

First Prize: The Fairy Affair *by Candace Kubinec*

It all started the day a car crashed into my house. It was close to lunchtime. I was in the kitchen, mixing up some tuna salad, when I heard a loud bang and then the whole house shuddered. I rushed to the living room. Just outside the window, parked on my front porch, was an old, smashed-up white car.

Fortunately, no one was seriously injured, but my house needed some major repairs. There was a hole in the den that went straight through to the outside. The whole room would have to be gutted and replastered. During the demolition stage of the project, an old bricked-up fireplace was uncovered. Liking the rustic feel it would give the room, I decided to leave it exposed. I guess you could say that was my first mistake.

I spent as much time as possible in the refurbished den. With a comfy chair and walls lined with bookshelves, it was my own personal refuge from the busyness of everyday. That was before I made mistake number two.

I was peacefully reading the latest novel by Louise Penny when I thought I heard the jingle of a small bell. I was alone, so I assumed it was my imagination, until I heard it again—this time, louder. I listened closely. The sound seemed to be coming from the old chimney. Impossible! Maybe I was spending too much time in the den.

I decided to investigate. Maybe the wind was whistling through gaps in the old bricks. I started to feel around the edges of each brick. Sure enough, one of the bricks near the bottom was loose. The little bell jingled again. I wiggled the worn brick back and forth until it started to pull away from the others. One quick jerk and I was holding it in my hand. I grabbed a flashlight from the basket beside my chair, flicked it on, and peered into the hole. I was not prepared to see two little eyes looking back.

“Hello. I’m glad someone finally found me,” said a sweet voice.

“Who are you and what are you doing inside my chimney?”

A shiny head and a pair of wings emerged.

“My name’s Faye. I’ve just been waiting.”

She hopped out of the hole and gave a little shake. A puff of coal dust floated to the ceiling. It was a fairy! In my chimney! She looked at me with crystal blue eyes. “I guess you’re the one I’ve been waiting for.”

I was pretty sure she was wrong. I don’t even like fairies, with their gossamer wings, iridescent dresses, and glowing wands. I’m more of a no nonsense, dirt-under-the-fingernails, troll kind of girl.

“How long have you been in there?”

“I’m not sure. I peeked inside when they were building the chimney, and the next thing I knew, someone closed the opening with a brick.”

My house was over one hundred years old. Surely she hadn’t been in there all that time. I began feeling sorry for her: mistake number three.

“Is there anything I can do for you?” I asked.

“Oh, no.” She giggled. “I’m here to help you.”

That was the start of our friendship—or so I thought. We watched old movies. Faye would wave her tiny wand and a bowl of popcorn would appear. She did my hair, gave me facials, and polished my nails. I'd never looked better. When I went shopping, she came along in my purse. We found the best deals. I did catch her changing prices once. That was when her true colors emerged.

She became bossy. If I didn't agree to watch the movie she wanted to see, the popcorn would be seasoned with red-hot chilies. When I tried to choose my own outfit, she would wave her wand and I would be wearing something that resembled a Halloween costume. It was like living with a mean sister with magical powers.

I tried hiding her wand, but she turned my hair a strange shade of magenta. I had become a mere cat's-paw in her magic fairy game. This needed to stop. I must find a way to lure her back into the chimney and seal up the gap in the mortar.

I should have known it would be a challenge. She seemed to read my mind. I told her I heard a bird stuck in the chimney. She told me, "Too bad."

She loved chocolate, so I put a small piece on a dainty saucer and placed it in the hole. She just zapped it back out and ate it in one bite.

It was while we were browsing through the garden center of a local home improvement store that inspiration struck. There among the houseplants and garden knickknacks were miniature chairs and fountains and toadstools. Everything a person could want to create a fairy garden.

"How would you like to have your very own garden?" I asked Fay.

She twinkled all over. I knew I'd found her weakness. Over the next couple of weeks we bought every small item we could find and created a garden just for Faye. She was so tickled she even let me choose the location, under the old apple tree. I moved things around until Faye thought they looked perfect.

"I have a surprise for you," I said.

"For me? No one has ever given me a gift before."

I held out a sparkly package. She unwrapped it to find a beautifully carved door.

"We can put it here, at the base of the tree," I suggested.

"It's beautiful," Faye said with a sigh.

"Try it out."

She slowly opened the door. Inside was a small chamber. Faye walked through the door. I slammed it shut, pulled some glue out of my pocket, and sealed that door for good.

Sometimes when I walk past that old apple tree, I think I hear a bell jingling. I just keep walking.

Candace Kubinec lives in Greensburg and is a member of Ligonier Valley Writers. Her poems and short stories have appeared in the Loyalhanna Review and several anthologies