I don't know... My Fairy Lady!"

"Stanalot!"

"Into the Woods!"
"Um, I think that one's taken..."


They spent an hour coming up with punny musical titles, until at last they fell asleep together in each other's arms.

* * *

Waddles did not approve of Pacifica's wyvern joining the other kids in the attic; at the sight of the winged beast bounding up the steps, he squealed and buried himself under a blanket. Scrutinizing the quilted lump, the wyvern sniffed, trying to decide if it would make a good snack.

"Georgette, no, leave him alone," said Pacifica, wagging a finger at the beast. With a disappointed groan, the wyvern left the pig in peace, curling on the opposite side of the room to bask in the early morning sunlight.

"Georgette?" said Dipper, raising an eyebrow at the oddly named wyvern.

"Yeah, like Saint George?" said Pacifica, rolling her eyes as she lay her sleeping bag next to her new pet. "The one with the dragon?"

"But he killed the dragon in that story," said Candy, curling next to Grenda on the floor.

"Ugh, whatever, you bunch of insufferable nerds, it's clever," said Paz disdainfully. She burrowed into her sleeping bag as Mabel took a spot next to her.

"I think it's a cute name," she told Pacifica, patting the wyvern on the nose. "And thanks for telling her not to eat Waddles."

"Well, as long as you don't totally annoy me, I guess I'll train her to not go after pigs," said Pacifica. "Unless they're named Gideon."

"Ha, ha, hilarious," snapped Gideon, collapsing on the floor with a flop. "Maybe that dragon of yours can help you find some treasure so your family will stop being dirt poor."

"Yeah," she retorted, "and maybe she'll find you a personality that isn't a total trash fire."

"Maybe go easy on the insults, guys," said Grenda, remembering Gideon's breakdown during the Changeling fight all too vividly.

"I'm too tired to destroy y'all today," Gideon mumbled. Soon enough, the boy was snoozing on the floor; Wendy covered him with a spare blanket.

"Huh. Smells like flowers in here," said Wendy, leaning against Georgette. The wyvern's tail coiled around her protectively, which Wendy only found slightly awkward.

"Don't ask about the flowers," said Candy darkly.

"Mabel?" said Pacifica, prodding a drowsy Mabel with her index finger.

"Yeah?"

"This was the worst sleepover I have ever been too in my life," said Paz bluntly.

"Not my best work," Mabel agreed, "definitely in the bottom one hundred."

"... I had fun though," Pacifica admitted. Then, smirking wickedly, she added, "Also, I saw your
"Uncle kiss the hillbilly."

"Wait, what?!" Mabel's eyes went wide, a burst of shock jolting her awake. "I missed it?! Oh noooooooooo, was it cute?!"

Solemnly, Pacifica looked Mabel in the eyes, and, placing a hand on her shoulder, she said, "Mabel... It was the cutest thing I had ever seen, and I am never going to let you forget that you missed it."

"Noooooooooo," Mabel whined, "What kind of matchmaker misses the couple's first kiss? This is a disaster!"

"Aw, I'm sure you'll catch the next one," Wendy reassured her.

"Yeah, I guess you're right," Mabel yawned. She snuggled against Georgette, the wyvern nuzzled Mabel's head until she was soundly sleeping.

Dipper, though still unsure how safe it was to sleep next to a fire-breathing miniature dragon, nonetheless took a spot next to Pacifica against the creature.

"So," said Wendy, her eyes still closed, "How much trouble did you get in?"

"I'm grounded for two weeks-- no TV, no internet, no exploring until the end of June," sighed Dipper. "It's pretty much the worst."

"Still better than being kidnapped by fairies, though?" asked Wendy slyly.

"Okay, it's not completely the worst," agreed Dipper.

"Sorry my terrible advice almost got you killed," said Paz, leaning her head against Dipper's shoulder.

"Well, it all worked out in the end, if you think about it," said Dipper. "The Wild Hunt disbanded, Oberon was defeated, Puck is free, Titania has her baby back... a little teenage rebellion did help out in a sense."

"I corrupted the nerd," she sighed, her eyelids fluttering shut as she settled in to sleep. She felt a pair of lips press against her forehead just as she had gotten comfortable.

"What was that for?" Pacifica asked, blushing.

"Revenge for earlier," Dipper quipped.

"Gross," she said with a little smile.

* * *

McGucket found the goat still chewing on his quilt outside Ford's bedroom. He didn't have the energy to guess how the goat had traveled through all the chaos between the mansion and here unscathed. After a few feeble attempts to wrangle back the quilt from Gompers, he decided to just let the goat keep it. Cracking the door open, he found Ford sleeping on the couch, a puffy comforter draped over his frame. Gently, Fidds nudged Ford with his hand; Ford, eyelids fluttering open, smiled at the sight of him.

"Hey there," he whispered, trying to make as much space for Fidds as possible on the narrow couch.
"Why in the world don't ya have a bed?" asked Fidds, wrapping his arms around Ford's neck.

"Never got around to buying one when I returned to this dimension," Ford admitted. He secured his arms around Fidds' waist, pressing him against his chest. "I guess I'll have to go buy one now... now that I'm back." He eyed the bowl of now stale popcorn, long since abandoned over the course of the evening. "It's too bad we never got to finish the show. I enjoyed watching it with you."

"... Ya know, they play marathons for the show every Sunday," said Fidds, cuddling close to Ford. "If ya want ya can come over and watch with me."

"I'd love to," said Ford, pressing his lips against Fidds' forehead. Grinning, Fidds gently nuzzled Ford's neck.

"I was gonna invite you and yer family over for dinner anyway," said Fidds, kissing Ford's cheek, "As a way to say thanks for having me over through all this... but if you wanted the first visit to be for just the two of us..."

"They'll understand," said Ford, and, after one last kiss, he dozed off to the thought of his next date with Fidds, hopefully one slightly less stressful than the first one had been. Fidds felt his own eyelids begin to droop as he laid his head against the soothing warmth of Ford's chest. The sun had finally risen when Fiddleford McGucket fell asleep to the steady sound of Ford's heartbeat.

> If we shadows have offended,
>  Think but this, and all is mended,
>  That you have but slumbered here
>  While these visions did appear.
>  And this weak and idle theme,
>  No more yielding but a dream,
>  Gentles, do not reprehend.
>  If you pardon, we will mend.
>  ... Give me your hands, if we be friends,
>  And Robin shall restore amends.


Chapter End Notes

And, ladies and gents, that's a wrap! I want to thank each and every one of you who turned in to read this fic from the beginning. This was a labor of love, and it's been so great writing this story and reading your comments at every update. I'm especially
grateful to see that this fic has been added to the Gravity Falls Fanfic Recommendations List on TV Tropes; I actually got into the fandom looking on the Tropes page, I can't express in enough words what an honor that feels like. Goodnight, everybody!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!