UNTITLED YA FANTASY SAMPLE

by Paige Alena

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Smack-dab in the center of the city is a park no one can enter.

Some mayor had the brilliant idea of building a park on an abandoned lot the size of a city block. It was a nice idea, I guess, to have a patch of greenery in a sea of iron and neon.

Construction crews took months to plant trees, lay cobblestone paths, and dig a duck pond. The park opened on the first clear day of summer. Parents brought their kids to throw bread at the ducks, grandparents sat on benches and admired the flowers, and couples picnicked under the apple trees. From June until September, the park was a little patch of paradise in the middle of the city.

That is, untile the fairies moved in.

It was iron keeping the fairies at bay. Iron drove out all the magical things that plagued our city when it was a humble village and not a sprawling metropolis. A space free of iron, full of fresh life and new rot, drew fairies like moths to flame. They moved in swiftly, practically overnight.

The pranks were harmless at first, stolen picnic baskets and missing shoes. The more fairies moved in, though, the bolder they got. One poor girl wandered into a fairy ring and wound up barfing toads. A couple stealing kisses in the shade of a willow tree found themselves magically stuck together, permanently lip-locked. The spells didn't last long, but the fairies made it very clear that they didn't want any people in their park.

Destroying the park was impossible. The magic was too strong for even a bulldozer to pass through the park unscathed. It was decided that the park would be sectioned off from the rest of the city. An iron fence was erected, seven feet high. No fairies could get out, and no humans could get in.

Untouched by humans, the park began to grow. The trees stretched and twisted, moss swallowed the cobblestone paths, and alien flowers sprouted in the rose beds. Try as they could, though, the plants couldn't push through the iron gates. The city was safe.

Or, at least, as safe as it could be.

The sun is just beginning to set. The sky is streaked with pink and orange, outlined in indigo. Acrid yellow light, cast by half a dozen street lamps, pools on the asphalt. Spring gave way to winter practically overnight, the last traces of snow gone from the gutter. Seasons don't touch the fairy park. Dead of winter or heat of summer, the plants are always lush and thriving.

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I circle the fence. Neighbors piled up protection charms in the corners, iron nails and salt packets and hawthorn branches. I don't think the charms make any difference, but it gives people a sense of comfort.

One of the trees made a real effort to escape the fence. Its branches are crammed against the bars. I use the branches as a foothold to haul myself over the fence, landing on the other side with very little grace. A twinge of pain shoots up my ankle and in to my kneecaps.

The moment I cross the fence I'm in a different world. The trees swallow sound and light. The darkness is heavier, blacker, and thicker than regular darkness. I take my ball of yarn out of my pocket and tie the loose end to a fence post. It's easy to get lost in fairy territory.

Ball of yarn in hand, I venture in to the park. The trees look too old for how recently they were planted. They're ancient green things, with gnarled branches that tangle in my hair. Feathery white mushrooms climb the trunks like spiral staircases. Patches of faintly glowing flowers sprout through the mossy undergrowth, lighting my path. It's nearly impossible to see where I'm going. I catch flashes of brilliant color through the darkness. I don't turn to look.

The clusters of trees open in to a clearing. The duck pond, which must have once been blue, is swampy green. The surface is clustered with lily pads and lichen. The gazebo next to it didn't fair any better; thick vines circle its posts and red and white mushrooms sprout through the sagging roof. There are more patches of glowing flowers here, brilliant orange and acid yellow and violent red. The smell is overpowering, damp earth and something much older, much stranger.

In places where magic is strong, you can practically feel it in the air. My hair pricks up on my arms and the nape of my neck. If I didn't know any better, I'd think lightning was about to strike. With an inhale for courage, I enter the gazebo.

A warm breeze wraps its way through the trees and rattles the leaves. I swear I can hear the jangle of distant laughter, musical and childlike.

"Hello?" I call out. "Anyone there?"

Nothing.

"Is anyone there?"

Still, nothing. I clench my fists. I won't be ignored.

"My name is Cordelia, and I want to talk to a fairy!"

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The breeze stills. The hairs that have been standing up on my arms settle. It's almost as if the magic heard my name and left.

"No need to shout!"

My breath hitches in my throat. There's a fairy perched on the railing behind me. It's about a foot tall, scrawny and freckled with beady eyes and paper white moth wings. It's clad in leaves and downy gray feathers, the same color as its shaggy crop of hair.

"You're a fairy," I say. The fairy titters.

"Pip's my name, thank you very much." It tilts its head. Its wings twitch when it talks. "You are a silly little girl."

"I'm not a little girl. I'm fourteen," I argue. "As of three days ago, in fact."

Pips pinches its spindly fingers together. "Teeny-tiny. I don't make deals with silly-willy, bitty-witty, itsy-bitsy little humans."

"I thought that's what you fairies liked to do. Making deals, tricking humans, stealing them away to live in the fairy court."

"Some fairies do," Pip shrugs. "I find most humans to be very dull."

Pip already looks bored with our conversation. Its eyes flit around, maybe looking to see if any of its fairy friends are nearby.

"I don't understand," I huff. "I'm standing in a fairy ring. I gave you my real name. Why won't you take me?"

Pip pauses for one moment before bursting in to raucous laughter. It's doubled over, holding its stomach, careening around the gazebo as its moth wings beat furiously. I dig my nails into the meat of my palm.

"You want to leave your world so badly?"

"Yes. I do."

Pip points an accusing finger at my face. "Are you a criminal? Escaping the law?"

"No, of course not."

"Something tragic then? An orphan? A slave? A prisoner?"

"No." I frown. "To all three."

"Ah! I know!" Pips snaps its fingers. "You're rescuing someone who was stolen by fairies. A parent? A sibling? Your one true love?"

I wrinkle my nose. "No."

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“Under a curse?” Pip circles me. It tugs at a lock of my hair. “You must be under a curse, look at you.”

“Not exactly,” I huff. “I don’t turn in to a monster under the light of a full moon, or anything like that, if that’s what you’re asking.”

Pip folds its arms over its chest and plants itself on the railing. “Well? What is it?”

“I’m bored” I admit. “So bored. Nothing happens to me. Everyone in my family has done something exciting, except me. I need an adventure.”

Pip stares, its expression unchanged. After an uncomfortable pause, a thin smiles creeps across its narrow face.

“Poor, silly little human girl.” Pip clucks its tongue. “Doesn’t know what she’s asking.”

“I do. I promise, I do.” I hold out my hand. “I want to go. I need to go with you.”

Pip shakes its head. It stands on the edge of the railing, one hand braced against a post.

“What fun would that be? Taking someone who wants to be taken?”

I don’t have an answer. Pip pushes itself off the railing. Wings unfurled it hovers mid-air, bathed in the faint glow of the flowers.

“You said it yourself, Cordelia. You’re ordinary. You’re nothing special. And I don’t bother with anyone anything less than interesting.”

Pip flies off. In the blink of an eye, the fairy is gone.

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