

Understanding

Von MChrisH

Inhaltsverzeichnis

Kapitel 1:	2
Kapitel 2:	13

Kapitel 1:

Title: Understanding

Author: MChrisH

Disclaimer: All characters appearing in Gargoyles are copyright Buena Vista Television/The Walt Disney Company. All characters appearing in TGS and Timedancer belong to the staff of TGS. No infringement of these copyrights is intended, and is not authorized by the copyright holder. All other characters are my invention.

Note 1: I'm German and have been learning English for five years. So I'm sorry if my vocabulary is not all that big.

Note 2: The story takes place in the future Brooklyn and Sata visited during their timetravels but it is not the future that will follow the end of the second season of TGS.

Floating in mid-air, Puck neatly deflected the flaming orbs. "Game, set, match!" he crowed. Looking around, Puck narrowed his eyes. "'Eeny Meeny Miney Mouse, Who's been creeping in my house?'"

"Your house, is it?" Garlon's voice echoed hollowly off every wall. "Once a servant, always a servant, eh, Puck?"

"Takes one to know one," Puck quipped back. "Madoc Morfryn has you running through mazes, doing his dirty work."

Disobedience

Fox: "They were definitely Unseelie and they were using some sort of small crossbow. There just wasn't time, none of us had time to react.... And he took the shot meant for us."

[...]

On the gurney, bloodied and limp, lay the unmoving form of Owen Burnett.

The Darkest Hour, part 1

Understanding

Garlon sat alone in the garden of Nicholas' villa, brooding. He was still angry like hell. He couldn't believe how easily Nicholas had discarded him now that he had Maeve by his side. Sure, Garlon had always known that Nicholas would grow more and more independent but he had not expected to lose all of his influence and status in the Court. But beneath the anger was another emotion, one he didn't want to admit. He was...hurt that Nicholas seemed to have forgotten him completely.

"All goes according to our plan, doesn't it?" a voice pulled him out of his musings.

Garlon used his powers to manipulate the air around him so he wouldn't be seen by whoever came by. He looked towards where the voice had come from and saw the

Morrigan and Maeve.

"You are right, cousin. It seems that the old saying about love being blind is true. I didn't think it would be that easy to foul him. It seems his human blood has not only negative effects on his powers," Maeve said.

"Probably. He is as stupid as his father was. I remember how easy it was to make him fall in love with me." The Morrigan laughed darkly. "But seriously, are you really going to marry that quarterling?"

"Definitely not!" Maeve exclaimed shocked. "He is convenient to get full control over the Court again. We will face these gargoyles, Titania's grandson and Merlin in the third war and this time, we will win." She gave a nasty smile. "However, wars have been known to cost lives. It would be a great tragedy if the victory were to be bought with blood."

"You have a plan?" the Morrigan asked eagerly.

"Naturally. I have a spelled arrow ready, especially for killing quarterlings. When the fight starts, I want you to take it."

"Of course, my dear cousin. However, we have to keep one thing in mind."

Maeve regarded her cousin quizzically. "What do you mean?"

"Garlon. He is not going to accept you that easily as his leader. It is risky to try anything with him around."

"I know what you mean. He is always keeping an eye on that boy. Well, I already had him lose his position. It shouldn't be difficult to get him away completely – and permanently."

"Just how permanently are we talking about?" the Morrigan asked.

Maeve's cold smile was answer enough.

Garlon gasped – and instantly regretted it when the two women started looking around. He quickly opened a portal behind him and jumped through it.

The portal had just closed behind him when Maeve and the Morrigan arrived at the place where they had been but they could find no trace of anyone having been there.

Garlon found himself standing on a beach. Judging from the sun, it was late afternoon, so he must have transported westward. He just wondered where exactly he was. "Well, it doesn't really matter," he muttered, walking along the beach.

He should have expected Maeve to try something like that. Everyone who knew her

should have but they were all blinded by their thirst for revenge and power or, in Nicholas' case, by love. Garlon growled. He couldn't believe how naïve the boy was. It'd serve him right to be killed by his beloved Maeve.

So why was he that worried and angry?

Garlon shook his head in disgust. He looked around, hoping to find something to keep his mind off Maeve and Nicholas. Suddenly he saw some unnatural shaped stones a couple of meters in front of him. Curious, he went closer.

The stones really were not shaped by nature but by humans. They were gravestones. Garlon wondered who had put them here. He went to the stone closest to him. It stood somewhat apart from the others who standing mostly in pairs. This stone however stood alone, overlooking the sea. It was a simple stone with some flowers laying in front of it. Garlon knelled down to read the name on the stone. He had to sit down when he saw it.

Owen Burnett

Puck

Guardian and beloved friend

A mortal death but immortal love

"Puck," Garlon breathed. He remembered the trickster who had fought against them in the last war und had died taking a shot meant for Titania's daughter and grandson. "I still don't understand you, Puck," Garlon said. "How could you work for mortals and even give you life for them?" His gaze fell on the inscription 'beloved friend'. "That was it, wasn't it? You started to dare for them, to love them, enough to give your life to save them.

"I often heard of some of you falling for mortals during your banishment. It seemed to happen quite often when you spent time with the same mortals for years. I guess that's what happened to you, isn't it?"

Garlon looked at the stone, stroking over the last two lines. "You were lucky, you know, to have found a master who cared that deeply about you in return. I saw them in the last fight. They clearly missed you.

"You would probably be surprised to see me now, a servant to a quarterling, to Merlin's son. I know you liked the boy and helped to raise him. I always suspected that it was you who distracted us long enough for Merlin and his mother to escape. If you had still been around when Nicholas was born...well, perhaps we would have a completely different situation. Now your pupil has to prove if he has the same intelligence that made you and his father so dangerous opponents."

Garlon fell silent, thinking of the upcoming fight between the two quarterlings. Again he found himself almost...worried for Nicholas' sake. He gave a mirthless laugh. "Remember when I attacked the Eyrie with just some Halflings? You said that we are both servants. You know, you were surprisingly right. We are both servants who started to care for their chosen masters. The question is just: are my feelings for

Nicholas as strong as yours were for the family Xanatos." Again he fell silent, lost in thoughts.

"Garlon?" a female voice said surprised.

Garlon jumped up, startled. He turned around and saw an elegant, brown-haired woman standing behind him. "Sekhmet?" he asked just as surprised.

The Egyptian goddess nodded. "What are you doing here?" She stepped closer to the grave and put some flowers in front of it. The same that were already laying there, Garlon noticed. "Seems I wasn't the only Unseelie who was impressed by him. Although I didn't expect you."

Garlon blinked. "I didn't know his grave would be here." He nodded at the stone. "Is he the reason you left the court?"

"Partly. Curiously, the other reason was your new master's mother."

Garlon nodded. "So you plan to side with Xanatos and the Seelies?"

"No. I might not want to fight with you in a stupid, unnecessary war we will never win but I also do not want to fight with such a naïve group like the Seelies," Sekhmet said.

"Well, Nicholas did manage to go to Avalon and harm Oberon," Garlon said proudly.

Sekhmet cocked her head. "What did he want there if not to kill Oberon?"

Garlon's gaze darkened. "Maeve," he hissed.

Sekhmet arched an eyebrow, waiting for him to elaborate.

Garlon hesitated, unsure if he should tell Sekhmet about it. He still had not completely gotten over his...dislike for felines and Sekhmet's pompous attitude had always been hard for him to accept. On the other hand, the last centuries seemed to have affected her as well. She was far more...approachable. He took a deep breath, then started telling her everything.

"...and so I ended up here," Garlon finished finally. "Even if I don't know why."

Sekhmet had listened attentively. What he had told her confirmed what she had been feeling. The last few days, she had been unusually tense, as if sensing that something was about to happen. She was however quite surprised at Garlon's reaction. She only remembered him as a quiet, self-centred servant. Now he seemed more concerned about his new master than about himself. She glanced at the stone, wondering if it had been by pure accident that Garlon had ended up here. "So what will you do now?"

"What do you mean? I'm certainly not returning to Germany so Maeve can kill me. Let them see how far they'll get without me!"

Sekhmet tilted her head. "Is that really what you want?"

"What are you suggesting?" Garlon said, suspicious.

"Well, I said that I will fight neither for the Unseelies nor for the Seelies. That does not mean that I'll stay completely out of the fight. It just means that I will fight for my own reasons."

Garlon looked intrigued. "Go on."

"I still owe him something." Sekhmet nodded at the grave. "He showed me that there is a way out of the rivalry between the courts. He might be dead but I still feel that I have to repay my debt – by keeping his pupil alive.

"On the other hand I guess I also owe your master's mother my thanks, so I'll try to make sure that he, too, won't die."

"And how do you plan to achieve that?"

"I don't know yet but you might be able to help me figure it out."

"How?"

"For starters by telling me how he got the idea of restarting the war."

"Well, that's probably my fault. I told him only good things about Madoc and the Unseelie War."

"Which explains what he said when you tried to convince me to follow you."

Garlon just nodded. He knew it had been wrong.

"We have to get him to see that whole picture. Perhaps then he will keep out of it?"

"He probably will. He is an intelligent young man."

"The question is just how we can do that. Is there any way we can get to him?"

"He is staying at his castle until the final fight. You won't be able to get in and it's far too dangerous for me to try and talk to him alone."

Sekhmet nodded in understanding. "Is there any way you can at least find out what the exact official plans are?"

"I guess Grimalkin will tell me. He'll simply believe that I'm off sulking. The more difficult task is figuring out Maeve's plan."

"Well, there is someone who can help us out. Someone who knows her and the Morrigan very well."

"You don't mean..."

"Yes, the Banshee."

"You mean you know where she is?" Garlon asked stunned.

"I found out by accident. Merlin's wife had greatly impressed me, so I secretly looked in on her every few years. During one of these visits to Britain, I saw how one of Arthur's allies was killed protecting some humans. He was the Banshee's love, the reason she betrayed the court."

Garlon shook his head. "Love really makes people do stupid things. They are even ready to die for their loved ones. I don't understand it. How can such a feeling change you that much? It doesn't seem worth it," he said confused.

"It is worth it. Believe me, it is," Sekhmet said softly.

"I still don't understand it and I guess I'll never will." Garlon shook his head. "Well, either way, we should contact the Banshee as soon as possible. I don't think Maeve will keep up this farce for much longer."

"Agreed. I'll talk to her. How about we meet here again tomorrow morning?"

"Okay, fine...just where are we?"

"We are in Bar Harbor, Maine. This is the Xanatos' family plot."

Garlon frowned. "You know, I'm somewhat surprised that his grave is here in the mortal's realm. Oberon took even Madoc back for an honourable funeral. I certainly was no friend of him, but didn't Puck deserve it even more?"

Sekhmet shrugged. "I agree but if there is one place where they were very alike then it was their ego. Both, Oberon and Madoc, would never let such disobedience pass, no matter what the reason."

Garlon made an affirmative sound. "Well, whatever. Let's get going. See you tomorrow," he mumbled.

"Until then." With that, Sekhmet vanished.

Garlon glanced again at the grave stone, then left as well.

Banshee sat opposite of Sekhmet. She had been quite surprised when Sekhmet had visited her. Sure, they had met from time to time after Rory's death and Sekhmet had warned her of the third Unseelie War but not that often – and certainly not to tell her such things. "Now, let me get this straight: you're suggesting that we help Garlon?"

"I know this sounds curious but somehow he's different."

"Different? He's one of those who caused Umbriel's death," the Banshee snapped.

"You know that the main reason was that Umbriel openly opposed Madoc," Sekhmet replied gently. She looked into the distance. "As to Garlon today: he won't admit it but he seems to genuinely care for this Nicholas. He has...gentled somewhat." Seeing the Banshee's doubtful expression, she added "And if that's not enough to convince you: Garlon was talking respectfully about the Puck."

"Okay, that is surprising but I'm still not sure if I can trust him."

"I'm not saying that you have to fight together with him. Just come with me in the morning and talk to him."

The Banshee hesitated, then nodded. "Alright."

The sun had barely risen when Sekhmet and the Banshee appeared in the family plot. They both looked around but Garlon was nowhere to be seen.

"Are you sure he will come?" the Banshee asked nervously.

"Yes, I am. Don't worry."

"Then where the hell is he?"

The Banshee's question was answered when Garlon appeared in front of them. "I don't believe them. What the hell are they thinking? Doesn't he see it?"

"Good morning, Garlon," Sekhmet greeted him.

He looked up surprised, then visibly tried to calm down. "Ah, yes, good morning." He turned to the Banshee. "I see you decided to help."

She looked at him verily. "That depends. What do you need my help for?"

Garlon passed a hand through his hair. "I don't know yet. I don't even know what I'm thinking, planning to openly go against Maeve. I mean beside the fact that I can't just let her kill me. I'm not one to just give up my life."

The two women glanced at the grave in understanding.

"What has Grimalkin told you?" Sekhmet asked, returning to the important subject.

Garlon's expression darkened. "Maeve," he spat out the name, "has convinced Nicholas to attack the clan tonight. That's far too soon, not only for us to make a real

plan but also for Nicholas to prepare himself. He is feeding Maeve his own magic to help her recover. He cannot fight now." He had begun pacing while he spoke.

"That's what she's counting on," the Banshee said quietly. "Like that, it won't be difficult to explain why he died in the battle."

Garlon looked up, surprised. "You'll help?"

The Banshee hesitated, then nodded. "I will."

"Thank you," he said. He looked at the two. "Now, to Nicholas' plan. Tonight at midnight..."

Nicholas let his gaze trail over his court that was standing behind him. Maeve, the Morrigan and Anath were standing beside him. They would engage, together with him, in a fight against the magic users of the clan, namely Demona, Angela, Merlin and Alexander Xanatos. They stood opposite them, looking wary but determined, especially his father. Nicholas felt a pang of pain at the thought that Garlon was not with him to help him face Merlin but had simply left just because he was not the number two of the court any more. He really wished he were with him. He felt rather weak but now was not the time to show it.

Maeve leaned towards her cousin. "Do you have the bow ready?"

The Morrigan smirked. "Naturally."

"Good. Wait until I tell you."

Nicholas recalled the plan Maeve had suggested. Grimalkin would lead the lower Unseelies against the clan and its weaker allies while they would follow a bit later to take out the powerful magic users. He took a deep breath to calm himself. "Grimalkin!"

"Here, my Lord," the black cat said.

"Attack with the others!" Nicholas ordered.

Grimalkin bowed. "Yes, my Lord." He mentioned for the others to follow him.

Nicholas waited a few minutes, watching as his followers engaged in a fight with the clan.

"Get ready, get ready," Nicholas whispered, looking at his opponent, Alexander Xanatos.

His allies tensed, ready to attack when he gave the command. In reaction, the others tensed as well, although Merlin looked reluctant to fight his son.

Maeve looked to the Morrigan who gave her a smirk.

“Now!” Nicholas commanded and both side rushed forward.

“Stop!” a second voice rung out, causing all eight to freeze. Between them stood Garlon.

“Garlon, what...?” Nicholas blinked, surprised to see his mentor.

“Please, Nicholas, listen to me! You have to stop this fight!”

“How dare you? My grandfather...” Nicholas’ eyes flashed in anger.

“Nicholas, I lied to you about Madoc!”

Nicholas froze, shocked. “What?”

Maeve frowned, not liking what was happening. “Nicholas...”

Garlon kept talking before Maeve could say anything else. “What I told you about Madoc, about his deeds and visions was not what really happened. It’s what I had hoped for the court, what could have become of it with an honourable, intelligent leader. A leader like you.” He made a step in Nicholas’ direction.

Nicholas didn’t know what to say. “Garlon...” he whispered.

Maeve hissed. The situation was getting out of control – her control. “Cousin,” she said quietly.

The Morrigan looked at her.

“Nicholas, please think again! Do you really want to send your followers to their death for a man who had no trouble killing his nephew and trying to kill his only child? Is it worth losing everything for?” Garlon kept talking.

Nicholas’ gaze travelled from Garlon to his father who was watching anxiously. He stepped closer to Garlon, opening his mouth to talk but no words came out.

Maeve looked from one to the other, close to panic. This was absolutely going wrong. She had not thought Garlon would still have so much influence on Nicholas. Now she was close to losing her own influence – and with it her power in the court.

“I-I...he...” Nicholas was clearly at a loss what to do.

“Nicholas,” Garlon said gently. “Don’t endanger yourself for a bastard like Madoc.”

Maeve’s eyes widened when she saw Nicholas nod slowly. She would not let this happen.

Garlon started to smile in relief but then his eyes widened. "Nicholas!" He rushed forward, standing directly in front of the quarterling.

A flash of magic appeared in the direction of Maeve and the Morrigan.

"What--?" Nicholas stared at Garlon in surprise. His eyes widened when Garlon's hand touched his cheek and his mouth opened – and blood came out. He looked down and saw the tip of an arrow sticking out of Garlon's left side where his lung was. "Garlon," he whispered in shock.

"Nich...olas...you...alright?" Garlon asked. He tenderly stroked Nicholas' face.

"Garlon...yes, yes, I'm alright..."

Garlon smiled slightly. "Good," he said, then his eyes fluttered close and he fell forward.

"Garlon!" Nicholas exclaimed. He caught his mentor and slowly lowered him to the ground. "Please, Garlon, say something!"

"Garlon!" a female voice exclaimed.

Nicholas looked up in surprise. He knew that voice.

Sekhmet and the Banshee were standing there, an unconscious Morrigan and a bound Maeve on the ground beside them. Nicholas' mind knew that it had been them who had been responsible for the flash of magic but he couldn't bring himself to care. His gaze travelled back to Garlon. "Garlon," he whispered.

Garlon's eyes opened somewhat. He looked around slowly.

"Garlon, what...why...?" Sekhmet shook her head, unable to understand what she saw.

"Seems I...was wrong." Garlon looked at Merlin and Alexander who had slowly come closer. "I under--stand him now."

Merlin gasped and Alexander paled. Anath, being held by Demona and Angela, hissed surprised while the two gargoyles shared a sad look of understanding.

Garlon coughed, drawing up more blood. "I'm so--sorry for...lying to you. I wish I... could make it...up to you."

"But you can! You...you'll heal and then you can tell me everything and then we'll talk about what you said about changing the court and...and..." Nicholas trailed off, a sob escaping him.

"Don't...cry for me," Garlon whispered, tenderly brushing away a tear from Nicholas'

cheek. He looked pleadingly at Sekhmet. "Sekhmet...will...will you..."

Sekhmet nodded. "I promise."

"Thank you," Garlon breathed. He coughed again.

"Garlon, please be calm. You have to gather your strength to heal," Nicholas begged.

Garlon shook his head. "'love you," he breathed. His eyes closed and his head fell back.

Nicholas' eyes widened. "Garlon? Garlon!" He shook the older man. "Garlon, please!"

Merlin gently touched his son's shoulder.

Nicholas shook the hand off, unable to accept the tender gesture. "Garlon," he whimpered. He sunk down on the chest of his mentor, shoulders shaking with sobs.

Sekhmet closed her eyes. It seemed it had really been fate what had brought her and Garlon to meet at the grave, just like she'd thought. She looked again at the heartbreaking picture in front of her but then had to look away. For the first time in her life, she wished she'd been wrong.

The End?

The fanfic is theoretically finished here but some time after I finished, I wanted a happy ending, so I wrote a second (optional) chapter. So those who are looking for a happy ending can read on or you can stop here, whatever you prefer.

Kapitel 2:

Like I said, this is the "Happy Ending"-chapter.

Sekhmet looked up when she felt a magical presence. She involuntarily placed herself between Nicholas and whoever arrived. When she saw who it was however, she froze.

Danu stood there, flanked by Tanabur and another man, a Halfling. She smiled sadly at what she saw. She looked at the Halfling and nodded in Nicholas' direction.

The Halfling bowed, then went to the fallen Unseelie. He knelled down and reached out to touch Garlon.

Nicholas barely noticed what happened around him. When he saw the hand reaching for Garlon however, he pulled away, drawing Garlon closer. "Don't," he whispered pleadingly.

Danu stepped forward. "Nicholas, let Clayton have a look at Garlon. He is probably Garlon's last chance to survive."

Nicholas looked up. "Survive?" he asked in a small voice, afraid to hope. When Danu nodded, he reluctantly allowed Clayton to come closer but refused to let Garlon go. He held onto his right hand with both of his own.

Clayton passed his hand over Garlon. "Hm, it looks not too bad. The arrow was poisoned but not necessarily enough to kill a full fay. It was designed for quarterlings."

"So you can save him?" Nicholas asked hopefully.

Clayton looked up. "Yes, possibly, but I have to get him to my surgery as quick as possible. Then it all depends on Garlon's will to survive."

"Can I come with you?" Nicholas asked instantly. Then he remembered where he was. "That is..." He looked at Anath, then in the direction Grimalkin had led the others.

"Go with him! I'll explain what happened here," Sekhmet offered.

"Thank you," Nicholas whispered. He accepted Danu's hand to help him to his feet.

"Tanabur, take them there, please," Danu said.

"Yes, Milady." Tanabur bowed before transporting the four of them away.

Danu turned back to the others. She looked at Merlin and Alexander. "What about

you? Are you alright?"

Alexander nodded. "I regret that I have barely any memories of Puck. I'm just happy Dad didn't have to relive it like this."

Merlin made an affirmative sound. "Yes, it is very much alike," he said softly. He swallowed. "I never saw it happen but it still reawakened the memory." He looked up at Danu. "Could you please take me to my son? I want to be there for him."

Danu nodded in understanding. "Naturally." She looked at the others. "What about you?"

"We'll take care of the situation here," Alexander said.

"Very well," Danu said. She touched Merlin's shoulder and they both vanished.

They found Nicholas sitting in a chair in a waiting room. Tanabur stood beside him, keeping an eye on the quarterling. Nicholas didn't seem to be aware of anything. He stared down the ground without seeing anything.

Merlin went over to his son. "Nicholas?" He knelt down in front of the younger man. "Nicholas," he called again, gently.

The boy slowly lifted his head. It took a few seconds before he focused on his father.

Merlin hesitated, then placed his hands on Nicholas's shoulders. "I'm here if you need to talk, okay? It helps, you know."

Nicholas pulled away. "What do *you* know?"

"I lost quite some friends," Merlin replied. He looked away, adding under his breath "Some of them because of my father."

Nicholas looked back at him. "What do you mean?" He blinked, remembering what Garlon had said. "You mean the man Garlon mentioned after...after he..." He swallowed, fighting to suppress his tears.

Merlin nodded. "Yes," he said softly.

"What happened?"

"Well, it was the day of the final battle of the Second War. I went out to meet my ...friend, Corby..."

It was over an hour later when Clayton came into the room, together with a woman.

"How is he?" Nicholas asked instantly, coming to stand in front of them.

Clayton shrugged. "We were able to heal the damage the arrow caused. The problem is the poisonous magic. While it was not enough to kill him, it took much of his power. As I said before: now it all depends on how much of a fighter he is."

"He is that, he is a fighter," Nicholas whispered. "Can I see him?" He looked pleadingly at the doctor.

"Well, I would have asked you to go to him either way. You seem to be very close to him. Your being there might give him a reason to wake up again."

"It might?" Nicholas asked hopefully. "Then can I...can I stay for a while longer?"

"If you wish. My wife will prepare a room for two people. We'll have it ready in an hour, at most."

"Thank you." Nicholas hesitated.

"Then go in, see if you can get him to survive. I'll get you some of your clothes if you wish," his father offered.

Nicholas hesitated, then nodded. "I have some clothes at Fenris Industries."

"Okay, I'll be back soon." He squeezed Nicholas' shoulder again before turning to leave.

Nicholas looked after his father. They had finally talked again but he couldn't bring himself to feel happy, not when it was still unsure if Garlon would survive.

He blinked slowly. The room he found himself in was unknown to him. He stiffened when he felt a presence close to him. Looking down the bed, he saw Nicholas lying with his chest on the mattress, sleeping. He looked paler than when he had last seen him. He noticed something glittering on his cheek. Looking closer, he saw that they were dried tears. Garlon frowned, not liking Nicholas' troubled expression. He flexed his right hand, loosening the stiff muscles, then slowly reached out and touched Nicholas' head, stroking his hair.

Nicholas awoke to the feeling of someone petting his hair. He wondered for a second if it were his father but then remembered that Merlin had left the previous day to help in Europe and would only return in one or two days. Curious, he opened his eyes. He stared in surprise when his eyes met Garlon's.

"Hey," Garlon said, voice rough from lack of use.

Nicholas swallowed, not speaking. Without warning, he hugged the older man.

Garlon was startled at first but then he returned the hug.

"You're alive, you really survived," Nicholas whispered.

"Not to sound ungrateful but why am I alive? Last thing I know I had an arrow in my chest." Garlon instantly regretted his last comment when he felt Nicholas flinch.

Nicholas pulled back. "After...after you... lost consciousness, Danu appeared with some others. One of them, a Halfling, is a doctor. He healed you but he wasn't certain if you'd survive." He kept his gaze on his hands in his lap. "He asked me to stay with you because..." he trailed off, unsure if he should continue.

"Because I needed a reason to stay alive," Garlon finished.

Nicholas nodded. "That's what he said." He still didn't look up again.

Garlon slowly pushed himself in a sitting position. "Well, I guess there are some things we should talk about." When Nicholas simply nodded again, he frowned. He reached out and covered Nicholas' hands with his. "Look at me, please." He waited until complied before continuing. "I'm really sorry for lying about the past. When I first met you, I just did and said what was necessary to convince you."

"Yeah, father told me about the first two wars. Madoc really was a...a..."

"Bastard? I know." He stared into space, debating whether he should tell Nicholas everything.

"It certainly achieved what Madoc tried when he brought Umbriel in the Court: hurting the Seelies," Nicholas said softly.

"Wha--? No!" Garlon exclaimed. "No, not only," he repeated more gently when he saw the younger man jump. "I mean, it was part of the reason I first talked to you. But it was also what I told you before the Morrigan shot: you changed the court for the better."

"*We* did," Nicholas corrected softly.

Garlon nodded. "Yes, we did. But the court lost its main importance after a while. Hell, I would have never done what I did for the court. It was you."

Nicholas swallowed. "You...you said that you...love me," he whispered.

Garlon took a deep breath. "I do," he affirmed. "I'm in love with you."

"Oh." Nicholas hadn't expected Garlon to repeat it. He had thought Garlon would deny it, ignore it or say that he had meant it in a purely platonic mentor-student or master-servant relationship. "I-I ... I should...tell the others you're awake. Sekmeth wanted to talk to you," he said and practically fled the room.

Garlon looked after him, a troubled expression on his face. He should have stayed quiet.

He was pulled out of his thoughts when Sekmeth entered. "Garlon?"

Garlon gave her a quick grin. "Hello cat lady."

She smirked. "Well, seems you're better again, mouse."

"Nicholas said you wanted to talk to me?"

"Yes, I do." She went closer to the bed. "I don't know if the boy told you but after you were shot, the fight quickly ended. Some returned to Germany and are waiting for your and Nicholas' return. Others fled and are in hiding again."

"I already guessed as much. I don't think you're here for that."

"No, I wanted to tell you that Danu offered the protection of the Elder Court for those who are willing to give up the ways of the Unseelie Court – Madoc's ways, that is."

Garlon stayed quiet for some moments. "So you're accepting?"

"Yes, I am."

"What about Nicholas?"

"From what I saw, he seems to enjoy meeting his great-grandmother. I think he'll stay with her for a while."

"Good, that's good. He needs someone to guide him now, someone he can trust."

Sekmeth frowned. "What are you talking about? He already has you to take care of him."

Garlon shook his head. "No, I lost him."

"What do you mean? If you're talking about lying about Madoc, then he already forgave you, at least if his staying by your side while you were out cold is any indication."

"I told him how I feel," Garlon said quietly, partly to himself.

Sekmeth drew a deep breath. That was unexpected. She just didn't understand why this meant that he had lost his pupil.

Garlon saw her confusion. "He ran away after I told him," he explained quietly.

"Oh, Garlon, I'm sorry," Sekmeth said.

Garlon shrugged, trying to appear indifferent. "I should have expected it. Remember, I told you he's in love with Maeve." He sounded tired.

Sekmeth wanted to say more but thought better of it. "I'll let you sleep some more." She turned to leave.

"Wait. Can you tell the other that I'll leave as soon as I can?"

"Are you sure? You almost died four days ago."

"Four... - Well, whatever. I don't really have a reason for staying. It's better for everyone."

"Well, it's none of my business." Sekmeth stopped at the door and looked back at him. "If you need any help, however, you know where I live."

"Thanks," Garlon whispered tiredly.

Sekmeth nodded before leaving the room.

The Banshee was waiting for her. "I never thought I would ask this after what happened but: will he be alright?"

Sekmeth nodded. "He probably will." She glanced at the window where Nicholas stood. "It's also good to know you don't mind all that much because he might visit me. At least he should, considering he has not recovered enough yet to travel."

The Banshee blinked. "He's leaving? Has he lost his mind?"

The demi-goddess kept an eye on Nicholas who had turned around and was staring at them. "I wondered the same when he told me but he is convinced that he has to." She turned in the direction in which the main building was. "Danu mentioned something about Anubis visiting with other Egyptians. I have to admit I'm curious who it is." She nodded to the quarterling. "Nicholas."

He didn't reply. Instead he rushed back to the room Garlon was in.

The Banshee looked after him. "You enjoy meddling, don't you?"

"Just making sure I'm not disturbed again for a while," Sekmeth said.

Garlon looked up when the door was opened. He had not expected to see his beloved again so soon. He did his best to school his features, already trying to suppress his feelings. "My lord," he greeted.

Nicholas stood there. "I...you...you said..."

"Don't concern yourself. You won't have to deal with it. I'll leave as soon as possible, if we're lucky today."

Nicholas paled. "No!" He rushed to the bed. "You can't leave me! I...I just got you back! You...you can't just leave me again!" He swallowed, trying to keep from crying.

Garlon stared. "Wha--? Nicholas, Nicholas, calm down!" He touched Nicholas' lower arm. "I probably made a mistake by burdening you. It's better if I..."

"Don't tell me what's better!" Nicholas snapped. "I don't want you to leave." A tear run down his cheek.

Garlon brushed it away. "Didn't I tell you not to cry for me?"

"Have you ever known me to do exactly as I'm told?" Nicholas gave a teary smile. "I need you with me," he whispered.

Garlon pulled Nicholas closer until he sat on the bed. "Nicholas?"

"I-I'm just so confused. I always believed in this dream of fulfilling Madoc's vision and marrying the good lady Maeve. Now everything has changed. Now I finally know Madoc's a bastard and I couldn't be happier if I never saw Maeve again." He looked down, the heartbreak still fresh.

Garlon tenderly lifted his chin. "I understand that. I'm really sorry for what you had to suffer because of Maeve." He caressed Nicholas' cheek.

Nicholas timidly leaned against the hand. "I know," he breathed. "As for what else you told me... I don't... I never considered you... or any other man... I mean..." He blushed.

"It's okay." Garlon took Nicholas' hand and placed a gently kiss on his palm. "I just wanted you to know. I don't expect anything from you."

Nicholas blushed even more. His heart quickened and he felt his whole body tingling, starting from his palm. "Garlon..."

The older man blinked, then his eyes widened. "I didn't mean to push you. I'll try to leave you more room." He pulled his hand back.

"No!" Nicholas exclaimed. He captured Garlon's hand and drew it back, leaning his cheek against it. "You...you don't have to," he whispered, looking down on his lap. "I don't want you to."

Garlon looked stunned, then his features softened. He leaned forward and placed a chaste kiss on Nicholas' forehead. "Okay, boy. – Now, you told me that we are here at Queen Danu's home and Sekmeth mentioned her offer. Have you decided already?"

Nicholas smiled. "Great-grandmother is very nice. I think I'd really like to spend some more time with her. She and father have been telling me more about the past and she even gave me a book about the first two Unseelie Wars. She said she's sure the previous owner wouldn't mind my having it."

Garlon started. "...who wouldn't...? Might I see the book?"

Nicholas was confused. "Sure, wait a second." He left the room but returned quickly, carrying a book.

Garlon opened it on the first page, looking for the name of the previous owner. When he finally found it, he leaned back, a look of surprise on his face. "I should have known." He looked at Nicholas. "Danu is right. He really wouldn't have minded. He would have been happy to help his cousin's son." He shook his head. "I'm just surprised how fate connected our lives."

On the top of the first page stood three words in a flowing script.

Robin Goodfellow
Puck

Two days later, the sun rose to nine people, four women and five men, standing in a normally empty family plot in Maine.

One of the women stepped forward and placed flowers in front of one grave.

"I always wondered who the flowers were from," a young red-haired man said.

"Just because we fought on different sides doesn't mean that I didn't respect him," the woman replied.

"Not all of us are that forgetful when it comes to family," an elderly woman replied. She smiled sadly at two of the men. "I asked Robin to leave but he refused to leave you to fight on your own."

The redhead returned the smile. "I think father would have preferred him to leave and survive." He looked at a nearby double grave. "It was hard for him to never know how Uncle Puck would have reacted if he'd told him the truth."

An older man spoke up. "I think my dear cousin loved him just as much."

A brown-haired man nodded. "I don't know exactly what he felt but I remember him saying that the Eyrie were his home. He'd never said that if he hadn't cared deeply for you." He hesitated. "I wonder if he had any idea how much it would influence me."

The woman who had placed the flowers at the grave cleared her throat. "Well, either

way, I should return to Egypt. Who knows what my servants did when they grew bored." She looked at a man standing somewhat to the side. "You and the others are always welcome to visit, Anubis. I'd like to see you all again." She vanished quickly before he could reply.

"Sekmeth's right. It's time to return home," another woman said. "I wouldn't have been here if she hadn't convinced me." With that she also left magically.

The redhead wrapped his arms around the young woman standing by his side. "All this made me see again just how lucky I am to have my family together."

The woman elbowed him gently. "Don't make yourself sound that old." She smiled up at him. "But I'm also happy that we didn't lose anyone again."

The elderly man nodded. "Yes, we were all very lucky." He stepped closer to the grave. "I think cousin Puck would have been happy to know that he kind of helped protect us, even in death." He respectfully touched the stone. "Thank you, cousin." He lowered his voice. "Thank you for helping me get my son back." He smiled slightly when the wind picked up and blew through his hair. It reminded him of how Puck had ruffled his hair when he'd felt down. He looked back at the others. "Could you take us back to the castle, grandmother?"

The elderly woman nodded.

A dark-haired young man spoke up. "We'd like to stay a bit longer." Without noticing it, he had taken the brown-haired man's hand shortly after they had arrived.

The others nodded and Danu transported herself away with Alexander, Serena and Merlin, leaving Garlon, Nicholas and Anubis in the family plot.

Nicholas looked down, only now noticing his holding Garlon's hand but he didn't let go. He had spent the last two days brooding but now Alexander Xanatos' words had reminded him that even though he and Garlon were practically immortal, that didn't mean that they'd endless time. So instead of letting go, he squeezed Garlon's hand.

Garlon looked surprised at the younger man. "Nicholas?"

Nicholas hesitated before looking up at his mentor. He was still too unsure to speak the words but he hoped that his gaze would tell Garlon what he was trying to say.

Garlon smiled gently and pulled Nicholas in his embrace. "Just tell me if I pressure you too much," He told him before leaning down and kissing Nicholas tenderly on the lips.

Nicholas' cheeks were reddened when the kiss ended but he was smiling brightly.

"Home?" Garlon asked.

Nicholas nodded before leaning his head against Garlon's shoulder. Garlon looked back at the grave. "Thanks," he said before vanishing with Nicholas.

Anubis smiled slightly, looking out at the sea. "Are you content with how it turned out?"

Almost transparent lips curved into a smile, blue eyes gentle. "Yes," the wind seemed to whisper. "That I am."

The End