

Fairyland

The screams echoed down the hall. Bounced off of the scratchy walls. Pranced across the rusty window panes. Landed in Isabella's kid-sized brain with a graceful bow. She clamped her pudgy hands over her ears and dug her palms into the holes. Sometimes when she did this the screams sounded almost pretty. Like a distant melody with crashing plates and knuckles hitting skin as the background music. Other times she wasn't so lucky. Jeremy had moved in about a year ago now. It had been a year of makeshift music. A year of Mom's old friends showing up at the front door with furrowed brows and homemade casseroles. A year in Fairyland.

Well, sometimes Fairyland, other times just red cheeks, watery eyes, and a chest at the brink of explosion because Mom's screams won't stop. His raucous voice won't stop berating, beating, and blistering. But today, Isabella chose Fairyland. Jeremy busted through the door at 3pm stinking of rage. Mom was sitting on the coffee-stained couch painting her nails. Isabella hurriedly scampered to her room, crawled past her sticker-infested closet door, and slammed her palms against the sides of her head. She squeezed her eyes shut and tried with all of her might to forge a lullaby from the increasingly loud voices coming from the living room.

A light breeze forced her eyelashes to tickle her cheeks as an overwhelmingly beautiful song reverberated through her head. She cautiously winked one eye open and released a heavy sigh. She had arrived in Fairyland. Isabella's feet fluttered and light blasted through her nerves. She was so relieved to be back. She gazed in awe at the tiny assortment of mushroom caps, hollowed out tree stumps, and dew-soaked flowers that stood before her. The sky boasted a cloudless terrain of Easter Egg blue that went on for miles. Sun beams shone down in delicate pillars that sliced through the hodge podge of greenery below. Dirt paths the width of Isabella's first two fingers snaked around wood and grass houses, through earthy hovels that the fairies

called home. A green and white striped caterpillar inched along the path with a blue-winged boy fairy sporting a healthy frown strapped on its back alongside a pile of purple flower petals.

Isabella excitedly threw herself into a twirl and watched her strawberry hair chase her until her eyes got blurry. She dizzily dropped to her knees and began scanning the grass with laser-focus to try and find the source of the singing.

Within a minute she spotted a glistening yellow mushroom poking out from behind a bulging stack of acorns. The voice became deafening as she peered around the mound. Propped elegantly on the tippity top of the mushroom sat a striking fairy. As soon as she saw Isabella, she stopped singing with a hiccup and greeted her with a waggle of her bright red manicured fingernails. The fairy had hair that looked like burnt autumn leaves and billowed down past her waist. The top was pinned up in a little knot by criss-crossing sticks that poked out from the sides of her head like antennas. Her wings stretched out past her lemon smock dress and had blues, pinks, oranges, and yellows that flashed and flirted with the sun with every move. Her green eyes were soft and lit up when she saw Isabella.

“You’re back!” she exclaimed in a sing-songy tone.

“I know I know I know! I’m so excited to see you! I can’t believe it’s almost been a week. I’m sorry I just couldn’t hear you right.”

“Oh don’t be sorry sweetie, I’m just glad to see you now.” The fairy’s ruby eyebrows squished together and her eyes turned downward.

“What’s wrong?” Isabella spewed, her cheeks getting warm. She hated to see the fairy upset.

“Well there have been some bad things happening in Fairyland the past few days. A new fairy came into our village and he can do things that I’ve never seen before.”

“Wh-what do you mean he can *do* things?”

“Some fairies have powers, but I’ve never even heard of powers as strong as his. You know how you can hear me sing? It’s because I have the power of the voice, it’s pretty common.”

Isabella’s eyes widened, she had no idea that the fairies had magic! Her palms started to itch and a craving for adventure was about to boil over in her stomach. She gulped as she continued to listen.

“He can move things with his mind! The other day he got angry and those acorns over there,” she daintily jabbed a finger behind Isabella, “exploded! It was raining acorns!”

Her hand shook a little as it plopped back in her lap and her petite shoulders sloped down.

“Ever since that happened, everyone is terrified! Did you notice how there is almost no one in sight? The only reason I’m out here was to try and get your attention. We need help, Isabella!”

Determination coursed through Isabella’s veins, she was not leaving until she helped her beloved fairies. It broke her heart that they were living in fear. That was not fair, she had to do everything she could to get rid of this pesky man fairy.

“Alright I am here to help. I’m like ten times his size, this shouldn’t be too hard. Where can I find him? I’m gonna pick him up by his little wings and chuck him as far as I can!”

“Ohh Isabella you have to be careful! He knows that you’re here and if you make him mad who knows what he’ll do! I’m pretty sure he’s hiding out by the creek, but promise me you’ll do your best not to make him mad. Who knows how much damage he can do.”

“I promise. I won’t let you down.”

And just like that after five minutes in Fairyland a mission had unfolded. There was always something exciting happening here, but this time it felt a tad different. Usually Isabella was tasked with tracking down a runaway squirrel taxi or helping repair grass roofs, it had never been this...dark. Regardless of what the fairies needed help with she would do it, so she puffed up her chest, tiptoed through the village, and headed down towards the creek. The path to the creek was not nearly as clear as the higher parts of Fairyland. Thorny bushes, stinging nettle, and spider webs littered the ground and Isabella had to really focus to not get pricked along the way. Isabella wore the honor of Fairy Protector proudly and some thorns were not going to get in her way.

She had started to lose track of time when the fog rolled in. The once dreamy blue sky had turned purple like a bruise and the moon was nowhere to be seen. Goose pimples popped up on her skin as she crouched down to peek through the brush. Under the bubbling conversation of the brook Isabella could hear a harsh whisper.

“Infiltrate. Intimidate. Ignite. It’s that easy! These stupid fairies don’t know what they’ve got coming. Ha! I can’t wait to see it all go up in flames.”

Isabella couldn’t believe her ears. Why in the world would another fairy want to destroy her fairies!? She couldn’t hold back her rage as she bursted through the brush and stood over the tiny, evil being. The fairy had skin as pale as porcelain, obsidian hair, and wore a deep plum suit. His wings were tiny and black with hints of purple. Bleak and horrible in comparison to Isabella’s singer. He planted his feet firmly and stared back up at Isabella with beady eyes. A wave of fear washed over her as she smelled something familiar. He was enraged.

“What do you think you are doing? Do you really think you can stop me? I have a plan and I am not letting some dumb human get in my way”

“I..I’m not gonna let you hurt them! They’re all I have!” Isabella screeched as molten tears sizzled in the dirt. She lunged for him but he sidestepped with ease. He darted around her feet, leaving tiny skid marks in the mud. She helplessly batted at him with her gargantuan hands as her heart began to sink. The evil fairy continued to dance in circles around the young girl, but she would not give up, not yet. She shoveled a handful of mud in her fist and hurled it at the ground as hard as she could. Globbs of earth went flying in every direction and a smile tugged at the corner of Isabella’s mouth. The purple blob of a fairy was pinned under a boulder of mud. He wiggled his legs in frustration and shook his fists in the air.

“YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU’VE DONE!!!” He shrieked as his face turned scarlet and sinister laughter filled the murky air. Before she could do anything, a huge plume of smoke shot up from the distant village.

Isabella shot up and ran as fast as she could back to her fairies. The spiky terrain didn’t matter anymore. Thorns dug into her legs and vines whipped her face as she got closer and closer to the wreckage. She slid on her raw knees to what was once the entrance of Fairyland. Her chest heaved as she ripped through the singed houses and paths with her fingers. With every swipe of her hand she uncovered a limp fairy, their wings shriveled up and devoid of color. Horror permanently painted on their faces as their hair continued to smolder. Isabella wailed as she made her way through the village. Snot splattered across the once-enchanting town and drowned out the remaining embers. She continued to search desperately for her amber-haired singer as waterfalls cascaded down her face. An acorn tapped her against her shoe, interrupting her panic. She got lower to the ground and glimpsed a speck of red sticking out from under a flaming heap of acorns.

Isabella tore towards it, swept the acorns away with her arm, and uncovered her sunshine clad fairy covered in soot.

“My Bella...” She choked. “I’m so happy to see you” The singer whispered.

“No! You can’t leave! What can I do? I need you!” Isabella begged.

The fairy’s crumpled body started to sink lower and lower. Charred acorns had crumbled into the tear soaked ground and created a black sludge that began to swallow the fairy. Her wings had already disappeared when she muttered,

“Go back home. She needs you.”

Isabella watched in disbelief as her fairy sunk down to oblivion. Her cherry fingertips were the last thing Isabella saw of her fairy singer.

The air around her began to ring an unbearable tone and her face went numb. She gasped as her own hands began to fade away. Smoke filled her nostrils and fogged her brain until she couldn’t hold on any longer. Isabella’s body smacked the ground, crushing the crispy remnants of Fairyland.

She woke up in complete darkness. Isabella stuck her hands out in front of her and collided with the oak closet door. Memories of shuffling into the closet came flooding back and relief washed over her. It wasn’t real. She must have fallen asleep. The smell of smoke still lingered in her nose as she unfolded her body from her cramped closet. When she stood up everything looked smaller. She wiggled her fingers and toes and squeezed the back of her arm until her eyes watered. This seemed real. Eager to see Mom, she started towards the living room, but caught a glimpse of the mirror. Her jaw dropped. She had grown a foot, hips had popped out of her waist and perky breasts sat naturally on her chest.

“Mom!” She called, uneasiness running rampant throughout her now grown body. The smell of smoke became stronger as she darted toward the living room. She saw nothing. Not the flaming curtains. Not the already charred walls. Not the broken furniture or collapsing ceiling. Nothing but Mom. Strewn on the floor like an abandoned mop. Autumn hair, now streaked with gray, knotted and gnarled across her swollen face, chipped red nail polish still adorning the tips of her fingers. Legs like a broken down barbie.

Isabella heard the screams again. They echoed down the smoky hall. Bounced off of the black walls. Pranced across red-hot window panes. Fell out of Isabella’s mouth and landed on the blood-soaked carpet with a devilish bow.