

Billy and the Fairy by Terry Bisson

Terry Bisson's first fable about young Billy appeared in our Oct/Nov 2005 issue. In that one, he battled ants. Now he encounters a fairy. What will it be next? Spacemen? Unicorns? The President? Stay tuned!

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"There's something in my room," said Billy. "I think it's a fairy."

"Fairies are make-believe," said Billy's mother.

"It glows in the dark," said Billy.

"Go back to bed," said Billy's father.

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Billy's bed was shaped like a race car. There was a little tiny person sitting on the front of the bed, beside the steering wheel.

"Are you a fairy?" Billy asked.

"Who wants to know?"

"Me. It's my room."

"So what," said the fairy.

Billy thought about that. "Are you really a fairy?" he asked.

"Are you really a little boy?"

"That's a stupid question."

"You're a stupid little boy."

"What are you doing in my room? My mother says fairies are make-believe."

"They are," said the fairy. "Real fairies are. I'm not."

"I thought you said you were a real fairy."

"I never said that. I'm really a fairy, but I'm not a real fairy. Real fairies are make-believe. I'm not make-believe."

"Make-believe stuff is stupid," said Billy, getting into bed. "Why aren't you wearing any pants?"

"Fairies don't have to. Who is that on your pajamas?"

"Dale Earnhardt. He's a race car driver."

"He looks like your father," said the fairy. "Aren't you supposed to sleep with your head at this end?"

"I'm afraid of you," said Billy.

"Suit yourself," said the fairy.

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In the morning, the fairy was gone.

"Is there such a thing," Billy asked at breakfast, "as fairies?"

"*Are* there such a thing," his mother said.

That didn't sound right to Billy. "There's just one," he said. "He doesn't wear any pants."

"Then watch out for him," said Billy's father.

"It's okay to believe in make-believe," said Billy's mother. "Just don't confuse it with reality."

"Huh?" said Billy.

"And don't forget those leaves," said Billy's father, getting up to go.

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Billy picked up the leaves out of the driveway. It was his only chore.

When he was finished, he went to his room.

He was hoping to talk to the fairy but the fairy was gone. There was a wet spot by the steering wheel, where it had sat.

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When Billy went to bed, the fairy was back. It glowed in the dark, like a lightning bug.

"Where do fairies go during the day?" Billy asked.

"Real fairies? They don't go anywhere. They're only make-believe. They have no place to go. No place would have them."

"Where do you go?"

"Wouldn't you like to know," said the fairy.

"Why do you come here?" asked Billy.

"I like this bed. It's shaped like a race car."

"You can sit on it," Billy said. "But I wish you would wear pants."

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The next morning, the fairy was gone. There was a wet spot on Billy's bed.

"What if there was just one fairy?" Billy asked at breakfast. "Would that be make-believe?"

"Of course," said Billy's mother. "Every child has a right to a little make-believe."

"There you go with those rights again," said Billy's father. He patted Billy on the head, like a dog. "I guess one fairy's okay, as long as he helps you pick up those leaves out of the driveway."

"He doesn't do things," said Billy.

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First Billy picked up the leaves, then he went to his room. The fairy was sitting on his bed, next to the

steering wheel.

"What do fairies do?" asked Billy.

"Nothing much," said the fairy. "Sometimes we kill people."

"Huh?"

"When God wants a new angel in Heaven, sometimes He sends a fairy down to kill him. Or her."

"Are you here to kill me?"

"Of course not," said the fairy.

Billy thought about that. "My mom doesn't believe in fairies," he said.

"So what."

"So she says you are just make-believe. That's what."

"That's because she's stupid."

"My mom's not stupid."

"That's what you think," said the fairy.

Billy had an idea. "Wait here," he said.

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Billy went into the kitchen.

"Come quick," he said. "I want to show you something."

"Not the fairy, Billy," his mother said. She was baking a pie. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Please, Mom," said Billy.

Billy's mother wiped her hands and followed him into his bedroom.

The fairy was gone. But that was okay.

"Look, Mom!" said Billy. He showed her the wet spot on the bed. "That's where it was sitting."

"*Billy*," said Billy's mother.

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"Billy's growing up," said Billy's mother at dinner.

"Good. Then maybe he can do what he's told," said Billy's father. "Like pick up the leaves out of the driveway."

"But I did," said Billy.

"Sir."

"Sir."

"Then where did I find this little item?" Billy's father pulled a leaf from his shirt pocket and set it on the table.

"They fall off the trees," said Billy.

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Billy put on his pajamas. The fairy was sitting on the bed.

"I saw your guy today," the fairy said. "Dale Earnhardt."

Dale Earnhardt was dead. Billy had seen the crash on TV.

"No you didn't," Billy said. "And I wish you would wear pants."

"Fairies don't have to wear pants. Dale said to tell you hello."

"No, he didn't."

"You're right, he didn't," said the fairy. "Dead people don't say hello. I did see him, though."

"Where? In Heaven?"

The fairy laughed. It made a nasty little tinkling sound.

"I didn't know him anyway," said Billy, getting into bed. "He was just famous."

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Billy woke up in the middle of the night.

The fairy was still there, glowing like a lightning bug.

"Do you really kill people?" Billy asked.

"Sometimes."

"Why doesn't God send an angel down to do it?"

"Angels are make-believe. I use a long needle."

Billy thought about that. "Can I see it?"

"Go back to sleep, Billy."

Billy went back to sleep.

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"How's your fairy doing?" Billy's mother asked at breakfast. "Is it still there?"

"Sometimes," Billy said.

"Maybe he can help you pick up the leaves out of the driveway before I get home," said Billy's father.

"He doesn't do things," said Billy. "I told you."

"Sir."

"Sir."

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Billy picked up the leaves himself. There was nothing else to do anyway. The fairy was gone all day.

"I thought you and your fairy were going to pick up the leaves out of the driveway before I got home," said Billy's father at dinner.

"But I did," said Billy. "Sir."

"Then where did I find this little item?"

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"Do you really kill people?" asked Billy. He was getting ready for bed.

"You already asked me that," said the fairy. "Who do you want me to kill?"

Billy thought about that. "My father," he said.

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The next morning, Billy's father slumped over at the breakfast table.

"Oh dear," said Billy's mother.

He was dead. The ambulance came and got him.

"That was cool," said Billy that night as he was putting on his pajamas. "But I didn't see any long needle."

"Of course not," said the fairy.

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The next day, the fairy killed Billy's mother.

She slumped over and her face went into the pie. This time, Billy saw the long needle.

The fairy was sitting on top of the refrigerator. Its little legs were crossed.

"That was stupid," said Billy. "Now I don't have any parents."

"So what."

"So the police will come and put me in the orphanage, that's what."

"Not if they don't know she's dead," said the fairy.

Billy thought about that. He dragged his mother into the closet and shut the door.

"I still don't have anybody to take care of me," he said.

"Clean up the pie," said the fairy. "I'll ask around."

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That night there was no supper. Billy got a box of cereal and took it to his room.

Dale Earnhardt was sitting on the bed. "Out of the box," he said. "Classy."

"I thought you were dead," said Billy. "I saw the crash on TV."

"Sit down, kid," said Dale Earnhardt. He stretched out on the bed. Billy sat down beside him.

"I can deal with the stiff in the closet," Dale Earnhardt said. "But you have to do your part, kid."

"What's that?"

"Sir."

"Sir."

"There's the little matter of the leaves in the driveway."

Billy thought about that. He looked around for the fairy, but the fairy was gone.

There was only a wet spot where it once had been.