



Faye's Cake Shop

By Leigh Gaddy

The problem with this farmer's market, I thought, was that it was too crowded. It was all elbows and the wheels of baby strollers crashing into your ankles.

Tables at the local farm booths displayed green paper buckets overflowing with berries and bright green lettuce with dirt still pressed between the leaves. The lines were long. I'd try again later.

Next was the vintage bookseller. There was a line, but you could browse while you waited. A hardcover with a lurid illustration of fairies caught my eye.

*Encyclopedia of Fairies and Sprites*. Published in 1972. Grandma O'Malley would approve. I bought it and immediately felt that familiar possessive urge to write my name on the frontispiece, a good sign. Awkwardly tucking the book against my stomach, I pulled a pen out of my bag and wrote my name on the flyleaf.

I'd done this since middle school. It was a thing.

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a flash of silver. Like a fishing lure sparkling underwater. I turned to see, raising a hand to shield the early morning sun. Was that an actual booth with no actual line?

The banner read *Fresh Dairy*. "Oh, that's on my list!" How lucky was this?

A man in an emerald green shirt gradually came into view. He stood, too good looking, under a pale yellow canopy.

"Hello," he said, "would you like to try a sample?"

I nodded, feeling shy. Glass jars of milk sat condensing on the table, and I could smell a milky sweetness in the air. The man held out a tiny paper cup filled with milk. "Only happy cows at our dairy. And everyone loves baby cows, right?"

Feeling tongue-tied, I took the cup. It was cool from the chill of the milk. I brought it to

my lips and smelled cream and sunshine. The milk ran over my tongue and down my throat like velvet.

“Wow,” I said, startled and awkward with my words.

The man looked a bit...mischievous. “Good?” he asked.

“Yes, very.”

“Care to sign up for our emails?”

“Oh! Yes. Where?”

A clipboard materialized in my hand. In a fog, I wrote down Tilda and [tildalovesmagic@gmail.com](mailto:tildalovesmagic@gmail.com).

“You know, I have a feeling about you,” he said. “Do you like music?”

“Of course! Why?”

He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and handed it to me. “Here, take this. Bus leaves in 10 minutes.”

*Bluegrass Magic Faire* was printed in retro letters and the ticket admitted one. My head swam a little. Feeling confused, I said, “All right. Ten minutes?”

The man's smile widened. A little wider than was normal. “Yep. See you there.”

#

A tall and beautiful woman with black hair swinging down to her waist beckoned me forward. I stumbled down the aisle, my bag bumping against pleather benches. A scent of diesel came in through the open windows.

When had I gotten on the bus?

She asked us all to keep walking forward, please, and to be careful stepping down. “Bring your belongings, that's the way.”

Feeling uneasy, I stepped off the bus and over a quaint line of mushrooms. My sight hazed. Out of the steam came wavering a delightful street. Old fashioned store fronts and rainbow tents. Cotton candy and popcorn. The music of banjos soared over the field, drawing me in.

Where was I?

#

“Welcome to Faye’s Cake Shop!” said a woman. She was plump and blue-eyed. Grandmotherly. Banjo music played behind me now, muffled by brick walls. I blinked. Between the old lady and me stood the most glorious bakery counter I had ever seen. Glass gleamed and rainbow light shone down on the baked goods. White cards declared delicious ingredients.

“Have you ever smelled anything more delicious?” she said.

“How...how did I get here?”

“I’m guessing you just needed a nibble?”

She giggled.

Another woman, tall and beautiful with black hair falling to her waist, appeared at my elbow. Where had I seen her before? She held a wide pink tray, full of scones and cinnamon buns. I leaned in, unable to help myself, and breathed in the scent.

“No, I...I can’t. I must get back home soon.” The beautiful woman pouted and turned to leave, her long white skirt swirling around her hips.

Impulsively, I began to apologize, but froze. *That counter!* Glistening sugar-glazed fruit tarts. Vanilla puffs filled with white cream and yellow pudding. Tiny square cakes draped with chocolate ganache and topped with strawberries. Chunky rows of chocolate chip cookies and dessert bars stuffed with nuts and jam. Banana nut cheesecake tartlets vied for space with graham

cracker and marshmallow mini pies.

A magnificent cake revealed layers of white, yellow, and pink sponge. The white buttercream frosting looked like a fluffy cloud, and an arrangement of fondant leaves and flowers sat on top.

“Won’t you try something?” said Faye. For the old lady *was* Faye. I could see her name embroidered in a looping script on her blouse. Longing filled me for one of the thick, oversized brownies. The card suggested I eat it with a cold glass of milk.

Grandma O’Malley’s face swam up from my memories. Of the many times she poured milk into a saucer on the back stoop. *Fairies love milk, did you know that?*

But my job! I had to get to work tomorrow. If I didn’t leave now I’d never make it home in time.

“No. Maybe later,” I stumbled backward. Faye frowned a little. “I’ll come back later; I promise.”

“You promised. I’ll remember that” she said.

#

“Aren’t you hungry, Tilda?” said a tall and beautiful woman, with black hair falling to her waist.

I blinked. We were standing under a red-striped tent, watching cute, scruffy men playing banjos, and it felt like we’d been there for hours. My muscles ached, like I’d been dancing all night.

“Huh?” I said.

“I said,” said the beautiful woman, as loud as she could over the music, “aren’t you hungry? You haven’t eaten anything, yet!”

“Um. Yes, I think so. Are you hungry?”

“Oh, yes. Come with me,” she said, tugging on my arm, “I know just the place.”

I looked up at the beautiful woman pulling me out of the tent, the light played strangely over her forehead. As if a crown of leaves interfered with the rising light of the sun.

Sunrise?

“Here we are now,” she said. I blinked.

There were a dozen others at the cake shop. They laughed over coffees and teas and glasses of milk, frosting and honey dripping down their fingers. The air was rich with bread and cinnamon and bitter espresso.

Heaven.

“Welcome back. I’m glad to see you remembered your promise,” said Faye as I approached the counter.

“Yes, of course,” I said shyly, unsure what she was referring to.

“What can I get you?”

“A cinnamon bun, please. And a tea.”

“Wonderful. What kind of tea?”

“Oh, you decide for me.”

“Okay, love. Take a seat, we’ll bring it to you.”

“How much do I owe you?”

“Oh, never mind that now.”

I was only slightly bothered by this and told myself not to forget to pay her.

She pointed me to a seat at the window. In the alley were bird baths that hosted a few splashing wrens.

Within a moment, a warm cinnamon bun and a steaming mug of tea arrived at the table, carried by a woman. She was tall and beautiful with black hair falling to her waist. She looked so familiar.

“Thank you,” I told her. “What kind of tea is it?”

“This is a special chai. We blend it here ourselves.”

“Well, thank you.”

The woman nodded and left, too quickly for me to spy the name embroidered on her lapel. I peeled off the sticky outer ring off the bun. A few chopped nuts were embedded in the cinnamon and sugar, and white icing coated my fingertips. The bun was soft and just the right temperature. It was everything I thought it'd be.

I forgot everything but that sweet bun and the warm tea I drank between bites, sighing with contentment. I was in love with the whole world.

“Can I get you anything else?”

Faye had appeared at my elbow. She smelled like fresh grass and rain-wet stones. I smiled at her. “More tea? And anything else, too.”

“Lovely,” she said.

“Thank you.”

The beautiful woman appeared out of thin air. I blinked.

She poured hot water slowly over a quaint tea strainer into a fresh mug. Mabry. The name embroidered on her lapel was Mabry.

“Thank you,” I said again. I sipped the tea. Mint.

Faye reappeared at my elbow and placed a plate of eggs and toast and hot buttered tomatoes in front of me. Ravenous, I tore into the food. Not even thanking Faye this time. She

disappeared before I thought to say anything.

I sat at my table in a pleasant daze. Not a care in the world. Around me everyone was smiling. Some were dressed like me, but many were not. Were those bell bottom pants on that whole family? And they all had really long hair. How odd.

That woman in the corner read a book, sipped her tea, and reminded me of the women in *Pride and Prejudice*. The good BBC version with Colin Firth. Well, to each their own. It seemed like a lot of work to dress like that every day, though.

I sighed and drank the last of my tea. A walk outside seemed like a good idea. On the way out, I waved to Faye. She waved back. Something about her face was different. Her chin was a little more pointed, and, for the briefest moment, the pupils in her blue eyes looked vertical, like a cat.

Had she always had those eyes?

I walked along the street, listening to the banjo players tuning their instruments. Tents flapped in the breeze. A man there dipped apples in caramel and then rolled them in crushed peanuts. Were those horns curling over his ears? I shook my head and looked again. No. Of course not. Just curly hair.

Outside one tent was a chalkboard advertising cowslip wine and dew.

“What a lovely town this is!”

I could stay here forever. And why shouldn't I?

#

There was a park at the end of the street. People strolled around a pond, which was ringed with cattails and dotted with lily pads. I sat at a picnic table in the sun. It was a deliciously woozy sort of summer day. Really the people here are different, I thought. Some were beautiful



and some were strange. Some had wings.

That lady looked like a furry caterpillar.

That man had on furry pants and his feet were cloven hooves. Women surrounded him.

They laughed together and stroked his face, his hair.

It was all fine, really.

The edge of a book peeked out from my bag.

I pulled it out and read the title. *Encyclopedia of Fairies and Sprites*. When had I gotten that?

The picture on the cover was garishly bright. I opened the book and gently peeled back the protective tissue paper.

At the top of the flyleaf was a name.

Matilda O'Malley.

That name.

*Matilda*. MATILDA.

A growing sense of horror stole over me. The hair on the back of my neck rose.

Tilda!

I remembered writing my name a hundred years ago—well, my nickname—on a book like this. On a sheet of paper for a man selling milk.

*Always leave milk out for the fairies, Tilda. It keeps them happy*, my grandma used to say.

I riffled through the pages of the book. It opened directly to a page listing the rules for warding off evil fairies. It explained that fairies loved to steal humans. That time in the fae realm was outside reality. Some people disappeared for an hour. Some never seen again.

The rules said:

1. Never give fairies your true name.
2. Do not eat their food.
3. Never make a promise to a fairy.
4. Never walk into a fairy ring.
5. Never accept a gift from a fairy.

My chest squeezed. I could feel the blood draining from my face.

I had broken all the rules.

#

Well, nearly all the rules.

I had not given my true name. I'd given my nickname. I never went by Matilda.

That had saved me. I still had my name.

And things were *not* fine. I'd eaten their food and accepted free gifts—all the food at Faye's—those were probably gifts in the eyes of magic. Or even common sense.

And I'd bet that line of mushrooms I'd crossed getting off the bus had been the edge of a huge fairy ring.

That booth at the farmer's market and that silver light! Luring, indeed.

I'd been stolen away by fairies.

How could I get home?

The only thing I could think of was to step back through that fairy ring and hope that it'd transport me back to the human realm. So, I had to find that fairy ring without getting caught.

A group of people—no, not humans—passed my table. I slapped the book shut, hoping

none of them had seen anything.

I had released myself from enchantment. But, for all I knew, another cinnamon bun would do me in. Oh, that pastry! My mouth watered and I looked in the direction of Faye's.

*Matilda*, my common sense yelled at me. *Get it together!* How blind I had been. Faye's? More like Fae's.

A jolt pulsed through me. Mabry! The tall and beautiful woman with black hair falling to her waist was Mab. As in Mab, Queen of the Fairies. I had accepted gifts from the queen of the fairies.

Be calm, I thought, be calm. Keep looking dreamy. Maybe I ought to find a thorn and prick my thumb. Wasn't that a thing?

"Hello, Tilda."

I froze and had to shake myself internally. It was Mab, of course.

"Hello there! What a lovely day it is!"

"Are you well, Tilda? You're looking pale."

"Yes, I need to go back to Faye's and get some food. It's almost lunch time, isn't it?"

Mab frowned. A crown of leaves and sunshine graced her forehead. Raindrops and rainbows glittered in the folds of her skirt, and she smelled like a garden. "Well, it's a bit early, but perhaps you *ought* to visit Faye. Get some dew and you'll feel right as rain."

"Yes, your majesty," I replied, barely knowing what I said.

Queen Mab nodded in a very royal way. "Puck will see you on your way."

A bottle-green beetle appeared on her outstretched hand. Puck, the beetle, clumsily took to the air and landed on my shoulder with a surprising heaviness.

The very Fairy of Mischief was supervising me himself. How was I going to get away

now? And how would I be able to go into Faye's without eating anything? I might lose my only chance to escape.

"Well, let's go, Puck."

The beetle shifted on my shoulder but said nothing. Thankfully.

I followed the sidewalk back to Faye's. I had mere minutes to plan how to be rid of Puck and escape.

What had my grandma told me about fairies? *Think, Tilda, think!*

Memories surfaced slowly.

Milk and honey on the stoop.

Shiny bits of foil strung on mobiles at a window.

Fairies loved riddles and could be bound by spells.

I don't know any spells, I thought in despair. I fought not to wring my hands.

Another memory. Grandma chuckling over spilled sugar on the table. *Tilda, did you know that fairies can't bear spilled sugar? They must stop and count every grain!*

I remembered my six-year-old self laughing hilariously over this and felt a delirious hope. That could do it. Otherwise, my life would be nothing but cinnamon buns. That wouldn't be too bad, though...

*Wake up, Tilda!*

#

Faye's was full of the brunch crowd. I swooned over bagels and lox and mimosas. Spinach and feta quiche, for goodness' sake.

Brunch is my favorite meal. Oh my god, what was I thinking?

I sat at my table and Faye appeared immediately. I controlled my shock, but only just.

Faye was now green skinned with the brightest blue cat's eyes. Her chin was very pointed, and her gray hair was a snarl containing a bird's nest full of speckled eggs. Her wings were all leaves and feathers, and she floated an inch off the floor. "Welcome back, Tilda." She smiled with a row of tiny, pointed teeth.

"Faye, this looks amazing. Bring me anything." I stuttered over my words. Puck moved around on my shoulder. Faye glanced back and forth between me and the beetle. She frowned.

Did Puck supervise naughty humans all the time?

Oh, this was such a bad plan.

Faye poured me a cup of black tea.

"Could I get some cream and sugar?" I asked her.

She snapped her fingers, and both appeared on the table in little pewter dishes.

I was losing my cool but spooned a little sugar with a shaking hand and stirred. Now what?

Faye appeared with the bagel and lox. Fresh slices of tomatoes. A mini cheesecake tartlet—I hoped it was the banana nut one.

No, I yelled internally. Focus, Tilda!

"You're welcome to anything you like, Puck." My voice cracked a little. Puck scuttled down my arm and flew onto a tomato slice. Guess I won't eat that, I thought.

No, Tilda, you're not eating any of it!

I glanced around. Faye watched me from the counter as she helped other customers, her cat eyes slitted with suspicion. I groaned inwardly. As nonchalantly as possible, I pulled the pen out of my bag and wrote my name on my hand. It steadied my mind.

I tucked the pen under the lip of my plate and picked up the bagel.

Oh, it was good. Soft sourdough and just-warm cream cheese. The cool give of smoked salmon. My eyes closed as I chewed. Maybe Faye could use a new helper. Opening my eyes, I saw a name written on the back of my hand.

Matilda.

I jumped. One bite of salmon and I'd nearly lost myself again.

No more of this. I reached across the table to stir my tea and deliberately knocked over the sugar bowl. The grains tumbled onto the table and Puck buzzed angrily. He threw himself onto the pile of sugar. I saw his tiny feet pushing through the grains. I could *feel* him counting them.

It was time to go.

I slid out of my seat, hugging the wall like a scared mouse, and slipped out the front door.

Then I ran for my life.

Eyes were gathering around me like cold touches on my back. I ran to the far end of the street and gained the forest. I could no longer remember where the bus had stopped, but I remembered the edge of a field. Tree roots tripped me up. Spiderwebs snagged at my face and hair. But still I ran.

Soon, the sense of angry eyes lessened. The sunshine mellowed. The trees thinned. I began to see mushrooms.

This must be the right way.

There was nothing ahead of me now but an empty, misty field.

I slowed to a jog, panting heavily and with a horrible stitch in my side. My feet were scratched and sore. Another step, and there—a huge fairy ring.

I thought of Grandma O'Malley and stepped one foot over the ring.

The world tilted as I picked up my other foot, and I fell...

...onto the sidewalk.

The vendors at the farmer's market were taking down their canopies. The sun was low in the sky. My car was down the road. There was a red parking ticket on the windshield.

Collapsing onto the curb, I sobbed with relief.

And searched my mind for the nearest bakery with a good cinnamon bun.