

The Fairy Lamp

Lucy's interest in fairies had roots far deeper than her brother's prank with the lamp.

She had always held a passing interest in the subject. But it was no more serious than her interest in, say, the aliens from her storybooks. It was her grandmother who really kick-started her fascination with fairies.

Every year, during the summer holidays, Lucy's family would spend two weeks at her grandparent's house. They visited at other times, of course, but never would they stay for such a length of time as in the summer.

Her grandparents lived in Scotland, near Edinburgh. They lived in a pink stucco house in the countryside with four bedrooms, two studies, two kitchens and a woods just outside. Leading to the woods was the front garden.

The rest of the family referred to the front garden as "Grandpa's garden." This is because Lucy's grandfather had invested an enormous amount of time and effort into maintaining the garden. He had grown a rose-patch in the centre and surrounded it with a delicate mesh fence. He maintained a hedge about the boundaries and a carefully mown lawn, broken here and there by flower patches containing foxgloves, lavender, hyacinths, orchids and more, depending on the season.

In the summer large fluffy bumblebees swam in lazy circles over the flowers, whilst in the winter, when all the trees save the

pinetrees had lost their leaves, great black birds would perch amidst the skeleton branches like omens of death.

It was during one of the family's annual stays at the pink house in the Scottish countryside—the year before Lucy acquired her magic lamp—that her grandmother took her into the garden to look for fairies.

It must have been mid-august, and Lucy had woken up earlier than usual that day, due to the heat. Both her parents sat at the breakfast table. Her father was reading the back of a newspaper, folded over his knee. Her mother had taken out the pages with the crosswords, and leant over them, tickling the bottom of her nose with the end of a pencil.

By the window, looking out over the front garden, was Grandma Maureen. Grandma Maureen was Lucy's mother's mother, and both Lucy and Ross called her "Little Granny", as she was four years younger than their other grandmother. There was some irony to this nickname, as Grandma Maureen was anything but little. She was built like a rhinoceros.

Everyone gave Lucy a cursory 'good morning' as she entered the room, before returning to their distractions. This struck her as odd. Normally, when she came downstairs for breakfast, at least someone would ask her what she wanted to eat.

Slightly put-off by this turn of events, she pulled out a chair by her mother and sat down. She leant forward to look at her mother's puzzle, hoping that no-one expected her to make her own breakfast.

Grandma Maureen, spurred into action by an invisible cue, slapped the kitchen sink and turned around. 'The fairies came last night,' she said.

Lucy's mother smiled. Possibly at something in her newspaper.

'The fairies?' asked Lucy, raising herself up from her chair.

'Come and have a look. They left sweets in the garden.'

Grandma Maureen pointed out the window. At first, she appeared to be pointing only at a bird bath next to the rose bushes—a bird bath Lucy had seen a hundred times—but on closer inspection, when Lucy ran right up to the kitchen sink, she noticed something silver and shining balanced on the stone rim of the bird bath.

'That's not a sweet,' said Lucy.

'You ought to go and take a closer look,' said Grandma Maureen. 'Go and fetch your boots from the back kitchen. Fetch mine too.'

So excited was Lucy as she ran out the room, that she did not notice the self-satisfied smiles that both her parents wore.

Out in the garden, with her Grandma in tow, Lucy found nearly twenty sweets wrapped in tinfoil. Most of them were boiled sweets—not the sort she normally liked—but this did little to impact her excitement. She found sweets stuck in the tar along the wooden fence; sweets amidst the branches of the rowan tree; sweets nestled in the crook between the thorns and stem of the rose plants. Such an abundance of sweets had been hidden in the garden, and so inventive were the hiding places, that Ross woke up and came outdoors to help before she found them all.

Ross was less taken by the hunt. He joined for only a few minutes, then grew bored and took to kicking the heads off

dandelions. By the end of the morning, he had found six sweets and Lucy had found nearly thirty.

Later, Lucy would ask her Grandma if the fairies came regularly.

‘Sometimes,’ answered Grandma Maureen.

‘And do you ever see them?’ asked Lucy.

‘Sometimes. Sometimes I speak to them. They only speak to witches.’

Lucy nodded thoughtfully. This seemed to her a sound answer. She had known her Grandma was a witch for years.

Every Halloween at Grandma Maureen’s house, when the sky became purple and pregnant with thunder clouds and the fields about the house turned brown, stripped of barley, Grandma Maureen met with her coven. They were all old women, witches like her, and in their meetings they chanted incantations and curses and boiled potions in their great black cauldron.

Grandpa Joe corroborated this for Lucy. He asserted that all Grandma Maureen’s friends were witches. They all had warts on their noses and evil, screeching laughs. ‘And your Grandma,’ he would say to Lucy, ‘is the worst of the lot.’

One night the Halloween prior, Grandma Maureen switched all the lights off and announced that she needed the knee bones of two small children for a particularly difficult potion. She chased Lucy and Ross, cackling, cackling, skipping about the house in the dark with such an odd nimbleness to her large frame that Lucy had truly believed she was a witch. Even Lucy’s mother laughed and joined in. She let the children have candy necklaces—normally banned in the house—and

eventually, when she was tired out, had gone to sit with Grandpa Joe in his study. Grandpa Joe had been spectacularly unimpressed by the whole affair.

It was during these evenings spent running from her grandmother and mornings spent searching for sweets that Lucy's fascination with fairies and all things magic grew. She received an enormous book about fairies for Christmas that year, categorizing all the different types of fairy. It had sections on shy night fairies that can be found sitting in the space underneath mushroom heads during the day. It described wild wood fairies of all types that live in all manner of English trees, and the decorations that they hang outside their homes at times of solstice.

Lucy studied that book as if she would be tested on it. She asked for the sequel, by the same author, next Christmas, but didn't receive it. Her mother thought by then that she was growing too old for fairies.

When it came time, then, for her to own a fairy of her own, inside Ross's magic lamp, ten pounds and fifty-seven pence seemed a small price to pay.