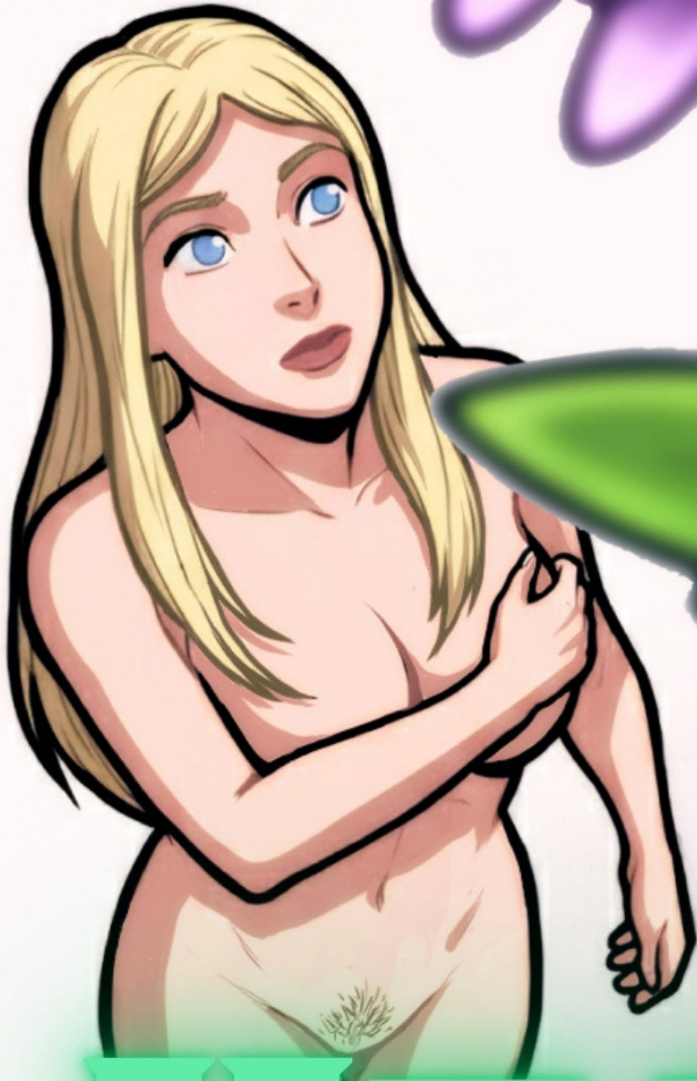


CHAPTER 5



HEATH

FICTION

Rawly Rawls

Heath Chapter 5

Illustrations by Eronautics

Written by RawlyRawls

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A dust cloud rose to the south. Philip noticed it about midday when he looked over his shoulder. "Mother, look."

Lady Rachel stopped, turned, and stared, shading her eyes with a hand. "I'm surprised to see they could spare such a large party for our pursuit."



"They're mounted on reindeer," Philip whispered.

"They must be." Rachel nodded. "And they seem headed our way. Perhaps they spied us with magic. Maybe they have nefarious birds in their employ?" Her belly grumbled. "We'll need food if we're going to fight." She turned her attention away from the distant dust cloud to the purple baladeen berries all around them. They did look delicious.

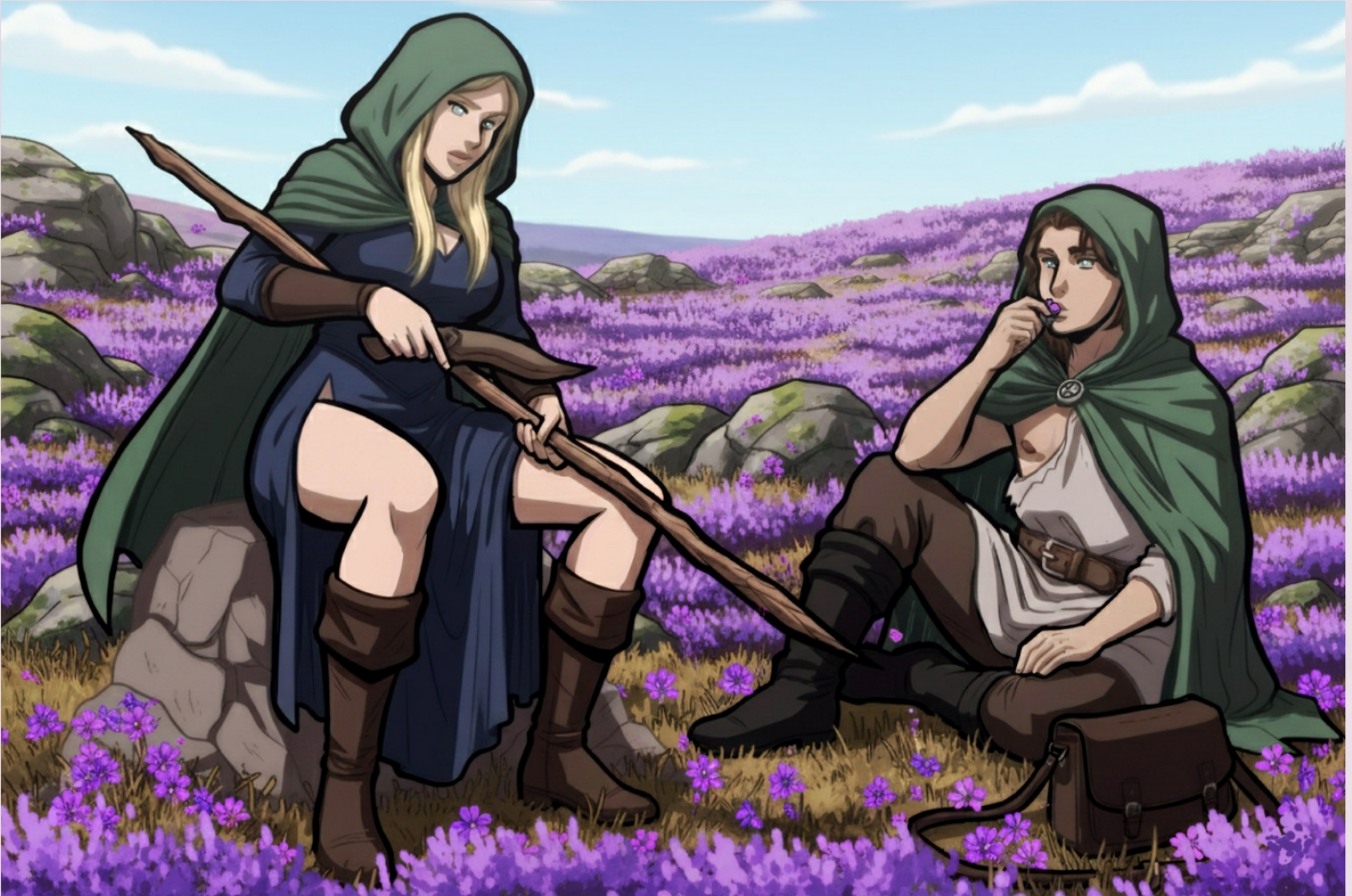
"We have no weapons. How will we fight?" He kept his eyes on the dust cloud.

"We have the gifted daggers. Perhaps we can find some branches long enough for spears. We'll need them to take down cavalry. But eat first, we'll worry about weapons later." Rachel was already picking nearby fruit and plopping them into her mouth. Zesty and sweet, they were indeed delicious.

"I hope the rhaveneen are a myth." Philip did as his mother asked and began pulling fruit off the stubby bushes.

"Me ... too ..." She said between bites.

They ate enough to feel some energy return, but not enough to further upset their cramping stomachs. Then they set about carving some spears that were about the length of a short person. They used their spears as walking sticks to hike north, taking small breaks to eat the fruit.



As the day wore on, the dust cloud grew steadily nearer. Eventually, Philip thought he heard the thundering of hooves. But the reindeer were still far enough away that he thought he might have been imagining it. In an attempt at distraction, he tried to spot the elusive bees as they walked, but that grew frustrating. He still couldn't find one. They always seemed to be in the periphery.

"Do you hear that?" Rachel stopped. Her body buzzed with the anticipation of the coming fight. She judged the hunting party was no more than an hour away now.

"Reindeer hooves." Philip stopped and turned back. The dust cloud now took up a large portion of the southern sky.

“No ... it’s something else. Something pulsing. It reverberates in my insides like a loud noise, but it’s ... it’s ... the bees.” She could hear them all around her. “You’re right. I should be able to see them, there are so many. But wherever I look, they’re just out of sight.”

“Mother ... this is magic.” Philip felt the thrumming inside him. He pulled both daggers from his satchel and handed one to his mother. “How do we counter it?”

“I don’t know this spell. I haven’t encountered ...” She held the dagger in one hand, her spear in the other, waiting. The fabric of reality seemed to stretch around her. She dropped her spear and threw her arm around her son. “Stay close. Something is about to –”



Reality tore right before their eyes. And the pair instantly fell into the waiting chasm.

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“They use bindings in their world when you want them to hold still.” Thistle directed several other faerie collectors as they dealt with the ugly, unconscious humans. A baladeen shrub towered over them, casting them in deep shade. Underneath Thistle’s bare feet, she could feel the ground shake. Elves were coming. “Quickly, strip that leaf and use it to secure them.”

“You have lived among them. We do not understand binding.” Nightfall frowned at her cousin, Thistle. “If they require binding, you must do it yourself.”

“Fine.” Thistle stripped a leaf with her sword. Using living magic, she quickly wove the green threads together into rope. Carefully, she secured the humans, tossing their satchel to another faerie. “You do understand the concept of carrying them?”

“Of course. It’s just like the pollen we collect.” Nightfall tossed her dark hair back and smiled. “Should we put them in our pollen sacks?”

“They will suffocate. We will carry them by hand.”

Thistle tossed her own sandy hair in mockery of Nightfall’s motion. “Come. Let’s get them home.”

“I’ve never seen one before. They are ugly things, aren’t they? Uglier than elves.” Nightfall picked up the woman with the help of another faerie.

“Fairer than elves, I say.” Thistle lifted the man on her own, hefting him onto her back between her wings. “Heavier than elves, though.”



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"Mother ... Mother ..." Philip shook his mother awake. They were in a spartan, stark-white room. He could see no door or windows. The bed he'd woken on was made of one soft cushion with no bedding. Both he and his mother were naked, with no sign of their belongings. "Mother!" He shook his mother harder, bouncing her on the cushy bed a little.



"Wh ... wha ... what?" Rachel opened her eyes and sat up. "Did the elves catch us?"

"I don't think so. This doesn't look like our castle. And where else could they take us?" Philip was glad that his exhaustion and malnourishment had kept his penis slumbering. His mother looked truly beautiful, sitting in such a way that accentuated the curves from her waist out to her hips and butt.

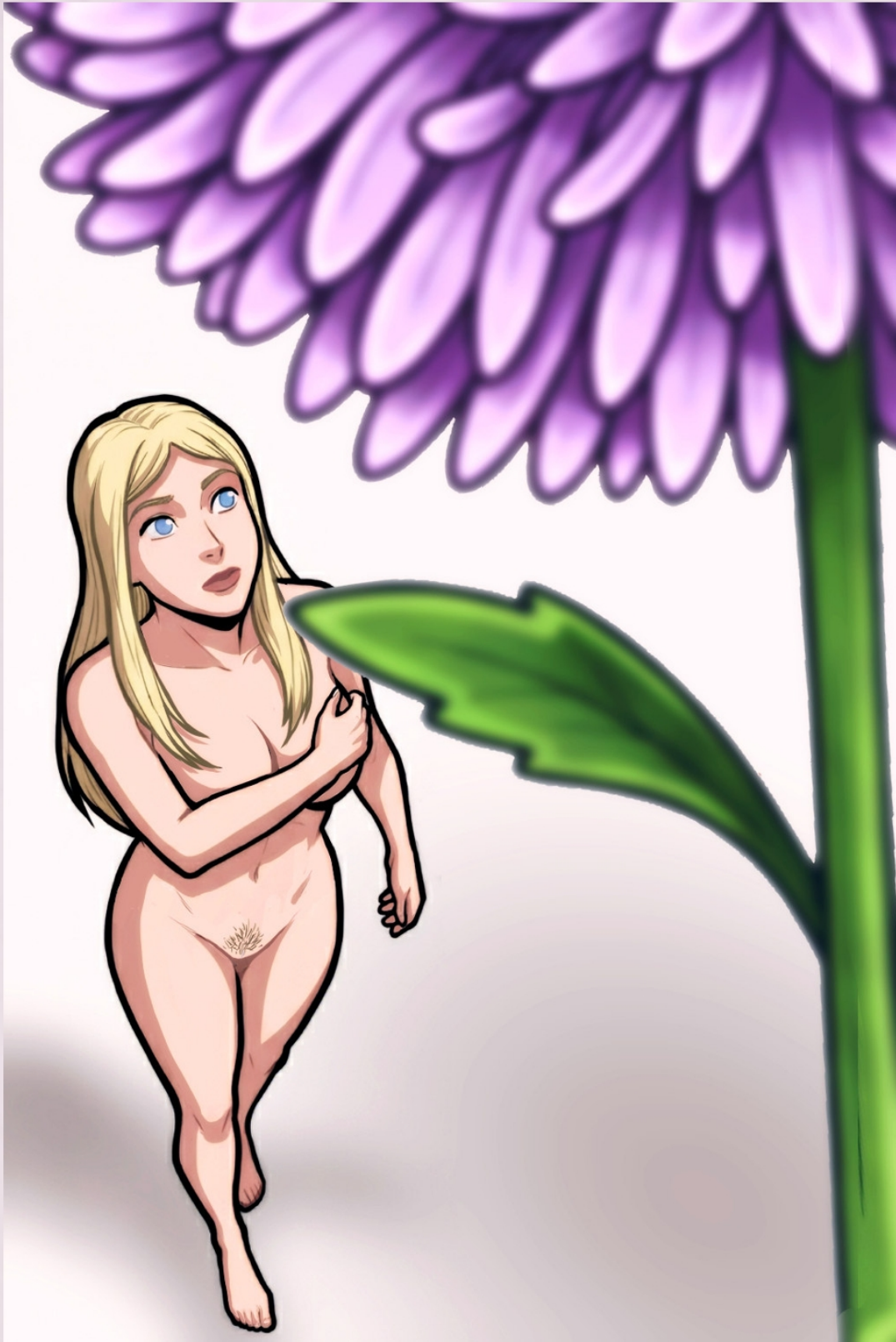
"Oh, my. Yes, this isn't elven at all." She pressed her fingers into the bed experimentally. The depression she made temporarily held the shape and then sprung back into position. She looked over at her son. "This place is strange." She noticed his long, dangling penis. "We need to cover ourselves. There must be a sheet or blanket or something." The place was incredibly spartan. She didn't see anything to cover herself with. The only color in the room came from a vase with a giant flower.

"There's nothing, Mother. Nothing to eat or drink, either." He frowned at her, turning his hips so she didn't have to look directly at his sleeping cock. "What happened to us?"

"Look at that flower." Rachel covered her breasts with one hand and pointed to the vase with the other. "It's an aster."

"So?" Philip looked. "I suppose it's pretty."

“It’s huge. Like twenty times larger than any aster I’ve seen.” Rachel, still covering her breasts, got off the bed and walked over to the flower. Its fragrance hit her hard as she approached.



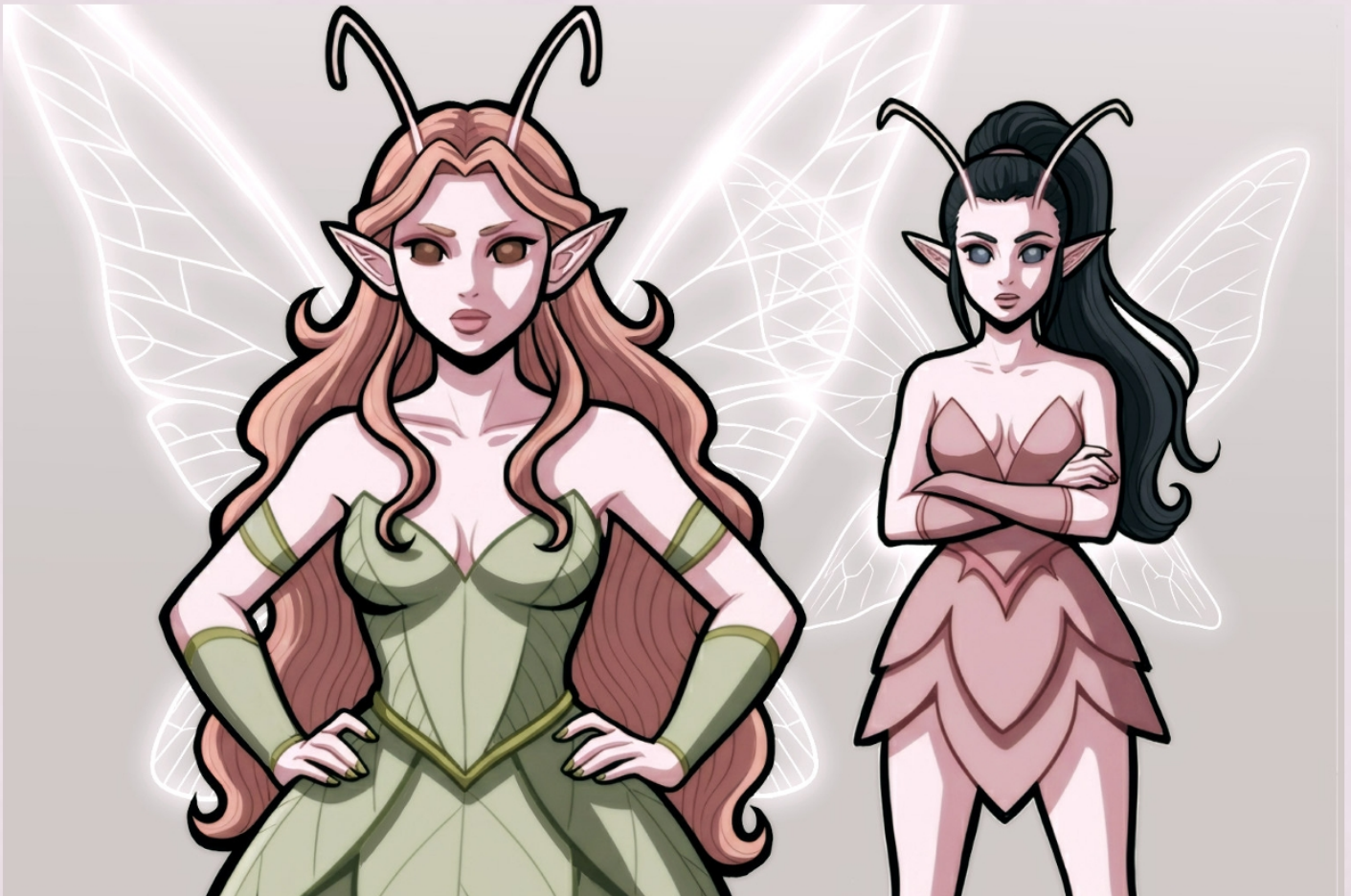
“Oh ... ooohhhhhh ...” Philip nodded. “The flower isn’t large, is it?”

“Exactly. We’re small.” Rachel paced about the white room, trying not to notice that her son was looking at her in a way he shouldn’t. *At least his spear remains soft.* “The rhaveneen have taken us for eating their berries.”

“The rhaveneen are fae it seems.” Philip sighed. “Out of the frying pan and into the fire.”

“Exactly, I –” Rachel was interrupted by a loud clicking sound.

A door opened in the monochromatic wall where there hadn’t been a hint of a door moments before. In stepped two female creatures. One had sandy-brown hair, the other raven hair. They were both fair in complexion, dressed scantily, and sported wings folded to their backs. The one with the sandy hair exuded authority. “I am Thistle,” she said, placing her hands on her wide hips. “You have eaten the forbidden fruit, thus you have put yourselves under our power. We will decide what to do with you.” She looked at Nightfall. “We’ll probably slit your throats. That’s what we usually do. But sometimes, the queen will bargain with you if you have something she wants. But I have to warn you, your human minds won’t understand fae bartering. I have spent time with humans, so I –”

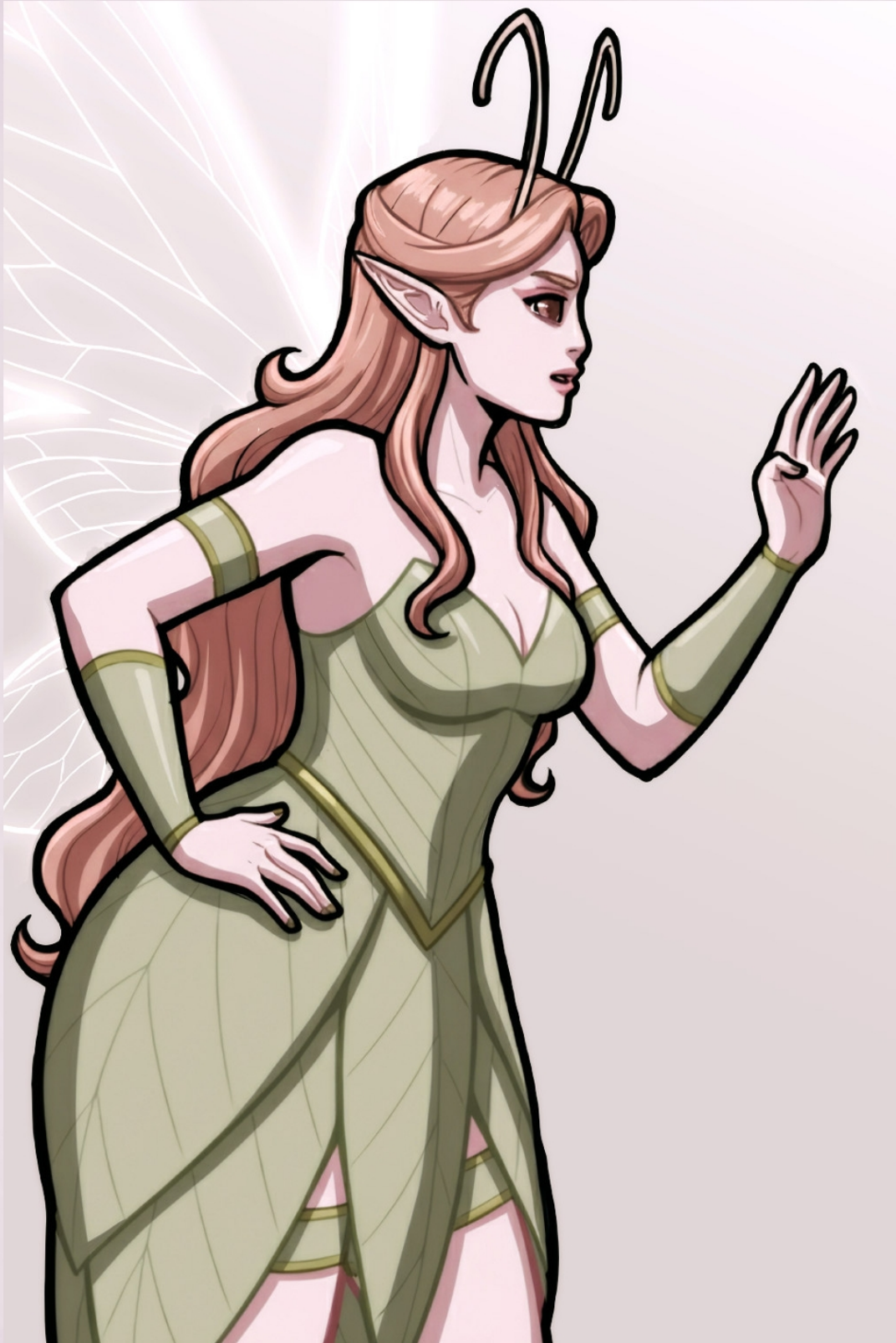


“Excuse me, madame.” Rachel stared in awe. She’d never seen such a creature before. Remembering her training, she stood straight and wove magic into her words. “This is my son, Count Philip. We only ate the berries because we were starving, and we were hunted by elves. We needed strength to fight them. We meant no offense. Release us now, and we will bother you no more.”

Thistle rolled her eyes at Nightfall, giving an expression that said: *Do you see what I have to deal with?*

Not understanding her cousin, Nightfall shrugged.

“One, don’t interrupt me, human.” Thistle counted off points on her fingers. “Two, I could give two flaps of a tattered wing for any title this boy-man holds. Not that I believe you. You look like a pair of thieves to me. And your actions with our fruit support that theory.” She ticked off another finger. “Three, your pathetic human magic won’t work on me. It’s offensive that you even tried. Four, what did you steal from the elves that they chased you with such a large party of riders? It must be valuable. Was it in the bag we took from you?”



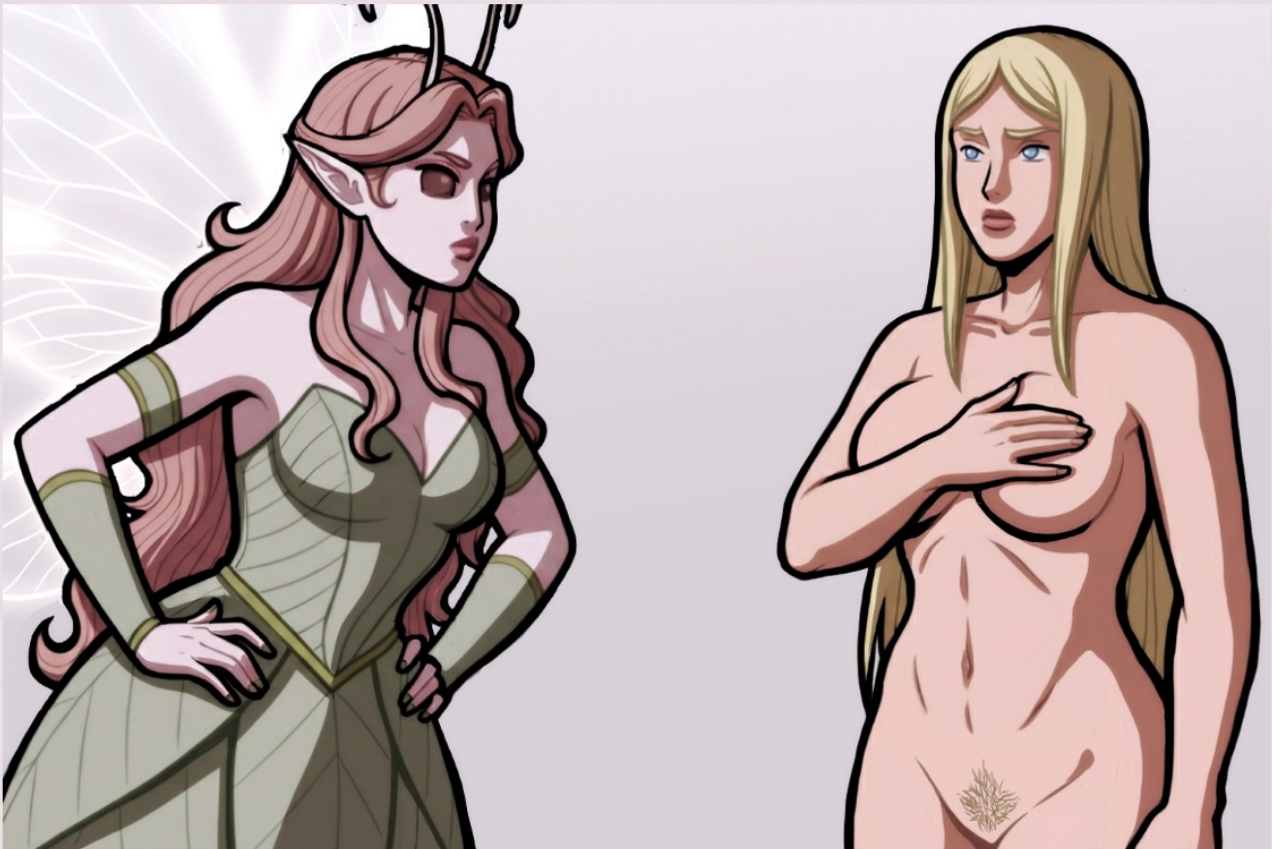
“That bag was a gift from a good friend.” Philip walked up and stood next to his mother, using his courtly bearing. Which wasn’t easy to do naked, but he felt he handled it well. “If you have damaged –”

“I can tell you’re a young one. I’ll talk to your elder.” Thistle silenced him and eyed the woman. “What did you steal?”

“I apologize for using my magic. I only wanted us to be out of your hair and on our way.” Rachel tried to keep a pleasant smile on her face.

“She doesn’t answer your question.” Nightfall cocked her head and regarded the woman. “Is she slow?”

“We didn’t steal anything.” Rachel worked hard to keep her posture despite the way this odd faerie was staring at her breasts. “I’ll tell you what happened.” She laid out the story of their count’s move to the Heath and his betrayal by the emperor.



When Rachel was finished, Thistle barked out a quick laugh. “Did you understand any of that, Cousin Nightfall?”

“Do they think they possess our flowers?” Nightfall sounded mystified.

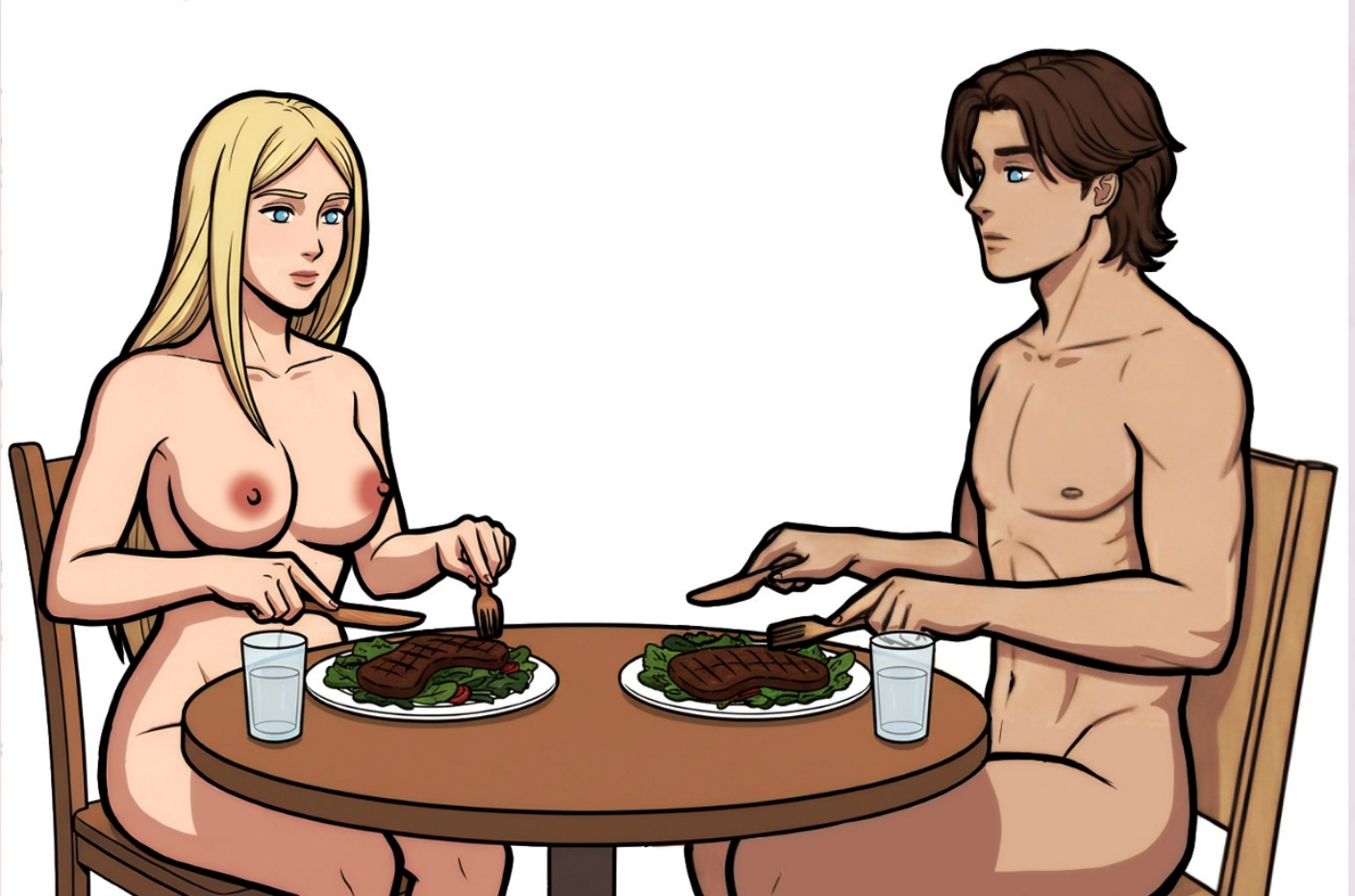
“Yes, they think that.” Thistle nodded to her cousin and turned back to the humans. “I’m not sure I believe your story. I will bring it to the queen’s people, and we will decide whether to torture the truth out of you.” With that she pivoted, flapped her wings, and flew out of the room. Nightfall followed her. The door closed and disappeared.

“That wasn’t good.” Philip sat heavily on the bed.

“No, it was not.” Rachel sat next to him and put an arm around his shoulders.

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Some time later, they were served food and water. The meal consisted of an unknown vegetable and roast meat, which Rachel and Philip suspected was an insect. They didn't mind. It tasted good enough, and they were starving. They slept after that. When Rachel woke, Thistle and Nightfall were waiting for them.



"The queen doesn't understand much of your story, but she says she believes you." Thistle smiled brightly. "She does understand why you ate the forbidden fruit and forgives you. She accepts that this young pup is somehow titled and important in your world."

"That's great news." Rachel sat up, shaking her son awake. "So, we're free to go?"

"The queen will barter for your freedom," Nightfall said gravely.

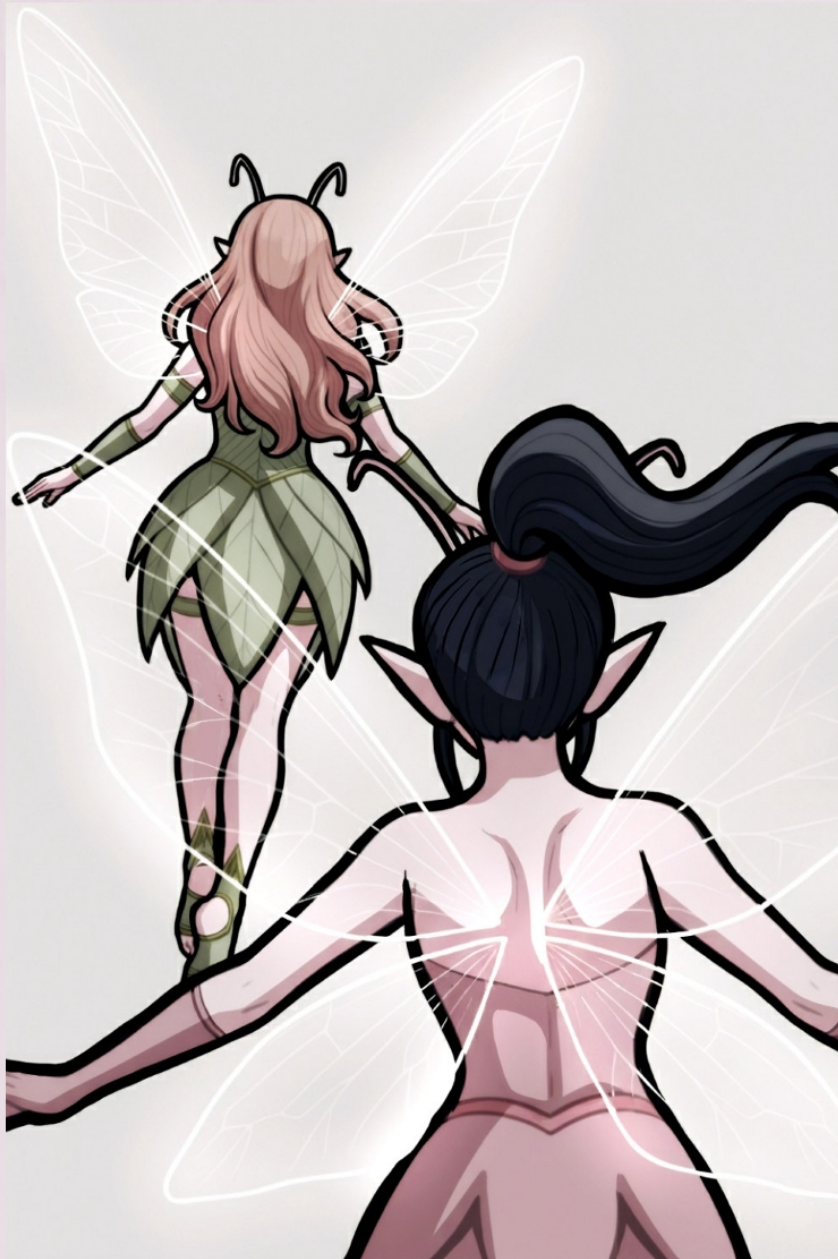
"Barter? We don't have anything of value." Philip climbed off the bed and stood before the fae. He didn't like the way they appraised his naked body. "We didn't steal any treasure from the elves. They stole from us."

"We want nothing from the elves," Thistle said. "But the queen would like a human child to raise in her court. She has a goblin one. A human would provide symmetry." She cocked her head. "I see you don't understand. Let me speak it out plainly. Give us a baby, and you may go free."

"That's impossible." Rachel looked at her son in horror. His eyes were wide in disbelief. "He's my son."

"Why is she telling us this?" Nightfall asked her cousin.

“That I do not understand.” Thistle shrugged back at her cousin. “You two humans better get started. I know it takes more than five months to make a baby.” She flapped her wings and flew out of the room, her cousin right behind her. The door closed.



“We’ll think of something, Mother.” Philip let the shock wash over him.

“We’ll have to.” Rachel’s mind raced. That was not a barter they would ever make. She shuddered with disgust even to think on it. There had to be something else the fae wanted. They would find another way out of their new prison.