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STUDENT WRITING SERIES

LAILA AND THE WOOD

Best Works: Summer 2021

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CHAPTER 1

I lived a very normal life, or what I would consider normal. Until this day. This story took place before your time, approximately 800 years ago in Hillsborough Castle, Scotland, which had large radiant woods directly next to the large castle.

The woods were colorful yet mysterious; no one had gone deeper than a mile or two before retreating back to the castle, those who did had never returned... The woods were filled with birds and squirrels that would often make an awful racket but were terribly cute so it didn't matter.

I would often sneak off into the woods with my best friends Geraldine and Robin. We would have picnics with food we took from the kitchen and we would climb trees. Not Geraldine though. She was afraid of pretty much everything. Geraldine was a bit of a goody two shoes who worked as a maid for the princess so she was much more ladylike than me. However, she was a bad liar and if confronted, she would confess. Like a deer in headlights, as Robin often said.

Now Robin was the opposite. He worked in the kitchen with me and would do meaningless bad deeds such as stealing food (even though we had plenty) and take the head chef's keys and put them into the bread dough. I worked in the kitchen where Robin and I spent most of our time. In the kitchen there was a large smooth kitchen island in the center and a very big oven that we used mainly for bread. To the left of the entrance there was one small window which was the main source of light for most of the time. The smooth marble countertops and very large assortment dishes and gritty old pots were all there since I was a baby.

My name was Laila and I, similar to Geraldine, was a bit of a goody two shoes. I was not so good at thinking on my feet and was super extroverted. Those sometimes aren't very good traits, which didn't really matter because the king liked me! One time the king himself said to me:

"This pasta is certainly... not horrible." He gave me a (what I assume to be) very small smile. That pasta became my signature dish, pasta linguini. Which brings me to the beginning of my story...

It was a sunny afternoon on a lovely Thursday. I was making my signature pasta linguini. The busy buzz of the kitchen was awfully distracting but I persevered and continued to knead the greasy dough until it was one smooth consistency. I looked out the one small window on the opposite side of the kitchen and noticed the princess playing in the garden. She was beaming. I was so jealous. All I wanted to do was grab Robin and go outside just to feel the warm summer sunshine on my face. So, I finished making the pasta, told my mom to put it in boiling water and ran to Robin's workspace where he mainly chopped things. (He isn't really trusted with much else.)

"Robin!" I said.

"What?" said Robin, who appeared to be eating something. He quickly swallowed; and then I could tell by his breath what he was eating.

"Robin! Are those my scones?" I exclaimed in horror.

"... no." He was such a bad liar.

"Whatever, that's not the point! I wanna go outside. Will you come with me?"

"What? Just go on your own," he said.

"But what if I get in trouble?" I knew I wouldn't but I just didn't want to go alone so I could blame it on him. So I gave him puppy dog eyes, and he couldn't resist.

"You're so annoying. Fine, I'll come," he said. A smile dawned on my face.

"Yay!" I exclaimed.

As we raced down the halls I thought about the woods. Isn't it creepy how no one has gotten that far into the woods? What's in there that makes them so scared? So I asked Robin: "Why is everyone so scared of the forest?"

"Well let's go and find out," he said. "I'll get Geraldine and we can go into the forest. You go back to the kitchen and get some food."

"But I-"

"OK, meet back here in five," he said. I couldn't even finish speaking! This was such a bad idea. We were all going to die. There's a reason no one returns from the forest! The king was going to kill me.

CHAPTER 2

I went back to the kitchen anyway. Not to continue making pasta, but to get food for the trip. Why? I didn't know but looking back I'm glad I did. I got some nuts, two loaves of bread, some berries and a few carrots. Then I ran to my mom, gave her a hug and dramatically said "Goodbye." before running off. Poor mom was only trying to make some pasta. Then I met back with Robin and Geraldine who looked like she was going to cry. But don't worry, that's just how she looked some days.

"This is a bad idea." said Geraldine.

"I know." I said and I gave Robin a dirty look.

"Well, two against one majority rules so I'm going to finish my sandwich now." She started walking away but Robin grabbed her shoulder and pulled her back.

"It was your idea, Laila," Robin said.

"It was not!"

"Well, you made me think of it so technically it is." I wanted to smack him! But I kept my cool and told myself to remain calm.

"Whatever, let's just go outside." I said hastily.

As we made it outside, I locked eyes with the princess who almost immediately looked away. Princess Briana was very introverted and didn't talk to anyone outside of her father and sometimes her maids. From what Geraldine told me, Princess Briana was quite out of touch with the real world; she didn't know how to dress herself, bathe herself or do much of anything without someone doing it for her or at the very least assisting her. Since the queen died the king was super overprotective of her and she could only leave her chamber at meal time or to play outside for one hour. There have been many times that I have tried to interact with her, but she usually just ran away or started picking at her skin and then was saved by her maids or father. So as we locked eyes, I waved at her. As expected, she just stared at me.

When we entered the woods I felt nothing at all. It was fun, actually. It was intriguing to rebel so much. We were laughing and joking about something being in the woods... What if there were monsters or fairies? We had no idea... As we got further and further into the woods the joking stopped. I started to feel as if someone was staring at me. I looked at Robin and Geraldine. By the looks on their faces they definitely felt it too.

CHAPTER 3

We'd been walking for about two hours in complete silence.

"Why don't we stop here tonight?" I said. They both agreed. and we began unpacking our bags. I threw down my two pillows and a blanket then started the fire. Robin had already collected the wood, so I was just trying to start the fire. I clashed the two pieces of wood together in an attempt to make a spark (note the word attempt). After like ten minutes Robin stole the wood from my hands and started the fire in a mere second.

"Thanks, but I had it." I rolled my eyes and got out the food.

"No... you didn't." He jokingly pushed me. This was not a joking matter. Anywho, I turned to look at what Geraldine was doing; she was sitting in her elaborate bed construction sulking.

"Geraldine, we don't have time for this..." I said. She showed me her index finger where there was a teeny tiny cut on her knuckle. "Spit on it." I said. "Or suck on it. Get the blood back in your system!" I said jokingly. She was not having any of it. "Or maybe not..."

"Geraldine, we might be out here for a while so you better get used to not having all the privileges that you used to have," said Robin. For once he sounded sincere and not passive-aggressive or sarcastic. Geraldine launched out and gave us both a hug. Which she never did. Then things took a weird turn.

"I'm going to be so sad when you die," she said. Robin and I looked at each other in shock.

"Gera... I'm 13," I said.

"I know," she said, "everyone dies though, and since I'm younger than you you're probably going to die first." She looked so unbothered by the statement she just made. "Let's eat!" she said. So we ran to the campfire and began eating nuts and sharing scary stories. But while we could act like everything was ok, we all knew it wasn't. And before I knew it we were all asleep. Well... "asleep", like you know when you close your eyes and say that you're sleeping. That was me. That feeling like something was watching me wouldn't go away.

In the morning we kept walking. Robin was snacking on nuts all the way through. Until we came to a wall. Covered in moss it looked as if it stretched for the whole of this side of the forest. The forest seemed to have ended.

"No... this can't be, why would people retreat to just a wall?" I said.

"We did all of this, for a wall!" shouted Robin. Geraldine was still a little bit behind so she came bolting towards us as she came closer to Robin and I. We weren't paying attention, and she tripped on a rock and came crashing towards the wall. Except she didn't crash into the wall, she crashed through the wall! Next thing we knew she was gone. I looked to Robin raising my eyebrows so high they might as well have gone through my head.

"There's only one thing to do." I said.

Next thing I knew we were running towards the wall at full speed. I closed my eyes in fear and then, the wall sucked us in. I could feel my body twisting and turning until I opened my eyes and we were in a bush with Geraldine beside us.

"Gera!" I said.

"Shh," she replied. "F-f-fairies."

"Huh?"

"Fairies!" her whisper-scream is what really compelled me to look. And indeed there before us were... fairies.

CHAPTER 4

It looked like a festival of some sorts. These fairies were the size of my hand but looked like humans. Their tanned luscious skin was nothing like my pasty skin, all their clothes were colorful and looked to be made of flowers, leaves and all kinds of items you would find in a forest. and they were dancing. They were enjoying their festival. So, since we found what was in the forest I thought about leaving. There was no point ruining their festival.

I was about to turn to Robin and leave until something popped out from the distance. Not a regular fairy like the rest. She was taller, almost the size of me, she had reddish hair that looked sickly and unwashed. She wasn't as tanned as the other fairies and she looked almost pastier than me! I didn't think that was possible. Her eyes were a dark, dark brown and the whites of her eyes were red, not white. Her eyelashes drooped down, making her eyes look small. She had a sharp nose and pointy red ears, tiny lips and a sharp yet lopsided jaw. Her clothing was unlike anything I've ever seen before. It looked like she stole the king's clothes and expected these clothes made for an overweight 180 centimeter male human to fit this fairy that was the size of a small child, to fit her. But the most shocking thing was the crown on top of her head, clarifying that she would be the... queen.

"I smell an un-fairy-like being in our presence," she said. Her voice was raspy and old. When she talked her eyes bulged from her head.

I could feel Geraldine trembling beside me so I pulled her in and gave her a hug. Then the queen collapsed... the crowd gasped and her two guards picked her up.

"The queen will be taken back to the palace to recharge," said the first guard. He was an ogre with the largest underbite I had ever seen.

"Please don't panic, she will return shortly," said the other guard who was also an ogre but he had a big overbite and was slightly better spoken. They started walking away and as soon as they were out of sight, Robin stood up, revealing himself to the fairies. Turning himself in if you will.

The fairies gasped. "Hide! What are you doing?" asked one fairy.

"Take me to your leader," said Robin. I pulled him down back into the bush.

"What are you doing?!" I said.

"Fixing this! These poor fairies are living with a ruler who clearly wants to kill them. If I talk to them, maybe I can talk to the queen and she'll become good." He stood back up. "I will take you out of this authoritative land!"

"There are more of you!? Show yourselves!" said the fairy again. Geraldine and I stood up, revealing ourselves to the fairy.

"Listen, we want to help you," said Robin.

"Well you can't. The only way to defeat the fairy queen is to commence a battle with her and steal the throne. And the only way you can do that is with powers and you, as a human, don't have powers!"

"Well there has to be some way to get powers!" Robin said, pacing around, being careful not to step on anyone. An old fairy limped out from one of the toadstool houses. He looked very wise and kind. His belly was huge for his body size. He had blue and green fluorescent wings and the hair on his head was balding and graying. Then everyone bowed their heads.

"Welcome Elder Angus," said the fairy. The elder looked up at us,

"I haven't seen humans in over 100 years around these parts," said the elder "I heard you talking about how you want powers, that's a very big responsibility but getting powers is easier than you may think." said the elder.

He sprouted wings and flew up to grab Robin's hand, Geraldine and I tagging behind them. At last we reached a humongous round stone. It looked like a dragon's egg or something but it was beautiful. "Lay your hand on it, you will soon be given powers." So Robin, Geraldine and I all laid our hands on the egg and a beam of light lashed out at us. Then it all went black.

CHAPTER 5

"Laila, Laila," Geraldine said softly in my ear.

"No, no! You can't do it like that! She'll never wake up," said Elder Angus

"LAYLA! LAYLA!"

"It's actually Laila," said Geraldine.

"I'm awake, I'm awake," I said. Elder Angus's screams were still ringing in my ear. "And Gera is right, it's Laila."

"Sorry, Geraldine," said Elder Angus. Geraldine and I both rolled our eyes at each other.

"Oh, and Robin can turn invisible," said Geraldine.

"What!?" I was in complete and utter shock! The egg worked!

"I'm here," said Robin.

"And I think I can fly," Geraldine said, "Elder Angus said that after the big light I was floating. Then when he woke me up I thudded on the ground."

"Well, what power do I have?" I said.

"We can't know for sure. But it should be based on your personality. Robin is obviously very mischievous and sneaky, so invisibility. And Gera needs to learn how to be braver so I guess flying. But for you, well for you we can't be too sure. I sense some childhood trauma, dead parent? You're definitely a goody-two-shoes, extroverted, hmm..... I don't know. Sorry, Lily," said Elder Angus.

"Laila," I said. I was so upset. Why can't anyone get my name right? Why can he sense that my dad died but not what my power is?

"Ha! Of course she can't get her powers," said Robin.

"Robin! At least I'm not the one who is always gossiping!" Now I was even angrier. Thanks Robin.

"I didn't say anything," he said. I had a feeling he was just messing with me, but it still made me aggravated.

"Sure you did. You made fun of me because I can't get my powers."

"I said that in my head. Laila, I think you can read minds!"

"Telepathy?"

"Telepathy."

"Ooh! I want telekinesis! Is it possible to have telekinesis?" I asked Angus.

"Yeah, sure try moving this rock." So I focused really hard and then the rock flew out of Angus's hand and hit Robin in the eye.

"Ow!" said Robin.

"Well, we better depart soon," said Angus.

"What for?" I asked.

"For your battle with the fairy queen," said Angus. "Come on, I'll tell you about her on the way."

As we walked, I practiced using my powers, moving things with my mind and reading what Robin was thinking about. Mostly food. All the while Angus told us about the queen's weak points, her strengths and weaknesses. Supposedly if we catch her while she's recharging we can wear out her power quicker. And if we hit the center of her back in her gem (which all the royals get) we can knock her out. Our plan was to permanently trap her in her charging chambers so that was where we were heading.

"You smell that, that sweet smell? Well it won't stay like sweet for long. Soon it will smell almost as bad as the queen because that the smell of the charging chamber."

As we approached the sweet smell, I pushed away the leaves to expose a gaping hole in the ground surrounded by a rainbow exterior which smelled as sweet as sugar. Smoke came out of the black hole in the centre. The smoke, unlike the rainbow exterior, smelled horrific, like a bathroom or like eggs that had already expired and were only half cooked. I peered inside... and a nasty face with yellow teeth, sickly hair and bulging eyes peered back at me. The queen... so I made a run for it.

I actually had tears in my eyes. I was so scared I gave Geraldine a big hug.

"It's OK Laila! we'll go in with you," said Geraldine. Her voice was so comforting. But I knew I was NOT comfortable. Since the queen saw me I knew she was already getting out of her chambers to begin the battle.

"Everyone, get ready!" Elder Angus said with passion and hope. Then I read his mind: I'm so scared. I want my mom. Uhh... anyways. Geraldine started to lift up from the ground readying herself. I could tell there was fear in her eyes. Robin, I- I couldn't even see him. Elder Angus flew in the air, fluttering his tiny fluorescent wings. I readied my mind to take the sleeping guards keys. Goosebumps ran down my back.

"Let's go," said Robin. As we all charged through the bush, the queen was already waiting for us, but her powers were not fully charged. We were at an advantage. Or so I thought. The guards had woken up. There was no way I could get the keys now. I wasn't that advanced yet. I looked at Angus. He gave me a reassuring nod.

YOU have the advantage. YOU have the most power. He was right. I could tell everyone's next move. I could move their body parts and I could lift them up. A sense of pride ran through my veins. So Robin ambushed the queen by pulling her hair, smacking her, tickling her, distracting her. Geraldine swooped in from above, tackling the queen's goons. As they toppled down, I grabbed the keys to her chamber and passed them to Angus, who slowly cast a spell waving his arms around. Then a key hole revealed itself. Angus stuck one key in and tried to turn it, but it didn't work. He stuck in another that didn't work, and another and another and another. It was just one key after the next when I realized the queen had it.

Dangling from her giant pocket was the key. I tried to take it, but Robin was moving her too much!

Robin, stop moving so much! I sent the message to his mind. I could tell when he received it because he let go of her! NO! That's not what I meant! She started running towards me. So, I lifted her up. Geraldine was still fighting the guards. I could tell she couldn't take it much longer so I also lifted both the guards up. Their heavy nature prevented me from lifting them up so easily.

Grab the keys from her! I signaled to Geraldine and she shot up into the air. I couldn't hold all three up for much longer. Then I remembered that Angus had powers too.

Turn the goonies into stone! I was having fun with this new power of mine.

And so Angus did some more of that hand waving and Latin mumbling and boom! Stone goonies. Geraldine snatched the keys from the queen and dropped them onto Elder Angus's head.

"Ow!" he said. Then he collected himself and opened the lock. This was happening! I propelled her into the deep black hole. Confining her, making sure she won't move. Then Angus did some more of his spell casting Latin and more of his extravagant arm movements. And then the queen froze. She was locked in there forever.

CHAPTER 6

When we went back home, I ran into the kitchen and gave my mom a big hug.

"Where were you!?" she said. Should I tell her?

"Mom! We saw fairies in the forest!" I said.

"Uh huh yeah... Now, since you lied, left the castle without telling me anything, and dragged Robin and Gera with you, you can't leave my sight for the next fortnight." Ugh, some people just won't believe you. So all you have to do is move on.

- End -

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2021 Summer Writing Workshop's Student

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