



Branwen's Quest

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Magic

The light of the full moon cast silvery streams of light across Branwen's kitchen countertop. She was wide awake again. Her fluorite and amethyst crystals were having a moon bath in a porcelain bowl. For a glimmer of a second, Branwen thought they were humming a hushed song. She stilled her heartbeat so she could hear the miniscule noises between the muffled silence of the witching hour. There was a definite sound of singing. "Where is it coming from," pondered Branwen as she gracefully slid out of her usual tree pose. It comforted her somehow to stand rooted like a tree when she was feeling restive and unable to sleep. The humming turned into a louder buzzing noise. The clicking of toenails could be heard from the bedroom and Branwen felt a minor annoyance with her dog Chance. He'd been sleeping peacefully, but must have picked up on Branwen's curiosity about the strange noises for he came bounding down the stairs and into the kitchen, letting out a series of deep throaty barks. As soon as Branwen managed to calm him, she listened for the curious noise, but it had stopped. She sighed.

"Oh Chance! What am I going to do with you, you rascal."

He tilted his head to the side and thumped his tail against the hardwood floor, before finding his cushion in the corner of the kitchen and snuggling into it comfortably. He was soon snoring peacefully.

Branwen picked up one of the crystals from the windowsill and placed it in the palm of her hand. She was so sure the strange noise had come from one of the crystals, but there didn't seem to be anything unusual about them. They vibrated with energy from the full moon, as they always did after a moon bath, but nothing more. She was just about to pour boiling water from the copper kettle which had just started whistling into her favorite purple dragon mug when a flash of light caught her eye. Was it a shooting star? Branwen quickly made

a wish by placing her hand over her heart. She believed in magic and knew that wishes really did come true for those who believe with all their heart. Her wish was to go on a magical quest. She had wanted to discover a portal into another world ever since she was child. Now, at 27 years of age, Branwen had become a bit disillusioned with life. Although she was a witch and tried to live a magical existence, nothing really extraordinary had happened in quite a long time. She wished with all her heart to be able to feel the ancient magic once more. The light should have disappeared by now, but it was growing brighter all the time.

“What in the world?” muttered Branwen. She slipped into her coat and wellington boots, grabbed a torch, and opened the kitchen door of the cottage which led out into the back garden. There was an intense, orange and white light coming from behind the garden shed. Chance had awoken again and followed Branwen outside. It was a clear October night. The sky was a deep sapphire blue and the stars looked sharp as diamonds. Branwen drew a quick breath; the air was frigid but felt refreshing to one who had been cooped up inside a hot cottage. It was impossible to adjust the temperature to her liking. The entire cottage was heated with a wood burning stove. Branwen often opened the windows, even on the coldest night, so as to let in some fresh air. Chance ran on ahead of her. She tried whistling to him, but he wasn’t minding her. His natural instincts had taken over. Branwen could feel her heart beating faster as she approached the shed. Chance was growling viciously now. He had appeared to have cornered something. Branwen put one hand against the shed and peered around to the other side. Big baubles of golden light peered back at her out of the darkness. She gasped! Her hand flew to her mouth, more in surprise than fright. She felt excitement rise up from the pit of her stomach.

There, crouched down low, on the other side of the garden shed at Penny Lane Cottage in Kent, England, was an honest to god Dragon!

“Hello,” whispered Branwen cautiously. The dragon tilted his enormous green head to one side. Moist tendrils of air crept out of his nostrils. His golden eyes were bigger than Branwen’s hands when balled into fists. Branwen was completely fearless, which had gotten her into numerous scrapes in the past. The dragon sensed this lack of fear and instead of retreating, ventured closer to the tall willowy woman with long hair the color of moonlight. Her green eyes flashed with an inner fire of one just on the threshold of power. The green eyes of the human met the gold eyes of the dragon and something magnificent occurred.

Branwen felt her palms burn with fire. They tingled and felt similar to that strange feeling which people always call “falling asleep” as in “My foot fell asleep.” Her eyes grew wide, but a smile crept across her face. She was

soon beaming from ear to ear, her plump red lips felt almost as warm as her hands. The dragon nodded and then Branwen heard the humming noise again. This time she knew the sound was coming from within her! She had managed to grab Chance by the collar as soon as she had first glanced the dragon hidden behind the shed, but now she was forced to let go as her hands really did feel as if they were on fire. He didn't attempt to chase after the dragon, instead he stood back and whinged pitifully.

"It's okay Chance," comforted Branwen.

She glanced towards the dragon and he nodded his head once more. She knew intuitively what to do next. She closed her eyes and felt the power bubble up inside her. Her particular breed of magic was blossoming into being at that precise moment. She had always created spells and was quite gifted at working with plants and concocting herbal potions, but this was like nothing she had ever experienced. This was the full force of her power and magic emerging out of her all at once. Imagine a dam trying to block a river and suddenly the dam bursts and instead of a river we are faced with a tumultuous ocean. That's what it felt like for Branwen. But instead of the element of water, Branwen was all fire. Her hands glowed as orange and blue as the fire currently burning in her kitchen stove. She held the palms of her hands in front of her face and gazed at them in wonder. When she was ready, Branwen put her hands together and concentrated with all her might. The fire emerged from her hands slowly, like sparklers that children like to light on Bonfire Night. The sparks of light began twisting and turning and eventually fused together. It was like watching someone knit a hat out of spools of yarn. Branwen wove the threads of fire together with her fingers. Her eyes grew larger and brighter as she worked this powerful spell. The dragon could see Branwen's lovely face floating in the darkness. The rest of her body was cloaked in the nighttime void, but her face glowed brightly from the light emanating from her hands. The dragon's tail curled around the side of the garden shed. He looked rather comical, like he and the shed had grown together, but Branwen was too focused on her task to notice the humor in the present situation.

Branwen kept weaving the golden threads until they formed a solid ball of light. She then released it. Her hands went from feeling like hot coals to cold as marble in a split second. The light, which she immediately termed a Fae Light, floated away and she felt sure she was supposed to follow it. The dragon beckoned to Branwen and she knew he wanted her to climb on his back. She hesitated, but only briefly, before leaping onto his back. She wrapped her arms around his shimmering, green neck and whoosh they were off. Chance came running after them. Branwen said a silent "Please don't leave Chance behind," to the dragon and lo and behold

she received an answer. The dragon hadn't really spoken, and yet Laney heard his voice in her head. It was a deep, resonant, booming voice. Laney tried communicating her thoughts with the dragon again.

"What's your name?" she asked in her mind.

"Shadow Song," replied the dragon telepathically.

They followed the Fae Light through the winding streets of Marlow Village. The cobblestone streets glowed coppery red in the moonlight. They continued their journey past hedgerows and over the heath until they were deep in the forest. Branwen could hear the "twit twoo" of a tawny owl and the shrill shriek of a vixen. The air was damp and smelled faintly of moss, mushrooms, and woodsmoke. She was glad of the late hour, for the villagers tended to sleep through the night. She was the odd one out, at times an insomniac. Branwen had difficulty in functioning if she wasn't able to get enough sleep, and unfortunately this was a frequent occurrence. Her mind felt fuzzy all of a sudden and her head began to hurt. Pretty soon her eyes felt shriveled and heavy and she dozed off.

Branwen's dreams were always quite colorful, but this one seemed incredibly real. It was still a moonlit October night. She was soaring across fields and over a vast ocean until she came to a crystal tower in the middle of a woodland. Chance was flying through the air beside her, but she didn't see how this was possible. They soared in through an open window way at the top of the magnificent tower. Branwen landed on a bed crafted from tree branches and filled with millions of swan feathers. It was the softest bed she had ever lain on. She was soon sound asleep.

She awoke with a start. The first rose gold light of morning was warm against her eyes and cheeks. She glanced about the room and quickly realized she was no longer in her cozy little cottage in Kent. Instead, she was in a crystal tower. She sprung out of the fairy tale-perfect bed and glanced about the room. Chance was sleeping on a down comforter in a golden basket on the floor. He lifted one eyelid and upon seeing that his mistress was awake he yawned widely, stretched his front paws and circled around Branwen until she took notice of him. She patted his head and he gazed lovingly at his human companion.

"What do you think Chance? Am I still dreaming?" murmured Branwen with a mixture of awe and a sort of almost religious reverence for her surroundings. She couldn't quite believe she and Chance were really in the crystal building in the middle of a woodland. The room was like something from a fairy tale. The bed appeared to be made from tree branches, but fancy gold ones. She inspected it more closely and realized there were diamonds and emeralds embedded in the gold branches. The mattress was filled with swan feathers and the

bedding was the lushest velvet and silk in a soft plum color. A fire burned in the enormous fireplace which appeared to be crafted from the same clear crystal as the walls. The floor appeared solid though and upon further scrutiny was revealed as moss, except for a stone pathway in the center of the room which continued out the open door and into the hallway. Branwen followed this path with Chance in tow. Her stomach grumbled with hunger, but she was too interested in exploring this strange place to be bothered with satiating her bodily hunger.

Branwen and Chance followed the hallway until it ended at a stairwell. The stairwell appeared to spiral down endlessly. It made her feel dizzy to peer down and not be able to see the ground. She swallowed hard and began her descent. She gripped ahold of the crystal and silver banister which was encrusted with rubies and sapphires. Her knuckles turned white from holding on to the handrail so tightly, but Branwen just gripped it more tightly as she was afraid of slipping and falling down the steep and slippery stairs. Chance was not. He raced on ahead, turning around every once in a while to make sure his favorite person in the world was still following after him. When they finally reached the bottom of the stairwell, they could smell garlic and rosemary frying. And was that the scent of tea?

She followed her nose and soon found herself in a circular room with a table set for two. The place settings were the most beautiful she had ever seen. A garland of vivid gold and red autumn leaves woven together with scarlet berries and pine cones graced the center of the table. At both ends of the table were gold linen placemats embroidered with vines and roses. The plates appeared to be made out of silver birch bark and the chalices were carved out of rubies. Hundreds of candles floated above the table. Branwen gasped with pleasure upon seeing such exquisite beauty. Through the open doorway which led into another room, she could hear someone humming a song. She and Chance crept quietly into the next room which turned out to be a kitchen. Whereas the rest of this mysterious tower had clear crystal walls, the kitchen was covered in what looked like fur. It was a cozy room and smelled like heaven.

There was a cheerful red Aga stove in the center of the room in front of which was a tall man wearing a moss green tunic, leather trousers, and leather boots which looked like something crafted by an elf. He was humming a happy tune and was in the process of flipping eggs into the air. He quickly placed the cast iron skillet behind his back, shut his eyes, and shouted, “ta da” as the eggs landed in the pan. He then bowed and said,

“Shadow Song at your service.”

Branwen gasped! How could this man be the same dragon who had awoken her inherent magical abilities the night before?

As if he could read her mind, and Branwen reminded herself that he could, Shadow Song continued.

“I have been cursed by a dark faery and I need your help. We have much to discuss. But first, breakfast is served!” He waved his arms with zeal and ushered mistress and large, lumbering dog back into the elegant dining room.

Breakfast was the most incredible meal Branwen had ever tasted. It was just simple, home cooked food, but every bite was more flavorful than the last. There were potatoes fried with garlic and rosemary, fried eggs with hollandaise sauce, crystal cups filled with chopped fruits, little dishes of mixed nuts, platters of kippers, and hot buttered toast. Branwen’s tea cup seemed to refill just when she thought she had taken the last sip. There were three different kinds of fruit juice as well. She helped herself to her favorite foods with a zeal reserved for the particularly hungry. Anything she was hungry for seemed to appear before her. It was the most amazing and surreal experience. Even Chance had a dish of the best food he had ever tasted and his water was the coldest and cleanest he could ever wish for.

Branwen kept glancing at her breakfast companion with a mixture of disbelief, horror, and fascination. He had the same bright gold eyes as the dragon and his black spikey hair did look green in some lights. She didn’t quite know why it was easier for her to accept the existence of a dragon more so than of this otherworldly man who appeared youthful and ancient all at once. He seemed to have the capacity for violence and yet she was absolutely certain that he wouldn’t hurt a fly. There was kindness and humor in his eyes. Branwen thought any woman in her right mind could easily fall in love with such a creature and yet she felt more of a sisterly affection for him. It was difficult for her to articulate why this was so, it just was.

After the incredible meal, Shadow Song got down to business.

“I don’t expect you to believe me, but we are brother and sister. Our parents were killed by the same dark faerie who cursed me. You were raised as a human and I have been cursed to remain in this crystal palace in my true form by day. If I attempt to leave I instantly turn into a dragon. I remain in dragon form as soon as the sun sets until the first light of dawn. You are the only one who can help me break this curse dear sister.”

Branwen’s lip trembled and tears filled her lovely green eyes. She couldn’t believe this was happening. This man had to be a liar. Was she going crazy? And yet her inner voice, not of reason but of an ancient knowing, told her that this man was telling her the truth. She looked at the shape of her hands and then at his. They were

the same. His eyes crinkled in just the same way as hers. They shared the same tall, willowy figure.

“I know this is a lot to take in. You must feel like you have stepped into a dream, or perhaps a nightmare? But I assure you I am telling the truth.” Shadow Song grabbed Branwen by the shoulders and looked into her eyes. She squinted back at him and nodded her head.

“What are we going to do? How can I help?” asked Branwen with courage in her lovely, lilting voice. She raised her chin stubbornly and Shadow Song felt the strength of her resolve. When she set her mind on a task there was nothing that she wouldn’t do to obtain her goal. Branwen was determined to help her brother, even if she didn’t quite believe that he really was her brother.

“Here’s the plan,” articulated Shadow Song. Over the next few hours Branwen listened and watched as Shadow Song pulled scrolls out of cupboards and dusty old books off of shelves. If the bedroom, dining room, and kitchen were more magical than anything Branwen had ever seen, the library certainly was a sight to behold. It was the most magnificent room, more charming and jaw-droppingly beautiful than even the grandest libraries from her dreams (and Branwen often dreamt of libraries). Shadow Song shared their history, relying on books and his fragmented memories to convince her that they were in fact brother and sister. There was even a photograph of the twins as babies. One child had silvery white hair and the other jet black curls. They were holding hands in the photograph. If that weren’t proof enough, Shadow Song went to a safe behind an exquisite painting of a troupe of faeries on white horses, and retrieved from it a necklace. Branwen gasped when he placed it in her hands. She reached under her blouse and showed him her own necklace. The two were identical. She had had that necklace for as long as she could remember. It was silver with a white jewel which gleamed more brightly than any diamond.

After much plotting and planning, Branwen and Shadow Song set off for the deep dark forest. As soon as they were past the gardens which surrounded the crystal tower, Shadow Song morphed into his dragon shape.

Branwen had only seen this dragon in semi-darkness, so it was fascinating to view him in the full light of the midday sun. His scales were emerald green and his long, snaky tail was green with orange. His serpentine form was elegant and graceful; his teeth were bright and sharp; his belly was surprisingly soft and furry.

Branwen climbed onto her brother’s back once more and they set off for their journey southward.

It hadn’t been too difficult to persuade Chance to remain at the crystal palace. His bed was soft, the fire was warm, and his food dish was never empty.

It seemed to Branwen that their journey took days, but in reality they arrived in a few short hours. The forest was shrouded in a gloomy veil which made her feel lethargic. It was as if a spell had been cast over the entire forest, causing anyone who entered to fall into a deep sleep. Shadow Song nodded his head at Branwen and she searched her pocket for the vial containing the potion she had helped Shadow brew. She took a sip of the disgusting liquid, forced herself to choke down the slimy stuff, and instantly felt revitalized.

Brother and sister walked gingerly across the hazardous ground. Tree roots jutted out at awkward angles; thorn bushes wove their way across the path, choking out the other plants which were shriveled as if in great pain. At one point Branwen grazed her hand against a thorn and crimson drops of blood dripped on to the ground. This forest was nothing like her beloved woodland back home. This was a dangerous place, filled with the presence of evil. When the path became too narrow, Shadow Song had to fly ahead, way above the treetops. Branwen had to keep glancing up to make sure she was following him instead of getting lost in the treacherous, dratted place.

She fought her way through thick cobwebs and felt a sudden sense of relief which quickly turned to dread upon finding herself in a more open landscape. The thorns were gone to be replaced by a wasteland. The bracken, brambles, and gorse were burned to a blackened death; the ground was soft and squishy and Branwen found herself sinking into the boggy marsh. The sound of a crow, a bird she normally loved to hear, was ominous rather than spiritually nourishing as usual.

“Shadow, help me!” screamed Branwen in terror as she felt herself sinking into the decaying earth. There was no answer.

“Shadow!!!” shrieked Branwen in utter terror. Her heart felt like it was going to burst out of her chest, her limbs felt heavy and numb, as Branwen continued to merge with the rotting earth. Branwen’s terror grew more pronounced. Shadow Song had been soaring above her only a moment before. What could have happened to him? Her anger flared suddenly at the thought that this entire journey had been planned by Shadow to, what exactly, get rid of her? Why would he do that?

She tried to calm her thoughts and stopped struggling against the thick, murky liquid. She shut her eyes and felt the spark of fire within. Her hands began to glow warmly once more. This time she was prepared for the sudden burst of flames. The Fae Light glowed more brightly than ever. She directed it to twist into a thin rope this time, instead of forming it into a ball. Even though it burned her flesh to do so, Branwen grabbed ahold of the firey rope and flung one side across a thorn bush. Fire rope fused with thorn bush and became solid, like

coals. Branwen grabbed ahold of the rope and hoisted herself out of the marsh. It took her a few minutes to catch her breath. She reeked of stale water and the stench of despair. Glancing around, she saw there was a cottage a short distance away. Keeping to the stone path, Branwen soon found herself standing before the front door, poised to knock, moments later. The door swung creakily open.

“Hello,” trilled Branwen in a voice much braver than how she felt.

She stepped over the threshold cautiously, ready to back away if anything untoward were to happen. Nothing did. She stepped into the room. The walls were made of bones and the air was filled with dust. A caged bird blinked at her from the corner of the room. A cuckoo clock chimed the 9 o'clock hour causing Branwen to jump. She looked behind her, out the open door and was surprised to find that it was indeed nighttime when it had been day only a moment before. At the sound of a voice, Branwen turned around suddenly.

The voice said, “welcome to the underworld Branwen, Child of Fire.”

Branwen's arms were pinned behind her back, bound with invisible, cold as ice threads. She glanced around her frantically and saw that Shadow was hunched over, his head resting against the hard, cold floor. She was relieved to see he was breathing and surprised to find him back in human form. Her opponent stood hovering over her. He was a tiny man, shriveled and dry as bones. His eyes were pitch black and there was no warmth or compassion to be found in even his pinky finger.

“This must be the dark faerie Shadow told of,” thought Branwen. She glared at him, but didn't say a word.

“I see you have as much spirit as your brother. That shows you are capable of great power. Obey me and you will go far in life. This I promise.” The elderly man's skin was of an unhealthy pallor and his frame was gaunt and bony. His spine was crooked. He appeared to be less than five feet tall.

“How could such a tiny man cause so much destruction,” pondered Branwen with a mixture of pity and disgust. The dark faerie was retrieving a bottle from a cupboard. Inside the glass bottle was a sparkling emerald green light.

“Do you know what this is?” demanded the dark faerie.

“No idea,” said Branwen with spirit.

“I thought not.” The faerie's eyes gleamed maliciously and he rubbed his hands together gleefully as he continued his show of superiority.

“This, is your brother's soul fragment. Ah yes! Return this to him and the curse is broken.” Branwen tried

moving her arm to grab ahold of the bottle, but to her dismay she still couldn't budge.

"Not so fast my dear little plum cake." The faerie grinned, showing sharply pointed, furry looking green teeth. Branwen felt her stomach turn at the unpleasant sight.

"You have a choice. You can give me what I have been searching for and in so doing I will return your brother's soul fragment, or you can refuse and I will take yours as well. What will it be?"

"And what is it you seek?" questioned Branwen with a hint of mistrust in her voice, which she was relieved to note remained clear and powerful.

"Give me your fire!" demanded the dark faerie.

"And how am I supposed to do that?" replied Branwen rather snarkily.

"Willingly," suggested the faerie.

"And if I do, what will happen?" Branwen insisted. The faerie put his hands together, palm touching palm, and spun around with his back to Branwen. He pointed to the limp figure of her brother.

"Do you know why Shadow became a dragon?" inquired the dark faerie. Branwen started to answer, but he cut her off.

"Your dear parents wouldn't listen to me. All I wanted was the power to wield fire. Fire which could warm this cold heart of mine. This place is always cold. No warmth, no love. I just wanted a bit of that warmth. But your parents wouldn't allow it. They said you were only a tiny baby. They tried to protect you. In the end my power was greater than theirs, but unfortunately, they managed to hide you away. In retaliation, I captured your brother and cursed him, knowing that one day you would be sure to reunite and would find me." The faerie turned around, his eyes flashing, the smug expression clear on his toadlike face.

"And you have. Isn't this wonderful?" Branwen wanted to say several things, but she bit her lip and listened.

"What happens to me if I give you my fire?" Branwen wasn't going to agree to this unless she was absolutely certain he would break the curse surrounding her brother. Even then, she was determined to find another way, but she was curious as to what this vile man was planning and why.

"You will lose all inkling for magic. You will live a normal life. You will feel satisfied living day by day and won't question your existence. Is that so bad?" Branwen agreed that it was not, but secretly she was fuming.

"Give up my magic! Give up that which makes me me! Why that little toad. That vile, loathsome miniscule excuse for a man!" screamed Branwen in her mind. And then she heard it.

"Branwen," said the shadow voice. She realized her brother was communicating with her telepathically once

more. She asked the faerie another question about breaking her brother's curse and at the same time communicated silently to her brother,

"What are we going to do?"

Shadow responded, "He thinks I am still unconscious. Keep distracting him and I will tackle him from behind. Wait until you hear me say now, and then grab the bottle containing my soul fragment. Got it?"

"Got it," Branwen directed to her brother.

"How does this work?" Branwen was speaking to the dark faerie again as she gestured to the bottle.

"The soul fragment? It is the part of your brother which keeps him human. Although I suppose you have guessed by now that neither you nor your brother are human," said the faerie maliciously.

What?" gasped Branwen. She was genuinely surprised and had to remind herself to listen for her brother's message.

"Oh yes. You are children of the fae. Didn't you know?" The dark faerie tsk tsked and continued, "how disappointing. I assumed you were clever."

"So what do you mean by saying this soul fragment makes my brother human?" Branwen was puzzled.

"Ah! Well I suppose it is more accurate to say it makes him appear human. Long ago the fae returned to middle earth, but they developed the ability to mask themselves in human form. So long as I have this," he gestured to the bottle, "your brother can not live a normal life. He must remain hidden so as not to disturb the humans. The fae are banned from revealing their true forms to the human population. If a fae should do so, that crime is punishable by death."

Branwen thought for a moment before speaking, "Do you mean to say that my fire is what keeps me masked? You would take it from me and banish me just as my brother has been banished. Is that what you intend to do?" Branwen was shouting now, in part because she really was furious, but also so she could keep the foul little faerie's attention preoccupied while Shadow crept behind him.

"Now," shouted Shadow. Quick as a flash Branwen grabbed the bottle containing her brother's soul fragment at the precise moment that Shadow pinned the dark faerie's arms behind his back.

"Can you do the honors," said Shadow with unmasked victory in his voice. Branwen knew just what he meant. She created a fae light and twisted it into a rope which she tied around the faeries hands and feet. He was fuming. His eyes were flashing with rage and humiliation at his defeat.

Shadow accepted the bottle from Branwen and gingerly removed the cork. The green light swirled around and

flowed like water. The drops merged together and spiraled into Shadow's skin, leaving behind a tattoo which looked like sea waves. Branwen's green eyes shimmered with excitement and awe as she witnessed this most ancient magic, a soul retrieval. Shadow gasped as he felt something heavy return to him. The weight of his soul returning to his body soon transformed into the cozy feeling of one returning home after a long journey to an unpleasant place.

"For the record, what shape would I have found myself in had I given you my fire?" asked Branwen rather flippantly.

"A dragon, of course," answered the odious little man.

The journey back was much longer as Shadow could no longer fly.

"Do you suppose you have lost your shapeshifting abilities for good?" inquired Branwen rather plaintively.

"I suspect I can still transform when I'm in a dream state, much as how a shaman can shapeshift as she or he journeys. You have the power to create a fae light after all. The thing is, I have been a dragon so long and I don't really want to transform into one again. I suppose if I really wanted to, I could." Shadow was thoughtful and introspective for most of their journey back to the crystal palace. When they got to where the palace should be, it was gone. The gardens were still there, but the tower was gone. Just as Branwen was going to comment on the tower's absence, Chance came running out of the woods, barking happily at seeing his best friend and her brother.

"Oh, thank goodness," exclaimed Branwen gleefully as she patted Chance, wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed his furry face.

Shadow looked about him in bewilderment. This tower had been his home for as long as he could remember and now it was as if it had never existed.

"Nevermind," said Branwen soothingly, "my cottage is much cozier. Your crystal tower was the most magical house I have ever seen, but it wasn't exactly like a home you know."

"Do you mean?" asked Shadow wistfully.

"Of course," replied Branwen. "You are my brother after all. You are welcome to stay with me and Chance for as long as you like. I rather suspect you will want your own place eventually, especially as your decorating style tends towards the grand and exquisite and mine is much more cottage chic. Come on, let's go home."

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