

The Tale of Mr. Toad

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The story told here is utterly fictitious and any resemblance between the characters herein or the events depicted and any true incident depicted by the Fairy tale is completely coincidental and unintentional.

Dedicated to Joe-bike

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Once there was a young Toad named William who was known to most in his town as Bill and by one elderly dame as Billy. This young chap was quite a clever fellow who was strapping and rather well liked, he thought. He was in fact a rather similar to the others in the town and completely unremarkable in any way except to the elderly dame who had loved him for his own self since she had met him as a child in her schoolhouse. William Toad had grown up to be quite a fellow of fellows with a good sense and a taste for wearing medium grey sport suits with no tie and properly shined loafers. Bill liked to look like how he wished to be, a relaxed and amiable fellow, an upstanding citizen, and a professional with a life and career.

Five days of every week were repetitions of each other. Before the rising of the sun, Bill would be up with a steaming pot of hot coffee, a plate of buttered toast with jam and a bowl of sliced fruit. Once the breakfast had been polished off and the dishes put away, it was time for a brisk walk to the park, around the pond thrice followed by the return to his home at the bottom of Cobble Stone Lane. After a quick bath, Bill would dress a clean white chemise with his suit, polish his shoes, and set off for his office on the third floor of a converted mansion from a bygone time beyond the scope of Bill's imaginings. For ten hours of every day Mr. Toad answered

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questions on the telephone and looked up answers he did not have amongst the many books, files, and archives stored in the library in the old basement of the building. For only one hour of every one of these days, Bill was free from sharing his soul in representation of The Firm. For the one hour of freedom each afternoon he would lie on the lawn eating and resting his noggin from the enduring turmoil it shared with both The Firm and its indentured clients.

Relieved at the end of each of those days, Bill would waddle home exhausted. By the end of each day his head and body ached from the tedium and allotment of his soul in the service of The Firm. He was happy to do it for it was a small price to pay for the respect, fortune, and security that was promised in return. Deep within, his spirit lay buried beneath the weight of his obese soul. Each night the return home was interrupted by a visit to Conker's Bar, which was in walking distance from home. Conkers was the gateway into the quiet and pretty neighbourhood. Every night his seat at the bar between Don and Phil was waiting by the far wall of the stuffy, dark little bar room. In the corner where the three friends sat, little light reached them. They ate hamburgers piled high with toppings and condiments with oily fried potato that they dipped in mayo. While they ate, they each consumed four pints of wheat brew and a whisky sour, which

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opened their palates and loosened the tongue.

From their safe vantage point in the obscurity of relative darkness, the three friends nattered. Over the dames who came and went they remarked on the greater and lesser qualities of what they could see. For the more significant qualities that the observed may have had within, there was not a thought. However, for the greater part of the visit at Conker's, there was football to watch and to discuss the performance of the competing teams. After dinner Bill would find his path home among the littering of invisible obstacles set on the green lawn flanked sidewalk. Bill was certain at those times that the city workers had put the obstacles there just for him to trip and call in a complaint. He was a nice guy though, which meant that Bill only complained about it to Josh the barman, Phil and Don. Thank fully, there was his trusty recliner in the living room before the enormous liquid crystal display screen where Bill could regain his strength and relax. The news was usually on when the large screen began resonating at his soul and irradiating his corneas. Bill found that pushing a button and seeing the world open up before him was comforting and reassuring. Feeling reposed after absorbing the sports news Bill pushed a button to find himself in a new world of adventure, excitement, drama, and romance.

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On his recliner, relaxed and also aroused with excitement from the film, Bill Toad would slip into dreams of living the promised life one day when he retired. Some hours later he would awake to the disturbing growls of a creature threatening a maiden. Roused from his slumber he pushed a button to extinguish the violence. He had been dreaming of conquering as he rose to become the president of his Firm, which he swiftly put out of his mind. Roger Moro was his only competition at his level. It was a private joke of Bill's with his associates at Conker's that Moro was short for Moron. Though this humour seemed benign to Bill, he would have been indignant to learn that Roger shared a similar jest with his new wife about Bill being as ugly as a toad. The physical similarities between the two competitors was such that neither could recognize them selves in the other. The most they were aware of was the dissimilarity of the names which was as marked as their difference between wearing a grey suit or a blue suit. Awaking late in the night, Bill put away his suit and slithered into his cosy bed beneath his blankets and comforter to rejoin his dreams.

Saturday morning was very much like any other with the destination after dressing becoming the shopping centre. Along with fruit, bread, butter, jam and coffee, Bill

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supplied himself with ale, chips, pretzels, and a few frozen meals each week. In the mornings he would play video games online with friends who he had never seen and hoped secretly to never meet. By the time that afternoon was upon him, the room was littered with empty beer cans and bags of salties. It was time to watch the Saturday game. Bill's ill coordination had lost him several games by then, and the novelty of the diversion had dissolved. Thankfully, it was time to assume the position with the recliner and yet another case of beer and bag of salties. At the half time intermission Bill would be up in the kitchen heating his dinner in the microwave when the phone always rang.

"Ohh, Helllloo Billy Deary!" said the high and warm toned voice of the elderly Ms. Pierce. "You will be at Service tomorrow, won't you Billy?" Responding with a slur that he tried to disguise, Bill always responded in the affirmative with two words, "Yes Miss." Like the ritual that it was Ms. Pierce would continue. "Excellent Billy, excellent, would you please pick me up at seven so that we will not be late?" The response was again the same, "Yes Miss." Without another word she would kiss loudly into the handset and hang up leaving Bill's head and ear ringing. He pushed a button on the remote and muted the sound of the pundits pretending to know something about something loudly for anyone who cared to listen. He ate his

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reheated meal in silence with a glass of water hating himself for liking this life full of empty promises and illusions that helped pass the time.

Ms. Pierce was the only person he had ever met who loved him for his spirit and his body, the only one who did not want his soul, and the only one who had pity on him for the misfortunes that he had to believe were success. Love, not true love or being in love, it felt good. Love, it scared his pants off, but it was the only thing in his life that Bill had never managed to lie to himself about. The old school teacher Loved him and asked for nothing in return.

When he had said no to picking her up to go to church she had walked the four miles without being in the least upset. Ms. Pierce had told him about how the birds had been singing along the road in the morning and that it had been lovely, smelling the fresh morning air. He could see that she was tired and cold, but she did not ask him to take her home. The next week she called again and Bill could never say no again.

Bill could feel his heart ache as he thought of her as if she caused him pain. Some times he thought that he loved her; though he did not believe that Love could cause pain or that a young person could love an old person. After all, Miss was not young, pretty, or alluring for age had erased her vigour, fertility, and mellowed her soul. Sometimes Bill was certain that he hated

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her for he felt an inexplicable feeling of being oppressed by the old woman in some ineffable way. Other times Bill would wish she would just die and go away from his easy life, however, the guilt would overwhelm him later and he would buy her a large bouquet of flowers on the way to her home in the morning in apology for wishing her ill without ever speaking of his true motives. But the old Dame knew and forgave him for his crimes against himself because they needed forgiveness and Bill never forgave himself.

With part of his mind on Miss, Bill returned to his recliner to observe the remainder of the game detachedly. At the end of the game there was an analysis by the pundits and a historical review of the teams before the Saturday Dramatic Romance motion picture which always followed. Bill was not paying attention to either and let the programming pass through him like water through a sieve. He daydreamed about meeting Ms. Pierce when she was a young woman and still teaching. His wishes would be for her to have been a beautiful and gentile young lady of exquisite beauty and grace. They would have fallen in love romantically after meeting at church and getting to know each other over candle lit dinners and movies at the theatre. After a few years, when his career had led to a stable and significant position in The Firm, they would have been married with great fanfare

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as his nemesis, Moro, had been. Then his life would have been inscrutable and secure. With success would come little Bills and little Debbies.

How wonderful if only it this fantasy could be, but it was impossible for Bill was only in his first year as a barrister at The Firm and Miss was marking her seventieth year. They had met when Bill was only a child in elementary school. Ms. Pierce had remained unattached for all those years despite a dozen marriage proposals. Most of her suitors had been turned out on the simple phrase, "Love has no price that can be paid by a man who gives his soul in exchange for profit." The rest of the suitors had been humoured until they realized that she would never reciprocate the appearance of loving them simply to satisfy a societal expectation that those who marry will always love each other. Bill knew in his spirit that he Loved Ms. Pierce as much as she Loved him for no other reason than for whom she was in spirit. Bill's soul found the Love painful, repugnant, and was ever perplexed at Bill's inability to obtain a suitable date when the field of opportunity was open to him.

With a start Bill awoke from his forty winks on his restful recliner late in the evening while the news was being repeated. Deftly and with meticulous care, Bill cleaned his mess and went to bed leaving a clean house for his spirit to wander in. When

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Bill's body and soul slept, his spirit was free to follow its destiny. It most often found its way to contact the spirit of Miss, as she also slept. The contact invariably went unnoticed by Bill who felt invigorated and energetic in the morning as a result. For Ms. Pierce, the interaction was conscious and of some comfort that brought with it a thread of sadness for in a way they were already married by a fate that society and soul were nearly completely unaware of. However, the spirit did convey understanding to the soul and the bodily world in its own slow way even if the message seemed inaudible. Bill was simply not interested in any soul mate no matter how pretty and appropriate their union promised to be. Deep within himself he knew that his marriage would cause pain to his elderly Love. Causing her pain consciously and deliberately was not an undertaking that Bill was prepared to risk despite the social image of a disinterested bachelor.

Sunday morning finally came and Bill had a glass of water and fasted before his walk. Following his three circuits of the pond at the park and his return home, Bill continued his fast with more water before his bath. He was not sure why he fasted every Sunday before the service, but he explained it away to himself by telling himself that the church always fed them a banquet of a brunch. In fact, Ms. Pierce also fasted each morning as part of her

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ascetic spiritual practices she had been practicing for the last fifty years. It was a way of life that changed one's way of looking at the ordinary world by giving up portions of the structure of life to make room for the spiritual. Limited sleep and regular exposure to the elements also were part of Miss's way of life which Bill could feel but not see. Bill dressed his black dinner suit for the service, is best garment with his little used black dress shoes and a pale pink shirt with a blossom pattern bow tie that Ms. Pierce had given him. It had been her suggestion that Bill wear pink shirts as it made him handsome by bringing out the warm tones in his pale skin.

As he drove down the road leading out of town Bill felt a warmth of childlike excitement mingled with happiness and an irrepressible expectant arousal of visiting a dearly missed lover. Each Sunday that he had gone to collect Miss since his return from law school he had felt this way. It had been over a year since his return when his relationship with Miss had grown stronger and more complex than ever before. Bill had never forgotten what she had said the moment she had first set eyes on him again, "I have been waiting for you to return for many years and would gladly go on waiting until the end of the Earth." Ms. Pierce had been at the airport in the City waiting for him to disembark. Bill had not had any contact with her since he left

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for the military. He had never found out how she had known when he was arriving for he had not even told his parents, nor how she had gotten there. His arrival was supposed to be a surprise, but the surprise had been his. They had driven back into town together and enjoyed a cosy dinner at Ms. Pierce's home before Bill had gone home to surprise his parents.

That night she had touched his face ever so lightly with a tear of joy and another of sadness in each of her eyes. Miss had simultaneously touched his soul and his spirit with that loving touch. The words and response had sprung out of Bill spontaneously before he had even realized what he was doing. "I Love You," he had said returning her touch of his face to hers and kissed the old Dame with a gentle and thrilling passion. He had promised to see her every Sunday in the very least. For a year and more now Bill had been giving Ms. Pierce the very least and he felt a nagging feeling of shame rising, forcing its way past his ego and his soul. He thought about buying flowers again and a powerful negating response struck him. He passed the florist and felt himself reaching psychically with his soul for the florist. The turn off toward the woods came and went. While Bill struggled with himself, he drove for another mile before he realized he had to turn the car around.

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Bill pulled up to the little bungalow surrounded by hedges on two sides and the little forest of the state park on the others. For forty years Ms. Pierce had been living in this little house and walking the three and a half miles to the schoolhouse where she had taught several generations of children how to read, write, add, and subtract. For the older children of the parish she had also taught theory of knowledge where she had instructed them on the theological and philosophical principles of life as can be understood through logic and discussion. This course had been presented in collaboration with the parish Minister, but it had in fact been led and conceptualized completely by Ms. Pierce.

Theory of Knowledge sought to give her students a key with which to their lives and find that which was meaningless in order to separate it from those elements that had personal or social meaning. In essence, it was a course on self integration for the young adults that were forming to make the transition and comprehension of the significance of adulthood a conscious reality. It was a fact up until that course changed the community, that adults thought they were important and their children were relevant. The fact was though, that by living in this way, the adults depended on having children to lend their supposed important lives a meaning in a concrete and daily way. Essentially,

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the adults had been living their lives through that of their children, which robbed the children of their childhood experienced as they were artificially accelerated in an effort to live adult lives and think like adults while still children. After theory of knowledge was instituted, the adults began to accept that they were relevant and that that was the meaning that they so desperately sought. The children, on the other hand were subsequently free to have experience and to observe the universe as it intersected their lives.

Bill parked the car before her little gate and walked through the bed of flowers and the herb garden along Miss's winding gravel path. He saw Ms. Piece looking at him from behind a fine veil of a curtain, but she still waited for him to knock before answering. While standing between two rose bushes with open, fragrant blossoms, Bill rapped thrice upon her carved wooden door with wood burnings as accents on the raised elements. For the few moments it took Miss to reach him, Bill Toad found himself irresistibly attracted to the pink blooms. His nose was nearly touching the flower of which he was enjoying its bouquet when Ms. Piece opened the door quietly to observe him. For almost a full minute Bill was entranced by the flower as obscure memories from his youth flooded his suddenly attentive mind. As her hand took hold of the blossom at its base and

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broke it off with some of the stalk, Bill snapped out of his enchantment to find his lips only half an inch from Miss's cheek. Unable to restrain himself, and before he had realized it, Bill had kissed Miss, who returned him an equally impassioned kiss before tucking the pink flower in the left button hole of the suit jacket's lapel.

As she had tucked the bloom in its place, Miss had repeated her whisper he had heard every Sunday and in his dreams, though Bill had tried to pretend to not hear. "I Love you Billy." Today, Bill let himself hear it and he found that after that there was no turning back. He immediately responded that he Loved her and that he wished to marry Ms. Pierce. After briefly smiling she took his hand and drew Bill in the door without making a sound. Having seated him on antiquated wooden bench seat that was used as a sofa, Ms. Pierce brought him a steaming cup of mint tea she kept warm by the fire place beneath a substantial tea cosy. As she took the empty cup from his hand, she touched his face gently and kissed his forehead. Bill felt relaxed, happy and very much at ease at last. It had been this feeling that he had sought to emulate with his lounge chair and television experience which had never failed to fill him with dreariness until he finally fell asleep in the radiant glow of the slim, dark box construction before him.

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After briefly rinsing the tea cup, Miss joined Billy, who was awaiting her by the entry. Hand in hand they walked out to the motor carriage through her lovely garden once more. Mr. Toad opened the door for her and closed it firmly once she was comfortably seated. Together, they set off for the church. Whilst holding hands, they entered the little brick house of God to join the town's other parish members as the priest began his benedictions at the start of the service. For a split second, the priest made eye contact with the two late arrivals which made him pause and stutter slightly before continuing. He had not failed to note the marked difference in Bill's demeanour as he escorted his Love and fiancé to their customary pew seat. Most of the parish turned to look and found themselves unable to look away from the glow of joy and happiness that seemed to surround Miss and Billy with something much like a halo. Most of the parish followed their progress as they walked up the aisle as if at a wedding before taking their seats, still hand in hand, on the edge of the second pew from the front as always before.

Toward the end of the service there was the making peace where those who were proximal generally shook hands and relatives hugged. Every one of the parish members that encircled the newly betrothed couple hugged them for a little longer than was generally practiced. In

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practice this amounted to them clinging desperately trying to enjoy their happiness for just a moment longer in the hopes that that joy might rub off on them and make their tedious and mundane existence a tad bit more pleasant, but it could not be transmitted in that way. Once the service had been ended a small crowd of curious interrogators, onlookers, and gossip mongers surrounded Billy and Miss as they moved to the buffet room, ate and drank. The clergyman, now wearing only his customary black suit with the official collar, made a public announcement to the ravenously eating congregation declaring the imminent marriage between Mr. William Toad and Ms. Debra Pierce over the loudspeakers, provoking a raucous flurry of cheers and clapping. Bill made an especially generous donation to the church that day and doubled that on behalf of his new bride.

They met privately with the cleric to make arrangements for the following month before they left by the back entry to avoid further insincere fanfare. They headed for Ms. Pierce's home from which they set off on a wandering ramble through the forest with nothing more than their coats in hand. Somewhat more than an hour later, they came across a small clearing encircled by oak trees with a large flat centre stone forming something of a natural amphitheatre. Miss knew the clearing quite well and had visited it very often over

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the years. Bill would have marvelled at its beauty and seclusion had he not been completely distracted by the presence of three fairies dancing upon the flat rock. For a few minutes Bill and Ms. Pierce stood still, in silence, watching the merry dance around a ring, continuing to hold hands affectionately. Had this appeared before him before, Bill would have panicked trying to get away so he could go on not believing to continue his uneventful life. However, with the change of his spirit emerging from beneath his soul, the betrothed legal advisor stood calmly with his elderly fiancé glad of the enchantment that brought him such a priceless, beautiful gift from nature.

When the dance had come to an end the three little people stood in a rising sunward row from smallest to largest, each benefiting from the shade of the other. They bowed in unison to Ms. Pierce, who curtsied low and lengthily in return. Directing their attentions to Bill they glared at him for a moment, almost with reproach, but also a hint of humorous impatience before they changed into expressions of smiling approval. Having appraised him, the three Fairies began in a song like manner to congratulate Bill on a job well done, very well done indeed. The smallest stepped forth and waited for Bill to come close. She kissed his cheek and whispered into his ear that within the year he would have a child. The middling then

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also came forth taking Bill's hand firmly in his. Congratulations, he repeated, before telling Bill to never allow his new wife to be without cover for a year, to always cover her head from the rain and to stand between her and the North Wind for that period until one year and one day had passed. Lastly came forth the tallest who also kissed Bill on the opposite cheek from the first. She spoke in the loudest voice of the three with instructions and promises of gift. That afternoon, before the sun had started to set, Bill was to lay with his bride for now, because of Love, they were more truly wed than they could be thereafter. By the rising of the moon they must be back at the rock and sleep there for in the morning their wedding garments would have been measured and made for a wedding to which they might not be late, beneath the slab where the temple is found in which there is no lie. Beyond time, beyond rhyme they would be wed for all time. The last was a warning to see how Love changed all things that stagnate in the flow of all time.

The three Fairies stepped back and for a moment there was an image of a large hall filled with Fairies of all sorts cheering joyously without sound. Then the grey, flat stone lay clear while Bill and Miss heard a snatch of a lovely song played by a Lyre accompanied with a wood flute that made one reach into the air trying desperately to catch it for all time. It was impossible to

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remember the tune a moment after it was gone, but it both filled one with simultaneous joy and grief. For a few minutes the bride and groom stood motionless, holding hands and feeling each other's warmth and happiness as a cool, damp wind blew around them from the east. Suddenly the entire forest was silent and still as it had been before while they had been walking. They turned to face each other and Bill kissed Debra passionately. It began to drizzle, but the lovers took no heed.

Kissing led to hugging, which took them to caresses that gradually created a small and damp pile of clothes on one side of the vaguely elliptical stone. As the light drizzle continued Bill possessed the elderly Ms. Pierce upon the flat of the large stone. For a timeless hour the lovers were engaged in a tussle that took them both into a delirium broken at last when in unison at the peak of ecstasy, they both reach a clarity of mind experience rarely by men and occasionally by children who are frequently chided for their inconvenient sight. It was mid afternoon before the two were once more in their sodden attire and heading back to the little house on the edge of the wood by a direct route. Ten minutes later, after trotting through the forest in an increasing rain, they reached the lush gardens at a run in a torrential down pour. Through the narrow wooden gate they passed before skipping over the

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winding path to take refuge in the overhang of the entry door where they took off their muddy shoes before entering the little house.

After having a couple cups of hot tea and sandwiches followed with shortbread, they packed for the night. With them they took a large waxed tarp, ropes, three blankets, a basket of sandwiches, two apples and shortbread with a flask of hot tea. They dressed warmly with their coats bundles before taking the bundles and the umbrella for the return walk to the clearing. Bill set up something of a shelter with the longer side forming a dry ground covering blocking the wind from the north. The rain had ceased before they had set off and the flat stone was nearly dry by the time they returned, Upon it the sat into the evening watching the dimming light diminishing in the growing darkness of the forest. As soon as the last light of the sun had faded, a sudden and mysterious fire sprung from the top of the stone near the tent. The abrupt heat and flames so startled Bill, that he fell as he tried to leap off to save his camp from torching. Debra helped him up by the elbow as if she had been much younger than she appeared, simultaneously reassuring Billy that the flames were contained. Faint, yet audible, was the rolling laughter that seemed to come from the fire that had actually been the gift of a passing Fire Fairy for the two inductees the Fairies had long waited for.

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When Billy set eyes on his bride again, she was somewhat younger looking than when they had first sat on that stone. Bill had not noticed Debra changing earlier as it was a gradual and subtle process. However, when it struck him that she was becoming younger, Bill realized that he had not been as observant of his environment nor of his Love as he could be. At that point he began to think of what he may have missed that was important rather than relevant in his life. He searched his mind and experiences that he had taken for granted to identify those elements and for detail that seemed minor, but that could change his entire perception and reality. The first memory he took note of was his most recent, the encounter with the three Fairies and their apparently meaningless chanting. The easiest to recall was the fist Fairy who he recalled as the largest and loudest having been the in fact the smallest who had been a Sylph and whispered in his ear. He would have a child, with the elderly bride. Though this aroused his incredulity, his greater awareness and consciousness informed him that like the enchanted fire that blazed upon a stone and gave true light and heat, his bride would conceive as truthfully as she was also becoming younger.

As Billy continued to investigate his memory he found the instructions from the Fairy that had looked remarkably like a

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very large sea horse or perhaps it had been a very small mermaid. The middling had actually been a male undine in a small form akin to a bass fish standing on its fins like feet, but not exactly. Bill recalled having to keep Debra under cover, protected from both rain and the North wind. Reflecting the storm they had been in earlier, Bill realized that he had only this night in which to ascertain all the detail that could bring him disaster to guide his actions for the coming year. He had quickly perceived that Debra's youthful appearance was at risk if he failed and missed an important and perhaps irrelevant instruction or other detail. The magical youth was a gift to him from the Fairies that served the purpose of an incentive for him to do as instructed, and also a test of a nature to test his faith and endurance of attention.

Bill could fail easily by missing only one detail, having the North wind wipe her youth and beauty away with its own magic. It could likewise be washed away by rain, which also included other forms of water falling such as snowfall, cataracts, and hail. Deep in his acute senses Bill began to perceive these truths and felt the weight of keeping up his attention for a year and a day. This was in fact a lenient period that the Fairy Queen had felt was well within Bill's ability. It was not uncommon for such favours from Fairies to mankind to come with demands that insisted on

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compliance for several decades, or even an entire lifetime. In most cases, the Fairy Queen determined the least possible time required for a particular person to satisfy some portion of the internal logic of a spell. In the cases of life long spell demands, there was little that could be done to help the recipient short of leaving regular reminders for them in their daily lives. Bill was very fortunate with his burden, but he was not yet aware of the facility of his challenge of only one year.

A year was a long period of time to regard in its entirety, Bill thought. He struggled with that for some time and concluded to continue with his investigations and approaching each day as a period in its entirety as each day came and passed; He was pleased to recall that he had made love to his Love as he had been instructed before realizing that that was one of the most relevant and easily understood instructions of along with sleeping at the rock. The story of being measured and garments for a wedding being ready were intuited simply enough, though not comprehended in their whole. Intuitively he knew that the Fairies would measure their bodies and have a suit for him and a dress for her, with shoes by the next morning. This meant to sleep unclothed and explained the intensity of heat the proffered flame provided. Bill understood without knowing and consciously chose to follow his senses without the certainty that

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knowledge gave in reassuring an ego that it is important enough to know facts and rationalized quantities. Because of his choice, he did the right thing.

As far as the Fairyland contract was concerned, for that year and a day, if Bill did what was right he would keep his bride's youth and beauty to be lost gradually as they both aged together. This would, as Bill will learn later, extend Debra's life significantly longer than it would have been with her being seventy years already. Once the year and a day were passed, her new age would become a reality for them to live out their married life together. The birth of the child would come shortly before the end of the period, after more than ten months of gestation. Fairyland did not wish to risk the child's future with an uncertainty of an elderly mother that would die in its formative years. The test was after all for Bill Toad to pass or fail. The child would naturally not be born in the case of a reversal of the spell or its removal by either the North wind or rains.

Struggling with his mind's desire to take these tasks with ease and to essentially be lazy, Bill trooped on attempting to decipher the message about a wedding, being outside of time, and his being more married to Debra now than he would be later. Relying on his choice to sense and intuit without knowing he let the magical

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part of his mind, which he had in common with all men and women like Debra. Bill began to perceive. They would be married in the attire provided by the Fairies the very next morning in a magical place outside of time. The temple was likely the Great Hall of the Fairies which was a place that forbade, revealed, and punished all lies, much like the perceptions that mankind had fragmented into judgement day, hell, and heaven. Bill understood by choosing to, that the entry into the Great Hall was beneath the stone that he was correct in assuming could not be lifted by a man.

How to enter the temple, he intuited, would reveal itself in due course, leaving the warning. Bill thought carefully without reflecting, about how Love changed all things, even those that make a particular effort to not change over time. The only certainty in life is change for even the passage of time can be manipulated as one travels back and forth along the eternal continuum that links all point past, present, and future with the great oneness of the universe. The Fairies make practical use of this truth throughout their existence. And now Bill and Debra would also experience this and perhaps, he felt, learn a little about how that magic is used in order to employ it effectively.

Billy surprised himself with the clarity of his understanding and level of acceptance

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of magic. He took to it so readily and whole heartedly that his soul and mind were left with little to argue to achieve the disbelief in all magic that his society encouraged. His body, being the direct receiver of the universal messages his spirit was delivering, never doubted any of its reality in contrast to how his body had felt about Bill's habits of drinking heavily, eating greasy meals, and lounging before a television. His body had rebelled and been crushed under the determination of Bill's wilful soul which left it resorting only to sleep as an escape from that life. The body, as the spirit, was well suited to a magical life and found itself suddenly interested in what was transpiring. For this reason, when he lay with Debra to sleep, he found it difficult to sleep. Bill saw the Gnome woman, the tallest of the three from earlier, approaching him with a tape measure and slipped into dreams after a look into her comforting eyes and a wave of her hand toward him.

When morning came with the rising sun, a beautifully embroidered, fine muslin dress with lace fringes all around rested beside an equally intricately woven and embroidered linen suit also with a muslin lining. The embroidery, buttonholes, and stitching were so fine and close that Bill could not imagine a tailor or seamstress capable of such beautiful work. Woven into the cloth, and in all the details, were single threads of gold, silver, and a

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shimmering thread that could not be recognized as it changed appearance, colour, and texture every time one looked at it. His suit was of a dark violet overall, whilst Debra's dress was of a pale rose that seemed to change to a lilac as she turned. They each had been made a pair of shoes of a light, and supple leather that made them look somewhat like gloves to be worn on the feet. For Bill there was also a matching Homburg with edging and trim in the leather of the shoes. For Debra there was a lace fringed embroidered parasol to matcher dress with a cherry wood handle.

Having dressed, they realized that their clothes and shoes were nowhere to be found, and that the basket with their edibles had similarly disappeared. Bill searched around the large flat stone half-heartedly, not expecting to find any of their belongings. As he did search, on the opposite side of the bottom lip of the stone, he did find what looked very much like a roughly semicircular mouse hole or perhaps a small door. When Bill touched it with his finger, it tingled strangely and they heard the same beautiful snatch of music they had been left longing for the previous day. A blink of an eye later, around his finger appeared a loop of leather lace with a very small key threaded to it. Bill offered his bride to be the little key, but she urged him to open the tiny door with it. Whilst Ms. Debra Pierce held onto Billy by the shoulders with both

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hands, he inserted the little key, with difficulty, into an equally tiny keyhole that resembled a knot of wood much more than a keyhole. As the key was turned they both found themselves thrown backward as the stone slab rose over the ground to reveal something of a small stone hut that reminded Bill of a bunker he had once seen on a motion picture some time ago.

The little hut was broad and of a pale grey with an identical door in a much larger scale. However, for either of them to pass through the low slung doorway, they would each have to duck so low they were almost doubled up into a crouch. Hand in hand the pair ventured inside the opening that was wide enough for them to enter side by side. Unexpectedly, the door swung shut behind them, leaving the two in a pitch black darkness that forced them close together as if they were in a trap room where the walls were encroaching. For a moment they both felt claustrophobic in the mysterious isolation of that dark passage, clinging to each other for comfort.

As suddenly as it had begun, the darkness vanished and they found themselves standing near the wall inside an immense room with high earthen walls, standing on a very soft silt soil before a large number of creatures, animals, small persons and various type of Fairies, all of whom were singing a song that was immediately obvious to be in praise of them both. Behind them, there seemed to be no door,

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only a small niche in the wall with a small door shaped piece of wood hanging on a nail with an indecipherable glyph burned into the ancient wood.

When the singing finally came to an end, the entire hall erupted into cheers. A stunning beauty of a woman stepped forth from the group that had concealed her completely. Adorned in a dress of luminescent white silks of various shades, one could not be completely certain she was a woman, perhaps she was an animal that could also be mistaken for a plant. Her splendour made her ageless. On her face and hands were the lines and shadows of understanding that comes with great age, though her loveliness begged that she be mistaken for a youth coming of age. Her movements were graceful and fluid, concealing how she moved, suggesting that she was gliding toward the visiting couple. Tall and stunning, yet also diminutive, reassuring and gentle, the Fairy Queen stood before them and took their hands in hers with confidence and love. With their hands in hers, pressed together into a form much like a blossom of hands, the Fairy Queen lowered her head toward the hands in what seemed to Bill a ferocious turnoff speed that felt menacing that was in fact a slow and precisely timed bow that enveloped their hands in a shimmering silver screen of glowing hair that was simultaneously every colour the eye could

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behold and as soft and fine as the finest silks and satins, but softer.

Carefully the Queen kissed each of their fingers and hands as her magical locks brushed over them as light as were her kisses. Ms. Pierce and Mr. Toad both felt an electrifying pulse of joyful passion fill them and travel between them that they recognized as a magic they had only experienced as toddlers exploring the new world ahead of them with no reserve or thought for themselves. The total selflessness of the experience opened doors within them that had been long shut and locked by the crippling process of transforming into the form of adult that society expected from its members. For a brief moment Bill felt it would have been better to not be a member rather than to have lost touch with this capacity to experience life, then he realized that his bride had kept herself apart from much of society, appearing like something of an outcast or recluse in an effort to regain precisely this. Now they both had regained their abilities lost from their early youth as a gift filled with the love and affection from the Fairy Queen in person.

As the Fairy Queen rose, regaining her imposing erect stature, they both discovered a ring of a translucent or luminescent bark on their ring finger that glinted and resembled a very dark gold band with iridescent striations like veins.

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Without hearing the Fairy Queen's voice they both felt her speaking into their hearts. Billy and Miss both understood that though the physical rings might wear and flake until there come a day that they are no longer there, the bond of love that had made them come into existence would only be stronger with the passage of time that limited their concrete union. For all time they would now be united, more joined that the fate that had drawn them together, and from which Bill's soul had sought to escape to retain the outward appearance of an ordinary life only for itself and his ego.

The Queen then took back her hands from theirs and thanked them for their choices before assuring them that much would now change for them, but to remain faithful to the great one as their fortunes and affluence would only be redoubled to be redoubled again with the coming of the changeling child. The child would have only one need that would demand their protection from the ordinary, that no blade should ever touch its hair before it matured into his final destined calling on the eve of its fifteenth anniversary. The Queen then transformed into the little unclothed nymph that she was more often seen as and waved a hand to bring up the elliptical stone as a table upon which there was a feast awaiting the newly weds and their Fairy companions.

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What seemed like several hours later, once the orgy and the fornication that had been raised subsided, the impregnated Ms. Debra Pierce, and the renamed Mr. Billy Pierce, were sent on their way. Following a sloping earthen path that rose from the opposite end of the Fairy Queen's Great Hall, the couple soon found themselves emerging from a stone with a hole in it at the edge of the pond at the park on the opposite side of the street from the church at which they had been what they knew to be the day before. To their astonishment, the minister came out to greet them as the first arrivals at the church on the Sunday morning as if they had not been to the service only the morning before. By the day and time of the world in which they inhabited, Billy and Debra Pierce were one hour early for the Sunday service they had not yet attended.

The priest greeted them warmly and remarked on the unsurpassed beauty and distinctiveness of their dress. Learning that they were to be wed, the clergyman suggested eagerly, to their surprise, that the ceremony could be readily added as an extra at the end of the service seeing that they were clearly already dressed for the wedding. As the other parishioners arrived, as the previous day, they were all enchanted by the exquisiteness of their costumes. Furthermore, the new couple were showered with good wishes and promised gifts to be delivered at their home

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on the edge of the woods, at various times throughout the coming week. Many also made them gifts of currency and checks on the spot which were donated to the little church before Billy and Debra set off for their home on foot, where the automobile still waited for them, unaware and unknowing of any portion of its benefactor's lives or of this tale.

∞**END**∞