

Coggy and Faerie

It was a peaceful, perfect day in River Tree. I sat in my treehouse, looking out over the water. I loved days like this, where the sun was shining and the air was perfumed with marsh and lemongrass. “Faerie would love this”, I said to myself. I can just picture her saying,

“Oh Coggy, we must go to the river. The earth is rich, and you can paint the water! Or the rocks! Or the birds! Or me!”

I set off to go and find her. It was a short walk to the river, which was Faerie's spot. Everyone knew that. She spent days there, harvesting pure earth to make her clay. It took me 10 minutes to get there, when it takes everyone else around five. I haven't walked normally since I could crawl. I still haven't figured it out. Is it a problem with my legs? Am I just not a creature that walks? The path was not nice anyway, so that didn't help. Every rock, root, even twig made me stumble. Once I got to Faerie's spot, she was nowhere to be found.

I looked up and down the river. In every cave, under every rock, and then back on all of the paths. I walked around all of River Tree, calling out for her. Everyone looked at me like I was a maniac, but they looked at me like that anyway, so it didn't bother me. I spent hours searching for her. She never hid from me, ever. And she was always at that spot on the river. Always. Wait! She could be at my treehouse!! I ran as fast as I could (which isn't very fast) back. I was almost there when I tripped. Hard. I looked down at what could have possibly tripped me up that bad, and saw Faerie's favourite pink hair clip.

I sat on the forest floor for a long time. Why was it just lying there? It has never fallen out before. Then, I realized something that made my heart jump with fear.

Faerie was in trouble.

She had always talked about how ‘they’ would come and take her away. We laughed about it, and up until now, I had never taken her seriously. Faerie was an orphan, and it seemed that orphans are always the ones that went missing.

I ran back to the river, trying to look for anything that could help me. Anything at all. I crossed the river on the small wooden bridge, and directly in front of me was a bright purple barrette. I recognized it. I picked it up and put it in my pocket, along with the pink one from the path. I walked for about five minutes more, and there, lying so perfectly in the path was a neon green barrette. It was shaped like a butterfly. Faerie loves butterflies.

I walked for hours, following the trail of barrettes. Whenever I saw one, it was like a spark went off. I knew that she was somewhere. I lost track of time very quickly. All I was focused on was looking for those bright, candy-coloured splotches of colour. Before I knew it, the sky was fading to a peach sherbet colour. I could almost hear her saying,

“Cog, look! The sky is like if those peaches from Mr. Murphy’s farm and the cotton candy from the carnival last summer had a baby! Do you see that one spot of the sun?”

I decided that I needed to rest. Just for a few hours, until the sun rose, and I could look for the little pieces of Faerie that were scattered across the forest floor like stars in the sky. Just..a few..hours...

I woke up with a start. The sun was high in the sky, and it was another one of those perfect days. It took me a second to remember what was going on, but as soon as I remembered, I jumped up. There, not even a foot in front of me, lay a blue barrette. I started walking again.

I had just picked up a red barrette when the smell hit me. A horrible, raw, chemical smell that reeked of sewage and sweat and something oddly salty. I almost turned, because there was no way that Faerie was in a place like this. I saw a yellow heart-shaped clip though, so I continued.

After walking for what seemed like forever, I tripped again. I looked down, ready to see a rock or a branch that had left me sprawled on the ground. Instead, I saw a long iron bar. I looked ahead of the bar and saw pieces of wood laid out like a ladder, and another bar of iron on the other side. Train tracks.

I looked up towards the sky, and I saw clouds of steam rising from long, chimney looking pillars. There were creatures everywhere. Creatures that looked like me. Those creatures that you see in drawings; with their huge poofy dresses, and their parasols. The men in their top hats with dashing suits. I looked up at these creatures in wonder, and then I looked around a bit more. To my left, there was a tall, grungy building. There were creatures laid out in the street in front of it. Sleeping in the gutter, begging for food, cradling their children. They looked so dead, like they had given up on life. I looked around some more. I realize that these creatures, the ones who were poor and dirty, outnumbered the rich, powerful, and fancy creatures. By a lot. It seemed that even though the rich creatures had a power that they took advantage of, the majority didn't do anything.

I looked around trying to find someone who could help me. The poor creatures looked like they didn't want to be bothered, and the rich creatures just looked snobby. Then, I saw her. A cheerful face through the crowd, giving bread to the poor people, playing ball with the children. I knew that she could help me. She reminded me of Faerie.

"Excuse me, sorry to bother you, but I have lost my friend. I don't know London, could you help me?" I said.

"Oh, sure! I'm Maxsteam. I know this city inside and out. And I know the secret parts too!"

"Thank you so much. I'm Coggy."

"It's a pleasure to meet you Coggy! Any idea of where she might be?"

“No. I don’t think that she has ever been to London. We live in the forest. I think she’s in trouble though. She wouldn’t just leave like this.”

“Coggy. Is there any chance that she could be..an orphan?”

“She is one!”

Maxsteam gasped. This wasn’t good. I was starting to get very, very nervous.

“What, Maxsteam? Is something wrong?”

Maxsteam motioned for me to follow her.

“I know where she is.”

I followed Maxsteam through alleyways, bustling roads, and buildings. She certainly knew the city. She moved almost like a snake, whirling past carts of fruit, slithering in between people. I struggled to keep up and bumped into way too many people.

Suddenly, she stopped. I stood beside her and looked up. There, in front of us, was a monster of a building.

It towered over us, glaring down. It was so square, and uniform looking. There weren’t many windows, and the ones that were there were dark. The thing that shook me to my core though was the steam. Giant, alien-like, towers of steam and smoke were everywhere. The gas billowed out and flew up into the sky like it was being pulled towards the clouds.

I stood there for a while. I had never seen anything like it. Back home, all we had were candles. That was our most advanced technology. We walked everywhere. The houses were

simple, and we all shared food. My village, my home, seemed so simple to me when I looked at this literal monster of technology.

“This is the factory. She’s definitely in here.” Said Maxsteam.

“How do you know?”

“This place collects orphans. They force them to work for up to 18 hours a day, six days a week. They get paid close to nothing and get fed even less. Trust me, she’s in here”

I couldn’t believe it. My incredible, joyful, optimistic Faerie was in a place that was so soul-crushing. I knew, right then and there, that I would do anything to get her out.

“Okay. Maxsteam, how do we get her out?”

“I have a plan.”

She looked at me with a mischievous glint in her eye.

Maxsteam told me to wait on a bench in an alley. I had no clue where she was, what she was doing, or how long she would be gone. After around half an hour, she came back carrying a top hat, men's pants, and a long, long, long coat.

“Are we going to do what I think we are going to do?”

Maxsteam just smiled.

We spent the next hour getting ready. Since Maxsteam was much lighter than me, she would be on my shoulders, and I would be the feet. Rather difficult, considering I couldn’t walk that well. Maxsteam climbed on my shoulders, put the top hat, the pants, and an eyepatch that she just pulled out of nowhere on. Then, she put on the jacket.

I could see through a tiny hole in the coat. I somehow managed to step over every pebble, piece of sewage, or stray ball that was in my way. It was like the thought that Faire was in that horrible building was pushing me forward. Before I knew it, we were at the door.

A stern-looking woman answered the door.

“Hello....sir. How may I help you?”

“Yes, hello. I am Mr...um...Habasgurderson. I am here for one of the children.”

I stifled a giggle. Maxsteam was talking in such a fake posh accent, I wondered how the housekeeper didn't kick us out on the spot.

“Let me guess. Social Services? One of the children has parents?”

“Yes, Miss. Does this happen often?”

“Very. It's alright though. We never run out of workers. They just keep on coming!”

“Huh. Well, where can find a Miss Faerie?”

“Oh, see we don't know their names! All they do is work, no time for play, or school, or any socializing.”

I couldn't believe it. My Faerie, and who knows how many other children, were being treated like machines. I knew that we needed to hurry up and get her out quickly.

“Oh..um...if you please Miss, may we go and find her?”

“Go ahead. Hurry up though. You don't want to disturb them while they are working. We just got a new loom in, and we need them to work so much faster. Anything to keep our nobility looking beautiful!”

Maxsteam headed down the long hallway, into the room marked, ‘Work Place’. We stood there, trying to figure out what to do.

“Maxsteam? What do we do now?”

“Coggy, we need to be quick. Get her out as quickly as we can. I guess I’ll just walk in and announce that we need her?”

“Okay, Maxsteam. In and out.”

Maxsteam slowly opened the door. The machines roared, but the room was dead silent. The children were not talking. They were just working. They looked like robots, completing one task, then doing the same thing over and over.

Once they noticed that someone was at the door. They stopped what they were doing, and all turned to look at us. They all kept their heads down though as if they were afraid of what might come next.

“Um...is there a Faerie in here?”

Then, I saw her. She lifted her head, looking so, so scared. I wanted to run over and hug her, but I knew that that would be catastrophic. Instead, I just trusted that she would come with us.

“Y-yes, sir. I-I’m Faerie.”

“All righty, dear. You are leaving. Get your stuff.”

She looked scared. I didn't know what I could do to make her trust us. Then, I got an idea. I remembered her hair clips in my pocket. I gave one to Maxsteam, and she held it up.

"Someone wanted to give this back to you, miss."

From my little looking hole, I could see her face light up. She knew that I was here to rescue her. She practically leapt up from the table and raced to grab her satchel. We got out of that blasted factory so quick.

We walked in silence until we reached the path back to River Tree. The second that we were safe, and out of earshot and eyeshot, Faerie tackled me.

"I knew that you would find the barrettes and come rescue me!!"

"I couldn't have done it without Maxsteam. She helped so much!"

"Oh Maxsteam, thank you so much. You have truly saved me!"

"Well, I'll be off now. I have many important things to take care of. I'm starting a trade union!! It was such a pleasure to help you Coggy. You too, Faerie."

"Thank you, Maxsteam!"

I turned to Faerie . She looked so tired.

"Faerie, how about we find a meadow that is far, far away from this city and its smell, and rest there before heading back to River Tree"

"Coggy, that sounds wonderful. I can't wait to go back home."

As we walked into the sunset, I stumbled on something. I picked up one last hair clip.
We smiled at each other and skipped back home.

By Amy S.