



**The Celtic Fairy: Asio Otus**  
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Do you ever get bored with life? An odd question right? When your life is nothing but the same again and again, like a broken record, would you do anything to fix the loop? To free yourself so you can finally hear the rest of the song. I know of a young boy who would do anything, to break the cycle. His name was Chance.

Chance was a young boy no older than 10; he was as simple and boring as his life. He was a thin, frail boy and, as a result, could never leave the house without someone accompanying him, and even then he wasn't allowed to go past the porch of his parents' house. His parents have always acted rather oddly towards Chance; perhaps it was because of his illness. He tried to rationalize their behavior by saying to himself, *'They are probably just worried about me'* *'They're my parents, they care about me.'* This only made him doubt their strange actions more.

You see, Chance's parents were what people call 'helicopter parents'; they were constantly watching him even when they thought Chance didn't notice their gaze. Then there were the times when they would simply forget about his existence. On those days, they'd leave during the afternoon and wouldn't return till the morning during breakfast, acting as though nothing had happened. Chance tried looking for them once, but he wasn't allowed out without being accompanied and got in trouble for trying to leave.

This left Chance nothing to do but watch the world go by from his bedroom window and the few books he had of the animals that inhabited the forest. His family lived in a secluded house deep in the winter woods; they survived off the land. It was always snowing, making the dark spruce trees a seemingly permanent white.

He longed to go out; he longed for something to save him from his birdcage. Chance hated watching the world go by. It had been the same scene for the past 10 years, and he was sick of it. He was sick of watching the beautiful snow cover everything; he was sick of watching the forest, and he was sick of lying in bed his whole life. So he had an idea. If his parents were going to lock him away, then he would have to find a way to escape this birdcage he was in.

Chance decided it would be best to leave just before sunrise so he could use the cover of darkness to slip away. That night he stayed awake to plan his escape and how he would get back inside before his parents noticed anything amiss. Chance packed a small bag of water, snacks, and his inhaler. He also made a pillow dummy to take his place. When he finally had finished setting everything up, he looked at the clock that hung on his wall and saw it was 4:30 in the morning. It was time to take action. He quietly put on his winter coat and gently turned and opened the door to his room. He shut it behind him gently, so as not to wake his parents.

He tip-toed past his parents room and headed down the stairs; when Chance had finally made it to the door, he put on his boots and carefully unlocked the door. The wind blew the door open and caught Chance by surprise. He took a deep breath in then out watching the smoke escape his mouth and stepped out into the winter forest. Chance shut the door behind him and looked out into the snow-covered land ahead. He had to admit he was nervous; it was his first time being outside alone, but he wanted to know what was out there and that was enough motivation for him to press onward.

As Chance took his first steps into the snow, he was surprised at the crunching sounds his boots made. He looked back at his house, which seemed so far now, and hoped the fresh falling snow would cover his footprints. He grazed his hand over the bark of a spruce tree that marked the beginning of the forest. Chance traveled deeper into the forest and looked up at the forest trees and noticed an owl landing on a branch resting from the long night of hunting. The owl felt the young boy's gaze and turned to look down at him. He remembered he had seen a photo of it before in one of his books it was called an Asio Otus commonly known as a long-eared owl. It had a slender body with gray and brown feathers contrasting the surrounding snow, especially its ear tufts that were a bold black. Chance was amazed at the colors of the owl, its golden eyes drawing him in putting him in a sort of trance.

Chance admired its strength and ability to fly, he wished he had been given wings so he could fly, there was nothing compared to the freedom the ability to fly granted. The owl then took off once again. Chance took this as a sign to follow it; he didn't care where it led him so long as it was far from there.

Chance ran after the owl, unaware of his surroundings, all he knew was that he wanted to catch up with it and maybe it would deem him worthy of the gift of flight. Then again, children can be so naive to the cruel reality of the

world. He ran keeping his eyes on the owl so as not to lose him. The poor boy was so close, yet so far from this magnificent bird and his dream of flying away. Chance reached his hand out to the bird as he ran, "Please! Teach me how to fly! Teach me how to be free!"

Chance's eyes were so focused on the owl that he didn't notice the cliff in front of him and ran right off it. He felt his stomach drop and screamed as he slid down the cliff. The jagged rocks tugged on his jacket helping to slow his fall. He shut his eyes tight expecting to meet his end, but to his surprise, the angle of the cliff and ice allowed him to slide safely down and land in a pile of soft yet cold snow. Chance opened his eyes and sat there in shock that he was somehow still alive. He started to laugh. Even though he was scared for his life, he had to admit it was actually really fun. He looked up at the cliff and wondered how he would find his way back up when it was time for him to head home. Chance decided that he would follow the side of the cliff and hoped he would be able to find his way up along the way.

He kept about a foot away from the cliff and walked in the way it naturally curved and bent. Chance walked for what seemed like hours, but it was likely just his body failing him with all the exertion; both mentally and physically. He soon saw in the distance that the cliff sloped down, "That's my way back!" Chance ran closer to the now ending cliffside and heard a noise. It was odd it sounded like music but a kind that he'd never heard before, at least not in person. It sounded bright but with low notes every so often, almost telling a story; a mischievous one.

Chance looked back and forth between his way back home and the mysterious piano playing. If he tried to go back home, his curiosity might just kill him, but if he were to search for the piano, his parents would definitely notice him gone. Chance stared at the ground weighing the ups and downs, then he heard a very loud and low note being played. It rang out through the trees and shook snow off some. This alone had convinced him. He ran as fast as his legs could take him in search of the piano. Chance ran through rows and rows of snow-covered trees, the crunching of the snow under his boots nearly as loud as that note.

Chance saw something just ahead; it looked like a clearing. He slowed when he reached it and there it was. The piano stood there on top of green grass, not an inch of white. It was peculiar how an almost perfect circle of land had no snow at all; the only thing that separated the snow from the grass was a

ring of mushrooms. The trees also seemed to form a circle around this piano, which somehow was in perfect condition despite being abandoned, almost like it was being kept safe from the elements.

Chance gazed in awe at how nature could do such a thing. He had never read or seen anything like it except for maybe in fairy tales. He stepped out of the trees closer to the ring of mushrooms where the tips of his shoes were just barley outside the circle. Chance hesitantly picked his arm up and in one quick motion waved it through the circle. He grabbed his arm with the other and could swear it felt *warm* in the circle. It was impossible how a ring of mushrooms kept all that heat in.

He took a deep breath in, then out, preparing himself, then stepped into the ring of mushrooms and instantly the warmth hit him. Chance smiled at it, glad to be out of the cold. He took off his coat and left it on the ground and set his sights on the piano. He stepped towards it and ran his hand across the keys. Chance sat on the small black bench and, despite never learning how to play the piano, he began playing a beautiful piece that was full of joy and happiness.

Chance closed his eyes and became so lost in the music that he didn't notice the animals coming out of the forest to watch him. There were white tailed deer, their dark brown coats blending into the trees leaving nothing but curious doe eyes. Snow white rabbits with hints of gray making them seem like dirty patches of snow. The same owl from earlier, with its glistening gold eyes, all watching him. The owl looked different since he last saw it but it was no doubt the same owl that led Chance off the cliff.

There was a change in the music Chance was playing what was once light hearted and full of joy became sorrowful and depressed. Still the music was never ending. What had felt like a few minutes to Chance was actually hours. His hands danced across the keys sounding so happy, but there was no smile on his face, just a blank stare. He played and played. What was once hours became days. What was once days became weeks. What was once weeks became months. Then it had been years. Many, many, years. Poor Chance was lost and soon disappeared with the wind, withered away after decades of endless music. His parents died never knowing what became of their son. The forest soon became a small town with a park and a local legend of a strange piano in the center surrounded by mushrooms haunted by the fairy Asio Otus. Those who hear the sound of a piano are said to be cursed to play for the animals until they meet their demise.