

Blue Wings, Excerpt

For half the morning, Annabelle sat like a sentry watching the fairies soar across the sky over their central town. She was thinking about heading home for an early lunch, or a late breakfast, when she spotted a single fairy approaching from the direction of the Monarch's turreted palace on the near edge of the town. The dot with wings grew steadily larger until Annabelle felt it prudent to lie flat on the wall to observe the lone fairy, who was not flying with any enthusiasm. He was meandering morosely across the sky as if his body was too heavy for his lovely orange and black wings. He kept heading in her direction until she felt overexposed, even lying as flat as a sun-basking lizard.

"He won't notice me," Annabelle told herself. Her dress was as drably gray as the stones beneath her. She was well camouflaged and fairies never noticed pixies anyway. And if they accidentally did notice a pixie, they pretended they didn't.

The fairy kept coming and Annabelle kept watching. Never having seen a fairy fly so close, she was enthralled. When he passed right over her, he appeared lost in thought, but not so lost that his eyes didn't work. He did notice Annabelle and faltered in flight. There was no smile. He scowled so fiercely that she quickly rolled onto her side of the wall, to scramble down into the province of the pixies. Alas, she did not move with her usual care on the wall and had a hard time finding a crack or a jut for her fingers or toes.

She clung briefly to the stone before beginning to slide down the rough surface at a frightening speed. She screamed until a hand caught the back of her dress and slowed her descent. Annabelle was plucked right off the wall and lowered the rest of the way to the earth as if she herself was flying. The sensation filled her with rare joy until her feet touched the earth, then everything felt wrong again.

"Are you injured?" her rescuer asked.

"No! I would have been fine without your interference." Embarrassed by her clumsy fall and generally resentful of fairies, the words she spoke were both ungrateful and rude.

"Just trying to help. Didn't mean to interfere with your plummet," he retorted, the sarcasm overdone.

Up close, his wings were as delicate as a butterfly's. Annabelle had never in her life stood so close to a fairy or shared conversation with one. And this one was too splendidly handsome for his own good. Even his clothes were perfect. His pants and backless vest were spun from shimmering blue silk and embroidered with wavy golden lines. His hair

glinted in the sun and looked to have been spun from the same golden thread. Annabelle guessed his age at fifteen or maybe sixteen, which was old to Annabelle.

Her tongue stilled and felt knotted, which was surely an improvement over shrewish. She swallowed hard and made an overdue effort to act civilly. He had saved her from a nasty spill, after all. “Oh ... well, I do thank you for your help. I’m usually fine on the wall. There shouldn’t be a wall there anyway,” she blurted.

“Of course *you* would say that.” His fine straight nose tilted higher.

“What do you mean?”

“You’re a pixie. You don’t need a wall, but the fairies do.” His eyes darted over the nearest trees as if he was scanning for dangerous enemies.

“Why do the fairies need a wall?” Annabelle asked, trying to focus on his words and not gawk at his fine figure.

Golden eyebrows arched higher over green eyes that looked at Annabelle as if she was quite stupid. “For protection, of course.”

“Protection from what?”

“Pixies.”

“Pixies?” Annabelle echoed. She did sound kind of stupid at that point, even to her own ears.

He crossed his arms and moved a few steps backwards into the very center of the clearing where they stood. “Yes, pixies. Don’t pretend you’re not dangerous.”

“Me? I’m Annabelle Blue and I’m not dangerous. I may have something of a reputation for being disagreeable but - .”

He cut her off. “All pixies are dangerous to fairies, even you, Annabelle Blue.”

“Dangerous how? I’m not big enough to be dangerous.”

“Don’t pretend you don’t know.”

“I’m not pretending. I don’t know!” Frustrated, Annabelle stomped her foot. She was used to arguing with pixies, who at least made sense when you traded hot words with them. This fairy was speaking in vague circles, which was not the right way to argue. How could she prove him wrong when she didn’t even know what he was talking about?

“What’s your name?” she asked.

He hesitated before he said, “I am called Lark.”

“Lark?”

“Lark.”

“That’s a funny name. Lark, you’re not arguing properly,” she said, trying to be instructive. “You’re making assumptions that I know things that

I don't. You have to tell me why you think I'm dangerous so that we can argue properly and I can prove that I'm not dangerous." Being disagreeable was the only thing Annabelle was good at, so she knew what she was talking about.

Lark squinted at her as if her outline was hard to bring into focus. It was better than the look that said she was stupid, but not by much. He said, "I had best get back to my side of the wall—I mean home."

"But you didn't say why you think I'm dangerous," Annabelle reminded him.

"I don't have to. You already know why." He departed quickly and without a farewell.

Hands on her hips, Annabelle watched him launch into the air, amazed that leaving the earth could be done with no more than a single bound. Lark spread his wings and sort of half-flapped and half-floated over the wall and out of sight. She had a good look at the way his wings were attached to his back, tracing along his spine and curving a little bit over his shoulders, away from his neck. The wings looked almost like they had been stuck onto his smooth skin even though it was obvious that they were a part of him.

And then she was alone in the empty clearing, wishing there was someone to argue with. "But I don't know why I'm dangerous, and I really don't think I am," she said to the trees. They barely rustled their leaves in acknowledgement.

Annabelle sighed heavily and started trudging home, bruised in more places than she'd realized and hoping that her mother was not going to be too angry.