

"At first, Mirabelle couldn't see anything but the lovely miasma of rose pink golden light. But as she looked closer she saw that in the midst of the light was a gilded birds cage. The bars of the cage were pink and gold. And in the cage was the most fabulous and delightful creature. At first Mirabelle thought it was some sort of rare humming-bird or gigantic tropical butterfly. But then she saw that it was a little one foot one fairy, with glimmering gossamer wings, a delicate apricot-pink summer frock and just about the prettiest little doll face you could ever dream about.

Mirabelle rubbed her eyes and blinked once or twice to make sure that she wasn't dreaming. But no, the one foot one fairy was still there, with her apricot-pink summer frock and her gossamer wings and her long streams of curly golden hair. Best of all, the darling little creature was swinging back and forth on a golden swing which hung from the roof of the gilded cage...

"Oh dear... A real live fairy." Mirabelle gasped, and with her little heart pounding like a drum in her chest, she rose from her bed quiet as a mouse to get a closer peek. Mirabelle was sitting on the edge of her bed, enjoying her Fairy, when all of a sudden her bedroom door slammed and in strutted the most peculiar looking boy Mirabelle had ever laid eyes on. He was dressed in a dark purple shirt and tights and had wrapped around himself a long royal purple cloak like the ones kings used to wear in olden days. He seemed to have very good manners however, because the moment he entered the room, he swept the cloak around his feet and bowed grandly to Mirabelle, just as if she was an honest to goodness Princess.

"Good evening little Princess, and congratulations on your 13th birthday." he addressed her in the most familiar fashion, "And if you would be so kind as to pick your lazy pretty bones off the bed then I'll show you a magic trick..." Mirabelle got up immediately and didn't give so much as a thought to the fact that she only had her night dress on, and that she was walking barefoot on the floorboards without her slippers: a thing her Mama had often warned her about.. She was also surprised to hear that it was her birthday...Was it 12 o'clock already?

"You see yonder fairy in her cage?" The boy asked her.

“Yes...”Mirabelle nodded. “She’s the prettiest fairy I’ve ever seen.”

In fact, it was the only fairy Mirabelle had ever seen, but she said this as if she were a very experienced fairy spotter who had encountered any number of the one foot one breed.

“Well, Mark this... That Fairy is my personal assistant.” The boy boasted as he pulled out a rather handsome cane, with all sorts of magic symbols inscribed upon it, and a very large transparent crystal attached to the end.

“It’s a Magic Wand.” Mirabelle gasped recognizing the article immediately.

“Very good.” The boy Magician congratulated her. “Go to the top of the class, Mirabelle. Of course the hand is quicker than the eye is it not?” He went on, twirling the wand from one hand to the other with such dexterity that Mirabelle felt quite giddy.

“And I’ll have you know that a young Witch like yourself is very special and if she wishes hard enough, she has more Magic in her little finger than most grown-ups have in their entire body... Which brings us to the reason for why I’m here. It’s not just to show you the trick. But also to help you make something wonderful happen in your life, before you totally outgrow yourself...”

Why they were the very words she had uttered that night before wishing for her little brother’s angels to come and play with her angels. It was almost as if he had stolen them from right out of her mouth!

“But they are my words!” She objected. “How do you have the effrontery to take my words and pretend they’re yours? And how is it that you know so much about me?”

“Well, in reply to the first question. If you are so careless as to leave your private thoughts floating around in the ether for anyone to grab, then you can’t complain when someone takes them and uses them against you, as I

have done..." He replied flatly, "As for the second question... I can't tell you the answer to that just yet... But I did come out of your Magic Box you know... So that should give you some clue as to who I am and why I'm here."

"You didn't come out of the box at all you bold-faced little liar," Mirabelle loudly protested. "I saw you enter through the door and I even heard you bang it..."

"If and when you solve the Riddle I gave you, clever little one that you are." He replied, confirming Mirabelle's suspicions that he was the Riddle's author... "Then you'll see things more clearly. In any case, now is the time for the trick. Our little fairy friend is becoming very impatient to earn her gold and go home."

He winked provokingly at Mirabelle as he began to rap his cane on the rim of the cage, catching the attention of his flighty assistant who, with little high-pitched squeaks and squeals, began to do the most enchanting tricks on her golden swing.

"This Fairy Mirabelle," He informed her, "Is a very cheeky saucy one... That's why she is in this cage. Because if you let her out, she will grow very large, almost as large as a young Magic girl like yourself. Only with all her fairy powers intact. So you see she would cause all sorts of mischief if she got out. But when she's in her cage, she is quite tame and has to do what you tell her. And, under a trained Magician's eye, she can perform all sorts of magic tricks..."

And even as he spoke, the contrary creature was pulling up her swing and making the sassiest faces behind her Master's back. Mirabelle grinned to herself and decided that she rather liked this saucy, cheeky one.

"What is her name?" She asked the Magician.

"Apricot Lantern." He replied flatly. "A rather silly name I think, but you can't expect much else from fairies can you? They have a good deal of Magic in them, but they don't know a pin about real Philosophy... They are a bit

like little magic girls in that way...”

“Pooh.” Mirabelle replied, more than a little miffed. “It’s no wonder your Fairy keeps sassing you... You really are the most boastful and contrary boy. That is if you are a boy...”

“Like the wing footed Mercurius of the Gold-makers. I am different things, to different people at different times...” He boasted and his contrary little assistant sassed him again. This time Mirabelle heard her impertinent high pitched squeaks and realized that she was speaking in a kind of fairy language which only she and her Master appeared to understand.

“What did she say?” Mirabelle asked him straight out.

The Magician smirked to himself. “Well... Freely translated from the fairy tongue to ours... She said that you’re rather too pretty for me by a very long way... And, if she had a wish... She’d like to be a pretty young Princess like you are...”

“Oh dear.” Mirabelle replied blushing all over her face. The bad tempered Fairy, apparently quite dissatisfied with the boy’s off the cuff translation, shrieked and raged at him through the bars of her cage.

“Needless to say Princess,” he went on, totally ignoring her antics, “The little vixen can never be a young girl. She is after all just a silly fairy and has no human soul. And if it wasn’t for all her Magic I’d have nothing to do with her...”

“Oh, then you need her Magic?” Mirabelle concluded. She was slowly finding out more and more things about her clever boastful friend.

“What I need little Princess is an apprentice.” The Magician replied rather firmly. “A very perspicacious and mindful young Witch who will sit and listen attentively, while I teach her all the Magic and Philosophy in the world. And I don’t mean any of your dreary Socrates and Plato either.... Rather what I am talking about is the ancient Sapiential art of transmuting metals

and sublimating essences. You see little Princess, I want to make you an apprentice Alchemist, in the tradition of a long line of Gold-makers stretching all the way back to Christian Rosenkreutz and wise old King Solomon himself.”

And to show off his credentials to Mirabelle, the Magician began quoting all twelve verses of the Emerald Tablets of Thrice Great Hermes in full.

: “In truth, certainly and without doubt, that which is above is in the likeness of that which is below. The upper is in the form of the nether. And the nether is in the form of the upper, for the purpose of accomplishing the Great Work of the One...”

“For just as all things proceed from the one, by contemplation of the one, so are all things born from the one according to Nature’s tendency and disposition.”

“Its Father is the Sun.. Its Mother is the Moon. The Wind herself hath borne its body. And its Wet-nurse is the Earth...”

As the Magician intoned these curious verses, he began to crank up the Fairy’s cage, winding it up like a mechanical music box. He cranked the cage against the clock, and it clicked with each rotation. And, each time it clicked, he began to bang the cage firmly with his Magic Wand, probably trying to tame its captive, Mirabelle thought, a bit like lion tamers do with big cats. And Mirabelle felt a bit sorry for the giddy creature in her shiny gilded prison, because she was clearly frightened about what was going to happen to her.

The Magician went on with his recitation and as he did so he continued to bang the Cage with his wand. Little Apricot Lantern was now livid with rage and shrieking at the top of her lungs as she rattled at the bars of her cage to get out. Unlike the lions in the circus, Mirabelle observed, this temperamental creature just would not be tamed!

The Magician didn't stop cranking and banging on the Cage with his wand, until he had finished reciting the last verses of the poem. Bang. Rattle. Crank. “And it is for this reason that I am called Hermes Trismegistos - Hermes Thrice Great – for the purpose that I possess in full all three parts of the

Wisdom of the entire world”

“And herein have I accomplished all that I have set out to say about the Great Work of the Sun...”

One final whack of the wand and the cage was fully cranked up. The poor exhausted Fairy was now crumpled up on the floor whimpering miserably and desperately clinging to the bars. Mirabelle felt suitably ashamed that she didn't dare to say or do anything to stop this grotesque violation of the Fairy's fundamental human rights - not that the Fairy was human mind you, but her rights should still be the same as ours shouldn't they?

“And now for the trick.” The Magician beamed with triumph to his apprentice. “But I warn you. I have never seen the little vixen so angry. She has sworn black and blue on all the saints' halos that she is going to do something really awful to us both when she gets out... Not that she will get out mind you... But we will both have to watch her mindfully. You see Princess, our Apricot Lantern is not just any ordinary fairy. She is what you might call a Wishing Fairy. And this particular type of fairy is undoubtedly the most unpredictable and conniving of the one foot one breed...”

Mirabelle nodded. Despite all her cleverness, she didn't know what conniving meant and her comrade might have been well advised to use a more simple word when addressing a young girl, such as cunning or sneaky.

Be that as it may, the cage was now fully cranked up and the Magician, with a dramatic wave of his wand, let it go. Immediately, the cage began to uncrank itself, rotating, as it were, the other way - in a clockwise direction. As it rotated, there was a constant flickering of golden hypnotic lights, the kind you sometimes see when the sun dances and plays with its own reflection on ripples of water.

It's very beautiful and magic, but the more you look at those dancing lights, the more muddled and topsy-turvy your world generally becomes. And it is here that the especial breed of one foot one fairies, known as Wishing Fairies, can play all sorts of nasty and unpredictable tricks on their victims. If Mirabelle is wise, she will pull herself away from those dancing hypnotic

lights, before she becomes totally spellbound by Apricot Lantern's spell of Faery Glamour.

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Unhappily, for Mirabelle the hypnotic charm of the lights was totally irresistible and she could not take her eyes off them. Little by little, she became more and more giddy and senseless. Under the spell of Faery Glamour, she began to chat on and on about how honoured she was to be chosen as the Magician's apprentice and how kindhearted he was to take on such a contrary girl as herself: one who hadn't even solved his Riddle and had rudely insulted him by saying that he had come through the door and not from the box, which, if you thought about it, amounted to pretty much the same thing anyway. Didn't it?

"You are the most magic and special little girl in the world Magic Mirabelle." The Magician praised his apprentice. "And that is why I am here. The greatest Magician of them all should have the prettiest and cleverest apprentice of all. Is it not so?"

Mirabelle agreed. And she was quite sure that under his perspicacious instruction, she would not only be the best apprentice ever, but that together, she and the Magician would become part of the most enchanted fairy-tale ever. By this time, however, the crumpled up little Wishing Fairy had gotten back all her lost Magic and strength. And seeing how deeply Mirabelle had fallen under her spell of Faery Glamour, she became even more contrary and obnoxious. She proudly got back on her swing and began to defiantly kick her legs up in the air higher and higher, her apricot frock lifting up so high that it was no longer polite or decent. Then to top it all off, the Fairy began to sing a very saucy and impertinent lyric at the top of her little lungs to mock Mirabelle and her treacherous master.

The Saucy Fairy even sang her song in English, instead of her own fairy tongue. And that enchanted Mirabelle even more as she listened to the Fairy's charming sweet voice. Her singing had a very haunting otherworldly quality to it, reminding Mirabelle of small tinkling chimes and miniature bells

making music right next to her ear. And, if Mirabelle had been bewitched by the sparkling ripples of dancing lights, she was now totally entranced by Apricot Lantern's enchanting song, which went like this:

"A Kissing Angel Kisses me
Kisses me with Kisses Three
Kisses me in my little Bed
Kisses me with lips bright Red
A Kissing Angel that is Me
I kiss her and she Kisses Me"

The Magician for his part thought the song a little silly and was wondering why Apricot Lantern was singing it in English. The only reason he could think of was that the little vixen wanted to impress Mirabelle with the sort of dark humour and sarcasm that is a characteristic trait of the one foot one breed of Wishing Fairies. The sarcasm was lost on Mirabelle however, and she went all gooey and soppy when she heard the song and just stood there gazing adoringly at her handsome Magician when, oblivious to her love-struck condition, he ordered her to run along and get her Magic Dragon Box. When she brought it back to the cage, he told her that he would fill it with something quite extraordinary, the best thing in the world, next to herself.

"Just like in the letter." Mirabelle sighed deliriously, as she ran off obediently to get the box and bring it back to her clever, adorable Magician. He instructed her to hold the box under the cage, as with a sweep of his cloak he covered up the Saucy Fairy and then, with another sweep, uncovered her again.

"Visita interior terrae
Rectificando invenies
Occultum lapidem"

As the Sorcerer chanted this Spell, he prepared himself for the shower of gold which he calculated would fall from the Fairy's cage into Mirabelle's box very soon afterwards. But the conniving Fairy was already prepared for this moment, and instead of obediently delivering the shower of gold to her

Master and Mirabelle, she played the most dastardly trick upon them both, shaking her apricot dress shamelessly back and forth like a boat sail and filling Mirabelle's bedroom with an even more potent dose of her enchanted Faery Glamour.

There, from the filmy folds of her dress emanated the most intoxicating fragrances: the pungent smells of an old fashioned apothecary mingled with all the sweet scents of a blossoming moonlit garden. The tantalizing aromas wafted from the cage in coruscating streams of glittering stardust. And, as the lovely golden trails of fairy gossamer enveloped them both, the most astonishing thing of all occurred to Mirabelle.

All of a sudden, she began feeling very lightheaded and dizzy, like a part of her had separated from her body and she was now standing outside herself. Next she knew, there was a violent ripping and tearing sound and suddenly she felt herself being cut in half like an apple. One half of her, Awake Mirabelle, was standing paralyzed with her Magic Dragon Box, as still as a statue underneath the Saucy Fairy's cage. The other half, Asleep Mirabelle had followed the perfumed gold-dust trail into the most beautiful and enchanted garden you can ever imagine.!

Extract from Chapter Three "The Magician and Apricot Lantern"