

Three grey stars are scattered around the title. One is at the top center, one is at the top right, and one is at the bottom left.

My Unfair Godmother

Janette Rallison



Walker & Company
New York

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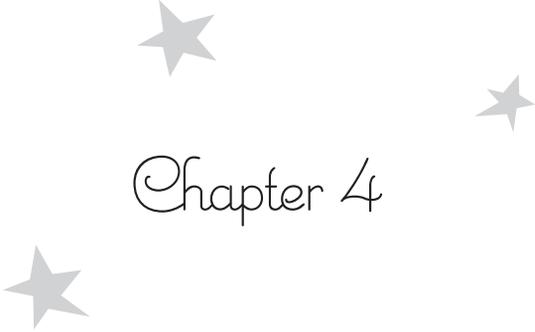
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Chapter 4

For a moment, I just stared at the men. They wore tunics and leggings, with bows and arrows slung over their shoulders. A couple were older, with gray in their hair and beards, but most were young with muscled arms and tanned faces. I guess I had never considered what a bunch of men who lived in the forest and never showered would smell like, but in the confines of my bedroom, the smell of sweat, dirt, and unwashed clothes hit me with nose-curling strength. I tried to breathe through my mouth.

The men looked around my room, drawing swords and knives, then turned to me with fierce expressions.

“Chrissy!” I hissed, both panicked and elated—panicked because a dozen scary men were brandishing weapons, and elated because—talk about superstar sightings—Robin Hood and his Merry Men were in my bedroom.

Chrissy didn’t come back.

“What devilry is this?” one of the men demanded.

"This has the look of magic to it," another said.

Actually my room had the look of the JCPenney teen department. Sandra decorated it before I moved in. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bring you here," I said, gulping. "There's been a mistake."

A young man with shoulder-length blond hair, a pointed green cap, and a dark green tunic stepped toward me, sizing me up. His features were sharp and flawlessly handsome. His eyes were startlingly blue in his tanned face. Chrissy hadn't been exaggerating when she said Robin Hood was hot.

His gaze ran over me, and he raised an eyebrow. I glanced at my reflection in my closet mirror to see what he was looking at. I wore a velvet green dress that swept around my ankles. My hair was pulled up into a bun with loose ringlets. No sign of tears or mascara streaks remained on my face. In fact, I wore bright red lipstick and smoky green eye shadow. This apparently was Chrissy's idea of a makeover. I looked like I was about to go to the prom.

"Who are you?" Robin Hood asked, his voice cautious. "Why have you brought us hither?"

"I didn't mean to." I lifted my hands up to show them I didn't have a weapon. "It was an accident. I'm trying to get her to come back and fix it." I glanced around the corners of my ceiling, hoping Chrissy might be floating around up there. "Chrissy, this isn't what I meant!"

Robin Hood sheathed his sword and folded his arms, but the other men kept their swords and knives drawn, which made them seem more menacing than merry. A burly man with a thick brown beard stepped forward. He stood at least six and a half feet tall, towering over everyone else. Little John, I guessed. "Who be this Chrissy you call for?"

I took a step back from him. He didn't seem to have any concept of personal space. Or hygiene. "Chrysanthemum Everstar. She's my fairy godmother."



This caused a round of grumbling from the Merry Men. “I knew it was magic,” one of them growled, and then spat on my carpet.

“Hey,” I said. “You’re inside my bedroom. Don’t do that.”

Robin Hood fixed me with a look. “And why, pray tell, did your fairy godmother bring us to your bedchamber?”

“Well, you see, I had a run-in with the police tonight.” When I didn’t see any recognition on Robin Hood’s face, I added, “The police work for the sheriff.”

“The sheriff!” another man snarled, and spat on my floor.

I could see it sitting there all gooeey and gross. I turned to Robin Hood. “Would you please make your men stop spitting on my carpet?”

“What dost thou mean by a run-in?” Robin Hood asked.

I ignored the spit soaking into my carpet. I would clean it up later. “Basically, it’s where they hauled me into their headquarters and threatened me.” And then, because I really wanted someone to understand what I’d been through, I told them about the whole ordeal with Bo and the officer who tricked me.

Robin Hood and his men listened intently, and when I’d finished, Robin Hood nodded. “I see.”

“Then while I was talking to my fairy godmother about it, I sort of wished that Robin Hood was around.”

“To give the sheriff bigger game to pursue?”

“No,” I said, blinking. “I wouldn’t have wished you into the twenty-first century for that.”

Little John’s jaw dropped open. “*The twenty-first century?*”

I shrugged apologetically. “It’s where I live.”

The men turned their attention from me to my bedroom, examining it more closely. One used his sword to push the comforter off my bed, checking to see if it was hiding anything. Several others picked knickknacks off my dresser. They flipped through books, poked at my iPod, opened my drawers. Friar Tuck lifted a necklace out of my jewelry box.

"If you don't mind," I said, shutting my underwear drawer and standing in front of it, "this is my personal stuff. I don't want anyone touching it."

Little John pushed back my curtains and eyed the houses on the street with interest. "Robin, cast your eyes at those buildings. And behold the torches that light the road. They stand as tall as trees!"

Robin Hood strode over to the window while I tried to keep the Merry Men from tossing things they found uninteresting onto the floor. I was able to rescue my cell phone. My box full of nail polish wasn't as lucky.

A man the others referred to as Will—I assumed Will Scarlet—took a book from my shelf, opened it, then held it upside down and shook it. His dark hair hung in greasy strands around his shoulders and his beard ended in a sharp point. "What odd, useless things you have in the future."

I snatched the novel from his hand before he could drop it. "It's a book, and that's not how you treat it."

This is what happens when you're raised by a librarian. Even though I had refused to read books for years, I still couldn't stand to see one ruined. I reshelved it with a forceful thud. "Chrissy," I hissed toward the ceiling. "We really need to talk." My giddy-fan feelings for Robin Hood were fading fast. These men didn't belong here, and they had to go back before my dad or Sandra discovered them here.

A car passed by our house, and Robin Hood and Little John simultaneously gasped.

Little John leaned into the window until his nose touched the glass. "What strange manner of beast was that? Lights streamed from its face."

"A car," I said. "They're one of the twenty-first century's very useful things. They're faster than horses and easier to take care of."

Robin Hood put one hand on the glass and peered farther down the street. "Are they friendly?"



“They’re not alive. They’re machines, like . . .” but I couldn’t think what machines they had back in the Middle Ages. “They’re tools. When you turn the key, they start up so you can drive them down the street.”

Friar Tuck had finished going through my jewelry box and stuffed several rings and necklaces into the pockets of his robe. None of them were expensive, but still. “Hey, stop that,” I said walking over to him. “You can’t take those.”

He smiled a nearly toothless grin. “I’m simply admiring them.”

“Well, admire them in my jewelry box, not in your pockets.”

Another of the Merry Men had thrown open my closet and pulled out shirts. “Behold the finery,” he called to the others. “Her wardrobe puts the king’s to shame.” And then he looked at me accusingly, as though I had been hoarding shirts.

“Everyone has a lot of clothes now,” I said, and went to take the hangers from his hand. “I’m not one of the rich, if that’s what you’re thinking. Far from it.”

Robin Hood still scanned the street. “Wench,” he called to me, “how can I procure one of these cars?”

Wench? “My name is Tansy,” I said. “And will you please tell your men to stop pawing through my stuff?”

Robin Hood glanced lazily around the room. He let out a bird whistle and the men grudgingly turned their attention to him. I winced. If Dad and Sandra heard weird noises coming from my room, they would come in. How was I going to explain the presence of a dozen smelly men dressed in ratty clothes and wielding swords?

“Unhand the wench’s things,” Robin Hood said. “I want to go forth and discover what the world has become. Who is with me?”

The men let out a shout of agreement, still clutching shirts, knickknacks, and scented candles.

“Shhh,” I called to them. “My dad and stepmother are down the hallway.”

“How many men at arms be at your castle?” Little John asked.

I vaguely remembered from my reading days that men at arms were soldiers.

"This is a small house," I told him. "Only my family lives here."

Will Scarlet took hold of my doorknob and opened the door a few inches. I nearly threw myself against it. "You can't go out there. Someone will see you."

Robin Hood gestured out the window to the neighbors' homes. "And the other buildings nearby, are they small houses as well?"

"Yes," I said. "Mostly."

Robin Hood and Little John exchanged a look and grinned. Robin Hood, unlike so many of his men, had straight, beautiful teeth. Still, his smile made me uneasy.

I stepped away from the door and held my hands out to Robin Hood, pleading. "Look, you need to stay put until I can get hold of my fairy godmother. She had a job interview to go to, which is probably why she's not answering me, but that can't take long. Then we'll get this straightened out and she'll send you back to your home. In the meantime, you need to be quiet."

I had barely finished speaking when I heard Nick at the door. He knocked then said, "Dad says to turn off your iPod and go to sleep."

I didn't have my iPod on. "Okay," I called back.

I hoped he would go away, but he opened the door instead. "What are you listening to anyway? It sounds like—"

He stared at the occupants of the room with wide-eyed surprise and then took in my long dress and hair. His voice dropped to an indignant grumble. "You're having a costume party in your bedroom? Aren't you in enough trouble already?"

"It's not what it looks like," I said.

He rolled his eyes in disgust. "Whatever. It's your life. Who am I to stop you from wrecking it?"

He shut the door harder than he needed to.



I turned back to Robin Hood. “That was my stepbrother, Nick.”

“He bore no weapons,” Robin Hood said.

“People around here don’t carry weapons. It’s illegal, and it’s not polite either. Which reminds me, could you ask the Merry Men to sheath their swords?”

“The who?” Robin Hood asked.

“Your Merry Men,” I repeated. “That’s what history calls them.”

Robin Hood chuckled at his men. “Did you hear that? History knows us, and thinks we are merry.”

“We’ve been called a far sight worse,” Friar Tuck said. He was standing by my jewelry box again.

Another man snorted. “I’d be merrier if I had a spot to eat.”

“I can get you food,” I said, then wondered what to serve them. In the movies, the Merry Men always ate fire-roasted rabbits and stuff like that. I would find something. “It will take me a few minutes,” I told Robin Hood. “Can you control your men until I get back?”

“Of course,” he said, like it was a ridiculous question.

As I put my hand on the doorknob, Robin Hood took hold of my elbow. “One question before you go. What does history say of me?”

With his blue eyes staring down at me, and his hand touching my elbow, I felt like a giddy fan again. “You’re a hero. You robbed from the rich to give to the poor.”

“Ahh.” He nodded, processing this. “History has been kind.”

“I’ve got a book about you. You can have it if you want.” I went to my shelf and took down *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. “My father read this to me when I was a little girl.” I put the novel in his hands and felt myself blush. “I’ve admired you for a long time.”

One of the men laughed and in a low voice said, “As have many women.”

I hadn’t meant it like that, but there was no explaining that

now. Besides, Robin Hood had smiled when I said I admired him. He flipped open the book, first looking at the pictures, then the text.

"I'll be back soon," I said, then slipped out the door.

Down the hallway, Dad and Sandra's door was shut. The TV blared from their room. They had probably turned it up in an effort to drown out my "iPod." Good. I hoped that meant they would stay put. I took hold of my skirt and lifted it so I could hurry down the hallway without tripping over it. If my parents saw me, they would wonder why I was wearing a long dress and my hair was in a bun.

But I didn't have a choice about my wardrobe right now. It was better to keep the men busy with food until Chrissy came back.

I was microwaving chicken nuggets when I heard the crash. It was a familiar enough noise since I had already heard it twice that night—the sound of a window shattering. I left the kitchen and ran back to my room. When I opened the door, Little John pointed a sword at me and yelled, "Halt!"

I did, not because of the sword, but because of what the Merry Men were doing. They had not only broken my window; they'd laid my comforter across the remaining shards in the window frame and were proceeding to climb outside.

"What are you doing?" I walked over to them, hands in the air. "Do you know how expensive windows are? You could have just opened it."

Robin Hood sent me a half smile and bowed slightly. "Though we appreciate your hospitality, we must be on our way."

Friar Tuck heaved himself out of the window. I was so agitated I made little steps toward it, then toward Robin Hood, then back to the window. "You can't leave. You have nowhere to go."

Robin Hood remained unworried. "We shall live off the land. It is our way."

"You're in the middle of a neighborhood," I protested.



"There's no land to live off of." I motioned for the men outside to come in. Not only did they ignore me, but more climbed out. "You won't find any deer," I told them. "We don't have wild animals roaming around unless you count stray cats." The men kept going out the window without regarding me. As I watched them leave, frustration rose in my throat. "Robin," I said, "don't go."

He smiled and tucked one of my ringlets behind my ear. His voice took on a silky tone. "I regret I cannot stay and fulfill your wishes in that regard."

His men chuckled, and a few made comments about my wishes.

I flushed in embarrassment.

"'Tis true your beau, Bo, has failed you," Robin Hood said, stroking my cheek, "but I'm unready to stand up with any woman, even one as beautiful as yourself."

"That wasn't why I . . . I'm not . . .," I sputtered. "Don't you want to go back to Sherwood Forest?"

Robin Hood's hand slid from my cheek to my shoulder. "You brought us to a new land—a fortuitous event, indeed. The sheriff's men have death warrants on our heads, and they recently took to setting dogs on our trail. So, no, returning to Sherwood is not a pressing matter." He took one of my hands in his, then lifted it to his lips and gave it a brief kiss. "And now I must bid you farewell." After dropping my hand, he gestured to Little John. The big man left his place guarding my bedroom door and climbed out the window with more agility than I expected.

I blinked at Robin Hood, unbelieving. "But what about the poor villagers who depend on you?"

He laughed, which surprised me, then held up *The Adventures of Robin Hood* for me to see. "You are as amusing as your history." With the book still in his hand, he swung himself out the window and onto the rocks that bordered our lawn. The first few Merry Men were already running down the street.

I watched them disappear and sighed. I supposed they would come back when they realized what the world had become. They weren't going to be able to forage for food. Once you left town, the only things around were cacti and a bunch of scrub brushes that were waiting to dry up and turn into tumbleweeds. I hoped the Merry Men's survival skills would help them remember which house I lived in. That way, when they had second thoughts about living off the land, they would be able to find their way back.

I took some clothes into the bathroom and changed. Then I picked up the things the Merry Men had thrown around. Thankfully, most of the broken glass was on the outside of the window, so I didn't have to clean up much of that.

I couldn't even mutter angrily about them trashing my stuff. Not after I had just been to the police station for trashing city hall. Mr. Handsome Undercover Policeman would probably find it fitting that I was finishing up the night on my hands, wiping up spit from my carpet.

When I finished, I sat on my bed calling Chrissy. No one showed up except for a few bugs that flew through the broken window. I shut my eyes to rest them, and the next thing I knew, it was Saturday morning.

• • •

Sandra opened my door and called out, "Rise and shine. Time to do your chores." My dad usually woke me up on Saturday mornings, so the fact that Sandra had done it meant he was still mad at me. I was probably in for something horrendous like scraping pigeon poop off the roof.

I pulled the sheet over my head.

Sandra walked over and sat on my bed. "Come on, look on the bright side: today has to be better than yesterday."

Sandra was one of those optimistic people who not only saw the glass as half full, but figured it was half full of her favorite drink.



I tossed the sheet off and sat up—not from optimism, but because I suddenly remembered the rest of last night. My fairy godmother. Robin Hood. I didn't want Sandra to see my astonishment, so I tried to keep my expression calm.

She wasn't looking at me though. Her gaze zeroed in on the gaping hole in my window and she let out a shrill gasp of alarm. "What happened?"

I didn't think she'd believe me if I told her a bunch of Merry Men broke it. In fact, I wasn't sure I believed it myself. Could that stuff have really happened? Fairies and leprechauns didn't pop into people's bedrooms. Robin Hood and the Merry Men weren't real.

But nothing was left of my window except for jagged shards. That part was real enough.

I chose my words carefully. My lies might have magical consequences. "I was in the kitchen, and I heard a crash. When I got back to my room, the window was broken."

"Why didn't you tell us?"

"It was late."

She walked to the window, shaking her head. "You didn't see who did it?"

"No." Which was true. I didn't know which of the Merry Men had shattered it.

"It must have been Bo." Sandra's jaw clamped tight. "Well, he can pay for this window along with the ones he broke at city hall. I'll call his parents and tell them so."

"Don't," I said. "I'll pay for it." I hardly had any money to my name. I would have to find a job. I supposed that didn't matter, since I wasn't going to have a social life now.

She put her hands on her hips, watching my curtain flutter in and out of the frame. "I'll ask your father to put a board across it for now. I doubt anybody will be able to come out to fix it until Monday anyway."

Sandra left, muttering about Bo, and I stood in my room staring at the window. "Chrissy?" I called.

No one came. Had she been a dream—the product of an overstressed, overemotional brain? I walked to the closet tentatively. Last night I had hung up the long green dress. If it was still there, it would be proof I hadn't imagined everything.

I opened the closet, but the hanger I'd put the dress on was bare. I flipped through every shirt, dress, and skirt hanging there. No green dress. I threw up my hands. "It's official. I've lost my mind."

That's how the day started. It didn't get any better.

My chore list included hauling everything out of the garage, sweeping it out, and hauling everything back. Then I had to clean the bathrooms, mop the floor, and do laundry. Every once in a while, I whispered, "Chrissy?"

No twinkling lights erupted anywhere. I wasn't sure whether to be relieved or disappointed. The more the day wore on, the easier it was to convince myself none of the magical things had happened. I had dreamed it all.

Dad and Nick spent the day doing landscaping and painting the trim on the house, fixing it up for when we had to put it on the market. Nick had the radio on and sang along, but Dad worked with a stern expression, his eyes hard as stone.

Fine, I told myself. Let him think about what a disappointment I've turned out to be. He had chalked up a lot of points in the disappointment category himself.

It wasn't until eight o' clock that night when I was putting away my clean clothes that I saw the pathetic-o-meter sitting on my dresser.

I had completely forgotten about it, and I dropped the clothes on the floor and stared at the disk. The blue area had grown, and a new sentence read: *Thinks criminals are cool. 82 percent pathetic.*

I did not think criminals were cool, but that was beside the point. I hadn't dreamed the pathetic-o-meter into existence. It was real. And a fairy had given it to me.



Granted, the dress had disappeared, but then, Cinderella's dress had disappeared at midnight. So maybe fairy fashions just did that.

Still only half believing in my sanity, I picked up the pathetic-o-meter, walked to Nick's bedroom, and knocked. He opened the door. He wore a T-shirt that had pi written on it down to a thousand digits, but thanks to today's chores, a lot of them were now paint splotches.

I held the disk out to him. "You can see this, right?"

He squinted at my hand. "You think criminals are cool? Well, then it's not surprising that you're eighty-two percent pathetic."

"Did you see me wearing a long green dress last night? And there were a bunch of medieval men in my room?"

"Yeah, where did you find those guys anyway? They made Bo look downright normal."

I stepped into Nick's room, shut the door, and leaned against it. I wasn't sure whether to be happy or horrified about what had happened. "I *really* have a fairy godmother."

Nick gazed at me, unimpressed with this pronouncement. "If you're not careful you'll *really* have a parole officer too." He waved a hand in my direction. "Are you purposely seeking out every criminal you can find? Was there some sort of membership drive at the police station?"

Robin Hood and the Merry Men were real. And that meant they were out wandering around Rock Canyon somewhere. "This is going to be a problem." I put my hand against my chest, trying to stop my panic from spreading. "I accidentally wished Robin Hood and his Merry Men here. I need to find them."

"Yeah," he said, "you and every police officer in town."