



Copyright 2007

Publisher Wings e-Press

Order at <http://CatMuldoon.com>

Or

<http://www.Wings-Press.com>

Trouble in Faerie!

Treachery is afoot in the supposedly idyllic realm of Faerie, and their only hope is someone who knows nothing of her true origin.

Reviews of Rue the Day

Register at <http://CatMuldoon.com> for excerpts and a chance to win prizes.

Cat Muldoon weaves a tale that the reader can transport to the same world as her heroine. The tension was sustained throughout the book, without artifice, simply the force of a memorable tale. This is the first story of Cat's I've had the good fortune to read and it will not be the last. I look forward to visiting many other realms with Cat Muldoon. On my unbelievable believable scale this rates 5 pixies.

A. Dee Carey / *The Fox Lady*
Fantasy Novelist. www.adeecarey.com

Ms. Muldoon's fictional world is multilayered, well-defined, and rich with imagery. The story moves forward at a good pace, and the plot is filled with little twists and turns that keep you reading. The book all too soon comes to a satisfying conclusion.

Elaine Cantrell

RUE THE DAY...The Undercover Heir is a fast paced fantasy in the land of Faeries and Selkies, where behind the scenes there is political treachery, betrayal, and a plot to assassinate Queen Neala and King Nevin. Outside of her pet cat, the princess doesn't know who she can trust, and who might be an enemy to her royal family.

I love your ultra-complex plot line.

Joan Powell
Conger Books Review

Listen to Cat read excerpts of Rue the Day: The Undercover Heir Book 1 at <http://CatMuldoon.com>

Prologue

The Holy Mother Orla sat cross-legged on her plush cushion before the Well of Mysteries. She wore the simple silk robes of her Order with the tiara and jewels indicative of her exalted rank and experience. Early in the morning, she felt a jolt followed by a slow seeping drain, and she had to find out why the power that gave all Faerie its life felt weaker than it had yesterday. She sensed it easily because of her long experience manipulating the magical energies of Faerie.

Had something happened to the Queen? Perhaps a change of power had just been conceived. Could it be that Neala has lost control? She decided that the only difference between herself and the Queen was that Neala had prepared herself for Rule while Orla had taken vows of religious service. Both had considerable abilities to manipulate magic.

Orla damped her agitation, breathing deeply as she forced all thought from her mind. Determined to clear her mind and investigate the power drain, she rested her hands on the stony rim of the well. If she became lost in the images the water showed her, she could fall into the well and into the depth of her vision. She gazed into the sapphire ring on her left hand. Focusing on the beautiful gem always helped her when her mind whirled. When her thoughts stilled, she addressed the quiet depths. "Show me Queen Neala."

Candles interspersed around the cold rim shone like stars in black liquid night. Orla dipped her hand into the frigid water and traced a spiral. The pinpoint lights formed a sparkling array, and then showed her a vision... except... she did not see the visage of her powerful ruler. She leaned closer, trying to view Neala through the murk.

Grey fog shrouded trees in filmy obscurity. "The mists have risen in the Boundarylands," Orla whispered. "That bodes ill." Her eyes fixed unblinking on the images as she looked and listened to the vision.

A roar of the dangerous beasts that fed on unsuspecting Faeries, draining their life essence and magic chilled Orla. She recoiled from the icy terror running down her spine.

Crackling of branches under heavy feet. Orla shuddered. "No!"

A woman's scream. Is *that* ...?

Silence.

"Your Majesty!" Orla uselessly reached out her hand as if that could draw the Queen into the sanctuary.

As the mists shifted, Orla saw a piece of green silk trimmed in a lace knotwork border lying on the ground.

"What happened?" she yelled into the well, though she knew there would be no reply.

No answer. Only the ubiquitous mist.

Power drained so quickly from the land that Orla collapsed beside the well. She roused to a pungent odor filling her nose and making her eyes water. Two sisters of the order tried frantically to revive her. *I must not speak to anyone yet. Not until I tell the king that his queen is gone from Faerie and might be dead.* Orla sat, waving off their assistance.

"Holy Mother, something is horribly wrong!"

"Please tell us what is happening!"

Still in a haze mirroring the deadly mists, Orla could not even say who had come to her.

"Tell us what we should do," the first sister pleaded, grabbing Orla's arm.

"There is little anyone can do," Orla said, trying to sound reassuring, "but ... pray." *I must tell them something.* She closed her eyes, leaned against the cool, stalwart stone, and gulped a few deep breaths. Ready to take charge, she accepted a hand, got to her feet and announced, "Tell the sisters there is to be no use of magic until further notice."

"What? Why not?"

"We do not understand."

"Dear sisters, something awful has indeed occurred. I cannot say more until I speak to the King... but Faerie magic is in danger." She did not tell them the rest. *The Queen is no longer in our realm and, if she does not return, magic will wither and die -- unless someone proves strong enough to wield it.*

Chapter One

Lynne felt as if she were in a waking dream. Night had brought an unexpected chill that the hidden October sun could not warm. Her incessant headache throbbed worse than usual. At times, the pain was so bad she thought it might kill her. She gazed out of the only window in the tiny hut, breathing deeply and attempting to drain the pain out of her head. Fog shrouded the hills and trees in a milky white blanket. She had learned not to fear the frequent misty mornings in the Ozarks, but there was something unusual about this one. She felt restless.

The cat rubbing insistently against her legs ended her reverie. It occurred to her that he still seemed to be a young cat even though he had been with her ever since she and Mother were separated forever on a misty morning much like this one. After more than seventeen years, he was still, unaccountably, as spry as a one-year-old. He had been with her through placements in over a dozen foster homes and was her only true friend. Smiling and scratching him between the ears, she said, "I'm sorry, Bree. I know you think you're starving to death."

She fed him and focused again on the veiled world beyond her door. No breeze rustled in the trees. No birds sang. Nothing moved at all. Why was it so still?

A yearning rose within her that she did not comprehend. A compulsion to go into the mist overtook her. Although Lynne did not understand what drove her actions, she felt she should make ready for travel. Trusting her instincts had saved her life more than once. Following the urge, she pulled her well-used backpack from under the bed, checked its contents, and found she had enough supplies to sustain her for a while if her journey was an extended one. An experienced journeyer, she filled the canteen and set the pack by the door. Lynne was sure-footed even in rough terrain and enjoyed being in the woods and sleeping in the trees.

A stubborn thought screamed for attention. She felt as if someone was trying to pressure

her out of the house, so she fought against the desire to leave. Instinct had saved her life on many occasions, but it never felt like a compulsion, and she hated to be forced to do anything. *Maybe this is not my instinct trying to save me ...There is nobody else here. Why do I feel someone trying to chase me out of here?*

Bree had finished his meal and was licking the bowl, pushing it around the floor with the vigor of his tongue. The sound stopped abruptly. Lynne turned to see the cat standing, tail fluffed, back arched, staring transfixed at--what? Whatever Bree saw in the middle of the room, Lynne did not. He let out a low “mmmm” that was neither growl nor purr.

“What’s the matter, Bree?” she asked shakily.

Not acknowledging the sound of his name, the cat stared fixedly at whatever only he could see and made that strange, guttural sound again.

The back of Lynne’s neck prickled. She tucked her golden-red hair behind her ears. Her mouth went dry. “Bree?” Lynne realized that she was clenching her fists only when the pain of nails digging in her palms alerted her. She let out an exasperated sigh. “Get a grip,” she admonished herself. “I’m being ridiculous.” The unsettling feeling remained.

Determined to bring normalcy to the morning, she sipped some water. Willing herself to calm, she practiced the Tai Chi centering breath that helped keep her in the present moment as she turned back to watch the cat. Bree’s murmur soon ceased. His tail shrunk to its usual size, and his back lowered. He stood more relaxed, but still stared at that specific empty point in the middle of the room. Lynne’s uneasiness mounted.

The throbbing pain in her head was almost more than she could bear. She splashed cold water on her face, hoping to shake off the mental foggiess that so perfectly mirrored the weather. Fighting for calm, she took several deep breaths in an effort to calm herself and diminish the pain. Maybe this time the deep breathing would help.

Lynne’s breath caught. She felt the presence of someone standing behind her. Her heart pounded. She whirled around and sunk into a battle stance, ready to attack the intruder. Nobody was there. “I must be losing my mind.” She grabbed the counter to steady herself.

Bree purred--a real purr this time. Lynne released her grip on the counter. The grey cat slowly raised a snowy paw and stepped forward. Though Lynne’s anxiety remained, his behavior aroused her curiosity. She knelt beside her beloved friend. Bree’s long grey whiskers twitched as he took another step, this time with less hesitation. His purr grew louder as he tilted

his head upward with an expression of bliss on his face, as if being scratched under the chin by an unseen hand.

Lynne had the strangest feeling someone was trying to comfort her. This only heightened her sense of alarm. Who could be trying to soothe me and my cat, and why? She feared for her cat's safety and wanted him away from the mysterious presence. "Bree, no!" she yelled, but he stayed where he was and purred contentedly. Not knowing what else to do, she scooped Bree into her arms, grabbed her pack, and dashed through the door into the misty woods.

The feline tensed and squirmed in Lynne's arms as she raced away from the hut. Bree squalled in protest and dug his back claws into Lynne's stomach, but she held him close. Her footing faltered as she slipped in a mud puddle. Reflexively, her arms spread to catch her balance, and Bree dashed away. "Bree, BREE!" she yelled, pursuing him.

Lynne rebuked herself for fleeing into the fog like a frightened deer. Bree had lived his whole life indoors, and she had terrified him. Certainly, he would not come to her call. She let out a cry of anguish as she started searching for her companion. She rarely cried, but now hot tears rolled down her cheeks. She tried to make her voice calm as she called to Bree.

Maybe if I act like a normal person, he might come to me.

The only sound was her breathing. Her incessantly throbbing head made it difficult to focus and quiet her mind. She forced her breath to quiet as she walked more calmly, listening for him. Without noticing, she held her arms out to help guide her, since her eyes gave her no useful information in the milky mist. At one point, she felt a branch break beneath her foot. A few minutes later, it occurred to her that she had not heard the branch crack. Walking with purposeful disregard for the terrain, she did not even hear her shoes contacting the earth. Though an expert at moving quietly through the woods, the headlong dash through fog surely must have taken her through countless crunchy autumn leaves and fallen sticks. She could not see her feet, and could not imagine moving soundlessly in these conditions.

Experimentally, Lynne stomped her foot hard. She felt the impact through her leg, but heard no sound. She clapped twice and heard two dull thuds. She raised a hand before her face. All she saw was a vague shape. She shuddered. The temperature had surely risen; the fog should be lifting. The back of her neck prickled and her sense of danger increased.

"Bree, I'm not going home without you," Lynne called. Her voice did not travel through the woods as it should have. Finally, weary and hoarse from hours of anxious searching and

calling, Lynne slumped against an old tree and sank onto the ground. Bree might be lost forever, and it was all her fault. If only she had kept her wits and stayed to face whatever was happening at the hut, none of this would have happened.

Lynne shivered. Had the day grown so cold? She was no closer to locating her beloved companion. *You'll never find him sitting on your pity pot.* She cautioned herself to stay centered and keep her wits. *Be in the present moment.*

Just then, a sense of imminent, mortal danger shocked her into action. She had to move now. Rolling to one side, she sprang to her feet, feeling dizzy and disoriented. Something made a dull thump as it hit the tree just where her head had been a moment ago. She moved with stealth behind the tree and slowly rounded it, looking in every direction for the mysterious projectile, but could find nothing in the dense fog, either with her eyes or with her hands. She leaned against the tree and took in deep but shaky drafts of the chilly air, grateful that her instinct, sharpened by numerous dangerous encounters, had just saved her from death again.

Looking, listening and feeling all around the area, Lynne no longer felt immediate danger. Since the feeling of impending doom had passed and not returned, her desire to find Bree and go home eclipsed her desire to know what had just hit the tree. Resuming her hunt, she methodically placed one foot before another and called Bree's name every few steps. Although Lynne had no idea in which direction to look for him, she would search until they reunited. She had to find Bree. The fog had to lift eventually. Perhaps her love for the cat or some inner guidance might come to her aid.

How long had she been wandering? Several hours, probably, but it did not matter. She continued to trudge and call and listen. She heard a rustle and maybe a sound. She stopped. Had she heard a meow? She waited. *No, it must have been wishful thinking.* With a sigh, she continued.

"Brrrrrrraaoow?"

"Bree!" Yes, it was definitely Bree's voice just ahead of her. She looked up to where his call had come. Just then, she saw the thick fog thin from pea soup to taffeta veil. Now she was able to see for several feet around her. Bree perched on a branch at shoulder height. "Oh, Bree, I am so glad to finally find you." She reached for the cat.

Bree jumped off the branch, dashed several feet, and turned to look at her.

"Bree, come on. Let's go home," Lynne cajoled. She was almost in reach when the cat

again dashed ahead a few paces. Lynne kept curses and harsh words to herself as she advanced.

The cat, to her annoyance, continued his antics several more times, letting her get almost close enough to catch him before sprinting. "Oh, Bree, please don't do this to me," the woman said quietly. She wanted to wail in frustration, but had no more energy for outbursts.

At long last, Bree sat motionless, facing Lynne as she approached. He wound his steel grey tail around his white paws and sat like an elegant statue. His eyes gazed directly into hers. She knelt to pick him up. "I love you, Bree," She cooed.

It was then that Lynne noticed the soft leather boots behind her cat. She rose, Bree purring in her arms, to see the wearer of the boots smiling at her.

Lynne's jaw dropped. She had seen this man before, though they had never spoken or met. This rugged, well-proportioned man wearing linen clothes, a wool cloak, and laced boots, had recently appeared for brief moments, a silent observer in her dreams. She closed her gaping mouth and tried to think what she should say or do next.

The man's smiling green eyes resembled her own. "Greetings, Aislinn," he said warmly, his smile broadening.

* * *

Queen Neala lay unmoving, scarcely breathing, a pale reflection of the vivacious woman who had ruled Faerie for --hundreds of years.

Just a little longer, Meave thought, *and you will not be able to find your way back to this body.* "It takes so much work to help end the suffering of an immortal," Meave said as she stroked Neala's white hair. "We Faeries are not meant to die, but sometimes living is so much worse, my queen. I am doing all I can to let you pass peacefully." She twisted a lock between her fingers. "Your hair used to be so beautiful, and now... it is hard to imagine that it was you who won Nevin's heart." She tucked the covers around the unconscious woman under her care. "Your torment will soon be over."

* * *

King Nevin, with furrowed brow and clenched fists, stood gazing out the window of his suite into the misty morning. He did not want to give up on his Queen, but if something did not

change soon, he would have no choice. Tonight there would be only a sliver of waning moon to light the sky. A few nights hence would be moon-dark. When the orb shone full, a battle for rule of Faerie was likely, if not inevitable.

Unless a miracle happened.

He paced with quick steps, wishing his action could somehow hasten a solution. A hushed voice deep in his mind urged him to give up the struggle, to divest himself of the heavy yoke of kingship, to let someone else carry the burden. *Let the crown pass to another*, it urged. *Neala has guided us well, but it is time to let her go*, the voice urged.

Nevin used to be able to fight off such gloomy thoughts like the warrior he was, but today he could not make himself crawl out of overwhelming defeat. He acquiesced to the urging of that subtle call to surrender. Faerie magic had grown so feeble without the Queen to bring forth its power that the land was beginning to suffer in subtle but noticeable ways. Crops still thrived and flowers bloomed, but with flavors less rich and colors less brilliant. "Perhaps I should stop stubbornly clinging to our plans... to her."

The mellifluous voice in his mind cajoled him, *Do not let magic die. Let a woman of strength and resolve rule her people*.

Nevin melted into a chair and dropped his head into his hands. "I cannot summon forth the magic myself. I am not strong enough to withstand the power. Perhaps I should allow rule to be contested, cleanly and openly."

Yes, yes... You must not let your people suffer. You must let Faerie thrive and be potent once more.

"Faerie needs to be strong," he muttered. The flames of his hope had become frail flickers. His Queen had returned a few years ago, but it was not the jubilant homecoming of his dreams.

A knock at the door startled him. "Enter."

Meave moved silently into the suite and scrutinized him. Frowning, she carefully set a cloth satchel on the table.

Nevin smiled in forced amusement. "I can always tell when you are here for the business of healing. Your beautiful black hair is wound into an elaborate knot atop your lovely head."

She nodded.

"I have no need of your tender care. I am well."

"Your Majesty, I know you are worried. You have been looking pale. It is not proper for our King to look so distraught."

The healer's soothing, mellow voice served only to irritate him. "You know I am concerned for my queen. There is no need for me to take one of your vile potions." He knew he was acting a brute, but her increasingly frequent visits rankled him.

Meave set a glass vial on the table with a distinctive clink. "Should you have a change of opinion, take this with some food." She picked up the bag.

"Thank you," he said with rancor. "If you have no other news?"

A pause. "No, my friend."

"Then be gone."

She offered an unwanted seductive invitation with her smoldering eyes through thick black lashes. "As Your Majesty wishes." Her long blue tunic flared as she spun around and left.

Nevin's anger flared, burning off the despair, igniting hope. "I cannot give up on my queen. I will not!" He jumped to his feet and shook his fists in the air. "I do not concede!"

Read More Cat Muldoon!

Find all these books at Amazon.com

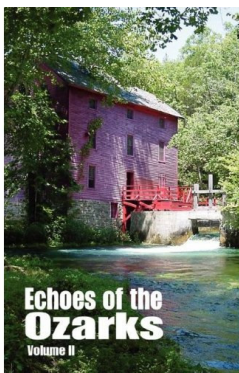
Rue the Day: The Undercover Heir, Book 1 <http://CatMuldoon.com>

Treachery is afoot in the supposedly idyllic realm of Faerie, and their only hope is someone who knows nothing of her true origin.



“Tired Old Cinnamon” in *Echoes of the Ozarks, Volume II*

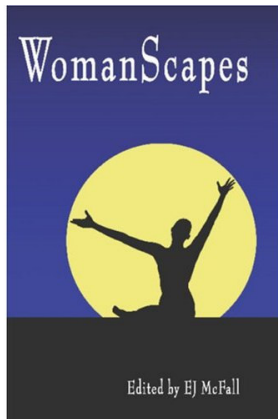
What if evil had a smell? It does for young Wade, and his special sense gets him into big trouble.



Muldoon / Rue the Day sample

“Seal Skins” in *WomanScapes*

Ilani, a woman of the Selkie (sealfolk) gets in the way of an arrow intended for the Selkie man who tarried with the shooter’s wife. faces the pain of her past and of the secret she discovers.



“Katrina’s Horror” appears in *Storyteller Magazine*.

An arrogant amateur horror author faces the wrath of someone who just might author his doom!

<http://www.freewebs.com/fossilcreek/store.html>

Storyteller Magazine is solid stories, poems and articles, all short. The annual subscription is only \$20 at this time, and you’ll have plenty to read throughout the month!