

The Bone Fairy

Rion knew there were all types of fairies in the village. He'd seen them come and go, like the birds that would roost in the family barn. There were water fairies that would cut through the fishing nets and cause mischief when Rion and his friends went down to the river to catch fish with their rods. There were wood fairies who had to be spooked out of trees before Rion's father and the other woodsman could cut the trees up for logs and firewood. Rion had even seen corn fairies that needed to be shooed from the cornfields by him and the other boys so that the village crop wouldn't fail. The only ones that didn't make any sense, in his mind, were the tooth fairies.

"Put your tooth under your pillow," Rion's mother told his younger sister, "and a tooth fairy will come and give you a shiny, copper coin for it!"

Rion had heard the same stories when he was younger. Sometimes, a tooth fairy would give more than a copper. Rion had gotten a whole gold coin once, but he'd also gotten an old fork and a half-empty flask one time. He'd seen tooth fairies in the night, sliding under his pillow to make the exchange, but it was never clear where they went after. The prospect of where fairies got their coinage made Rion's mouth water.

"You want to do what?" Aeol, his best friend, asked while they walked down to the river to fish one afternoon.

"I want to find the lair of the tooth fairies."

"Come off it," Aeol scoffed, shaking his head. "Everyone knows that Fairy Land is—"

"You don't believe those kid's stories, do you?" Rion said. "It's real money—or junk if you're unlucky. So where do the tooth fairies get it from?"

"They—I don't know, make it with magic?"

"Come on, Aeol! Think about it! What if we found the lair of the tooth fairies and it's loaded with money? We could make more money in one trip into the woods than any kid makes in the entire time they lose their teeth!"

"And you're saying I'm being ridiculous!" Aeol scowled. "No way, it's too

dangerous! The fairies that come to the village are a menace at worst, but who knows what monstrous ones are further in!”

“Don’t be such a baby!” Rion said. “We’re going in...tonight!”

“Tonight!” Aeol said. “Are you kidding me? Do you want to go chasing fairies through the woods on a full moon? Not a chance...”

“Fine!” Rion said, turning with his fishing rod. “More for me!”

Rion spent the rest of the day preparing. He made sure he had good hunting boots by his bed and had a full stomach for a night out in the woods. The hardest part was getting bait for a tooth fairy, which he only achieved by tying a string around his tooth and a doorknob to rip the tooth out with a slam of the door. Once his gum stopped bleeding, Rion put his tooth under his pillow and sat in his room, waiting for a tooth fairy.

When the moon was halfway across the sky, Rion heard the fluttering of fairy wings buzzing into his room. Like a tiny, pale woman, the tooth fairies walked on two legs with two dexterous hands. Hairless, the tooth fairies only had pairs of beetle-like wings. The tooth fairy knelt on the window frame for a minute, watching Rion carefully for any signs of movement. When the fairy confirmed that Rion wasn’t a threat, it cocked its head to the side and then fluttered across the room to his pillow. In its grasp, the fairy struggled with the weight of a copper piece in its hands.

Maybe I wouldn’t be doing this if tooth fairies weren’t so cheap, Rion thought to himself. After a moment of rummaging through Rion’s sheets, the tooth fairy climbed out with Rion’s tooth in its grasp. Buzzing its wings a few times, the tooth fairy took off and whizzed to the window. Rion jumped out of his window and followed the faint light from the tooth fairy into the woods.

The branches cut into his arms and face, but Rion did everything he could to make his way through the forest. He leaped over logs and stomped through the icy cold streams, but the faint light from the fairy was always in his line of sight. Dark shapes stretched out in the night and Rion felt like he was being followed every step. There were wolves and

other beasts in the woods, but Rion was ready to fight those if they came after him. The temptation of the tooth fairies' hoard was too much for him to pass upon.

The fairy fluttered around erratically, spinning back in circles or spiraling around tree trunks. Rion wasn't sure if the fairy was truly that chaotic or if the tooth fairy was trying to throw him off its trail until he started seeing more tooth fairies fluttering to and fro, with items to trade and teeth in their grasp. Rion allowed himself to lose track of his specific tooth fairy and followed the highest concentration of winged creatures.

Pushing aside a big, leafy branch, Rion looked in and saw the collection of fairies dropping teeth into a large pile. Rion watched for a while and noticed that the fairies were using the teeth to make a nest. The tiny humanoids crawled along the outside and made a complex structure that impressed Rion. He knew that fairies laid eggs, but barely paid enough attention in his classes to know how all fairies reproduced. Corn fairies would leave rings of cornstalks to lay their eggs, but those squalid holes were nothing compared to the ivory tower that the tooth fairies were building. Rion wasn't here for academic reasons.

Rion stomped into the fairy nest and looked around. The tooth fairies whirled around him, chattering and bumping against him, but they were too clumsy to cause any real harm. Rion waved his hand, brushing the fairies aside with a sweep of his arm to try and find his goal. The forest was only lit by the full moon above, but there was enough light from the tooth fairies to make a pile of shining objects sparkle. Rion rushed over with a huge grin on his face, fell to his knees, and started sorting through the pile. Bits of broken metal were tossed aside and the coins went into Rion's empty pockets.

Silvers and coppers, even a handful of gold coins, all became his. His family would eat like kings for months with this treasure. They could afford the nicest house in the village and still have plenty left for whatever they wanted. Everyone else was too superstitious to take the risk, but Rion's courage would secure his family for the rest of their lives.

Rion was so busy stuffing his pockets that he barely noticed the deep grunt behind him. He turned around and saw the dark cave to his right. The tooth fairies were around the edge of the cave mouth, chittering and buzzing their wings. The cave grunted again the fairies stilled, backing away and quieting a little. A set of deep red eyes peered out of the darkness and narrowed on Rion, hands deep in the pile of treasures.

A long, thin hand reached out of the cave and dug deep claws into the dirt. The fingers were covered in thick armored plates that went up and covered the wrist and forearm. The long, spidery arm pulled the creature forward, showing more of the humanoid body covered in more sharp, hard pieces of organic armor. The mouth had two rows of razor-sharp teeth, one outside the lips and another behind the hissing lips. The eyebrows were sharp points that rose high over their skeletal head to form a crown and the monster had deep red eyes that were deadly focused on Rion.

Rion had heard of all kinds of fairies: corn fairies, river fairies, wood fairies, and tooth fairies. He had never heard of fairies that were more than a nuisance because the adults in the village didn't want the children to be scared. The existence of tooth fairies should have been a warning. Tooth fairies were willing to trade shiny baubles for their prizes. Bone fairies didn't ask or trade for what they wanted.

The bone fairy leaped out of their cave, digging their claws deep into the dirt and showing their long, angular legs and an external rib cage. Rion rushed away, scrambling backward and losing his grip on the coin hoard. He was quickly cornered against the tooth fairy's tower and the bone fairy grabbed his leg.

Kicking and flailing, Rion screamed as the bone fairy dragged him back, opening their mouth impossibly large and tearing a chunk of flesh out of Rion's thigh. Calling out for help, Rion dug his fingers into the loose dirt as the bone fairy dragged him back into its cave, spitting the flesh aside and tearing out the bone. Rion struggled as much as he could before the bone fairy bit into his neck to get at the vertebrae and silence their victim.

The tooth fairies ventured into the bone fairy's cave, taking the teeth that the bone fairy was too clumsy to take for itself. The tooth fairies went back to their nest, adding more teeth to their collection. When the bone fairy was done, the tooth fairies would collect the loose coins Rion had tried to steal to trade for more teeth. The bone fairy snarled and snapped their jaws at the tooth fairies if they got too close.

Tooth fairies would trade shiny baubles for the teeth of humans, but bone fairies only took by force.