

Brian and Jamie

Judith Nolan



"A girl should be two things: who and what she wants."

~ Coco Chanel



"But, you're just a girl..." Brian scowled at the unwelcome guide who'd appeared to show him the path back to the surface and home. "Isn't there anyone else? I mean, you can't possibly know the way. We'll get lost."

He sighed with intense confusion. This whole new world he had inadvertently discovered right beneath his feet was making his head spin with thoughts and emotions that were very new to him. But, in his world, girls knew their place and kept to it. And they certainly didn't wear trousers, hold a long wooden staff like they knew what to do with it, and a darkening scowl that belittled his protests.

"Who said I don't know the way?" Jamie squared her shoulders, ready to do battle with this boy who had invaded her home without any warning or invitation. "Only Mouse and Vincent know the paths from Below to Up Top better than me. You wanna go and ask them for help?" She grounded the staff and leaned on it to glare at him.

"I...guess not." Brian shifted his feet uncomfortably. "I was just saying..."

"Well, say on the way. Time is short if I'm going to make it there and back before supper time." Jamie turned and stalked off down the dark tunnel. She tossed her next comment back over her shoulder. "If you've got a complaint, go and ask Vincent. I'm sure, in time, he will show you out." She shrugged. "Of course, since Catherine is staying Below tonight, he might be a while..."

She stopped to look back when Brian didn't move to follow her. "Are you coming or not?"

"Do I have a choice?" Brian looked back down the tunnel behind him, to where the flickering torchlights of the inner group of chambers and

pathways illuminated the heart of the hidden community. He frowned, looking for any last-minute sign of Mouse or Vincent. But he was disappointed.

“Okay, now listen...” Jamie hurried back to his side, to seize his upper arm in a painfully tight grip. “It’s me, or you get to stay another night.” She tugged him after her. “And I don’t intend to miss my share of William’s Saturday night stew.”

“Very well...” Brian winced. *She’s strong, for a girl...*

He pulled his arm from her clutch. “But I want to learn the way. If you know so much, you can show me.”

“Why?” Jamie shot at him, her long legs eating up the distance with ease. “You won’t be coming back here. Besides, we change all the entrances and paths at least once a month. To keep unwanted intruders out.” Her dismissive gaze said she included him in that unwelcome group.

“But I want to come back.” Brian argued, matching his stride to hers. “This place, it’s magic. It’s...incredible...it’s like nothing I’ve ever seen. There aren’t enough words to describe it. I love it here.”

“Maybe...” Jamie jerked a dismissive shoulder. “This is my home, not some kind of amusement park. You’ve got heaps of other places you can go for kicks. Or when you get bored.”

“I never said it was a park,” Brian replied quietly. “And now I understand exactly what it means to you. Everyone told me what it means to them.”

“Do you, really?” Jamie studied him openly as they walked along. After a lengthy silence, her scowling expression cleared a little. “Yes, maybe you do, after all.”

She grinned suddenly, her stride lengthening into a trot before she broke into a full run. Holding her staff horizontally and pressed close to her side, she laughingly threw back the challenge over her bouncing ponytail. “Race you to the surface! Or get lost all over again, your choice!”

“*Hey!*” Brian shouted with consternation, before he raced after her. “Not fair, you’ve got a head start!”

“City boy...” The nagging taunt floated back down the tunnel.

“Crazy girl...” Intent on proving himself, Brian pushed his protesting body to its limits, racing to at least keep Jamie in sight. After all, he could not possibly allow himself to be beaten, not by a slip of a girl...

~ *FIN* ~



