

Faeries in the Backyard

by *Celestial Melody*

Do you believe in faeries in the backyard? Do you *almost* hear the soft, mocking tinkle of bell-like laughter when you trip on a loose stone in a meandering garden path? Could you *swear* you felt the whirring flutter of filmy wings caress your shoulder on that fragrant spring evening ... or was it just the wisteria-scented, billowing breeze? Do eyes—angled eyes, dewy eyes, envious eyes, curious eyes—watch you in the garden? Does a glimmer of light, caught in the creased corner of your eye, make you gasp and turn quickly, face searching and open, hands frozen in mid-movement, waiting, seeking a glimpse of the bright, evasive mystery.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Notes

This was written as a creative essay for a class I took as a "blow-off" course in 11th grade. We were supposed to take a memory that we had and expound upon that memory. So I did. And this is what I came up with. And, yes, this *did* happen. =)

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I honestly wish I could say that I believe in faeries, but my "educated," seventeen-year-old brain jeeringly ridicules this hope even as my elemental, natural self desperately clings to it, wishing it were true. For although the idea of magical woodland groves where faerie circles dance by the light of the Sanguine Moon is a captivating one, I cannot say with complete honesty to myself that I believe unconditionally in faeries ... but I do try. And yet, at one time, I *knew* they existed; I knew it as if it were an incarnate truth in my soul. I was a child, of course, and children are apt to believe in magical beings more easily than adults, but on that one mystical evening, I do honestly believe I saw a faerie.

I cannot say what time of the year it was that I saw the faerie. (Who really notices the passing of the seasons when one is young and carefree?) However, if I had to guess,

I would speculate that it was one of those in-between days of spring-summer...or was it summer-autumn?...when I, a child unaccustomed to routine, spent each of my waking hours out-of-doors. Oh, but it must have been spring-summer, for the toads were out in full force, croaking their cantables to the majesty of the night, luring little bugs to their earthen homes with an acute slyness equal to that of the most fearsome carnal predator.

I can remember flashes of memory from that day, but only flashes, up until the moment I saw her. I remember that the evening was dryer than usual, but still heavy with an undercurrent of heady moisture that was always present in the marshlands of Pasadena; I recall that the sun was warm and lit our backyard with a warm citrine glow. Earlier that day, I had baked mud pies and had poked colored pieces of chalk into their doughy middles for "candles," and in the smoldering blush of evening, these pies basked lazily, their serene, rounded bodies lined in neat rows along roughly-hewn pine planks. Dreamily, aimlessly, I lolled about this tranquil scene, my bare, callused feet treading on spring St. Augustine grass as the cries of local neighborhood children...my friends and, yes, my enemies, too...echoed, alien almost, in the dusk.

Languidly, I drifted over to the pine planks to check my mud pies...they were hard as bricks and just as tasteless. The Technicolor chalk was lovely, but no real help in improving the *taste* of the "pie." Within moments, I had tired of the fruits of my miserable culinary skills and wandered over to the fig tree grove... Ah, but I must take a moment to describe the fig trees.

Many, many years ago, long before I was born, my great-grandmother Breaker had built the house in which we lived. It was situated on Robley Street, a residential cul-de-sac in shady, swampy Pasadena, Texas. Robley was perhaps the *best* street in all of Pasadena, or at least I liked to think so, and apparently so had my great-grandmother, for she lavished great care on her home, especially her backyard.

In this backyard, my great-grandmother Breaker had seeded St. Augustine grass (the very grass on which I had trod that evening), and as a result, we, her hapless progeny, dealt weekly with the rampant growth of a veritable jungle. It was a thankless task, coping with that tropical thicket, yet my great-grandmother had not failed to leave us beauty as well. She had also planted magnolias and spearmint, vincas and canna lilies, Mexican petunia and elephant ears, and because of the humid climate, it all grew beautifully, healthily, and with unchecked abandonment. It was, perhaps, this tangled mess that attracted the faeries, for it is well known that faeries are partial to wild and natural growth. But even without these enticing accoutrements, the fig trees made up for everything, and not even the hardest-hearted of faeries would have been able to resist the homes created obligingly by the contorted roots of the fig trees.

Our fig trees...we had two...stood companionably beside one another upon two mounds of dirt. These mounds rose from ground level (and every bit of ground in Pasadena, excluding the horrendous road dips, is plate-like and flat) to about one-and-a-half feet in easy, lifting mountains. Into these knolls, the ten-foot-tall fig trees were deeply rooted, and pockets, caves, and recesses had been formed by the dirt, leaves, and roots of bygone days. Within the swamper of these homes lived toads with their multitudes of children encased in translucent, bubble eggs and pushed far into the "indoor," moisture-soaked pools. In the airier, slightly elevated apartments, there dwelt a plethora of insects, often truly bizarre creatures like the stick bug and preying mantis. The preying mantis never stayed long in one apartment, but walked delicately along the roots of the fig trees to visit friends and *perhaps* to stay for dinner.

Occasionally, and not without some amount of arrogant intrusion, a shiny brown grass snake would slither through the fig tree community, frightening the bugs as it flicked its greedy, little forked tongue at them, relishing its power to frighten, though it could not have been *that* great a threat.

And above, most commonly in the early afternoon, with little more than a single fleeting thought to the life beneath them, butterflies and mayflies floated snootily among the sun-soaked, six-inch, hairy leaves of the fig trees, enjoying their ability to fly and be ethereally beautiful. Alongside them buzzed industrious bumblebees, their great, hairy bodies throbbing as they dive-bombed crazily towards juicy figs with jeweled, red insides glistening in the sun, victims already pierced by the visits of early-morning birds.

Under this paradise of foliage, my creative and magic-believing mind had run rampant, and I had created small homes for the faeries who *knew* lived in our backyard. In several of the vacant apartments, I had scooped out the refuse of past occupants and smoothed the dirt into earthen floors; then, with all the inherent enthusiasm of a child, I had piled colorful pebbles into heaps, creating steps to the "upper floors" (fig leaf-canopied patios supported by the thick, gnarly lower branches of the fig trees) of the apartments. Each home was carefully detailed, down to the comfortable fig leaf beds, and each home had a trim garden in front of it, lined with small, multi-hued stones and swept clean each day by the faeries' willing servant, me. Ah, yes, I was indeed bedazzled, but I believed in faeries so implicitly that the idea of labor on their behalf was not at all foreign or astonishing.

It was into this natural haven under the fig trees, then, that I stepped on that spring-summer evening. The butterflies and mayflies had long since drifted off to wherever it is that butterflies and mayflies go at night, and the busy chirping of crickets and croaking of toads filled the sun-soaked air. I visited the faerie town under the fig tree once that evening. I slid back the boards placed in front of the toads' homes and tossed hard-shelled pill bugs into the waiting pink mouths of the toads. Then I brushed out the faeries' homes and arranged their canopies with a confident, careful finger. Then, lazily still and with no real definite purpose in mind, I wandered away from the trees, past the mud pies, and behind our wood-shop. And then I saw her.

She...although I cannot say for sure if the faerie was female, for her torso was featureless...was caught in the gossamer twists of a spider web; her stringy body was two-and-a-half inches long, and her long wings were fluttering madly, gauzy, transparent, and threaded with pulsing veins. Her body was a near-perfect replica of a human being's, yet her toes were long and pointed, and her skin was the dusky grey of chalk-stone. She had no hair to speak of, and her head was slightly cone-shaped. She did not appear to see me, although her eyes were enormous and slanted, taking up half of her tiny face, but a faint glow emanated from her body, flickering lightly as she struggled to escape. The vision only lasted a second, for I blinked once, and she was gone. But she must have been there, for the spider web was rent in half, and gossamer strands waved lightly in the flower-scented breeze of evening.

I stood uncertainly, my small, brown toes clamped around blades of grass, and stared at the spot she had vacated as my heart thumped wildly in my chest. The soft chirp of crickets echoed in the steadily-darkening gloom, and in the distance, I heard my mother call me to dinner. Her voice was loud and her command one I knew, but I barely understood her, for I was entranced by what I had seen. But as Mother's voice grew more demanding and rose in volume, I wrenched my gaze away from the forlorn spider web and gazed up at the darkening sky, thinking of the faerie. I was not surprised that she was there, really. I had known all along that *they* lived in our backyard, but what a wonderful end to another of my beautiful, infinite days. Sighing once, I wriggled my toes once more in the glimmer of the sun before turning to walk slowly around the woodshed and toward the house.

In time, I tried to convince myself that what I had seen *might* have been a firefly, but sometimes, when the breeze blows lightly from the south, wisteria-scented and warm, when the sun glows amber on my bare shoulders and the chirping crickets sing their soprano alongside the baritone of the toads, I can still remember what she was like. And occasionally, I feel small eyes on my back, curious, slanted, and I know that she was real.