

A composite image featuring a woman's face in the background, with a large green moth superimposed over it. The moth's wings are spread, and its body is positioned over the woman's eyes and nose. The woman's eyes are looking directly at the viewer. The overall color palette is dominated by greens and dark tones.

HOW  
DOES  
IT  
FEEL?

JENEANE O'RILEY

INFATUATED FAE  
BOOK 1

HOW DOES IT FEEL?  
INFATUATED FAE BOOK ONE

JENEANE O'RILEY



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## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

*I want you to enjoy this book with every cell inside of your body. I want you to escape to a magical villain fairy land full of fun, but not at the expense of your health and well being.*

*Please be aware this story contains content that might be troubling to some readers, **including, but not limited to violence, abuse (physical, mental, emotional, verbal), kidnapping, death or dying, gore, mental illness, bones, hospitalization, profanity, snakes, sex, poisoning.** If you decide to proceed (cracks knuckles and turns to face you in a large, ominous desk chair) then please enjoy book one of the infatuated fae series.*

*Jeneane O'Riley*

*To you. My hope is not that you finish this book, but that this book finishes you.*

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## Acknowledgments

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# HOW DOES IT FEEL?

by Jeneane O'Riley

## CHAPTER I

# THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Callie

The damp floor of the dungeon made it hard to keep the tiny cuts of cheese on my mini charcuterie board. I suppose it was less of a board and more of a loose brick from the back wall, but the rat that visited this cell wouldn't mind.

I laughed out loud at how cute it looked with the little bits of cracker and honey saved from my meal yesterday. My muscles froze. I immediately berated myself for the laughter that had slipped out.

They didn't like when I made noises. When I made noises, they woke up. They had told me they would hurt me again if I made any more noise. I pressed my body into the faulty shelter of the dungeon's shadows.

My finger's poked the open, bloodied wound on my head as a firm reminder of its horrible capabilities.

A deep inhale stretched my sinewy ribs as I imprinted my finger nail sharply into the wound. I bit the iron cuffs around my wrist to muffle my cries as the metal tang of blood swirled with the bite of iron in my mouth.

Good, I still felt something. My taut muscles relaxed the faintest amount.

The iron chain between my cuffs clanged loudly against itself with my slight movement.

Blackness immediately consumed me as my eyes shut so tightly that tiny flecks of light speckled the back of my eyelids. The hard stone wall dug into my flesh. I pressed harder, willing it to swallow me up so I would no longer be inside the fear-laced cell of this dungeon.

Had I caused it to wake?

A few stray tears escaped my eyes as my body trembled.

*Fuck. Fuck.*

I shook so hard I threatened to wake him with the rattle of my bones.

*Be quiet or it will wake and hurt you again.*

I wish I could have known more details about all of this. I was beginning to question who I really was anymore. It was like ten versions of myself were shoved into this body, and I grew more confused about who I was with every day that passed.

I just wanted to be myself for a while. I had forgotten what that felt like.

A moment of stillness passed. I filled myself with a silent lungful of relief and returned to my mini charcuterie board.

I could wait and see if they gave me more bread tonight, but I doubt they would.

Holding my breath, I stepped over the rusted chain that connected my cuffs and pulled my hands wide on either side of my body. The thick iron chain pulled tightly around my lower back, silencing any metal clangs as I moved the brick of food back toward the cell wall where I had removed the brick from originally. I sat in front of the large gap and waited patiently for the only thing that kept me sane. The only thing I looked forward to anymore.

Within a few moments, the grungy brown rat came.

"I'm so glad you made it back," I mouthed excitedly, the smacks of my lips the only sound I dared to make.

The large brown rat turned its beady black eyes both ways before bypassing the food and running into my lap. He looked bigger today. His dark fur, slick with greasy patches, seemed more filled out than usual. Was I crazy to think a rat had gained muscle?

"I told you to stop saving your food for us. I want to help you escape, not take your nourishment," the mahogany rat whispered as he climbed onto my shoulder and nuzzled the crook of my neck.

His soft fur brushed against my skin. He was so warm and dry compared to everything else down here.

"Take the food back to the others, please. I'd like to know you are all fed," I pleaded softer than a whisper but more cautious than a secret.

He had told me many times that the castle rats were taken care of, but I couldn't stand the thought of any of the animals and creatures around this horrible place not having food.

"*Please* be quiet. I cannot stand to see them hurt you anymore," he whispered softer than before. "Any of them." He paused to look in the opposite corner of the dark cell before his small voice continued. "I came to tell you that *he* is on the way and I have failed you. Please, please don't

give up. We will find a way—” The brown rat squeaked loudly before scurrying off my shoulder and out the hole again with a deep grunt, just as a loud bang thudded and a large boulder slammed into the wall, somehow missing the rat’s naked tail.

It was awake.

I leaped back in an aimless attempt to gain distance between the monster and myself. Hurriedly, I moved my legs back over the chain that bound my wrists to have more movement of my hands. Not that I could defend myself much anyway.

“What did I tell you, human? What did I tell you would happen if you woke me?” rumbled a deep raspy voice.

It was haunting. Not high and not low, just the right sound to shock your senses and make your bones feel weak at the pitch. Nothing human sounded similar.

But then again, it wasn’t human.

It shifted with a horrible tremble as it turned itself back into a squat tree-stump-looking creature no taller than my hips. Brown bark-like texture covered its long body except for the angry tan face, arms, and hands. Green and brown leaves rustled loudly at the ends of its long arms and legs while large expressionless black eyes stared back at me. The only other notable feature of its face was a deep cavernous hole for its mouth.

“I-I’m sorry. *Please* go back to sleep, I’ll be quiet. I swear,” I pleaded to the forest bog, willing him with every fiber of my existence to accept my offer.

It trembled again, this time sprouting pointed branches covered with sharp thorns.

“I *will* go back to sleep after I kill you and use you slowly, you *human* piece of shit,” the forest bog rasped as it began walking toward me.

The thorns shifted, growing fatter as they angled toward me, ready to sink into my skin like the barbs of a fishing hook.

“Please!” I cried out.

The tiny black dress I wore shielded none of the cold stone from my skin as I sank back farther against the wall.

“So, you haven’t killed her?” thundered a deep voice as *he* opened the cell door and stepped inside.

At least fifteen armored guards stood on edge as the umbra of a man lurked forward reluctantly.

The bog shrank away instantly, withdrawing all its thorns and returning to the shape of a boulder once again.

“Sir, the assassin is not safe to be around. We will extract her. Please

leave her cell,” one of the guards shouted, stepping in front of the enormously muscular Fae.

The impressive Fae suddenly seemed to remember himself and left the cell to watch me from behind the iron bars as five other guards entered in his place.

“Please! Don’t do this,” I shouted as the guards grabbed me and formed a complete circle with their bodies, shoving me out of my cell and into the torch-lit aisle that ran between our cells.

“Where to, sir?” A different guard asked as they huddled around me, making certain to keep me as far from the Unseelie prince as possible while still forcing me to walk with him.

“To the chamber of blood. I am tired of the human, and it’s the perfect place to paint the walls with her pretty blood.”

## CHAPTER 2

## A SHORT TIME PRIOR

Callie

I slid my hands over the sun-warmed leather with an influx of small prayers.

The old truck gurgled and shook at my attempted coaxing. I heaved out a sudden breath of relief, sliding down in the seat a few relaxed inches. I wouldn't ruin my record. No late days, no call offs.

I was doing a good job.

The tires crackled haphazardly over the stray twigs that littered the gravel of my driveway as I pulled out of the winding trail and headed away from my beautiful cottage. Okay, maybe calling it a cottage was a stretch . . . and maybe so was calling it beautiful, but cabin made me think of some old hunting shack in the middle of nowhere. My house was much, *much* cuter. I'd bought it two years ago for a steal from a potbellied widower with a bald head and a penchant for pulling too many whitetails that he didn't have tags for. Was he trying to bribe me? Possibly. It was rumored I was dating the game warden, and in a small town like this, the folks would do anything to get a leg up, especially when it came to deer tags. I almost couldn't blame them, except that tagging was set up specifically to help control the wildlife population, and when people took it upon themselves to judge what numbers were okay to kill, the rehabilitation efforts and statistics always got skewed and caused problems. It didn't matter because Cliff and I weren't dating anyway . . . and also, Paul the potbelly had died a few days after I had bought the house.

My grip on the leather steering wheel tightened at the thought of Cliff, the handsome game warden, but I quickly brushed it away. In truth, we had never even been on a date, and we never would. When the state had



hired me as the park's environmental scientist, Cliff was one of the only kind faces to greet me. The small hole-in-the-wall town did *not* take kindly to a stuck-up fancy-pants scientist ruffling around in their business ( I actually heard this one with my own ears at the Sizzler in Maulberry), coming to their beloved town and ordering them to stop pulling out their milkweed and tightening the parks hunting regulations. Being the only woman to work the parks besides Cecelia at the wildlife rehab center, most of the men didn't take me seriously, and the ones that did were accused of having an affair with me. I guess that's small towns for you.

Though I can't remember my town having the same mentality, I was practically a child when I left.

At twenty-nine years old, with no children, no husband, bright blonde hair to my waist, and a decent enough figure (you try hiking these hills all day), the women of the town seemed to think I had a secret vendetta to steal their out-of-shape, misogynistic, hillbilly husbands or take all the available wrangler-wearing, dip-chewing men. It was actually kind of flattering if I thought about it. Until two years went by and I still had to think about it. Then it grew less flattering and more . . . lonely.

I debated stopping at the local gas station for coffee but decided against it. I really didn't want to risk the truck not starting up again. The coffee wasn't very good anyway, even for gas station coffee, and if I had to sit and listen to the locals talk anymore about Crazy Earl, the town drunk, and his quest for Sasquatch, I was going to quit my job and move.

Thankfully I was usually with Cliff when we stopped, and he would quiet them up a bit. He hated Crazy Earl. I'd never formally met the town drunk, but I'd heard enough stories to write a book.

I mentally made a note to check the woods behind the gas station for *Amanita muscaria*. They were poisonous mushrooms that, if eaten in small enough quantities, might not kill you, but made you act crazy . . . like Crazy Earl. He was always in the woods out back of the old gas station. I was just about to turn around to inspect my hunch when a long-necked bundle of brown feathers shot out across the road in front of me.

The aging truck screeched to an abrupt halt, protesting with a puff of black smoke the size of an elephant and shutting off. Temperamental hunk of metal and bolts, it was worse than a man.

"Gosh *dang it*, Dorothy!" I slammed the truck door closed behind me as I walked across the dirt road to the turkey hen that forever stalked me.

Thankfully I was on the long driveway of the rehab center, so I would just deal with my dilapidated truck later. Dorothy was flopping around wildly in a patch of cattails like a toddler that had just escaped their

parents' clutches. She was lucky I hadn't hit her with the truck and it was only her bum wing causing her to chaotically dance about like a poorly choreographed Zumba instructor.

I made sure no cars were coming, knowing they wouldn't be because it was the back entrance to the wildlife rehabilitation center. I plopped down crisscross applesauce style on the dirty path and tried not to look at the smoking truck to my left. Maybe if I didn't think about it too much, it would start up again.

No sooner had I sat on the dusty gravel road than I was accosted by the large adult turkey trying to nest in my lap. Happy squeaks and grumbles filled her long neck, and I couldn't help but smile at the goofy bird as she nestled into me. She was one of my patients at the center. It wasn't really in my job description to work on the animals, but with only one vet in the building, I ended up helping with the injuries more often than not. I didn't mind; I much preferred the company of animals to people as it was.

"I was just coming to see you. You didn't need to break free again. You're lucky I didn't run you down," I chided as I nuzzled the beady-eyed turkey, tightening my hold on her body as the crunch of gravel sounded behind me.

I lifted the giant bird, being careful of her gimpy wing, and moved us out of the way. I didn't bother to look up, assuming Cecelia had just come to look for her.

"You owe me five bucks," crooned a male voice.

I knew before I looked at the game warden's truck whose voice it was.

"I don't owe you anything, Cliff Richards. If you're stupid enough to bet with Cecelia, then you should owe me five dollars," I said with a big smile and scooted over toward the gray Ford truck with the handsome man hanging out the window.

We couldn't have looked more different in our khaki and green uniforms if we had tried. Mine hung over me like a too-big shirt I stole from my dad while on Cliff it clung to his athletic body like some L.L. Bean catalog model.

He peered over the top of his gold aviator sunglasses as he reached out to smooth down Dorothy's neck feathers. She flustered and bobbed her head away but eventually let him pet her.

"Never seen anything like it," he said matter-of-factly, a hundred-watt smile plastered to his unshaven face.

Sometimes he reminded me so much of my best friend from back home. Something about the friendly way he—I stopped myself.

I wouldn't dredge up his memory now.

“Seen anything like what?” I asked and looked around us.

The amber glow of the sun had begun to heat, and little beads of sweat had started to collect at my hairline. I was ready to get Dorothy back inside the air conditioning or in the shade of the woods. It was going to be a hot one today, and the crevice between my boobs was already pooling uncomfortably with sweat.

“Like you, Callie. Everything wants to be with you, even the wild animals. You’re like a goddamn Disney princess.” He smiled, and the look he was giving insinuated that more than just the turkeys wanted to be with me.

I shifted uncomfortably and tried to think of how to politely tell him I’d rather date Dorothy than him. It wasn’t anything against him, he was a great friend. I just had no interest in being trapped in this town forever, and I was not in the habit of having relationships with coworkers.

“She’s hardly wild,” I said as I nuzzled the large bird.

She had been raised from a poult at the center, born with only one good wing. I was making great progress with her, though, and had a few more things I wanted to experiment with to fix her wing.

“I gotta get Dorothy inside, I’ll see you later?”

I began the walk toward the new building when I was cut off by the back of Cliff’s tailgate as he reversed the truck in stride with us.

“How you gonna get home, scientist? You gonna build a set of wings and fly home? That truck of yours is done for. I told you last month it was too dangerous to be driving.” He raised his eyebrows cockily as he continued to slowly back up, maintaining eye contact with me.

“Well, it’s a good thing I don’t listen to everything you tell me to do,” I grumbled.

“Get in, I’ll give you two a ride back,” he said as he stopped the truck, blocking my path.

Dorothy flustered again once inside the truck, but it was a short drive up the road to the center, so I knew she’d be fine.

We pulled up to the back of the building two minutes later. The painted white brick beamed against the sunlight. Only two other cars were in the front parking lot, one being Cecelia’s. I got out of the truck to find I had turkey droppings all over my pants.

Perfect.

I set her on the ground and scowled at the fluttering bird as I wiped myself off, making certain she knew I wasn’t happy about it.

“Where you headed? To the lake?” I asked Cliff before I realized he was on his cell phone.

“Don, she did it. It finally broke down.” He turned to grin at me. “I know, tell *her* that. She won’t listen to me for shit. How’s about you send Wally out to get it? C’mon, man, do it for me. Git that old thing runnin’ again, and I’ll take you both fishin’ next week. To my *special* spot.” He rolled his eyes in mock humor before hanging up the phone. “There, now you definitely owe me dinner.” He grinned, making his tan face look extra charming with just a dash of arrogance.

“Forget about dinner, I want to go see this honey hole of yours. You know the bass are projected to be at a thirteen percent underpopulation next spring?” I accused.

He rolled his eyes. “I’m not taking *you* to *my* honey hole. Especially if you’re not gonna let me fish!” he shouted with mock exasperation.

For being the head game warden, he was actually incredibly lax about the conservation of wildlife. It was no wonder they had to hire me.

“You dummy, I’m not going to stop you from fishing, I want to study that spot. If it has a lot of activity, we may be able to recreate it and encourage reproduction.” As I said the words, my face began to heat and blush. “Thank you for calling Don. Last time, he told me he’d light it on fire before he towed it again.” I smiled at the memory from last year.

“Ya know, the state isn’t so bad, I know they’d *happily* give fancy-pants scientist a vehicle to drive if they thought she might stay for longer.” His voice was gruff, with just a hint of hillbilly clinging to the ends of his syllables.

“Ahh, but the migratory flight patterns of the monarchs wait for no one.” I brushed a stray feather from my sleeve. “As soon as I get the call, I’m off to Mexico, baby!”

Even as I said it, I could feel the energy shift within our conversation. I remembered why I didn’t make friends when I moved around.

They never understood when you left.

I had made it up the concrete steps of the back entrance and was about to breach the large aluminum doors when Cliff continued.

“I’ll pick you up at six, Callie Peterson. I’ll have Tom drop off the Jeep here if you need to get out and about.”

“If Tom’s bringing the Jeep then what do I need you for?” I smiled at him as I pulled the big metal handle to shoo Dorothy inside.

She patiently waited as her human servant widened the door to make room for her large feathered body and waltzed in as though she owned the place.

“‘Cause I’m taking you to my honey hole tonight. Get all your nerdy notebooks ready, I’ll throw in a fishin’ pole for you too. You want