

ONCE UPON A TIME

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He suddenly realized that it was exactly ten years ago today when he had vowed to throw himself off the Dunne Memorial Bridge after Myra turned him down. But why think about it just now. What was it that caused him to remember? He hadn't thought about it for several years, although he had promised himself at the time that he would never forget that day. Of course, it was easy to laugh about it now—now after several years had gone by—as only a memory of youthful puppy-love. He also remembered that, once he had decided not to throw himself off the bridge, he decided he would wait at least ten years before he got married. Ten years ago today... Did it mean that, he should run out and marry the first good-looking girl he could find? Hardly. It was strange though, now that he thought about it. Since Myra rejected him, he had never really gotten serious about any of the women he had dated. So why should he be thinking about getting married on this particular day?

While he was sitting at his desk mulling it over in his mind, his friend Jim came up to him.

“Hey, man, are you going to work all night? It's after five. Come on, grab your things, and let's get out of here.”

“Sure, Jim,” he responded. “I was just thinking...”

“Man, that's not good. Never let on that you're thinking. They might get wise and start giving you work to do!”

“God forbid,” he chuckled. “All right, wait until I clear my desk and then we can leave.”

As they got on the elevator, he realized that he was looking forward to a quiet evening at home after a nice supper, with a good book, and maybe a beer or two. He was still keyed up after a stressful day of business meetings, plus the pressure of trying to finish his reports before the boss complained. Yeah, it would be nice to relax for a while.

Jim interrupted his meditations during the elevator ride: “How about it, man, are you coming to the party Friday night?”

“I don't know, Jim,” he answered. “I don't have anyone that I really want to bring, and I can't see turning up at one of your bashes feeling like an odd man out.”

“What about Janet? I thought you were dating her lately.”

Janet was one of the secretaries at the office, a good worker and rather attractive, but a little too anxious to start a relationship.

“Janet's all right,” he answered, “but she's like most of the others, not much there after you get past her nicely polished surface.”

“And you managed to get past that pretty quickly, I'll bet. Yeah, you're a real lady-killer all right. It's a shame that...”

“No, no, nothing like that,” he protested. “It's just that after I got to know her she didn't interest me any more. All she thinks about is signing business contracts, locating office files, and then getting married. I'll bet she writes her diary in short hand and files all her love affairs under different category headings.”

“Efficient like an adding machine, huh? Well, I’ll wait and see what happens when some fair lady finally gets you by the short hairs; then I’ll watch you squirm and enjoy it. Seriously though,” Jim offered, “you know it’s about time you were thinking about a long term relationship. A nice looking guy like you ought to have no trouble finding lots of girls to go out with. They go for your type, you know... the strong silent male. You need to think about something more than just reading the latest best-seller, and playing golf on the weekend.”

“Yeah,” he joked, “before long I’ll just be an old foggy who only wants to stay by the fire place with a good book.”

“Hey, man, is that really what you want for the rest of your life? You really ought to think about marriage. Look at me,” Jim declared. “I’ve got a nice home with a great wife and three kids. I’ve never had it so good. But if you want to stick with your books and your golf clubs for the rest of your life, so be it. That’s your business.”

When they reached the lobby, Jim asked, “Can I give you a lift?”

“No thanks,” he said. “I’ve got to pick a few things before I go home.”

“Now you see,” Jim countered, “if you had a wife, she could do your shopping for you, and you could get home a lot earlier. Well, think about it. I’m sure Janet would like to come Friday night, if you change your mind.”

“Yeah, she probably would. Okay, Jim, I’ll see you in the morning,” and he started walking in the direction of the store where he did most of his shopping. Now that was odd. Why did Jim bring up marriage on the day he remembered his vow not to get married for ten years, precisely on the day those ten years had finally passed? Oh well, just another coincidence, he supposed.

Jim had a point, though. He did feel kind of left out sometimes when his friends got together, and he was the only one without a wife. And what Jim said about marriage was also true; he certainly didn’t want to stay a bachelor all his life. He would like to have children some day, and the idea of growing old all by himself didn’t appeal to him either. Maybe he *should* talk to Janet about Jim’s party.

Well, he couldn’t do anything about it until he bought his groceries, he thought, as he pushed open the swinging glass door and was confronted by rows of canned goods and boxes. Later, as he was checking out, he couldn’t help noticing the pretty young woman working the cash register—she certainly had a nice face and an engaging smile. Hey, get hold of yourself, old boy, he cautioned. The first thing you know you’ll be picking up the first chick that smiles at you just because the ten years are up, and Jim thinks you should get married. He paid for his groceries and couldn’t help smiling at the attractive cashier as she handed him his change. He wondered if women really considered him good-looking, like Jim said, or if they just saw another tired office-worker off for the day. Oh well... he had other things to worry about, so he took his sack of groceries and started walking toward his apartment.

He was tired, but he felt good for some reason. It took him about fifteen minutes to get to his building and he hummed a tune as he climbed the stairs. As he opened the door to his apartment he saw himself in the full-length mirror of hall closet. Fortunately, he had been able to avoid putting on weight, and his body looked trim. His short brown

hair still had no sign of gray—not too bad for a doddering old foggy, he thought. As he set his things down on the kitchen table, though, the quiet rooms around him seemed lonelier than usual. He saw that his landlady had left his mail on the table inside the door. There was some of the usual junk mail, as well as a letter from his mother.

After he had finished eating and washed his dishes, he sat down to open his mail, throwing the advertisements in the waste basket. The letter from his mother had the usual news about things at home, but one paragraph caught his attention:

“Don’t you think it is about time you were getting married, dear?” his mother asked. “Your father and I were thinking that most young men have already started a family at your age. Isn’t there some nice young girl you are interested in? What about the one you spoke of the last time you were home? We don’t want you to rush into anything you would be sorry for later, but it would be so nice if you could settle down with a family of your own. Do try to give it some thought, dear.”

Well, how about that! This was getting weird. First, remembering the vow he’d made after Myra, then Jim urging him to think about marriage, and now his mother. Strange! Could all this possibly be a coincidence? Could there be some mysterious cause behind all of this? Well, it was a cinch that he wasn’t going to do anything about getting married until he was damn good and ready... and not until he had found a woman that he cared about more than those he had met so far.

The rest of his mother’s letter had nothing new and, when he had finished it, he picked up his book and sat down to read. Hell, maybe he should find a mistress. That would liven things up a bit! He could just see his mother. “Mother, I couldn’t find a woman I really cared about, so I decided to shack up with this luscious young thing...” Oh, well, forget it... that would never happen anyway.

He got up and got a beer from the fridge and sat down again with his book. It was a mystery novel he had picked up from the newsstand the other evening. On the cover there was a picture of a scantily-dressed blonde who was evidently mixed up with some illegal international conspiracy. Well, that ought to keep him occupied for a while.

He took a sip of beer and turned on the lamp next to his chair. He remembered that the blonde’s name was Ingrid, and he began to read where he had left off, as she was combing her hair before getting dressed to go out with a foreign stock broker who was also involved with the conspiracy. He lit a cigarette and continued reading until he was thoroughly relaxed. The blonde was in a limousine belonging to the foreign broker while they were being followed by the police. He turned the page to see if they would escape feeling that there was someone in the room with him. He glanced up with the sensation that someone was watching him, but, no, the room was empty. He shrugged his shoulders, and began to read again. As he was reading about a scene where shots were fired and there was a terrible crash as the limousine slammed into a tree, he distinctly heard the sound of someone clearing their throat. His head jerked up, and this time, there in front of him, was the luscious blonde from the book, smiling at him in his own living room. Well... maybe she was a little slimmer, and not quite as voluptuous.

“What the... Who are you? How did you get in here?” he exclaimed.

"I'm a fairy. We can do those things you know," she said, still smiling.

"A fairy!" he burst out, "Come on! That's ridiculous."

"Well, maybe it is," she said pouting "but that's what I am, a fairy."

"You mean a fairy-tale type fairy," he said with astonishment.

"Yes, I guess you could say that," she admitted.

"Now wait just a minute," he protested, "I don't know what you're doing here in my living room or who you are, but I..."

"But I just told you," she interrupted him. "I'm a fairy, that's all. I don't see what's so strange about that. I've been one all my life. I can't help it if people don't believe in fairies any more."

"Okay, you're a fairy, and I'm King Tut, but what on earth are you doing here?"

"I've come to give you three wishes," she said.

"Oh really..." he protested. "The next thing I know you're going to tell me that you plan to grant them."

"That's right," she agreed. "Go ahead, make a wish."

The woman in front of him looked as though she might be in her late twenties. She was dressed in a simple blue and white cotton dress with white sandals. Her dress accented the blue in her eyes, her slightly curly blonde hair was shoulder length, and if she was not exactly luscious, she was certainly very pretty.

"All right, I need another beer. This one's almost gone. How's that...?"

In response, she nodded her head at the end-table next to his chair. On it there was a freshly opened bottle of beer of the same brand that he had been drinking. He frowned, but then shrugged.

"I guess I must have opened one while I was reading and then forgot about it."

"If you insist," she replied. "Go ahead, wish again if you don't believe me."

"Okay, I'll try to make it something good this time. My goodness, I can't waste a chance like this," he said sarcastically. "It isn't every evening a charming young fairy comes bursting into my living room offering three wishes."

"I didn't burst," she protested. "I just materialized, and when you didn't notice, I cleared my throat."

"Well, whatever. Let's see. What should I wish for this time...?" He was beginning to enjoy this, even if it was perfectly ridiculous. He decided to give her something that was impossible to do, and then, when she couldn't do it, she would have to explain what she was really up to.

"Yes, I know," he announced. "I want a new set of golf clubs."

"What brand?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't care, Wilson I guess, or better yet, make it Titleist, with a black leather golf bag."

As he looked at her, he had the feeling that there really was something different about this woman. Besides being very attractive, she seemed somehow... special.

"Okay, just a minute..." she said with a frown of concentration. Then, smiling she said, "Yes, that's it. You can find them in your hall closet."

He wasn't so sure this was going to turn out as he had expected. She seemed awfully confident. But he might as well find out if she was right, so he walked into the hall and opened the door. To his amazement there was a complete set of Titleist golf clubs in a black leather golf bag leaning against the wall of the closet.

"I'll be damned!" he exclaimed. "How did you do that? You must be a very clever young woman?" He felt like that was the understatement of the year.

"No, not particularly. All of us can do these things without any trouble. It's really quite easy," she said with a smile that was close to a smirk.

"Well, *I* certainly don't know how to do anything like that. It's got me completely stymied... unless you really are a fairy, like you say."

"Well, you will have to believe me sooner or later," she insisted. "And now you have already used your first two wishes for something that isn't really very important."

"That's easy," he countered. "I'll just wish for three more wishes."

"No," she objected, "that is the one wish we cannot grant. It's not allowed—only three wishes per person. So you'd better make the last one count."

"I can't figure you out," he said with a puzzled expression. "Fairies only appear in fairy-stories, but this is real life. If you're really a fairy, why there might be something to these coincidences... to the crazy idea that... No that's nonsense!"

"Well," she observed haughtily, "it makes no difference to me whether you believe me or not. It's not my job to make people believe in what they're too blind to see right in front of their noses. I'm just here to grant wishes, so if you will oblige me by making your last wish, I shall be on my way."

"Wait a minute" he said. "You don't have to get upset. After all, I've been brought up all my life to believe that fairies aren't real."

"Well, I can't help it if human beings are so stupid... er, that is..., unimaginative."

"Okay, okay," he protested. "For now, let's say that I believe you. If it's true, then I ought to find out a few things so that I won't be throwing away my last wish."

"Yes, that's all right if you want to interrogate me in order to convince yourself, so you won't feel like a fool when you ask for something you really want. It won't be the first time someone tried to do that."

"All right, maybe I am a little afraid of feeling foolish," he answered, "but how do you know that there is something that I really want? How do you know that I am not a perfectly satisfied, unimaginative, human being?"

"Oh, people always want *something*" she responded. "Besides, they wouldn't have sent me if there wasn't something you needed."

"Something is fishy here!" he objected. "Why should I need something?"

"I'm sure I don't know. As I said, my job is just to grant wishes, and if you haven't got sense enough to know what you need, I can't help you. Now, if you have some questions, ask them. Let's get on with it. I have other things to do."

"It's just that... well, I mean some strange things have happened to me today. I guess I can't do anything worse than make a fool of myself. But first, I want to ask you who are 'they'? You keep saying 'they' did something, or 'they' won't allow things."

She shrugged. “‘They’ are the other older fairies, the old-ones I work with.”

“Well,” he asked, “who are the ones that you work with? What about your family, your parents, your children?”

“My father and mother aren’t living now; I have one sister and I live alone with her. I don’t have any children because I’m not married.”

“Oh, I’m sorry...” he stumbled, “I mean, I’m glad... well, that is..., where do you live anyway? In a forest... or maybe in a castle?”

“That’s hard to explain...,” she hesitated. “I guess you could say we live in sort of a house.”

“You say you have one sister, and you’re not married. Fairies do get married and have children, don’t they?”

“Of course,” she said. “How do think I got here? We don’t live forever.”

“Oh, I thought maybe you did. How long *do* fairies usually live?”

“Oh..., maybe a hundred years or so,” she answered.

“Would it be too bold if I asked how old you are now?”

“No, I’m twenty-six.”

“Pretty young for a fairy, huh?”

“Yes, but I don’t see why you want to ask me all these things,” she objected. “I don’t see what they have to do with making a wish. You haven’t forgotten that, I hope?”

“Oh, no,” he said with a smile. “But it’s not every evening that I get to chat with a young fairy, and I have to take advantage of the opportunity. Then, when we’re done, maybe I could write a real, honest-to-goodness fairy-tale.”

“I suppose so,” she remarked dryly. “So is there anything else you want to ask?”

“Just what is your job anyway,” he asked again. “Do you just go around asking people to make wishes? Don’t you ever do other things, like changing people into toads or pumpkins, or something?”

“No,” she said, somewhat exasperated, “we haven’t done anything like that in a long time. Most of the time when I’m not working, I stay home and help my sister. I guess you would call it, keeping house.”

“Do you cook, and things like that? Do fairies have to eat?”

“Yes, of course,” she responded. “How do you think we stay alive?”

“Isn’t there anything else, sort of special, that you can do besides grant wishes?”

“Well,” she said, “I can make myself invisible if I want, and I can move from one place to another by just thinking about it. But only the old-ones can turn people into something else, and, like I said, they haven’t done that for a long time.”

“Well, I’m glad of that. But what about these wishes?” he asked. “Can you grant your own wishes?”

“No, I can only grant those of the people for whom I am told to do so.”

“Who tells you?” he wanted to know.

“Like I said earlier, it is the elders, or old-ones, the ones I work for. They pick out those who need the wishes and they send me or someone else to grant them.”

“I don’t know what they think I need, unless... But, hell, I couldn’t ask for that...”

“You still have one more wish.” she insisted. “As long as it is a reasonable request, I will grant it. Go ahead, you can’t lose anything...”

“Well, then,” he said, taking the plunge. “There is one thing I need..., a *wife*... I wish for you to be my wife.”

“What? Oh my! Oh, my goodness... I don’t know what to say” she said doubtfully. “I’ve never had a wish like that.”

“I would hope not! Well, you said you would grant my wish. That is, unless you would rather not... be my wife, that is...” he stumbled again. “Really, I’m not such a bad guy. But if you don’t want to, I guess I could withdraw my wish. If you insist...”

“No, it’s not that,” she objected. “It’s just that I never expected anything like this. All fairies want to get married, someday..., but I don’t have any idea what the elders would say. I suppose I must go back and ask them.”

“Oh no, I don’t want to put you to all that bother,” he protested. “Really, it’s nothing. Why it’s silly to think that I...”

“Of course it’s not silly,” she interrupted. “You had a right to make a wish and now I have to see if I can grant it. It’s my job, you know.”

“Yes, but I don’t want you to do it just because it’s your job” he pressed. “And I don’t want to get you in trouble with the old ones, or the elders, or whoever they are...”

“If you don’t stop, I’ll think you don’t want me anymore,” she said smiling while pretending to be disappointed. “For all you know, maybe I’m glad that you asked me. You know... now I think maybe you’re scared.”

“Of course I am” he admitted. “Who wouldn’t be a little... uncertain, under the circumstances. But if you really want to ask..., I would love to have you find out.”

“All right, then,” she said laughing. He decided it was a charming fairy-like laugh, like tinkling. “But wait, before you go, I don’t even know your name.”

“I’m Chloris.”

“Just, Chloris?”

“Yes, just Chloris.”

“Well,” he said, “that sounds like a fairy name. But what’s your last name?”

“We don’t have last names,” she answered. “It’s just Chloris.”

“Well, ‘just Chloris,’ I’ll be waiting. And if they say yes, you *will* have a last name. Mine’s Franklin, Bill Franklin.”

“Yes, I know,” she said. “That’s all right. I’ll be going now. I’ll be back as soon as I can. Goodbye.”

And then she was gone. He looked at the place she had been, but there was nothing there now, only empty space. So it was true, she really could materialize, or dematerialize, or whatever it was. All he could do now was wait and see what happened. He hoped it didn’t take a very long time. It wasn’t every night he asked a woman to be his wife, even if she was a fairy.”

He went into the kitchen and started to get himself another beer but then decided against it. He wasn’t going to take any chances. He wanted to be completely sober. He didn’t want this to turn out to be some sort of alcoholic delusion.

At least he could try out the golf clubs while he was waiting. He went to the hall closet and took out the leather bag full of clubs. He hefted the driver and swung it back and forth. The hall was rather cramped so he went into the living room and moved the coffee table out of the way. Yeah, the club was a perfect fit, well-balanced and easy to swing. He went to the bedroom and got a couple balls out of the top drawer of the chest. He rolled them across the living room rug with the putter which felt smooth and sure in his hands. He inspected the other clubs one by one and found that each one fit his golf stance perfectly. When he put them all back in the bag, the gleaming surface of the clubs sparkled happily in the lamplight. It was indeed a beautiful set. He couldn't wait to try them out of the course.

But now there were other things to think about. Still no sign of Chloris. He picked the novel up again, but it was impossible to concentrate. The characters all seemed distant and unreal after his experience with Chloris. But would she really come back? Could he have imagined all this? He could see the golf clubs, and they were certainly real enough. He wished she would hurry back.

He tried to read some more, but it was still impossible to focus on the novel. He couldn't help glancing at the place where Chloris had disappeared. But the spot remained empty, and it did no good to go on staring at it.

Finally, he couldn't stand to sit there any longer, so he went into the kitchen to fix himself a snack. He would have liked to go for a walk or something, but he didn't dare leave the apartment in case she came back while he was gone.

When he finished eating, he lit a cigarette and returned to the living room to sit down again. This time he made no attempt to read. He sat there and watched the approximate spot where Chloris had appeared before, getting more and more nervous the longer he sat there. It had already been over an hour since she had disappeared. They must at least be considering his wish, he thought, or she would have come back to tell him by now. Finally, he became so restless that he couldn't sit still any longer, so he got up and began to pace back and forth from the living room to the kitchen. Surely she would be back soon now.

He turned on the TV, but that was no help, because he couldn't keep his eyes on the screen. What could they possibly be doing all this time? He rearranged the magazines on the coffee table and straightened the cushions on the couch. He stopped for a moment to look out the window, but he jumped at every little sound, looking to see if she had reappeared. Not yet...

This was terrible. What if they didn't let her come back, or what if they were punishing her for somehow mishandling the situation? Perhaps they had to look it up in their law books, or whatever they used, and they couldn't find a precedent. Or maybe they were trying to punish *him* for making an inappropriate wish. He was going to go crazy, if something didn't happen soon.

Through a sheer effort of will he forced himself to sit down again and try to relax. After a few moments, he began to feel a little better. Why hadn't he thought to ask her how long it would take? At least, he would have had a better idea of what to expect. He

was beginning to feel a positive dislike for the old-ones, or elders, or whoever they were. Any answer would be better than this uncertainty, this waiting.

Once again he tried to force himself to relax. If he could only sleep, the time would pass more quickly. He made himself close his eyes, and after a while he began to relax a little. His mind was still filled with images of what might have happened, of fairies with pointed ears threatening Chloris... Come to think of it, did fairies have pointed ears, or was it elves? Oh, hell, what difference did that make? He didn't remember seeing her ears; they must have been covered by her blonde hair.

A little later he looked at his watch, and discovered it was after midnight. He must have dropped off for a while. Still no Chloris. Could it all have been a dream? No, there were the golf clubs which he had leaned against the wall next to the couch. This was awful. Maybe she was not coming back. It had been almost four hours now. If she was going to return tonight, certainly she would have come by now.

Feeling more and more discouraged, he began to undress and get ready for bed. He was still tired and would have to try to sleep some more, or he would be useless tomorrow. He got into his pajamas and brushed his teeth. After he rinsed out his mouth, he got into bed. He left the door to the living room open, just in case.

He lay there for a while, trying to shut off the stream of thoughts still going through his mind. He tried concentrating on his breathing and, after a while, that helped a little. Suddenly, he remembered he had forgotten to set the alarm. He rolled over toward the night table, and... he realized there was someone in bed with him! He leaped out of bed and turned on the light.

"Why, Bill," Chloris said, blinking, "I thought you were asleep."

"My God, woman, what are you doing here," he shouted with surprise. "That is... I'm glad to see you. What happened?"

"I thought you were asleep," she answered. "I didn't want to disturb you, so I just materialized myself into the bed."

"But what did the old-ones say?" he asked anxiously.

"Well, here I am. Obviously they said, 'yes.' They knew that you had been thinking about marriage, and they expected you would ask for a wife. But they were very surprised when you asked for me. For a long time they tried to determine whether that was against their rules, or whether a marriage between a fairy and a human would be practicable. Eventually, they came to the conclusion that it could be successful, and they decided to give us the chance to work it out for ourselves. So now it's up to us."

"Wonderful! Fantastic!" he said enthusiastically. "I was about to go crazy, wondering if you were ever coming back."

"Yes, I'm sorry it took so long. But," she added with a puzzled expression, "I don't understand why you were so worried. Would you really have been unhappy if I didn't come back?"

"Of course," he said. "I wouldn't have asked you to be my wife if I didn't care."

She broke into a smile, "I guess I'm not used to having someone worry about me, especially a man. I don't mind though. In fact, I think it's very nice!"

“Well, I’m glad somebody enjoys it,” he grumbled.

“Oh, Bill, you must be tired. Come back to bed. You need to get some sleep before you have to go to work in the morning.”

He reached out to turn off the light, but after a moment turned it back on, saying, “You know, I can’t sleep with you. We’re not married.”

“Oh, that’s all right, Bill,” she said, “we will be married soon. And besides, as long as the elders gave us permission, what harm can there be?”

“But, woman, you don’t understand. Maybe fairies don’t think anything is wrong when you sleep together without being married, but where I come from people frown on that sort of thing.”

“Well, where I come from,” she countered, “once the elders pick a husband for you, it is quite all right!”

“Wait a minute. You mean they *tell* you who to marry?”

“Yes, of course,” she responded.

“But don’t fairies have a chance to meet someone and fall in love naturally?”

“No, they would never permit that,” she insisted. “But they consider everything, and besides, they *know* if it will work.”

“Not very democratic,” he remarked. “You mean... they *know* about me too?”

“Yes, the old-ones can know things when they want to. How else would they be able to tell that you needed to be given three wishes?”

“Beats me. But what about you?” he asked. “Do you also *know* things?”

“Well, yes, a little,” she admitted. “There is part of our mind that we can learn how to use for things like that. But it takes time, and lots of practice.”

“Great! I can see I’m going to have a lot of privacy in this relationship,” he said sarcastically. “But I still can’t sleep with you, because we’re not married.”

“Well, let’s get married then, so we can get some sleep.”

“But, woman,” he objected, “you can’t get married at two o’clock in the morning! And besides you have to have a marriage license, and usually people get married in a church. All that takes time. I’ll get a license first thing in the morning, but right now I’ll take an extra blanket and go sleep on the couch.”

“Well, all right, if you insist. But I think it’s silly.”

“Yeah, I suppose so, but that’s the only way I would feel comfortable,” he declared firmly. “Good night, Chloris.”

“Good night, Bill,” she responded, as he turned out the light and went into the living room where he spread the blanket out on the couch.

He didn’t look forward to spending a night on the couch. It was a little too short and the cushions were slightly uneven. It couldn’t be helped, though, so he might as well make the best of it. Oh, damn! He still hadn’t turned on the alarm. He went back into the dark bedroom and fumbled with the alarm clock.

“What on earth are you doing, Bill?” Chloris asked.

“I forgot to set the alarm. Do might if I turn on the light for a moment?”

“No, go ahead,” she said.

He turned on the lamp on the bed table and set the alarm for seven o'clock. As he reached for the lamp to turn it off, he hesitated and asked, "Chloris, were you asleep?"

"No," she said drowsily.

"Well, you know, there would be no harm in giving you a good night kiss."

"That would be nice," she agreed.

She lifted her head off the pillow and he bent over. Her lips were soft and moist like they had been dipped in dew. This was completely different from what he had felt with other women. This must be what it is like to kiss a fairy, he thought. He felt things stirring in other parts of his body, but he ignored them, and said, "Good night, Chloris."

"Good night, dear," she replied.

He turned out the lamp and headed back toward the living room, but she called after him.

"Bill? Are you sure you wouldn't like to sleep in here?"

"Yes, after that kiss, I really would," he answered. "But I really shouldn't. I'll just be in the other room if you need anything."

"Oh, go sleep on your old sofa," she said resignedly. "I hope you get some sleep."

After he got settled on the couch, it took a while to stop thinking about the evening's events, but eventually he was able to fall asleep. Even in sleep his mind seemed to stay active; first, he dreamed that he was being chased through a dark, mysterious forest, and then he was flying over some snow-capped mountains in order to escape from a large bird with long talons that were reaching out for him. Later he was in a court room sitting before an old judge with piercing eyes and a long beard. The judge started rapping with his gavel while he glared at him with a threatening expression. But why didn't the judge stop rapping?

He opened his eyes abruptly and saw the bright sun-light streaming through the living-room windows. He realized that someone was knocking at his door, and looked at his watch. It was after nine o'clock. Oh for God's sake, he must have set the alarm without turning it on.

"Yes, I'm coming," he shouted at the person who was knocking.

After pulling on his pants, he went to the door. Turning the bolt, he opened it to see his landlady standing in the outer hallway.

"Oh, it's you, Mrs. Nelson. I'm sorry I must have overslept."

"I hated to disturb you, Mr. Franklin," she apologized, "but they just delivered this package and I didn't want to leave it outside."

"Yes," he answered. "Those must be the books I ordered. Here, I'll take them."

"I was also going to wash the curtains in the living-room, and in the bedroom," his landlady said, as she started in the direction of the bedroom.

"Oh, no," he said with alarm, setting the package down, "I'll get them for you..."

Without waiting for him, Mrs. Nelson went into the bedroom and began to remove the curtains from the window. He rushed in behind her and was surprised to see there was no one else in the room. He glanced into the bathroom, but it was also empty. Where on earth was Chloris? He hoped he wasn't going to discover it was all a dream.

"That's strange," Mrs. Nelson remarked suspiciously. "It looks like someone slept on the couch in the other room, but this bed has also been slept in."

"Oh, yes, well..." he stammered, "a friend of mine from the office stopped by last night and I said he could sleep on the couch. He must have left without telling me."

"My there's a lot of cobwebs behind these curtains," Mrs. Nelson observed, changing the subject. "I'll just get the dust mop from the hall closet and clean them off. I can't have my rooms looking like an old barn."

Laying the curtains on the bed, she went to get the dust mop. He quickly looked under the bed and in the bedroom closet, but there was still no sign of Chloris.

As Mrs. Nelson came back into the room, she stumbled, dropping the dust mop.

"Oomph, I must have tripped," she exclaimed, although the shocked expression on her face showed that she wasn't sure what had actually happened.

Suddenly, the dust mop rose up and began to move around of its own accord. Mrs. Nelson grabbed for it, but it evaded her and began threatening to strike her in the face. As he started forward with the idea of helping her, the dust mop fell to the floor.

"Well, of all things!" Mrs. Nelson said breathlessly. "There's something very strange going on here this morning. I could have sworn that the dust mop started to hit me on the head all by itself."

All by itself...! He suddenly remembered that Chloris had said she could make herself invisible. That must be it. But why was she bothering poor Mrs. Nelson? At that moment the dust mop began to move again, this time giving every indication that it was trying to swat Mrs. Nelson's rather ample posterior. She screamed and ran into the kitchen where she barricaded herself behind the table.

"Stop that, Chloris," he shouted in the direction of the floating dust mop.

"What do you mean stop it?" Mrs. Nelson shrieked. "I don't know what's happening, and my name's Marjorie, not Doris. Something is really strange here, Mr. Franklin. Maybe we ought to call the police or something..."

At that the dust mop began to threaten Mrs. Nelson even more aggressively, and he shouted, "Chloris, that's enough. Stop it!"

"I told you my name's not Florence, or whatever it is that you keep calling me," Mrs. Nelson complained. "Really, Mr. Franklin, I think I'd better be going. There's something wrong here. I'll come back later..., unless you want me to bring the police."

"No, no, I'm sure it will be all right. Yes, come back later Mrs. Nelson. Everything will be fine," he insisted as he urged her firmly toward the front door.

"Well, I don't know," she said dubiously. But suddenly something pushed her into the outer hallway, and the door slammed shut with a bang.

He turned to the vacant space around the door and asked, "Now what did you do that for?"

Immediately Chloris appeared and said, "I'm sorry, Bill, but we can't have her barging in here any time she wants. She would have started asking questions, and I couldn't let her spoil our first morning together."

"But why didn't you tell me?" he asked. "I could have gotten rid of her."

“You weren’t able to keep her out of the bedroom,” she pointed out, “and then she started getting suspicious. You’ll have to admit I’m very efficient.”

“I’ll say! So much so that I’m liable to end up in jail, or in a lunatic asylum.”

“I was just trying to help,” she countered.

“I know, but now I’m really late for work,” he said. “I don’t know what to do.”

“Oh, do you have to go to work?” she pleaded. “You promised to get our marriage license. Why don’t you call and tell them you are sick or something?”

“Okay,” he agreed, “but, Chloris, you can’t keep on treating people like that. You’ll get me in real trouble if this goes on. I’m sure that Mrs. Nelson would have called the police, if it wasn’t for the fact that they would probably think she was crazy when she tried to explain what happened.”

“Oh, all right,” she agreed reluctantly. “I suppose I’ll have to...”

“Well, why don’t you go into the kitchen and fix us some breakfast, while I call my boss. I guess the thing to do is tell him the truth or, at least, part of it anyway.”

He picked up the receiver and dialed. A moment later he said, “Mr. Stevens, this is Bill Franklin. I’m sorry I didn’t come in this morning, but my fiancé got in late last night. We’re planning to get married soon, and I would like to see about getting a marriage license this morning... Yes, we have been planning this for a while, but we finally decided just last night. The reports I was working on are almost finished... Yes, thank you Mr. Stevens... That would be great... Yes, I’ll let you know. Thank you very much... Goodbye, Mr. Stevens.”

“What did he say?” Chloris asked from the kitchen.

“He said I could take the rest of the week off,” and he added, “I was afraid they might be too busy, but he said I could take next week too if I wanted.”

“Oh, that’s nice,” she said eagerly. “Now we can go on a honeymoon.”

“Yes, I guess we can do that. But Chloris,” he said, eyeing her scantily clad body, “you really ought to put some more clothes on. If anyone else were to come by... I mean, I enjoy it, but... I hope you brought some clothes with you,” he said blushing.

“I don’t see what it matters as long as we’re going to be married right away. You humans certainly have odd ideas about these things. No, I didn’t bring any clothes with me, but that’s all right. I’ll just make some.”

“Make some? How are you going to do that,” he objected. “I don’t have a sewing machine, and we don’t have any material for...”

“No, silly,” she explained. “I don’t need anything like that. As I said, I’ll just... *make* them, like this,” and abruptly she was wearing a snug fitting pair of jeans with a white tank top, “Or if you want something more formal... how about this?” Suddenly, she was wearing a beige sleeveless dress with black high-heeled shoes.

“I can see this marriage is going to be very interesting, but how did you do that?”

“I told you; fairies can *do* things” she said. “This is just one thing we can do.”

“Well, great, but don’t *do* things like that in front of other people; it would be very hard to explain. Then, if you don’t mind, why don’t you change back to the jeans. That would be a little more appropriate for fixing breakfast.”

“Sure, anything you like,” Chloris replied, as she appeared again in jeans and tank top. “But I warn you, you’re going to pay for all this foolishness after we’re married.”

“What do you mean by that?” he wanted to know.

“I mean, for making me sleep by myself, and now this. You’re going to have to make up for all these prudish restrictions,” she threatened.

“Well, that may be *interesting* too,” he observed. “I’ll just see what happens.”

The next morning he got the marriage license and made most of the arrangements for the honeymoon. Since Chloris didn’t have a last name, he wrote the name “Smith” on the license application. He had thought about asking Jim to the wedding, but that would have led to many difficult explanations, so he rejected the idea. Chloris had materialized enough clothes for the occasion, and when they were finished packing, he asked, “Do you think we have everything we need?”

“Yes, I hope so,” she answered. “We have a whole car load.”

“Now,” he cautioned, “Be sure to remember, you are Miss Chloris Smith.”

“Yes, dear,” she assured him. “I won’t forget.”

“Like I said, I asked Reverend Knott in the church down the street if he would marry us on such short notice. He’s a very nice fellow, and he said he would be glad to do it. I hope you don’t mind if we don’t have a big wedding.”

“Not at all; it’s fine with me” she responded. “And I think God wouldn’t care if we have a small private wedding, or a big ceremony in a cathedral.”

“I’m sure that’s true,” he agreed. “Well, this is it, Miss Chloris Smith.”

They got in his car and drove to the church which was only a short distance from his apartment. The Reverend Knott received them cordially, and soon they were ready to start, with the janitor and the secretary to act as witnesses. Everything went smoothly, and Chloris remembered her part easily. In fifteen minutes the simple ceremony was finished, and they were on their way once more, this time as man and wife.

As they were driving toward the first stop on their honeymoon, he asked her, “Well, how does it feel to be married to a human being and have a real last name for a change?”

“It feels very strange, but wonderful,” she said, snuggling up to him as he drove.

“You know,” he mused, “I never thought about it before, but do you suppose our children will be able to *do* things, like materialize objects, or become invisible?”

“Why what makes you think we’re going to have children?” she asked with a malicious grin. Then she added, “Seriously, I really don’t know. Maybe the old-ones know, but I forgot to ask them. I guess we’ll have to wait and see.”

“Maybe we’ll start a new race of human fairies,” he said. “That is, if you are willing.”

“Just try and stop me,” she said, pinching him in a sensitive place. “Maybe I can also teach you a few things.”

They drove for most of the day, and when it was about dark, he pulled into a motel where they would spend the first night of their honeymoon. He signed the register “Mr. and Mrs. Bill Franklin,” and then went back to the car to get their suitcases.

As he approached the door to their room, he put down the suitcases.

“Just a minute, Mrs. Franklin,” he said. “According to our customs, I am now supposed to carry you over the threshold.”

“All right, Mr. Franklin,” she said with a smile. “And once we get inside, you’d better watch out. There will be no more of this sleeping alone, or having to keep myself covered up all the time.”

He sat her down inside the door and went to recover their suitcases. As he turned back into the room he saw that, true to her word, Chloris was no longer “covered.” In fact, she was completely uncovered.

“You see, I mean what I said,” she said holding out her arms.

“Yes, indeed. I see exactly what you meant,” he replied, taking her slim body into his own arms.

And now, dear reader, if you are wondering what happens next... naturally, as in all fairy-tales, Chloris and Bill lived happily ever after.

THE END.

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