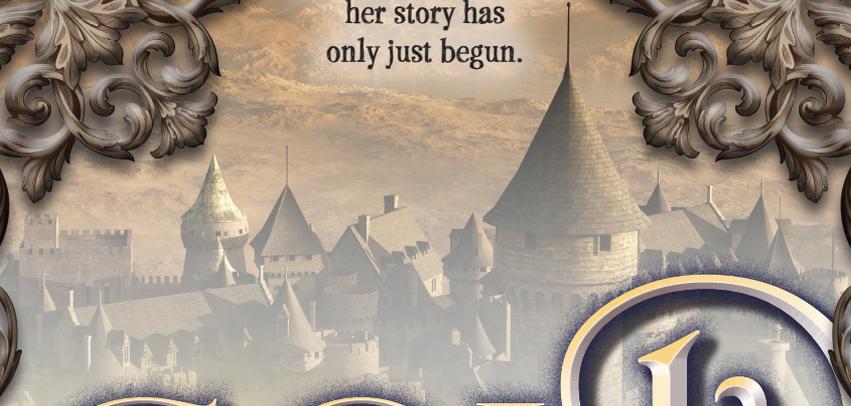


From thief to queen,  
her story has  
only just begun.



# GOLD SPUN



BRANDIE JUNE

GOLD  
SPUN

The image features the words "GOLD" and "SPUN" in a highly decorative, calligraphic serif font. The letters are rendered in a light gray color with a subtle gradient and a soft drop shadow, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. The letter "O" in "GOLD" is replaced by a detailed, grayscale illustration of a rose. The "S" in "SPUN" is particularly large and features a prominent, elegant scroll at its base. The overall composition is centered and set against a plain white background.



# GOLD SPUN

BRANDIE JUNE



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Books



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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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For Mom, my biggest cheerleader.

And for Erica,

my best friend and favorite

artistic partner in crime.





Glavnada

Magnomel  
(Uncharted Territory)

Netarian Ocean

Chelle

Sterling

Diawood Forest

Styenne Road

Lotanus

Reynallis

Venlin

Dusset  
Sea

Faradisia

Faradisum





“In a certain kingdom once lived a poor miller who had a very beautiful daughter. She was moreover exceedingly shrewd and clever; and the miller was so vain and proud of her, that he one day told the king of the land that his daughter could spin gold out of straw.”

– Grimm’s Goblins (1876)

By Jacob & Wilhelm Grimm,  
translated by Edgar Taylor







## Prologue

Prince Casper leaned against the ornately carved marble railing of the balcony as he finished the last of his coffee. In his five years as a royal hostage he had developed a taste for the very sweet cinnamon coffee so common in Faradisia, but always wondered if he would still enjoy the strong, bitter tea of Reynallis when he was finally given leave to return home.

*If he was ever allowed home.*

It had been weeks since his brother, King Christopher, sent him a letter. When Casper first arrived in Faradisia, his brother had written almost every day, praising Casper's courage and keeping him updated with news of home. Casper knew his brother was occupied with ruling Reynallis, aware that his focus was now directed at

keeping their country safe from the dangerous fay. Still, he could not help the feeling that he had been sacrificed and forgotten.

Casper stared at the vast landscape of Faradisía, long rows of citrus trees and wide stretches of grassland that were only green during the few weeks of rain. The sole movement in the serene valley was a lone man on horseback, galloping toward the palacio. As he neared, Casper could make out the official orange and white garb of a royal messenger. Casper idly wondered what news the messenger was bringing, though he knew King Jovian would never share sensitive information with Casper. The Faradisian king treated Casper with great courtesy, but never forgot that Casper's first loyalty was to his home country.

Straining his eyes towards the horizon, Casper imagined that he could see all the way to Reynallis. It was foolish, he knew, but it was his habit since he came to King Jovian's palacio. He had been fourteen when he first arrived as an 'honored' guest. Not wanting to shame his brother or his country, Casper only allowed himself to cry in the very early hours of the morning, long before even the servants would come to wake him. He would creep out on his balcony and stare to the north, his heart aching for home. He had not shed any tears in years, but he still looked towards Reynallis every morning.

Sighing, he set down the slender porcelain mug, wondering what activities the day had in store for him. Though it was mid-winter, the southern kingdom of Faradisía enjoyed mild winters, a brief respite from their sweltering summers.

Perhaps Lord Gerreld would want to hunt game or the ladies of the court would be interested in organizing a picnic by the hot springs. He might be afforded the finest luxuries the country had to offer, but his time was dictated by the whims of the Faradisian

nobility, and his every move was subtly watched by half a dozen guards, even though he had never given King Jovian the slightest reason to doubt him.

As if reading his thoughts, King Jovian himself burst into his room, his rich orange and white robes flaring out behind him.

Casper startled, nearly knocking over his cup. The king never came to Casper's quarters, rather summoning Casper when he required an audience with the Reynallis prince.

"King Jovian," Casper managed, giving a short bow to the king, as he smoothed on his diplomatic grace. "I am honored by this unexpected visit." But the smile slid off his face as Casper approached the king, noting his grimace.

"Prince Casper, a messenger arrived this morning from Reynallis. I thought it only right that I be the one to tell you." King Jovian paused. For a wild moment, Casper hoped that Christopher was sending for him, that his clever brother had finally found a way to keep peace with Faradisia and summon him home. But the question died on his lips as he noted the deep furrow in King Jovian's forehead. Casper swallowed hard, a sudden knot of fear making him sick. He had to fight the desire to cover his ears.

"I take it the news is not pleasant," Casper said, forcing his words to remain calm even as his mind whirled, trying to figure out what could be so important that the king himself would deliver it.

King Jovian briefly looked away before fixing Casper with an unblinking stare. "No, it is most grave."

"The treaty?" Casper could not imagine his brother would do anything to destroy the peace he had worked so hard to create, but it was the only matter so important that the king would personally deliver the news.

The king shook his head. "This is not about the treaty."

“My family?” Casper’s whisper was more of a prayer. He wished the king would correct him, but King Jovian only took another step towards Casper, confirming his fears. “King Christopher was killed a fortnight back.”

*No, not Christopher.* The floor dropped away from Casper, the rush of emotions making him dizzy. He stumbled to a chair, almost falling into it. King Jovian stared at him for a moment. Casper knew he was breaking protocol to sit while the king stood, but he did not think his legs would work as commanded. King Jovian gave a small nod and took a seat next to Casper, letting the slight go. Casper almost wanted to laugh, that it was mad that he was thinking about etiquette breaches right now. But it was easier than allowing himself to accept the king’s words. Anger, confusion, denial, and pain all swarmed inside him, making him want to scream. King Jovian sat by, staring at Casper with his shrewd eyes as Casper forced himself to regain some control. His brother would not want Casper to show weakness, even now. Casper inhaled deeply. *Pretend to be in control*, he reminded himself.

“What happened?” Casper’s voice was even, if a bit husky.

“There was an attack by the fay off the Stigenne Road near the Biawood Forest. King Christopher was traveling back to your capital, but he never made it to Sterling.”

“But it is too early for Christopher to be heading to Sterling. He never travels to Sterling till spring,” Casper argued, as though that would bring his brother back to life.

“The messenger informed me that the fay had sent word they wanted to initiate talks of peace. Your brother was heading to Sterling early to commence such talks.” King Jovian slowly reached into his pocket. “But unfortunately, it was a falsehood on the part of the faeries. They ambushed him.”

Casper had never seen a fay, but knew with certainty they all had to be malicious and cunning if they had outwitted and murdered his brilliant brother.

Casper swallowed hard, praying the rumors he had heard about the fay were not true. If the Mother was merciful, Christopher died with a sword in his hand, fighting. Were the Mother truly merciful, though, Christopher would still be alive. He had to know. “And how did my brother die?”

King Jovian apprised Casper, seeming to weigh his words carefully. “The envoy told us dark magic was used. King Christopher appeared to have choked to death on his own blood.” Casper imagined the scene, tasting bile in his throat. He needed to take care not to vomit in front of this king. “This was found pinned to your brother’s body.” King Jovian pulled out a folded piece of parchment from his robes and handed it to Casper.

*Kill ours and we strike back. We do not forget.*

Shock and fury warred inside Casper as he numbly held the death note in his hand. A few drops of dark rust stained the parchment. *My brother’s blood.* The very thought of the fay’s dark magic made him want to burn down the entire Biawood Forest, and all the fairies that lived beyond it.

“It does not make sense. We didn’t kill any fay.”

“The fay are a deceptive folk. They have no qualms about lying if it serves their purpose.” King Jovian put his hand on Casper’s shoulder, almost a fatherly gesture, but it felt wrong, awkward, and he moved his hand away.

Casper crumpled the note in his fist, wishing he was squeezing the neck of the fay that killed his brother instead. He silently vowed to never show mercy to the fay. They did not deserve it. *Someday*, he promised, *he would avenge his brother.*

“We will have preparations made for your departure.”

Casper looked up from the crumpled parchment to the king, feeling a sudden rush of gratitude. “Thank you, Your Highness, for granting me leave to attend my brother’s funeral.” It was not the homecoming Casper wanted, but at least he could say goodbye. He wondered how long the king would allow him to stay in Reynallis.

King Jovian shook his head. “You misunderstand, Prince Casper. Your sister will not be taking the crown.”

Casper stared blankly at the king, not sure he understood. “But Constance is next in line.” The fact of it was so ingrained in Casper, that he had never questioned it. His memories of Constance were more faded than those of Christopher; she had stopped writing him years ago. But the pain of being disregarded by his sister would be no reason for him to betray his country. King Jovian had treated Casper well enough, but he would never abandon Reynallis. “If you are suggesting I seize the throne, you deeply misunderstand me.” King Jovian was clever, and perhaps thought Casper would be a more pliable king, having grown up in Faradasia.

King Jovian’s raised eyebrows were the only indication of his surprise, or possibly his irritation, at Casper’s accusation. “Prince Casper, you are in shock, so I shall forgive any accusations. Princess Constance has decided to *decline* the crown. You are to take your place as king.”

All of Casper’s diplomatic practice and training abandoned him. “You are jesting.”

King Jovian rose, and this time Casper scrambled to his feet as well. “I do not jest, Prince Casper. You are free to return home. The situation from the initial agreement has clearly changed.” *The hostage exchange*, Casper thought. “And I assume you shall send my niece back home when you reach Sterling,” King Jovian continued.

“Arrangements will be made for your immediate departure. I imagine you will want to reach Reynallis with time to prepare for your coronation.”

“My coronation . . .” The word did not feel real to Casper. Coronations were held on the longest day of the year, and the summer solstice was in less than six months. There was no way he could mourn his brother and prepare to become a king in so short a time. “What reason did Constance give for passing on the crown?” Casper had never imagined anything would happen to his brave and brilliant older brother, but if it had, he assumed his older sister would be crowned queen. She might not care for him, but surely, she still cared for their country. Casper recalled her sharp tongue and efficient manner. Constance was no dormouse to scurry away from responsibility.

“The messenger offered no reason. Perhaps you should ask her yourself when you return home.” King Jovian took several steps towards the door. “I will give you some time to collect your thoughts and ready for your travels.” Right before leaving, he turned back to Casper. “And might I be the first to say to you, long live the king.” And then King Jovian was gone, and Casper was left with his ocean of crashing emotions.

Once he was sure he was alone, he allowed himself to cry. *Home. King.* Casper wondered how he could possibly ever fill the void Christopher had left behind.



## Chapter One

**B**y *Chace's den, we are so screwed*, I thought, stomping off the Stigenne Road and onto a lesser known path in the Biawood Forest. I had been so sure of the day's success, certain we could sell our cure-all tonic within the day and have enough coin to feed us for weeks.

Admittedly it was only a simple mixture of water, cinnamon, and molasses, but it transformed into a miracle elixir by the time I was done selling it. We had spent the last of our meager coins on those blasted green glass bottles.

I cringed as I thought about how I would break the news to my brothers. When my brother Jacobie, only eight years old, had asked where I was going this morning, I'd gleefully told him I was

off to scout the Spring Faire in Sterling and find us the perfect spot, promising to be back before midday. The sky was still inky with cold, bright stars, and my breath plumed around me as I instructed him to go back to sleep. As I left our tiny encampment, really only a rickety wagon, a crippled old donkey and the four of us in our thin bedrolls, Jacobie turned over, his soft snores soon joining those of our brothers Devon and Finn.

Only, once I reached the town square, I found another family selling miracle tonic. They even demonstrated its efficacy by curing a cripple boy's limp. I was certain the boy was their son and had no such limp. We had planned to perform the same trick with my brother Finn.

A city might be interested in one cure-all tonic merchant, but they became immediately suspicious when two set up. One time we had tried to sell our 'miracle' elixir in the same market as another party selling an almost identical bottle. People demanded a test to show which elixir was real and who was selling them snake oil. Neither tonic cured the sick villagers, and we were run out. My brothers and I barely made it out of that town, and to this day we avoided that village.

I kicked at the nearest tree in frustration. The thick birch trunk didn't care, but a sharp pain shooting up my foot had me unleashing an especially colorful string of curses as I hopped up and down in rage.

"Are you in distress?"

Whirling around, I started to see an elegant young man leading an equally fine horse. I silently scolded myself for crashing through the woods like a wild boar and thus not even hearing the approach of this stranger. I was a poor girl alone in the woods and well aware of what some men thought themselves entitled to. Still too far from

camp to yell for my brothers, I took a quick step back, but my foot flared with pain, causing me to stumble and fall on my behind. The young man's lip trembled, and I had the feeling he was holding back a smile.

"I'm fine," I muttered, struggling to my feet.

"Here, allow me." The young man advanced toward me, his hand outstretched. I was about to push his hand away when I saw the glitter of gold on his finger. I held out my hand, allowing him to pull me up as I gently slid his ring off, dropping it into my pocket before he noticed.

Standing, I bit back a cry from the dull pain that still radiated from my foot and appraised my rescuer. He did not look ready to pounce on me the way drunken tavern men tried, but he was also far too richly dressed to be a pilgrim or even a merchant come for the Spring Faire. And he was not hard on the eyes; with a strong jaw, and hair and eyes the color of obsidian. He was young, probably only a few years older than me, but held himself with the erect posture of the nobility. Of course, the costly blue velvet riding outfit also called out his wealth. The steed he led, a sleek midnight-black horse, was adorned with the finest saddle and bit I had ever seen.

My daft brain was shocked by in the incongruity of seeing a lone nobleman in the midst of the Biawood and I spoke before thinking. "What are you doing here?"

His eyebrows shot up. "Excuse me?" I couldn't tell if he was amused or offended.

"I only meant that you're clearly highborn, and we don't see many nobles wandering the woods. *Alone.*" My surprise made me sound foolish, and I scolded myself. I needed to stop talking and get away from this nobleman before he realized he was one golden ring short.

He laughed, a warmth filling his dark eyes. "I imagine I am an odd sight in these woods," he looked around at the surrounding trees, "but I seem to have lost my way. I was going for a ride, wishing to experience a bit more . . . freedom."

*Freedom to wander around the woods?* I had to school my face from betraying the mockery I felt well up when I thought about how ridiculous the highborn behaved. All the money in the world, and they go and get lost in the Biawood. That's not how I would enjoy such wealth. But instead, I smiled brightly, dipping into a deep curtsy to feign awe.

"Well, you are in luck, because I just came off the Stigenne Road. And you are not far off. You'll be able to see the road just south of that cluster of elms." I pointed him in the right direction, wanting to ensure his quick departure.

"Ah, wonderful, thank you." And without another glance, the nobleman jumped onto his horse and set off towards the Stigenne Road. I watched till he was out of sight, a grin slowly spreading on my face as I pulled the ring from my pocket. It was heavy, possibly even pure gold. It was a signet ring, the flat surface engraved with three roses, thorns, and vine intertwined. I slipped the ring on my finger, happily thinking that the morning had not been a complete waste after all. Not wanting the nobleman to find me once he discovered my theft, I detoured deeper into the woods, much farther from the Stigenne Road.

Rumors told that the fay of Magnomel came into the Biawood this close to the border, but I decided baseless gossip was less dangerous than a wealthy man with a fast horse. My return trip to camp would be a longer but safer journey.

Halfway to camp, I heard the distant sound of running water. It had to be a stream. Feeling thirsty, I veered toward the sound for

a victory drink. The stream was narrow enough to jump over, but still flowed briskly with freshly thawed snow. I knelt by the water, splashing my face and drinking deeply, the cold filling my stomach and radiating through my body.

“I still think we should kill it,” a voice said nearby. It was male, with an irritating whine.

“And miss our chance for the reward, I don’t think so.” This second voice was deep and harsh, like grit grinding.

“We can bring it in dead, Garin. It’d be safer.”

“The Crown pays for live fay, not corpses, Acel. They says they can’t question a corpse.”

I stopped, stunned. *Would the fay leave Magnomel and enter Reynallis?*

Sterling had flyers posted with the gruesome image of the Fay Queen Marasina and claims that the fay drank human blood. I had been preoccupied in town, but now I wondered if there really were fay here in Reynallis. *Leave, leave, leave*, my commonsense shouted. *But I just want to see it*, my curiosity answered back.

Crouching low enough to the ground that I could smell the damp moss at my feet, I crept into some bushes and peered through. There was a small clearing in the woods where two men had set up camp. Their various supplies, sleeping rolls and a tiny cooking fire were off to one side. The whiny man, Acel, was tall and wiry with a rat-like face. His companion, Garin, was stout and as solid as a tree trunk. While Acel couldn’t stay still, almost hopping from foot to foot in anxiety, Garin stood his ground, firm in his footing and his argument.

I couldn’t see the fay, but when Acel gestured to a tree, I figured the faerie must be tied up there. It was just outside my range of sight, and I tiptoed around the clearing to get a better look. I was

almost angled right to see the fay when I snapped a twig underfoot. I froze, fear of detection shooting up my spine.

“Did you hear that?” Acel hissed.

“All I’ve been hearing is your incessant yelling,” Garin growled back.

“No, I think I heard a noise, over here,” Acel said, getting louder as he approached my hiding place. I leaned back against a large oak tree, the only cover I had, and held my breath.

“We’re in the middle of the bloody forest you idiot,” Garin snapped. “Probably an animal or something. We’re too far from the Stigenne Road for travelers.”

“Yeah, fine. I guess so,” Acel grumbled as he returned to Garin. I let out the breath I was holding. I should leave, but . . .

Cautiously, I leaned around the tree and looked out at the clearing. I now had a perfect view.

I gasped.

I was staring at a faerie. I almost couldn’t believe it, but there he was. And he looked nothing like the monsters the flyers warned about. He was stunningly, painfully beautiful. His hair was gold—a true gold, not simply golden blonde, and it shone in the morning light. His large, almond eyes were deep, emerald green and his skin was pale, almost luminous. He had delicate, carved features, looking both elegant and otherworldly. He angrily shook his head and I saw his ears, which tapered to fine points. The only thing common about him were his clothes, which were travel-worn and dirty.

I would have expected the creature to shoot fire out of his mouth or control the minds of his captors with his dark fay magic, but he didn’t look evil. His hands and feet were bound with thick rope, and another rope was tied around his chest. I checked to see if that rope was binding him to the tree, but it was not. He struggled

against his bindings without success while the two men stood over him, arguing.

“Do you even think we’ll get the reward?” Acel asked, pacing in tight circles. “More like the guards will think we are working with the fay.”

“Then what do you suggest? We can’t just leave him here. And we could use the reward money.”

“We have to get rid of him. It’s the only thing,” Acel immediately responded.

“Just let me go and I will be gone. I shall never bother you again,” the faerie said. Despite his predicament, he sounded calm. For a moment I shivered, hearing dark music in his voice. There was a power to his voice, hypnotic and dangerous. I forced myself to pay attention to the men. At the moment, they were the real danger.

“Don’t listen to him,” Acel snapped. For a fearful moment, I thought he was talking to me, but I realized he was speaking to his companion who had taken several steps toward the faerie. Garin shook himself, as if he had been entranced.

“I can make it worth your while to let me go. Is it gold you want? I can give you all the gold you desire.” The faerie’s voice was melodic, and I found myself leaning in to hear him better.

“How much gold?” Garin asked. There was suspicion in his voice, but also eager greed.

“Enough to have you living like a king.”

“He’s a liar,” Acel hissed. “They all are. He’s a fay. They’ll say anything. He wouldn’t be roaming the woods if he had enough gold to live like a king.”

“A liar? Me? Never.”

Acel kicked the faerie in the shin. Hard. The faerie let out a cry of pain. I winced thinking about my own sore foot.

“And they say humans are such a civilized race,” the faerie spat out.

“Shut your mouth or you’ll get another one.”

“Maybe we should gag him. He might curse us and turn us into toads or something.” Garin was smiling, but it wasn’t kind.

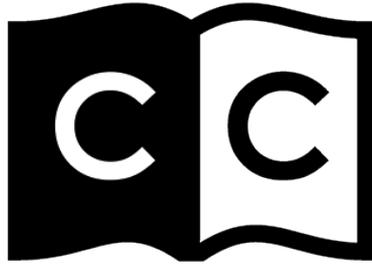
“If I could have turned you into a toad, I would certainly have done so by now.” Despite his calm tone, I could see fear and anger in the faerie’s large eyes. It suddenly seemed very wrong that he would be killed or imprisoned just because he was fay.

I knew I should leave. This was not my problem. And what if the fay were actually dangerous? I should turn around and pretend I had never seen any of this.

But . . . what if the reward amount for a faerie was truly as high as the flyer had claimed? Maybe the amount was not a joke after all. How many months could I feed my family if I turned in this faerie? It was insane to even consider it. But a sum that great, and we could actually start life fresh, maybe even buy a new mill to replace the one we lost in the fire.

It could mean the end of a life of petty crimes just to eat. A thrill ran through me, the same nervous excitement that filled me every time I started a scheme. It felt like a challenge that I decided to accept.

I crept over to the small cooking fire. The two men were busy arguing and didn’t notice me. Close to their fire was a small bundle of their supplies, a bottle of spirits and some food. I leaned over and opened the bottle. The alcohol smelled strong and sour, but I wasn’t planning on drinking it. I silently poured it on a rolled-up blanket that was leaning on a nearby tree. I laid the blanket on top of the food and supplies, and carefully pulled one end of the blanket into the fire. Then I disappeared back into the trees.



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# If Nor can't spin gold, she can always spin lies.

When Nor rescues a captured faerie in the woods, he gifts her with a magical golden thread to summon him for a favor. Instead, Nor uses it for a con—to convince villagers to buy golden straw—and attracts the suspicion of Prince Casper. Set on catching Nor in her lie, he demands that she spin a room of straw into gold. If she succeeds, she'll become a queen. If she fails, the consequences will be dire.

Desperate, Nor summons the faerie, launching a complicated dance of feelings for both prince and faerie—and must decide who she herself wishes to become.

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