



# *Lotus and the Hunter*

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Magic, Romance, Supernatural

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A long time ago when magic filled the air, there was a girl named Lotus. Lotus was in love with a brave hunter who never noticed her. One day he brought back his hunting party with enough meat to feed their village for a month. There was a group of villagers who greeted them with lots of noise. Presented with an opportunity to approach him, Lotus took a few steps forward, pushed slightly by the crowd. She started to smile at him, and he looked pleased. Her love was so great that she tried to speak to him, but her voice caught in her throat. Her face turned red.

Other girls called his name, and he turned to each one and smiled. He did not smile at Lotus. Lotus tried to reach out to him, but was bumped into by another villager. She began to feel tears well up in her eyes. She turned around and squeezed through the crowd to get away. She lifted her long skirt and ran into the woods. When she was alone and far enough away to not be heard, she allowed herself to cry. The sun had set and the full moon had risen. Still, her whole body shook with her sobbing. Lotus thought about how every time that she had tried to talk to him, something had happened so that there was no talk, no contact, no smiling. How was she going to get him to notice her, let alone fall in love with her? She kicked at the Wishing Tree's nearest root. So much of her free time had been spent at this tree. Not one of her wishes had been granted when it came to the object of her affection.

A whispering voice said to her, "You really shouldn't do that."

Lotus spun around to see who spoke, but nobody was there. "Who are you?" she asked the air, or the shrubs, or the mushrooms.

"A friend," was the reply, "who has watched you come to this tree many times. I have seen you tie wish pouches to branches and pour water and potions on roots. You have always been respectful of this tree. Why do you kick it?"

"It's never granted a particular wish." Lotus answered. "Who are you? I don't recognize your voice."

"I am not from your village. You may call me Coll."

"Well, Coll, please go away. I really want to be alone right now."

"What is the wish that was not gifted? Why do you disrespect the Wishing Tree?"

"I really don't want to talk about it."

"Maybe I can help."

"I doubt it. No matter what I do, he never smiles at me. He doesn't even know my name and we live five houses away from each other." Lotus heard the whine come into her voice, and she started to tear up again. She really wished whoever Coll was, that he would go away.

"Unrequited love." Coll paused to consider how to tell this girl that she might never get her wish. "You know love spells never work out anyway."

Lotus took a deep breath. This whispering was really annoying her. "Look, Coll, I don't need a lecture. I've been in love with this man since my tenth summer. I know that love spells are wrong; that's not what I've wished for. My wish has been that he would look at me, talk to me, smile at me, anything."

"That sounds simple enough, but it is still a wish that affects another person's will. That must be why you never got your wish."

This made her pause. She had never considered that what she was asking for would affect his will. Maybe he felt that she wanted him to look at her, so he never did. Maybe he felt violated. "Oh no," she said as she sank down to the earth. The man she loved might know that she had been trying, however unconsciously, to make him do things that he didn't want to do. "How terrible am I?" she asked herself. "What kind of person am I? I've been asking for him to look at me, to want to talk to me, to like me for five years. It never occurred to me before that I was harming him." Lotus felt the tears burn her eyes again. "No wonder he ignores me."

Coll's voice sounded closer as he said, "Maybe I can help you."

"How?"

"If you ask for something that only affects yourself, the magic of the wish should work."

Lotus wondered what she could change about herself that would make the Hunter like her. She tried to remember the words she had used in previous wishes. Several times it had been "I wish he would see me, smile, and say hello." A couple of times she had wished, "He will look into my eyes and see how much I love him and fall in love with me." She realized that most of the time she had requested him to use his eyes. She realized that she needed to be something that he saw, something he thought was beautiful and desirable. What were the correct words for this wish? She would also have to consider the proper offerings in order to appease the

Wishing Tree. Kicking it had been a mistake and now she would have to make up to it.

Lotus said to Coll, or the air, or the bushes, "I must go home and figure out the best thing to do. I will be back soon."

The next day, Lotus brought a strong herbal tea to the tree. She apologized to it, and rubbed sweet oil into the spot she had kicked. She repeated this for a week. When she felt that the Wishing Tree had forgiven her, she brought a new wishing bundle and tied it to the highest branch that she could climb.

"Wishing Tree, please grant this request for me: that I should be made worthy of his attention. I wish that I will become the most beautiful, unthreatening, and desirable thing he's ever seen. I want to be where he can't miss seeing me. I... I don't want him to be harmed or for this to affect his will. Please, change me, not him."

Lotus climbed down the tree and asked, "Coll? Are you here?"

"Yes," was the whispered reply.

"Do you think this will work?"

"I think it will. Are you sure this is what you want? Maybe it would be better to just wish for your past wishes to be forgiven."

Lotus said, "This is what I want. I've thought about it for a week. I'm not taking back my wish."

"Very well," Coll replied, "I think this wish will be granted."

Lotus went home and went to bed. The next morning, she woke up and felt compelled to go to the Wishing Tree. She had to see if her bundle had disappeared. She noticed as she walked through the forest that she felt more graceful, that everything seemed more interesting. The breeze felt wonderful. The smell of the village's wood smoke was an exotic perfume. The forest and the Wishing Tree were pulling her toward them. She arrived at the tree and looked up to the branch where she had climbed last night. The pouch was gone. Her wish had been granted. Elated, she looked down at herself to see if she had changed into a more beautiful creature.

Her hands were not there. Instead, she had hooves and she was covered in light-brown fur. She was suddenly afraid. She wasn't human anymore. What had she done to herself? Lotus thought she should be feeling the tears starting, but there were none. Only fear. Something was coming towards her. She could hear rustling in the nearby brush. She wanted to call out for Coll, but her voice was gone. Instead of, "Help," the only sound she made was a grunted cry.

"Oh no," Lotus thought as she ran deeper into the forest, "I'm a deer!"

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