

The Rainbow Princess

(A Fairy Story)

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Harvacour sat on the rock, weary from the day's hunting. "You tire my Lord" commented his companion standing over him and holding his bow with one end resting on the ground.

"That I do, Leonay" the prince replied. "But then again you have the size and stamina to out-perform any mortal that I know."

Harvacour was a tall handsome man of slim build and with shoulder-length blonde hair. His companion, on the other hand was a heavily built man with black, also shoulder-length hair and sporting a full black beard. Both were skilled bowmen and known for being very adept with the sword. They had left the castle early and spent a not altogether successful day hunting wild boar. Having instructed the attendants to return to the castle with the meagre game they had caught, the two men were now quenching their thirsts with wine from the leather pouches they had removed from their saddles. Harvacour's horse was a strongly built stallion of pure white whereas Leonay's horse was jet black. The two men had known each other from childhood and had always remained close and loyal companions, spending much of the time in each other's company.

"My father will not be too impressed with our lack of success today" Harvacour said, grinning.

"And I know that he is impatient to see you wed to King Rodian's daughter Adorah. He often tells me that it is time you settled down to undertake your royal duties responsibly and to start thinking about an heir for the Kingdom."

"Tis true that she is a very attractive and desirable woman, but for me the thrill of the chase and our adventures and explorations together still engender much excitement in me and I do not consider myself ready to give them up."

"Your mother, the Queen, would call it irresponsibility" Leonay laughed. "After all, we have journeyed together to many strange lands and have seen wondrous things. There cannot be many places left in this world that we have not visited."

Harvacour placed his wine pouch on the ground and turned to look behind him. There was a gap between the trees and through this gap he could look across the valley to the land beyond.

"Yet I still wonder what secrets the Land of Ectomore holds."

"We shall never know" Leonay replied, his expression changing to one of seriousness. "You know that it is a forbidden land ruled by the goblin king Gomer."

"I sometimes dream of entering that land" the prince replied, ignoring Leonay's statement. "In my dreams I think of it as the 'Rainbow Land'."

"Why might that be?" Leonay asked, knitting his eyebrows.

"Because on many occasions I have observed beautiful rainbows with their brilliant displays of red-orange-yellow-green-blue-indigo-violet."

"So, isn't that quite normal when sunlight shines through rain showers?"

Harvacour turned to face his companion. "Yes, 'tis true Leonay but I have espied these rainbows when there is no rain and sometimes not even sunshine."

"That is not possible my prince; you know that as well as I do, and ..."

Harvacour returned his gaze to the land of Ectomore. "I am well aware of that Leonay but there is something about these rainbows that are ... what can I say ... magical."

"Well, what do you expect Harvacour. It is known that Gomer practices magic, and evil magic at that. I say these strange rainbows are displayed to entice inquisitive minds and adventurers. I know that many have been tempted to enter Ectomore and those that have, have never been seen or heard of again. Cast such thoughts from your mind prince; no good can come of them."

Harvacour heard what his companion was saying but the rainbows were lately dominating his thoughts whenever he was alone, to the extent that even the King had become aware of his son's obsession.

Leonay broached the subject again. "The Queen has spoken to me many times about you, Harvacour. Only last week she suggested that the Princess Adorah would make a wonderful wife for you. Such a beautiful, elegant and intelligent young lady with such a lovely disposition." He paused.

"Go on."

"I agreed to have a talk with you on our next hunting expedition, this one in fact. Maybe the excitement of the chase is beginning to wear off and

we really should start looking at more productive pursuits. The Queen is certainly hoping that you will start taking your royal duties seriously.”

“Hm” replied Harvacour glancing over at Ectomore again. “We’ll see.”

Several days later, Harvacour and Leonay were sitting together by a stream satiating their hunger and thirst.

"My Prince" Leonay began.

Harvacour glanced at his companion. "Your tone sounds ominous my friend."

"You are aware of the King's and Queen's concern for your future aren't you?"

"Ah, nagging again" the prince laughed. "Now they are trying to recruit you as an ally."

Leonay relaxed at the prince's response. "Seriously Harvacour, I think we should make this the last hunt for the time being. I have been assigned other duties by the Court, which does not mean, I might add, that we will not remain close companions but ..."

"Yes, I know" Harvacour interrupted. "I need to start behaving more responsibly."

"Your words, not mine." Leonay smiled, grateful that the Prince was at last being realistic."

Harvacour got up and glanced around the woodland. "One last chase; eh Leonay?"

"One last chase" Leonay agreed.

The two men packed their supplies and mounted their horses.

"Let's find us a real prize as a farewell" Harvacour called out.

"Of course" Leonay agreed as they rode deeper into the forest.

Suddenly, Harvacour stopped and held up his hand.

"What is it, my prince?"

"Look, Leonay" he whispered pointing at a pure white deer munching berries on a tree. "This one we must not kill" he whispered to his friend.

"No; better that we try and capture it as a trophy. The king and queen would be honoured to own such a handsome beast."

As the two men eased their horses closer the doe looked up and, sensing their presence, moved off away from them.

“Quick Leonay” the prince said. “You move to the right and I to the left. Hopefully we will be able to cut it off and catch it in a pincer movement.”

The two men immediately gave chase with Harvacour moving left, as agreed, to force the doe over towards Leonay; but the animal kept just ahead of him. The prince rode hard trying to keep the deer in sight as he worked his way through the forest, assuming that Leonay was also tracking its flight. Minutes passed quickly as the deer veered over more to the left and started to descend an embankment but Harvacour managed to keep it in sight. So intent was he with the chase that he was not aware that he had entered Ectomore, the lands of Gomer, the goblin king.

The deer now ran into a narrow gully between two huge boulders with Harvacour in pursuit. Unfortunately the gully led to a dead-end where the deer quickly turned about to find Harvacour blocking its exit. Instinctively, the prince loaded an arrow into his bow but hesitated, unsure what to do next. The next moment there came the ominous growl of a wild cat which prompted both Harvacour and the deer to look up to the animal’s left. There, crouched on one of the large boulders was a black panther snarling at the deer. Harvacour sensed the fear in the doe’s face as the cat crept forward ready to pounce, ignoring the presence of the human. Harvacour slowly pulled back the bow string keeping his eyes on the panther. Suddenly it launched itself at the deer but Harvacour was quicker and released the arrow to kill the panther instantly. While both of them stood staring at the dead panther, the prince became aware that he should be calling for Leonay’s assistance. As he was about to do just that a miraculous thing happened. A transformation took place and the doe slowly turned into a beautiful maiden with long blonde hair and wearing a long flowing white robe. Harvacour lowered his bow and stared at the woman not believing his eyes.

“Do not be alarmed my prince” the maiden said in a soft voice.

Harvacour dismounted. “What ... who ... are you?”

“I am Chepi, guardian of the forest and protector of the good and honest” she replied.

“But ... you are ... were ...”

“Yes, a deer, and you saved my life.”

Harvacour suddenly felt guilty. “But I was going to ... ”

She pre-empted him. "In spite of how long you and your friend were prepared to chase me, you would never have succeeded in capturing me."

"But you were trapped. You couldn't have escaped. I could have ..."

"No, events would not have developed as you think, but let us not dwell on that incident." Chepi stepped forward and gave the prince a ring. "First take this ring as a token of my thanks for saving me."

Harvacour took from her hand a gold ring which supported a large crystal. As he placed it on his finger the crystal radiated a rainbow coloured light that immediately brought to mind the rainbows he had observed in Gomer's kingdom.

"Take good care of the ring" Chepi continued. "It possesses properties that will help you when you face dangers, which you will in due course."

Harvacour looked surprised. "How would you know that? What sort of dangers?"

"You will know when they occur, and in answer to your first question: your destiny is set and you will do what you consider honourable and just. Now I must go, as you must also, because we are in the land of Gomer the goblin king and his kingdom is guarded by a dragon."

Chepi then produced a golden sword. "As my second gift to you, take this sword. It has been forged by elves and has the strength to cut through any material. Gomer's dragon wears a golden collar. Sever that collar and Gomer will no longer control it."

Harvacour gratefully accepted the sword. "How will I know when and how to use the ring?"

"You will know when you face danger. The ring will grant you six requests, so use it wisely."

"Six?" questioned the prince. "Why six?"

"The answer will become obvious, Harvacour. But now I must go and good luck in you quest."

Harvacour glanced around nervously as the maiden changed back into the white doe, which proceeded to walk past the prince out of the gully. After a few moments pause, he made to go after the deer but there was no longer any sign of it. He stood there wondering what she meant by his 'quest'. *What did she mean?*

Harvacour led his horse out of the gulley, anxious now to find Leonay. If his companion had also ventured into Ectomore, the prince needed to find him quickly as it was likely that he would also be in danger. He remounted and was about to retrace his steps when he realised that he was no longer sure of the route he taken, being so busy chasing the doe. As he lifted up his head to see if he could recognise any landmarks he looked up and gasped. A rainbow was clearly visible through the trees even though there was no indication of rain. Working his way through the forest to obtain a better view he was astounded to discover that unlike a normal rainbow, this one appeared to be more solid with a definite start and finish, one end being anchored not far from where he was sitting on his horse. Fascinated and now oblivious to any dangers, Harvacour was now intent on finding where the rainbow reached the ground. This was certainly no ordinary rainbow.

Working his way through the trees he noticed the rainbow becoming clearer as he got closer; then he stopped. Voices. He could hear voices: women's voices, which were not that far away. He decided it best to continue on foot, so dismounted and tied his horse to a tree. As a precaution, he kept his sword with him but left his bow with the horse. Slowly, he crept forward peering through the trees to locate the source of the chatter. Finally, he found the end of the rainbow in a clearing hidden by the surrounding trees. It emanated from a sparkling pool in the centre of the clearing. The pond was ringed with seven large boulders. One boulder was slightly larger than the others and on it sat the most beautiful woman that Harvacour had ever laid his eyes upon. She wore a violet flowing gown with her long blonde hair falling about her shoulders. The other six boulders were also occupied by beautiful maidens each wearing a gown of one of the other colours of the rainbow. Harvacour was mesmerized by the spectacle of the 'coloured' maidens talking amongst themselves but with the maiden in violet being the obvious centre of attention. He couldn't help but notice that, although the conversation was animated, it seemed to convey an underlying sadness which was present even during brief instances of laughter.

The prince was curious and anxious to introduce himself to the group but hesitated, as he did not wish to alarm them. He manoeuvred his body to get into a more comfortable position to devise a plan of approach but inadvertently stepped on a twig. The crack immediately startled the

maidens, who gathered around the one in violet, the whole group staring in the direction of the prince.

The maiden in violet called out loudly. "Who is it that is hiding in the trees and unwilling to show themselves?"

Harvacour stepped out into the clearing. "I am Prince Harvacour from Zlonda and apologise my lady" he replied, bowing to her. "I heard you and your companions talking and wondered why such a beautiful a group of maidens would be out in these woods alone. When I discovered you enjoying innocent conversation, I was reluctant to reveal myself in order not to alarm you." As he stepped forward towards the edge of the pool, he was overwhelmed with the beauty of the maiden dressed in violet. "So, I ask myself: who might this beautiful damsel be and who might be the lucky man to whom she is promised?"

"I am the Princess Violetta, daughter of Gomer, the ruler of Ectomore and I am promised to no one" she replied. She raised her hand and indicated the group of maidens who had gathered about her. "These are my companions."

"I am indeed intrigued" the prince commented. "May I enquire why you are all dressed after the colours of the rainbow which, I might add, is not like a rainbow I have ever seen."

"That is because this is a magic rainbow and we are its children. It is our protector and guardian. Allow me to introduce my companions, who are also my keepers and protectors, as commanded by my father."

Each of the maidens now spoke in turn as per the colours of the rainbow, commencing with the maiden dressed in red.

"I am Ruby, to alert Violetta to danger."

"I am Oadira, the keeper of fire."

"I am Yasmin, the bringer of daylight."

"I am Gretel, keeper of our forests and meadows."

"I am Brielle, keeper of our oceans and rivers."

"And I am Imogen, keeper of the night."

Violetta then spoke again. "So what brings you to Ectomore, Prince Harvacour of Zlonda? Lord Gomer does not tolerate strangers in his

kingdom; you are therefore in grave danger being here and I advise you to return to Zlonda post haste."

"That, I cannot do in the presence of such a beautiful damsel. I would be honoured to meet your father so that we might become more acquainted. If I may then be so bold to suggest that should I be successful in my wooing you then we could unite our kingdoms in marriage."

"You are certainly speaking very candidly, Prince Harvacour, but I regret that what you suggest is not possible. Lord Gomer is very possessive and will not allow me to be wed."

At that moment a fearful roar could be heard in the distance. The princess and her companions glanced behind them, Violetta returning her attention to the prince with a worried expression. "Now you must go, quickly, as Nogard is approaching and will consume you. Please ... go ... now."

Harvacour stepped back towards the forest. "I will not give up. I will return. To ensconce such a beautiful princess and daughter away from the eyes of the world and joys of which she is being deprived must not be allowed to continue."

The roar of the approaching creature was becoming louder.

"Go! Go!" Violetta repeated. "It is also time for us to return to my father's castle."

She beckoned her companions to gather around her as Harvacour backed away. What happened next astounded him as the maidens merged and the seven of them disappeared, as did the rainbow. Harvacour's last thought as he mounted his white horse and rode off was '*the Rainbow Princess*'.

Harvacour was somewhat relieved when he heard the sound of Leonay's voice and guessed that he had probably now left Ectomore; yet he could not stop thinking about Violetta and was determined to try and find out more about the princess. He thought about the ring on his finger and wondered if it had something to do with her. It seemed too much of a coincidence that he had met Chepi just prior to finding Violetta. His thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of Leonay on his black steed.

"Harvacour" he called out, riding up alongside him, each clasping the forearm of the other in greeting. "Where have you been? I thought you were lost or had strayed into Ectomore and been apprehended by Gomer, which would have made it near impossible for me to return to court with such bad news."

"Do not fret, Leonay" Harvacour replied. "I can assure you that I was never in any danger, but I do have an amazing tale to tell which I will relate to you on our way back to the castle."

They were only a short distance from the castle gates when Harvacour had finished. Leonay pulled up and stopped. Harvacour did likewise.

"What is it, Leonay? Why do you stop?"

"Forget your rainbow princess, Harvacour. Gomer allows no one to enter Ectomore as I have already told you. Such a quest will only end in disaster."

The prince was taken aback and displayed a hint of annoyance. "Leonay? Why are trying to dissuade me? I always thought we were totally supportive of each other and always shared together any dangers we might face."

"I am fully aware of that, Harvacour, but when I informed your father of the tales that I had heard, he forbid me to mention them to you on the pain of dismissal. All I can do is apologize for keeping such information from you."

Harvacour felt humble. "No need, Leonay; I understand."

They resumed their journey towards the castle gates.

"In spite of your warning, Leonay, I know that I must find out more about this beautiful princess. It is my ambition and no one will stop me."

Leonay nodded slowly."

"You do understand, Leonay?"

"I do, my prince, but please do not ask me to help you."

"I will not compromise your position, Leony; but pray, whom may I approach to discover more about this princess?"

"All I can suggest is that you ask your father and mother, but be assured that they will request that you desist from embarking on any quest to seek out this princess."

As they reached the castle, Harvacour passed through the gates with a heavy heart and burning desire to return to find Violetta.

The prince decided that in the first instance he would approach his mother, the queen, who would more likely be sympathetic to his feelings.

She bid her son sit by her and put aside the embroidery which with she was working. "You look sad, Harvacour. What ails you my son?"

Harvacour told her about the pure white deer he and Leonay had seen and what followed.

The queen took his hands in hers. "Harvacour, your heart is ruling your head and you must cast these thoughts from your mind. There are many things of which you are not aware; things that it is best not to know about."

Harvacour removed his hands from her grasp. "Mother, one day I will be King of Zlonda, God willing, and surely it is important that I have knowledge of everything around me. How else can I protect the kingdom and its subjects?" He paused an instant. "Then there is this magical deer who revealed itself to me as the guardian of the forest."

The queen lowered her head pondering how to reply to her son. "Harvacour, it has been your father's and my intention to tell you more about Ectomore at the appropriate time, but it is obvious that you are now ready to receive this information. I will go speak with your father about it immediately, so please be patient. I will return shortly."

Harvacour sat waiting for what seemed a long time. He got up off the couch and started pacing up and down the room, when someone knocked on the door. He stopped and called out "Enter".

The door opened to reveal a servant standing in the doorway. "The King and Queen request that you join them, Prince Harvacour."

The prince thanked the servant and hastily made his way to the king's private quarters.

Harvacour's father immediately advised him to forget Violetta, reminding him that it was forbidden to enter Ectomore.

"It is rumoured that Gomer has a dragon to protect his land and drive out or consume strangers" he said.

"That explains the roar I heard when Violetta was obliged to return to her father's castle."

"You must forget about Violetta."

The prince rose to his feet, pacing up and down the room. "I cannot father; and I also cannot believe that she is the daughter of Gomer. She is much too beautiful to be the child of what I understand is an unpleasant goblin." Harvacour noticed the king and queen glancing at each other. "You are hiding something from me, father. Why are so against my wooing of the princess?"

"Sit down, my son" the king said, calmly.

Harvacour did as he was asked, waiting for the king to explain.

"Many years ago, the Queen of Archeon longed for a child but sadly the gods did not grant her wish. She was so desperate, that she approached Gomer, who was known to practice magic. Gomer offered to help her, but only if she promised to agree to his demand when she gave birth to the child. Unfortunately she was too hasty in agreeing, because after the child was born Gomer turned up to claim his fee."

"Which was?"

"The child that the queen had delivered."

Harvacour was astounded. "What? How could he do that? Didn't the king refuse?"

"Gomer told the king that if he reneged on his promise his kingdom would be 'devastated'. Sadly, the queen was so distraught that she went mad and killed herself."

"That is dreadful tale" the prince said, "but what about the king? Couldn't he have done something?"

"He did. He took an army into Ectomore but they were never heard of again."

Harvacour was truly shocked at what he was being told. "So this Princess Violetta is the daughter of the king and queen of Archeon."

"Yes, my son, which is why you must forget her and wed Princess Adorah. Any attempt to rescue Princess Violetta will only result in your death and a threat to our kingdom, should Gomer decide to exact revenge."

Harvacour felt downcast. "I hear what you are saying, father, but my desire for Princess Violetta is so strong that I regret that I am unable to promise not to attempt a rescue. She deserves more than being a slave to that evil goblin."

"But she knows no other life" his mother added, "and you could well end up destroying us all."

"I feel that the Gods are with me" Harvacour replied. "Our kingdom will be safe in your hands, father, and with Leonay at your side."

"Then all I can do, my son, is to wish you luck and may the Gods be with you."

Harvacour packed a bag of provisions and, armed with his bow, arrows and the golden sword, bid farewell to his parents, Leonay and the court. Most felt sad with misgivings regarding the prince's safety. He threw his arms around Leonay. "Farewell my close and long-serving companion. I know that with your support and loyalty I will be leaving our kingdom in safe hands. Wish me luck in my quest and, if the Gods smile on me, I will return with a most beautiful princess."

The prince rode off, looking forward to the challenge and anxious to hold Princess Violetta in his arms; but first he had to convince her that she was not the goblin's daughter. As he rode towards Ectomore he subconsciously fingered the ring that Chepi had given him, wondering how it was going to protect him from supposed dangers unknown.

His trail led to a ridge that overlooked Ectomore but there was no sign of the rainbow. He settled down for the night and decided that if it failed to materialize the next day he would enter Gomer's domain and seek out the goblin's castle. Although he awoke early with still no sign of the rainbow he hesitated to descend into Gomer's kingdom, slightly nervous following Chepi's warning. His determination, however, returned when the image of Violetta entered his mind. By late morning he finally saddled up and mounted his horse ready to descend into Ectomore. As he moved off, the rainbow suddenly appeared, even though it was a clear, bright day. The sight of it made his heart beat with expectation. He quickly descended the ridge, keeping the rainbow in view as he negotiated his path through the forest. After about an hour he became aware of talking and laughter as on the previous occasion but this time the sounds took him to the outskirts of a lush green meadow carpeted with wild flowers of a multitude of colours. Dismounting his horse he lay on the ground watching Violetta and her companions throwing a ball to each other. Observing the princess once again, the urge to leave his hiding place and approach her again became difficult to resist. As he watched trying to decide when to make a move the group of maidens stopped throwing the ball and appeared to be staring over to Harvacour's left at something not visible to him. The maiden known as

Ruby was pointing at whatever they were staring at. Harvacour wished he could see what it was.

"Let's try and catch it" one of the maidens called out.

"Gomer would be pleased to possess such a magnificent beast" said one of the others.

Harvacour immediately thought of Chepi in the form of the deer. His assumption was proved correct when he briefly glimpsed the beast disappearing into the forest.

"Come on" Ruby called out. "We can trap it between us if we surround it."

They all started to move off as Violetta sat down on the grass.

"Aren't you going join us, Violetta?" Gretel asked, looking back at the princess.

"No, Gretel, you go ahead" was the reply. "I feel a little weary after entertaining my father this morning."

Harvacour couldn't count his luck as the six maidens ran off in the attempt to capture the deer. When their voices had died away, he quickly got up and stepped out of his hiding place to approach Violetta, who was not immediately aware of his presence. Hearing his approach she quickly stood up with a surprised and worried expression. She looked about her, particularly in the direction taken by her companions, then turned her attention back to the prince.

"Why have you come back Prince Harvacour?"

"To take you away from this place" Harvacour replied excitedly. "Gomer is not your father so I have come to take you back to your own lands."

Violetta looked confused and shook her head. "What are you saying? Of course he is my father. It is your intention to abduct me? You will fail; for my father will summon Nogard who will consume you with his fiery breath."

"No, please listen" the prince begged. "You were taken away from your real parents, the king and queen of Archeon, by Gomer just after you were born."

Violetta slowly backed away from him.

"Why, pray, would he do that? You are being deceitful in trying to lure me away from my home."

At that moment something over to Harvacour's right attracted his attention causing Violetta to also gaze in the same direction. They both saw the white deer standing at the edge of the forest.

"The white deer!" Violetta exclaimed, turning her attention back to Harvacour. "You must go now. My companions will no doubt be returning soon as they are tracking that beautiful creature."

At this point the deer slowly walked towards Harvacour and Violetta standing together. As it approached, it transformed into Chepi once again. Violetta put her hand to her mouth with her eyes wide open, surprised at the transformation.

"Do not be alarmed, Princess Violetta." Chepi said. "Prince Harvacour speaks the truth, as you will see."

As Chepi explained how Violetta's mother had yearned for a child and what followed, resulting in her early demise, a hologram appeared which showed a man and woman, both well-dressed, seated and holding a newborn baby.

"They are your true parents" Chepi said, as Violetta gaped in amazement at the image.

"You look so much like your mother", Harvacour said, "and of equal beauty."

Tears flowed from Violetta's eyes. "Is this true and is my father still alive?"

"It is the truth" Chepi replied, "but sadly your father died trying to take you back by marching into Ectomore. He was never seen again."

Violetta went quiet with a look of sadness on her face.

"What is it, Violetta?" Harvacour asked. "We must make haste and go, now."

"I am unable to come with you, Harvacour."

"Why not? Is it your companions? They are still looking for Chepi."

She looked up into Harvacour's eyes. "I and my companions are bound together by the rainbow, which in turn is controlled by Gomer. Only by breaking the bonds will I be released from Gomer's control."

Chepi suddenly interrupted. "Your companions are returning, Violetta. I have to leave you."

"How do we break these bonds, Chepi" Harvacour asked.

"You will know when the time comes." She replied. "Just remember carefully what I told you. You can invoke the ring's help six times to realise your destiny."

At that, she was transformed back into the deer and quickly bound off into the forest. Each of the maidens now appeared from different directions calling each other.

"We were not successful, Violetta" Ruby said, approaching the princess. "We were closing in on the deer but then it disappeared."

Yasmin now stepped forward. "Did you see it, Violetta? I saw it going in your direction straight towards the meadow."

"No, I did not" Yasmin.

"But you must have; I saw it running away from you into the forest."

"I was probably dozing; I was feeling weary."

"Or talking to the prince" said Oadira, accusingly.

None of them had previously noticed the prince, who had moved away from Violetta under a large oak tree. They now all followed the direction of Oadira's pointing finger.

"Why has he come back?" Asked Briella. "You told him it was dangerous."

"Perhaps he has come to try and abduct you" Imogen now joined in.

"He won't be able to" Ruby said. "Gomer will not allow it." She now turned her attention to Harvacour. "Why are you here, prince?"

Harvacour wasn't quite sure how to respond. He didn't want to frighten them all so decided just to throw doubt into their minds.

"Princess Violetta is not Gomer's daughter."

The six companions all stared at Harvacour.

"What do you mean?" Said Gretel. "Of course she is. Gomer told us. He was so concerned about Violetta's safety and happiness that he gathered the six of us and bound us together in the form of the rainbow, which he controls. It is therefore impossible for Violetta to leave Ectomore."

"No" interjected Violetta. "It is true. I have seen it with my own eyes from Chepi, the forest fairy."

"But Gomer told us that Chepi is a wicked, evil, ugly witch who casts spells on people who cross her" Briella said.

"When did you see her?" Oadira asked.

"While you were all trying to capture the white deer" Violetta replied. "She appeared after the prince told me who my true parents were and how

Gomer deceived them. The prince came to take me back to them, or would have; but sadly my parents are dead due to Gomer's actions."

Ruby spoke again. "Surely that is why Gomer has always protected and guarded us so well – to stop anyone abducting you."

"But why does he guard us so closely and prevent us seeing anyone outside his court? Unlike this brave prince, we do not have freedom to journey outside Ectomore. No; Prince Harvacour is not abducting me. He is rescuing me." Violetta went on to relate what Harvacour and Chepi had told her.

Harvacour could now see that doubt had now been sown in the minds of the maidens.

"If this is all true" questioned Ruby, "then we are obliged to help you, Violetta, in whatever way we can."

Harvacour stepped forward excitedly. "You can" he said. "Through this ring, which Chepi gave me, I can control the rainbow and use it to release Violetta from Gomer's control."

"You are wasting your time, prince" Yasmin laughed. "Go now, before Gomer finds out you are here."

A distant roar prompted Ruby to glance over her shoulder. "Nogard!" She turned her attention back to Harvacour. "It is too late prince. Gomer knows you are here and Nogard is searching for you. It is still daylight so you must go and we must return to the castle."

"Wait!" Said Harvacour. "Where is the castle and what do you mean about it being daylight?"

As the maidens gathered around Violetta, the rainbow began to fade.

"Follow the rainbow and follow the stars" Ruby called out. "And should you need our help, you can summon us through the rainbow as we are now obliged to help Violetta." The last words he heard as the rainbow arched away into the distance were: "Nogard sleeps at night."

The prince watched the rainbow fade into the distance, noting the direction, and returned to fetch his horse to set out for Gomer's castle.

Harvacour mounted his horse and checked the position of the sun, in case he ended up going in the wrong direction. Fortunately, the forest was not particularly dense and there were numerous places where there was little or no tree cover. The intermittent roars that Harvacour could hear were getting louder, which indicated that Nogard was prowling around the forest looking for him. Unless he reached the castle soon, he knew that he would have to face the dragon. As he rode as fast as he could, he thought about the ring on his finger and how it might be able to help him if he encountered the beast.

He realised that time was running out when he heard the sound of something large crashing through the undergrowth, suggesting that Nogard was close by. Bringing to mind Ruby's last words and recalling what Chepi had told him about the magic ring, he stopped and removed it to examine it more closely. He watched the rainbow of colours emanating from it and his eyes focused on the colour 'indigo', which reminded him of the night. "Of course" he muttered to himself. "At night Nogard sleeps." He stared at the ring. "Help me Imogen."

Imogen instantly appeared before him. "I can grant you the darkness of the night and with the moon to lighten your way" she said to the prince. "You will be safe from Nogard and just need to follow the moon and stars. By accepting my help, I will be freed from the rainbow."

"That I do" the prince replied.

Rapidly, the sky darkened and revealed a starlit sky with the moon ahead of him. Imogen disappeared and the sounds of Nogard's approach ceased. Harvacour set off again for Gomer's castle, keeping the moon in view as he made his way through the forest.

In the castle, Gomer sat staring into a magic mirror that, instead of showing his reflection, displayed a number of images, including one of the prince. He erupted in anger when the indigo colour faded away and the mirror went dark. He had just lost one of his controls over the rainbow and Violetta. "That interfering prince will pay for this" he snarled, and waved his

hand across the mirror to bring up an image of his castle before waving his hand over it once again muttering some words.

Harvacour knew something was wrong when he smelt burning and soon saw the flames of a fire in the distance. Hurrying as fast as he could, he came across a wall of fire blocking his way. "What the?"

"Gomer has ringed his castle with fire" he heard Chepi's voice say.

"So how ..."

"The solution is in the ring."

He took the ring off again and studied the colours.

"I need water" he said to himself, as the image of blue oceans came to mind. "Brielle" he called out. "I need you help"

Brielle appeared before him. "I can grant you a storm that will extinguish the flames. Should you accept this offer, I will be freed from the rainbow."

"I accept, Brielle, and thank you for your help."

"But do take care" she warned. "The storm will be heavy and the water will run in streams."

As with Imogen, Brielle disappeared.

As daylight approached, the storm began and the ring of fire was slowly extinguished leaving a ring of wet smouldering vegetation around the castle. Gomer slammed his fists on the table in front of the mirror as he watched his fire die and the blue colour of the rainbow disappear. He knew what was happening and that the prince was trying to take Violetta from him with help from her companions. His control had weakened a little more, but he was determined to stop Harvacour. He waved his hand over the mirror again, muttering more strange words.

It was late morning and Harvacour now stood in front of Gomer's castle. The question was: how was he going to gain entry? Slowly he made his way around the walls looking for a way to gain access but the walls were far too high. He took the ring off again seeking a solution.

"If only there was something to climb up" he said to himself.

"There, I may be able to help you" said the voice of Gretel, who now appeared before him. "Gomer does not venture often from his castle; and,

although the walls protect him from his enemies, they can offer support in other ways.”

Harvacour glanced at the remaining colours emanating from the ring and focused on the green, which reminded him of the countryside flora. “A climbing vine is what I need” he said aloud.

“That I can provide and free myself from the rainbow if you accept it” Gretel said.

“I certainly do” the prince stated and, continuing his route around the castle, soon found a giant vine clinging to the castle wall all the way up to the battlements. With his bow over his shoulder he started climbing the vine as Gretel faded away.

With a third link in the rainbow now broken, Gomer was furious. He had ordered the six maidens of the rainbow to commit their lives and complete loyalty in protecting and helping Princess Violetta; now his command was coming back to haunt him. His control over Violetta was slipping fast. With Harvacour gaining access to the castle he summoned Nogard again to stop him.

After a strenuous climb, Harvacour climbed over the castle crenellation to seek the way down from the battlements but was interrupted by a familiar roar and found Nogard crawling his way towards him.

“Now that darkness will not protect you, foolish prince, let us see what you can do to avoid death” Nogard hissed.

The prince quickly placed an arrow in his bow and aimed it at Nogard. “I have no argument with you Nogard. All I wish is to return the Princess Violetta to her true parents from whom she was taken many years ago.”

“Be that as it may” replied Nogard “but I have been commanded by my master, Gomer, to destroy you.”

“Unless I destroy you first” replied Harvacour.

“Your arrows are useless against my skin” Nogard responded, “and there is no way that you can get close to me even with that sword of yours.”

Harvacour took the ring and glanced at the remaining colours: Red, Orange and Yellow – the yellow of the sun. He summoned Yasmin, who appeared before him.

“What is your request, Prince Harvacour?” She asked.

“Bring me the yellow of the sun to blind my adversary” he stated.

Yasmin obliged and thanked Harvacour for her release.

Behind Harvacour the clouds parted and the sun shone brightly into Nogard's eyes blinding him to the prince's position. Harvacour laid down his bow, unsheathed his sword and leapt across to Nogard and on to his back before the dragon could shift his position away from the blinding sun. Seeing the golden collar around the dragon's neck he swung the sword down to sever it with single blow.

Nogard turned his head towards Harvacour. "You have released me from Gomer's control Prince Harvacour. I am forever in your debt but unable to help you rescue Princess Violetta from Gomer. I will now return to my own lands, but should you be in need of my services in the future, I will return at your beckoning."

Harvacour jumped down from Nogard's back, thanked the dragon and bid him farewell as Gomer's scream permeated the castle. The goblin now ordered one of his servants to bring Violetta to him and consulted his mirror once again. His reflection disappeared as an image of Harvacour descending from the battlements appeared.

"Now I shall have you" he laughed, waving his hand across the mirror.

"Father" Violetta said with feigned surprise as she entered his quarters. "You seem angry. Why have you summoned me?"

"Your companions" he replied, slowly, "you will not be needing them in the future my dear. They have proved to be ... unreliable."

"But father, you ..."

"Enough, Violetta. Please come with me. We have a dangerous situation in the castle and I must personally protect you."

As Violetta nervously followed the goblin she questioned her parentage, feigning ignorance of the truth. "Father, you have never spoken about my mother. Tell me, what happened to her."

"It is too painful to recall" Gomer lied. "She died because I failed to protect her; but I will not fail you."

Violetta felt uncomfortable with the statement as he led her into a panelled room with a long table in the centre. Gomer sat at the far end of the table facing the double doors through which they had entered.

"Sit next to me my dear" he said in a gentle tone. "You will be safe here."

Questions and doubts entered Violetta's mind and she was becoming suspicious of his actions. What was he planning?

The answer came soon enough when Harvacour burst through the doors and stopped just inside the doorway holding a golden sword. Violetta stood up in surprise but was restrained by Gomer's hand as he gently grasped her arm to ease her back into her seat.

"Prince Harvacour" stated Gomer. "What brings you to my castle?" "You know very well, Gomer. I have come to return Princess Violetta to her rightful home before you took her from her true parents. You deceived them and deprived their daughter of her freedom and choices in life by keeping her captive in the pretence of protecting her."

"But her parentage was transferred to me in full agreement, so you have wasted your time my dear prince; so begone, back to your own realm before death takes you. Violetta wishes to remain with me."

The princess glanced at the goblin but decided it better not to contradict him, fearful of his likely reaction.

"So why have you expended so much effort in trying to prevent me taking her?" Harvacour asked.

"I am merely trying to protect her from being abducted by you for your own pleasure" Gomer replied, leaning forward.

Harvacour continued. "Your control over her is weakening, Gomer, and you have failed in your attempts to stop me. Admit defeat and allow me to escort Violetta out of your castle before it is too late."

Gomer roared with laughter. "Too late for you, pitiful prince. You underestimate my true power, so take your last look at the princess you came to rescue. You may have avoided being devoured by Nogard but you will now suffer a worse fate as your flesh is slowly torn away from you by the cave dwellers."

Harvacour was about to ask what the 'cave dwellers' were when Gomer pressed a button under the table which activated a trap door on which the prince was standing. The last thing he heard as he fell was a scream from Violetta.

Harvacour landed on a stone floor in what he presumed was some sort of cavern. It was pitch black and the only sound was a faint plopping sound of water dripping into a pool. The silence was soon broken by scratching sounds that seemed to come from his immediate surrounds and slowly getting louder and nearer. He needed some light and took off the ring once again to view the three remaining colours: Red, Orange and Violet. Orange, like the flames of a fire came to mind.

“Oriana” he called out I require a torch to find my way.”

Oriana appeared before him holding a flaming torch. “Accept this, Prince Harvacour, and I will be released from the rainbow.”

The prince accepted the flaming torch and Oriana disappeared. At that moment he felt that something nip his ankle and held the flaming torch nearer the ground. He shrank back in horror to see hundreds of small hand-sized white creatures with crab-like pincers scrawling around him. As he lowered it further, the creatures emitted squeaks and scurried away from him to escape the light. He lifted the torch and did indeed find himself in a cavern that stretched ahead of him. He had no choice but to make his way along the stony floor hoping to find a way out.

As he walked, the white creatures moved out of his way but still followed behind him, but well clear of the flaming torch. Shortly, the walls became wet, with water running down to form a shallow stream trickling along the centre of the passage. Crevices further on exuded rivulets of water resulting in a faster running stream. Harvacour presumed that at some point this stream must exit the cavern and hopefully reveal the way out. The white creatures had now given up following him, enabling him to relax and concentrate on finding the exit, and the steadily increasing volume and flow of the now underground river along with wafts of fresh air indicated that he was probably nearing the entrance to the cavern. Fortunately, the passage was still wide enough for him to avoid having to wade through the river running along the centre of the cavern. As the passage became lighter he was able to discard the torch. A new sound of rushing water suggested that the exit was now very close and he soon found himself back in daylight and emerged in a

forest glade where the water gushed into a pool from which the water flowed on into the distance. Harvacour had noted that the cavern path had been reasonably straight, so assumed that Gomer's castle lay more or less directly behind him.

Back in the castle, Gomer paced up and down with the knowledge that only one link in the rainbow remained. This suggested that Oriana had tried to help the prince; but did he survive? His mirror had failed to reveal any images of Harvacour so all he could do was to wait a while in the hope that the prince had perished. He summoned Ruby.

"Your sisters have failed me, my dear. You are therefore relieved of your duties to Princess Violetta."

Ruby, of course, knew the truth about Violetta but feigned surprise. "That is a pity Lord Gomer but rest assured that I will not fail her. My loyalty should never been in doubt." Her last statement, of course, applied to Violetta not the goblin.

"I am glad to hear that, Ruby" Gomer replied, thinking that she meant loyalty to him. "I believe that Prince Harvacour is trying to abduct my daughter and has been receiving assistance from your sisters and an evil witch known as 'Chepi' who has turned them against me. We must stop him for Princess Violetta's future happiness."

"Of course Lord Gomer, but how can I be of assistance?"

"Should this abductor return to the castle I need you to take him to the Great Hall where I can deal with him personally."

"By all means" Ruby replied. "We should do our utmost to help your daughter and protect her."

Gomer seemed satisfied with this response. "Good. You may return to her."

Ruby returned to Violetta's room and informed her that Prince Harvacour was alive and returning to the castle to confront Gomer.

Harvacour was surprised to find the main gate open when he finally reached the castle once more. Gomer was obviously expecting him. As he entered the courtyard, Ruby appeared at a doorway and beckoned him to join her.

"Ruby" he said. "Where is Violetta? Is she safe?"

"She is safe, Prince Harvacour, but you will now have to face Gomer."

“That, I am ready for. I must release Violetta from his power.”

Ruby then gave her warning. “Do not underestimate Gomer. He is extremely dangerous and you must draw blood to weaken his powers.”

“So where is this evil goblin whom I must face?”

“I have been instructed to take you to him in the Great Hall.”

Harvacour followed Ruby where he found Gomer seated on an ornate chair set on a raised dais at the end of the long room which contained a long oak table in the centre. In his right hand he was holding a golden mace with an intricate design, which Harvacour could not make out. On either side of the room close to the wood panelled walls were three statues of goblins in armour with their hands resting on swords with their points between their feet.

“You may leave us now, Ruby” Gomer instructed, then turned his attention to the prince. “We meet again, Prince Harvacour; and for the last time I might add. You may live to regret your futile attempt to try and take Violetta from me; but better for you to die.”

“On the contrary, Gomer. You are about to rue the day that you forced Violetta’s parents to part with their daughter.”

Unbeknown to them both, Violetta and Ruby had entered the hall through a side door and remained hidden behind long velvet drapes interspersed among the wood panelling.

“Where is the Princess Violetta?” Harvacour demanded.

Gomer laughed. “Your question is irrelevant so let us not waste any more time.” He raised the mace and pointed it at each of the statues in turn, muttering some words Harvacour couldn’t make out. To his horror the six statues started to move. He quickly unsheathed his golden sword.

Gomer leant forward. “You can walk away now, prince, before it is too late; but of course I will require payment for the grief you have caused me.”

“I didn’t come here to beg or bargain, Gomer.”

“So be it.” As he waved his mace once more the six armoured goblins came to life and approached Harvacour with their swords raised.

Seeing the likelihood of Harvacour being killed, Violetta called out “No, leave him. I will remain here. You must not give your life for me, Prince Harvacour.”

Both Gomer and Harvacour were surprised to hear her voice. Gomer was particularly incensed.

Harvacour kept his eyes on the goblins but called out to the princess “I came here sworn to rescue you, Violetta. If I fail in that task, then so be it. There will be no other woman for me.”

As the goblins closed in around him, one of them approached Harvacour and brought his sword down on the prince’s with a clash. The goblin may have been slow but the force of the blow was unmistakeable. The prince staggered but managed to dodge behind his attacker and swung his sword at the goblin’s neck, severing the head which crashed to the ground and broke into pieces. He then kicked at the still standing body, whereupon it fell against one of the other goblins causing it to stumble. The fight continued as Harvacour narrowly missed sword thrusts but the battle was taking its toll on the prince. He had decapitated two other goblins and was now facing the last three who now approached him as he jumped up onto the table, waiting.

A voice seemed to call out to him in his mind which made him glance at the ring. The two remaining rainbow colours – red and violet - flowed out to him entwined. Suddenly the red detached and reached out to him whilst the voice, Ruby’s voice, could be heard saying ‘Courage, strength, passion, blood’. He knew that he couldn’t fail Violetta with such a dubious future ahead of her, now that she knew the truth. With boosted courage and strength he leapt off the table and aggressively attacked the three goblins, who backed off at his sudden furious onslaught. Two more heads crashed to the ground as the last goblin stepped behind him swinging his sword down. Harvacour spun round and severed the goblins sword arm, kicking the goblin over for it to crash on the ground.

Gomer was now standing in front of his throne with his face a picture of hate and disgust. “Now die, prince.” He pointed the mace at Harvacour as the prince raised his sword to stop a bolt of intense light.

“Your powers are weakening, Gomer” Harvacour shouted.

Gomer responded by sending further bolts towards the prince, but he parried each one in turn with his sword as he gradually approached the goblin.

“You’re finished, Gomer.”

“No, you are” he shouted back and brought the mace down to strike Harvacour, but the prince was too quick and close enough to sever the mace in two, causing the goblin to back off. He now pulled out his own sword and advanced towards Harvacour; their swords clashing loudly.

The prince was surprised at the goblin’s strength as they fought up and down the room. Violetta could see that after battling with the six goblins, Harvacour was slowing down and being driven back by Gomer. Then, as Harvacour ducked to avoid a swing of Gomer’s sword, he managed to thrust his sword up and pierced Gomer’s sword arm. The surprised goblin dropped his sword with a look of utter surprise on his face and backed off as Harvacour stepped towards him. Gomer fell on his knees as blood dripped from his arm.

“Do not kill me, Prince Harvacour” he stuttered with his head down. “I will repay you ...”

“Tell me why I shouldn’t? You don’t deserve mercy for what you have done; but I am not a killer and neither do I seek vengeance.” The prince raised his sword high as Gomer cowered, waiting for the blow; but instead, Harvacour brought his sword down on Gomer’s sword to sever it in two.

The goblin raised himself up holding his bloody arm as Violetta came over from the side of the hall and grabbed Harvacour’s arm.

“Take the princess, which is what you intend to do anyway” Gomer growled. He made his way down the hall and sat on his throne. “Leave my land and do not return. You won’t be so lucky next time.”

“There will not be a next time, Gomer. I have achieved what I intended – to rescue Princess Violetta and return her to her own people.” He turned to look into Violetta’s eyes and spoke quietly so that only she could hear what he was saying. “Should she come to love me; that would make me the luckiest and happiest man in the world.”

The two of them left Gomer to attend to his wound and found Harvacour’s horse waiting at the castle gate. He patted and mounted the animal before helping Violetta into the saddle behind him.

“Where is Ruby?” He asked.

“She has gone to rejoin her sisters” Violetta replied, gripping hold of the prince around the waist as they rode away from the castle.

Leaving Ectomore and crossing into Zlonda, who should be there but Leonay, waiting on his horse. The prince dismounted and embraced his companion. "Am I glad to see you, Leonay; but tell me, how did you know that I would be returning at his hour on this day?"

"Let us just say that the appearance of a white deer told me that we should expect good tidings today." Leonay looked up at Violetta. "And this must be the beautiful Princess Violetta?"

"Who I hope will come to love me as I love her" Harvacour added.

"That I will, dear prince" she replied. "You are a noble and chivalrous man who would have willingly given his life for me. I cannot think of a better man to share my life with."

The three of them returned to the joy of the court where the princess was welcomed by the King and Queen of Zlonda. Harvacour and Violetta were duly wed to spend the rest of their lives together.

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Not long after the wedding, Harvacour and Violetta were riding out in the countryside when Harvacour pointed up into the sky.

"Look, Violetta, a real rainbow."

In the distance were dark rainclouds through which the sun was shining to produce the rainbow that arced across the sky, the ends disappearing amongst the trees.

"Perhaps it's the six sisters" Violetta commented.

Harvacour looked again and was convinced that the 'violet' colour was missing.

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