

# Damn Fairies



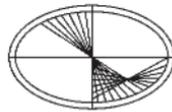
edited by  
Elizabeth Harvey





# Damn Fairies

*edited by Elizabeth Harvey*



DIVERTIR  
PUBLISHING  
*Salem, NH*

## **Damn Faeries**

*Edited by Elizabeth Harvey*

All stories contained in this manuscript  
Copyright © 2011 by the respective authors

All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

*Cover art and design by  
Jennifer Wilson and Elizabeth Harvey*

Published by Divertir Publishing LLC  
PO Box 232  
North Salem, NH 03073  
<http://www.divertirpublishing.com/>

*Kenneth Tupper, Publisher  
Elizabeth Harvey, Acquisitions Editor*

ISBN-13: 978-0-9842930-2-5  
ISBN-10: 0-9842930-2-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011921965

Printed in the United States of America

*Dedicated to my grandfather Kinsey, who  
never lost his belief in faeries.*



## Contents

<i>Whiskey Tango Foxtrot</i>	1
<i>by Phillip Wheeler</i>	
<i>A Night Off</i>	13
<i>by Dave Rudden</i>	
<i>Hot Stuff</i>	17
<i>by Stephanie Jordan</i>	
<i>Dragon Lady</i>	21
<i>by Ashley Dearborn</i>	
<i>The Stairs</i>	37
<i>by Alan Green</i>	
<i>One Good Night</i>	41
<i>by Ben Steele</i>	
<i>A Guy Walks Into A Bar</i>	68
<i>by Seth Brown</i>	
<i>The Wishing Star</i>	73
<i>by Elizabeth Harvey</i>	
<i>The Forgetful Wizard</i>	91
<i>by George R. Lasher</i>	
<i>Modern Fairy-Tale</i>	96
<i>by Kimberly Randall</i>	
<i>Careful What You Wish For</i>	105
<i>by Jamie McSloy</i>	
<i>The Faery Coin</i>	122
<i>by Kenneth Tupper</i>	



## *Preface*

All my life I have read faerie tales. They have been a fixture in my life for as long as I can remember, and it's my distinct pleasure to share this collection with you. It's my opinion that you can never outgrow faerie stories, and the magic of faeries is that they will never outgrow you.

Whether you believe in faeries or not, they are fixtures in every culture, in their own way. Little creatures (or big creatures) that capture the wonder and imagination of children, they serve to remind adults that we are never "all grown up". It is, to my mind, a terrible thing to be "all grown up", to lose that wonder and the magic. If everyone had a little magic in their lives, we might be less miserable.

So this is my attempt to bring a little bit of magic, to remind all of us that there is something out there in the shadows. That stepping in the wrong place might lead you to another world, one that you never expected. Never forget the magic because while you might not remember them, the faeries certainly remember you. And they never forget.

—*Elizabeth Harvey*



# Whiskey Tango

## Foxtrot

*by Phillip Wheeler*

**I**t's fall here in this old wood. The trees are naked, like lovers quivering in the wind of anticipation, all things colorful, garish, laid to the floor. A cold wind drifts through the branches like so much hesitation, but why? Why is this fall so much more different than any other? What is this energy trickling through the air here in the forgotten heart of the Old World?

It's waking up. A new breath of life, of change. Like so many lovers seeing each other for the first time. Something is happening and it will be both grand and horrible, mark my words. When she awakens, our petty little world will fall down

*on itself. For everything we've made she will take from us and make it anew.*

*The autumn leaves dance on the wind with a seeming purpose, pairing up and then lingering off to another as if a grand gala was being held in this old forest. As if something other than human was here to celebrate. It's a pity you aren't here. It's a pity you cannot see this for yourself. Don't worry though. You may not be invited to The Ball, but everyone will be there for the party.*

§ § §

It was fall in a place a bit distant from that dry old bit of enchanted wood. Here, however, it wasn't all that windy, nor all that magical. It was raining. Not heavy rain or light, innocent little drizzles. No, it was just a steady, monotonous drip. My least favorite type. Cold enough to need a jacket and wet enough to need one that can stand up to the rain.

My name's Jack, by the way. I'm a manager at a local restaurant: 'Whiskey Tango Foxtrot'. It's not one of those big, *fancy* chains with thirty grand in advertisements spanning the nation's cable television. Just a locally-owned joint. The restaurant, however, isn't important. I mean, let's be honest; since when are they *ever* important.

I can hardly be asked to get up in the morning to head in for work.

*Anyway*, getting up this morning was the usual humdrum: get out the pressed slacks, find a decent uniform shirt, wonder what jackass registered their phone under the name “your Dreams” and prank called me in the middle of the night. I mean *honestly*. I thought I was bored.

Dismissing the call, I hopped into my car and drove to Whiskey Tango Foxtrot to be confronted by my *favorite* person in the whole world: Crystal.

Now, I know what you’re thinking: she’s young, pretty... vapid, annoying, and far too self important. Someone obviously had the *gall* to request the day off that she wanted before she had and she couldn’t get the day off herself. I was halfway through ignoring her whiny yet soft and bell-like rant on why she had to get *that* day off when my phone rang.

I pulled my phone out of my pocket and glanced at my caller ID. What a pleasant surprise. It was that prankster from last night. Mustering all the managerial authority could, I calmly silenced the insipid barely-adult and told her I had to take this call.

Hitting the ‘answer’ button, I pressed the phone to my ear and spoke. “This is Jack speaking,” and stood there

while a small pair of giggles answered. Arching a brow in response, I kept my calm. I mean... I had to make sure Crystal thought I was taking a business call. "Yep. No, we don't want to order any more noodles. No I don't *care* if they're going bad and you need to move them." I droned on. Pranksters usually give up when you start being entirely silly back.

This, however, was not the case with these pranksters. All I got in response was two voices giggling and a little song for my trouble.

*Bed is calling...  
but I forgot to charge my cell...  
I wonder if it will leave a message.*

*If it will tell me the dreams I've had.  
the hopes I've lost...  
the chances I didn't take...  
I wonder if it will leave a message.*

*So many things to do, so few of them mean so little.  
Not enough to go find a reason to pursue what we really  
want...  
My dreams are falling...  
and I forgot to tie them off.*

*I wonder if they will sustain the fall...  
if they will still be there when I am done climbing...*

At this point I didn't really have much choice, the 'conversation' had ended and Crystal was giving me a look that suggested if I didn't let her whimper at me it'd just be worse later. I hung up and turned my phone off so that it couldn't bother me while I was at work. "So, where were we, Crystal?" I said with my sweetest tone and my fakest smile. Though I could've sworn I heard my phone giggle as I walked in to open up.

§ § §

The rest of the morning passed with no event. At least nothing I'm going to bore you with (it's a restaurant... we make food, the hell do you want?). It wasn't till after the lunch rush that *something* peculiar happened. I was just done helping the kitchen finish up when Susan came to me.

Now Susan, she's a dear. Far too old to be a waitress; she's going to break a hip one of these days, I swear. Anyhow, she came to me about how the POS... Oh, right. POS. Point Of Sales, or just a piece of shit. It works both ways, to be honest. The console was acting up. She was

trying to place an order into the system but it just kept on putting it through as our sweet potato waffle fries for some reason.

To make matters even stranger it didn't even ring it up to the right *table*—it was ringing it up to the bar. I had to do my manager thing, stick in the key, do a manual override, see if it would do anything and... nothing. Just more sweet potato waffle fries for the empty seat at the end of the bar.

After a few minutes of this I rang the order in and went to the kitchen to tell them to just put it through without making it. Just as they did that, the screen just started *flooding* with orders of the damned things. Growling in frustration, I simply told them to make an order of damned fries and went to the office to call the company that serviced the damn things: ASUS, or MAYTECH, or something like that. Hell, may have even been CISCO for all I cared to look.

It was a hell of a day and enough was enough. Pranksters on my phone, my food order system was throwing a tantrum like a child... I didn't even want to *think* of what was going to come next. On the phone, once connected to the company, I got an odd message telling me that they were busy with calls and to be patient, or call back later. After sitting there for about ten minutes I

hung up and sighed, heading back to the front.

I went to see how things were going back in the kitchen. It seemed that after the fries were actually getting *made* the system had started behaving again. Orders were going through just fine. I picked up the fries and headed over to the bar and just stared at them a bit. They were delicious things. Waffle-cut sweet potatoes deep fried in shortening and sprinkled with cinnamon and brown sugar while still hot. Who *wouldn't* want them?

With a sigh of resignation, I picked one up and began to bring it to my mouth when it was abruptly yanked from my hand. Suddenly starting to attention, I looked about to see who the hell had grabbed it and, instead of the usual jack-ass Tim, or even Eric, his friend, there was a swarm of little lights congregating over the bowl and devouring its contents.

Before I had time collect my thoughts on the whole matter, my phone buzzed. Narrowing my eyes and not remembering having turned it back on, I reached down to find the notification that I had a text message with no sender. Just a text message.

*We want some too!*

There really was only one response to this: Whiskey.

Tango. Foxtrot. I mean *honestly*. There were pixies, fucking *pixies*, toying with our damned POS for sweet potato fries! What else could they have been? Laughing little balls of glowing light could only mean, in my limited understanding of the supernatural, pixies. And now gods-know-what was inhabiting my damned cell phone.

Some of you are *probably* wondering how I know they're pixies. That's simple: what the hell *else* do you call floating, giggling bits of light invisibly screwing around with electronics? Honestly. The people I have to work with some days.

Now, this is usually the point in which I moan about not being trained to deal with this sort of thing but in all honesty manager training is about as useful as a sock full of semi-firm mud. There is a use for it, sure, but it's only in some odd sort of sport in which the rules state you need to hit your opponent with said sock for the crowd's pleasure.

Team building, trust exercises, all that silliness don't really apply outside of the training seminars. Really, they're only useful for making the higher ups smile at our misery during their "motivational seminars". Part of why I work at a locally owned joint is that there *are* no regional supervisors. None of those silly suits who know as much

about running a restaurant as they do how to crochet socks for paraplegic war veterans. But I've worked for chain places before and I know how they work.

However, dealing with children who call themselves adults and think they're a big part of the world? Plenty of experience there. I mean, that's what I get to lovingly call staff around here. Pixies couldn't be *too* much different. Throwing tantrums when things don't go their way, or when they get hungry and are all grouchy if not fed right...

*Yeah, I think can deal with this. Let's hope the third shift manager is as optimistic as I am. Maybe I should leave them a note. Hmm... It would be the responsible thing to do... But the amusing thing to do would be to not tell them and review the security camera footage tomorrow. Choices, choice, I thought.*

In the interest of keeping my place of work from going down in flames, I spent the last few minutes of my shift writing a short memo for the night shift and arranging a meeting. I kept it short, and not very specific. I mean... mention pixies and they'll think you're crazy. Just tell them to deliver the damned order to the bar and leave it there, and that there will be a meeting over this matter next Monday. Peachy.

With that done, I left rather quickly. I mean, if those

really *were* pixies you never know what they're up to, and just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're *not* out to get you after all. I was fairly certain I was stuck with the one in my phone anyhow; I mean it had been with me since late last night when all this insanity had first started.

I would have liked to say that the ride home was uneventful, but you know how it is when you give a ride to a friend, who keeps on fiddling with the radio station? Yeah. It was a lot like that. Only I couldn't reach over and swat'em across the head for being prats. It was a lot like playing tug of war with an invisible five-year-old. Giggling and everything. I wanted to listen to something decent, but the damned... I don't even know if it was the car itself or the thing in my phone. It kept switching the radio station from my usual station to some new-age nonsense that made me want to set my hair on fire. Either way, I won in the end. See, during the ride I had figured out their weakness. I told them if they didn't stop messing with the radio there would be no more waffle fries.

Oh yeah, I forgot to mention, I brought home a large order of the things. Always be prepared. Needless to say I figured right. Those delicious little heart attacks were like the rains near the river Nile. Control of them made me

God, and as cranky as I was from this new development in my life, it was one that I fully intended to abuse.

Walking in the door, I looked around to get a full appraisal of what exactly was in my home. On my small kitchen table in that comfortable apartment of mine I emptied out the bag of fresh sweet potato waffle fries, and offered them up with a declaration. “All here who want some of these better make themselves present and accounted for!”

I figured that the secret was taking after that voice my father adopted when he wanted to summon every last child in the household. And it seemed to work. In moments, little sparkling lights flooded into the kitchen and began to dive on the potatoes, and for the most part I let them. I left out to shower; it had been a long day.

My shower was entirely uneventful, thanks for asking. Damn faeries.

§ § §

*With this series of events there is some clarification to be had. Magic had returned to the world and, rather than as many might have wished and wondered, it didn't re-converge the entire world back to how it was. That isn't what magic was, what it is. Things once mundane yet complex were given a new*

*breath of life. Science and technology weren't radically changed, but a core principle was added: any machine or device that reaches a sufficient level of complexity gives birth to its own spirit.*

*Cars and radios now knew who their owners were, and smart phones were not just smart but cleverly mischievous. On a small note, individual fairies were tied to the phone number, rather than a specific device. This also really cut down on telemarketers, much to every one's delight. Political rallies started to protect the fae, political movements started to try and eliminate the fae. It was all a big ugly mess as things were prone to be. Though anti-fae forces didn't get far—it's really hard to organize a rally when your phone won't work and you can't get onto the internet. Really annoying.*

# A Night Off

*by Dave Rudden*

Once a year I shut my doors. One of my punters was an American who worked in some fancy marketing company. He used to laugh drunkenly when he heard about my rule of closing, citing in a voice thick with alcohol and buzzwords all the money that could be made by opening on that particular day—the costume parties, the promotions, demographics and trends, rolling off figures from the pockets of his expensive suit. I would always shrug and say that I made enough, that it was a tradition, and then I'd shuffle over to empty an ashtray or wipe a surface, the bartender's universal signal that the conversation was over.

It'd come around to that particular day and my usual opening time would come and go quietly, as if unwilling

to disturb the silence on that cold morning. I'd spend my morning sitting in the deserted bar, without my sprinkling of hardened regulars looking to kill a morning beneath betting slips and Guinness. I'd clean during those gained hours, tracing the familiar lines of my bar with a cloth, carefully dusting paintings and ornaments. I'd eat my lunch in the back office over receipts and invoices, rendering a year of nights and drinks and laughter into a couple of neat little columns on snow-white paper. Outside, the day would drag on, the wind and dark rising beyond the shutters.

I keep a staff of about five, but they know that this night is always a night off. Sometimes I'd press a fifty into their hand so I could be sure they'd go out and enjoy their night, not grumble about the lost pay. I had a girl here once that the punters loved, quick on her feet and mad about the horses, always ready with a joke in her broad Glasgow accent. She was a great girl, but she got too curious about my tradition and I had to let her go. Didn't like doing it, but it was better than the constant questions and what could have gone wrong had she dropped around to quench her curiosity.

It would be around seven that they would come.

I never look too closely, keeping myself busy with tap-checks or the careful stacking of glasses, but since the

doors were bolted and shuttered it's a brave man's guess where they come from. I would sometimes look up, just for a moment, and see a flicker of light around a keyhole or the shadow of movement at a painting, but the first thing you learn in this trade is to keep to yourself, to respond but not query, to nod and to smile, hearing orders not voices, drinks and not faces. They were good punters; they kept to themselves, never left a mess, and so I didn't complain.

The American would have been pleased to know that their money was good, if a little cold.

They drink wine, whiskey, brandy and scotch. Some drink beer, but only the rough, flavourful European stuff, not the tasteless American brands. Glasses would be left up on the bar, so I never had to weave between the flickering, monochrome shapes to collect, even though a little part of me wanted to. Just curiosity, no more than my Glasgow girl, but a part of me was smart enough to know when I was being done a favour. I'd serve my time, keeping an eye on the old Famous Grouse-branded clock on the wall above the mantelpiece, counting the minutes until closing.

When the night was ending I'd flick the lights, trying not to notice how some of the punters held their own glow, shimmering like moonlight on water or a firefly somehow trapped in the folds of a diamond. When a bartender dims

the lights, it's an unspoken signal, that subtle hint that this night, like any night, was ending. We call it the 'half-hour of grace'. It would pass without incident, except for those rare nights where I'd see one of the drinkers rise from the corner of my eye and lift a glass in something that wasn't quite a hand. Out of respect I would turn to the till, and my fingers would shake as I counted the notes into even, crinkled piles while the punters' song rose around me.

When I would pull together the courage to turn around, they would always be gone.

I avoid thinking about them much over the year. I try and lose myself in the Christmas rush, in New Year's and Valentine's and Paddy's Day and all those other nights where the living take their turn to toast the dead. It works, for the most part. It's a night like any other night, just something I've always kept to myself. A duty I've been doing for years. There are times though, when their light shimmers across the stacked bottles on my shelf, times when I think about calling that girl from Glasgow and letting her know that there's still a job here, and a single night when I keep the shutters down and the kegs full. Not for a couple of years yet, though.

I'm not ready to move to the other side of the bar.

# Hot Stuff

*by Stephanie Jordan*

**D**o you know the Muffin Man?"

The bar was crowded. I knew my whispered words would not be overheard. Still, the wolf-man at my side stiffened and looked around. His ear twitched.

"Which muffin man?" he asked, his gravelly voice barely audible above the drunken laughter and heated arguments around us. I gave him a pointed look.

"You know which one."

He sighed and downed the rest of his drink.

"Come with me."

We stood in the alley behind the pub. It was dark — I could barely see Big Bad's form leaning against the dirty brick wall. The only indication he was still there was the flashing of his golden eyes.

He took a pack of cigarettes out of his leather jacket pocket and lit up, providing a little illumination, if only for a few seconds. After a few puffs, he decided to speak.

“Drury Lane.”

“What was that?”

“He lives on Drury Lane. The Muffin Man.”

I kicked away a stray piece of garbage.

“So I heard.”

“What you need him for?”

I swallowed.

“Blueberry.”

His eyes widened as he regarded me with shock. The cigarette nearly fell out of his mouth. He struggled to find the words to express his astonishment.

“Blueberry,” he repeated lamely. He shook his head. “Well, he doesn’t make blueberry much anymore. Keeps it on the D.L. They’ve been cracking down hard on it, you know?”

“Oh, I know,” I said, probably more darkly than I’d intended. Big Bad looked at me strangely, as if seeing me for the first time, and stuffed his paws in his pockets. I cleared my throat.

“I know. I used to get my fix from the Muffin Man before the big raid on Dorset. I haven’t been able to find him since.”

“Ah.” He let out a grunt of sympathy. “Well, he’s relocated to number 14 Drury. That’s pretty much all I can do for you.”

I nodded.

“Thanks.” I turned to leave, but was stopped by his voice.

“Hey, wait a sec, will you?” He whipped out a business card from his jacket and handed it to me. “In case you need to contact me again.”

I nodded acceptance and slipped the card into my own pocket. He went back into the bar. I turned to leave. Once I’d made it out onto the cobble-stoned street, I looked at it beneath the flickering light of a street-lamp.

*Big Bad Wolf*

*Demolitions Expert*

*Specialist in many fields and forests*

The house was nearly the same as the last one. Three stories. Brick façade. Tall and skinny, with little room on either side. I squeezed through, making my way toward the back. The back yard was concrete, and a dog lay chained to a rickety doghouse. A small sparrow sat perched atop the roof of the mutt’s shack. They glared at me as I walked up to the back door.

I used the old code. Four knocks, pause, four knocks.

The door opened as far as it could while being chained shut, a familiar eye peeking out through the crack. The door closed and the chain was undone. The Muffin Man opened the door, warm light and heavenly smells spilling out and engulfing me.

“Hello,” he said, a slow smile spreading across his face. “So you’ve found me again.”

“So it seems.”

He opened the door further, allowing space for me to step inside.

“Do come in,” he said. “I’ve just taken a batch out of the oven.”

“Blueberry?” I asked almost desperately. His smile widened.

“Just as you like it.”

# Dragon Lady

*by Ashley Dearborn*

Jason Feltcher was an average man. He was six feet tall (and one inch) with a dashing smile and a quick-witted attitude that left people almost breathless. It was no wonder, then, that he was a traveling salesman. He often joked that being a door-to-door man was a dead art that should be revived, and that was one of the few jokes he had that inevitably left people cringing.

Yes, it was a hard life. The number of people who slammed their doors in Jason's face was far greater than those who stopped to listen about the wonderful product he sold. And what did he sell? Why, nothing short of the most amazing set of knives and cutlery in the world! Solid titanium, sharp as a razor and shinier than a fistful of diamonds. He always loved it when he reached the end of his sales pitch and got to say: "Don't shop smart, shop

sharp!”

It was, without a doubt, the finest product in the world and it deserved a fine owner (or two or three). This was what brought him to Hilltop. It was a legendary place amongst those who could sell and be sold, a place for the wealthy and the powerful... or as close to that as it got in this town. The economy had been rough on his kind so the pickings were slim. Most people were on watch for him in this neighborhood. Some even had signs up: No solicitation! But did this stop Jason? No, never. He'd have that door slammed in his face a hundred times and a hundred times over before he gave up because of a little sign!

Of course, there were hazards. Dogs were always a problem, and cats too if you weren't careful. And the occasional pet snake. But the biggest problem *had* to be small children. They could distract a potential buyer or be set loose on you! After all, little children couldn't be scolded for kicking a salesman in the knee (or worse, higher up). Who would buy from him if he yelled at their children?

Steeled with this knowledge, Jason approached the first door. It looked promising (or maybe he just thought that because it was painted yellow, a warm, inviting color that called to him like a moth to a flame). He rang the

doorbell and stood there waiting until the door was cracked open and a head popped out. Oily black hair and the frowning face of a teenager: disaster. He worked up his best smile and spoke quickly before the boy could open his mouth.

“Why hello there, young fellow! My name is Jason Feltcher. You can call me Jason. Is the Mister or Misses of the house at home? May I speak with them? And how are you this fine day?”

A swift and purposeful attack if ever he had mustered one but this young fellow was no dull blade himself. He narrowed his dark eyes at our hero's assault of cheerfulness and frowned deeply. “No. They're both at work. Yanno, at a REAL job. The kind that doesn't wake people up before the crack of noon. Beat it, Jason.” He spat the name out like an insult or vile curse, and slammed the door shut.

Jason stood there for a moment with his hand rubbing the back of his neck. “Crack of noon?” he muttered to himself. Kids these days! Well, one down, and more to go.

He walked swiftly back to his car and started it up, eyes trailing down the street until he saw another door he liked: a deep, polished rose color. He took a moment to ponder: why did he only stop at colorful doors? That

wouldn't be very productive for sales, but it had seemed to work out alright thus far. Jason fired up the engine and pulled away from the curb, still considering that eternal quandary, though he let it go as he approached his target. He stepped out of his car once it was parked and approached the door, pausing a moment to push back his hair and make sure he had his best smile prepared before he rang the doorbell. This time it didn't open at all and yet another danger to the common salesman appeared: the peephole! Like the mythic Beholder, this all-seeing-eye was the sort of thing that would keep your foot out of the door. A voice came muffled from the rosy wood of the door, "Get offa mah propidy yeh lanky bastage!"

Jason's jaw dropped open. "D—did you just call me a *bastage*?" He wasn't offended, in truth he more surprised to hear such nonexistent words as "propidy" and "bastage" used on this street. His mind wandered. Perhaps it was some naval officer who—*CLICK*. That was a sound he knew too well. A sound that meant the final 'stop-all' for even the heartiest of his kind: a gun.

"Ah said, git offa mah propidy! Take that nonsense up the Hill! Go talk to the Dragon Lady, she likes all that crap y'all sell!"

Dragon Lady? On top of the hill? Perhaps a goldmine, but he didn't have time to ask questions. He had heard

the click and it was time to go! “Th—thank you for your time s—sir!” He stammered and beat his feet back to his car.

That was one of the many Unspoken Rules of his trade. Gun meant leave, of course, but there was also a clause to that rule: the “Click Clause” stated quite plainly that in the event of a Click, one must take a break to calm down. The classic way of doing this, of course, was a soda and a candy bar at the local gas station. Jason drove away from Hilltop, and went to the nearest service station. He was greeted by the sterile looking glass doors of most any gas station, the kind that made him feel like this was a sanctuary, a place where selling didn’t matter, only buying, and resting. The taverns of old had been replaced with these stout buildings of shimmering glass and brick, the bar replaced with a counter full of goodies, and the wooden seats made to smooth plastic booths.

It was within this peaceful place that he also decided to grab some information to go with his soda and candy bar. Walking up to the counter with his smile and his purchases, he looked at the attendant: a wizened looking man of unknown heritage. It was here, he was sure, he’d find his needed tip off on this ‘Dragon Lady’.

“Hey there, my friend!” he said in his cheerful way. Noting the coming frown on the man’s face he spoke up

quickly. “No—no, I’m not trying to sell you anything. I just wanted to ask you about something someone said to me earlier. What’s this about a Dragon Lady on the Hilltop?”

The man grinned, showing a row full of white teeth around his burnished bronze looking mouth, “Ooooh. The Dragon Lady, you say?” Jason was immediately struck by how romantic the man’s voice sounded. Mild baritone, rolling “R’s” and a melodic undertone that left him wondering where this man’s accent came from.

“The Dragon Lady is a local legend. No one seems to know which story is true, though. Some say she’s a hoarder. She buys up everything and keeps it hidden away in that big house on top of the hill. Others say she’s got a fearsome temper and that many who go up there don’t come back down.”

Jason couldn’t help himself. He grabbed up his purchases and threw some money down on the counter. “Keep the change, my friend! Thank you for the information. Quick though our meeting might be, I have a date with destiny!” Rhyming seemed to be common today, he noted in his absent minded sort of way, and again made a mad dash for his trusty steed: a Ford something-or-other with more miles on it than any vehicle should possess. Once inside, he drank his soda and plied himself with the candy bar as he drove back

towards Hilltop. "Dragon Lady, eh? Hoarder? Sounds like my lucky day!"

Once back on Hilltop Drive he paused to look up the hill where the man with the gun had instructed him to go. The house didn't look all *that* foreboding. Well, not if you were Count Dracula. It was an old Victorian-style manor house with the kind of windows that reminded one of eyes staring back at you. A black, wrought-iron fence and a serious case of overgrowth surrounded the property with a sense of inevitable foreboding. What if the other side of the legend was true? What if she had a fearsome temper? What if she was a crazy person?

"Easy now, Jason. This could be your big score, don't blow it by running away." He steeled himself with the thought of the all consuming Bonus. One good hoarder and the Bonus would be in the bag for him this month. One good Bonus, and he could take some time off!

He pushed the car into drive and began the trek up the Hill. Slowly but surely, Jason inched his way up the long drive to park in the circle, making sure his front wheels faced out in case he had to beat a hasty retreat. Once roused, he imagined this Dragon Lady could get pretty rough, if her name was any indication.

Stepping out of his car, he straightened his suit and grabbed up his briefcase. He took a few moments to

check his inner coat pocket for the sample he kept there, just in case he got his chance to show off his wares. Kept in a smooth leather case, the long butcher's knife was the pride of his collection of cutlery and could startle even the most shrewish of housewives into a fit of purchasing. Stepping up to the door, he huffed and smiled his best smile before he rang the doorbell.

At first, he imagined the great lady of the house didn't hear him as there was no stirring behind the door. No sounds of television being turned up to block him out, no angry footsteps. So again he rang, and again: nothing. With a frown, he waited and counted to ten before ringing one last time. If there was no answer then he would ply his trade elsewhere. There was still no response. It was with a heavy heart he started to turn, imagining that golden Bonus sneaking away from him, when he felt something strange: a hint of heat at his heels. He looked back at the door in surprise to see smoke curling out of the edge of the door. *Dragon Lady indeed!* It popped open to reveal a woman in a red robe with stringy hair, smoking a cigarette. She had waspish features, the kind that made him cringe and wonder if she really was short of temper, but Jason never balked! He smiled his smile, and stepped back to the door.

"Good morning, Madame, and may I say what a

wonderful robe that is you're wearing! My name is Jason Feltcher. Just call me Jason. I'm here from Fantastic Cutlery, and I'd like to sho—"

"How much?" She asked suddenly, interrupting him. With a gulp and a renewed smile, he tried to regain his footing on his pitch. Never deliver price up front; sell the product before you ask to see a wallet.

"Well ma'am, with our Penultimate Package there are 48 pieces of fine kitchen apparel as well as a free cutting board! If I could just sho—"

Again she cut him off, this time with a wave of her hand curling smoke from her cigarette drifting towards him. The smell made him twitch his nose: an acerbic scent with a hint of an earthy tone to it. What brand was *that*? But then she was speaking and his attention snapped back to her. "Come in, come in. Let's get it over with," she said in her haggard tone, opening the door and stepping in without waiting for him.

Jason allowed himself a victory fist-pump in the air before practically skipping into the door, shutting it behind him. *Golden opportunity, here we come!* The word "Bonus" floated through his mind several times before he calmed himself and prepared to give his pitch.

She lead him down the entrance hall, past several beautiful paintings and tapestries, most of them of

mountains and a volcano or two, until she lead him to a large living room with vaulted ceilings and a long divan which she slumped down on without the slightest hesitation. He was disappointed to see no hoard lying around, no cache of made for TV or door to door products just hanging about all over the place. It was actually a fairly tidy room. His reverie was interrupted by her gravelly voice. "So whaddya selling? Hurry up and show it."

He smiled and cleared his throat, reaching into his inner coat pocket to pull out the long, sheathed butcher's knife, the prize of his collection. Before displaying it, he set his briefcase on the floor beside him to leave his hands free to gesticulate. "Madame, I present to you the prize of Fantastic Cutlery's Titan line, the prize of any king or queen's kitchen: the Excalibur! This masterwork kitchen accessory can cut through almost anything, even wood, which is why our Penultimate Package comes with a stone cutting board to protect your counter tops from the vastly superior edge of the Excalibur. Why, you could even slay a dragon with this thing!"

Her eyes suddenly widened from their drooping, calculating gaze, as she regarded him sharply. "What was that? What did you say? Slay a what?"

Jason swallowed nervously and realized he may have

made a mistake, but he again applied his salesman's smile and said, "Slay a dragon, madam. It's just an industry term, we don't advise you to use the Excalibur for—"

She cut him off yet again, smoke issuing from her nose and mouth as she spoke. "Slay a dragon, you say?" she said in an almost hissing tone. He suddenly realized she had no cigarette in her hand now, and yet smoke continued to billow from her mouth and nose. As she raised herself up she seemed to be getting longer at the waist, though Jason was too focused on the smoke to pay particular attention to that.

"Slay a dragon? I'd like to see it do something like *THAT!*" And with that final word she burst from her robe, a slithery, scaly creature with two sets of legs and one set of arms, each ended with razor sharp talons. He noted, with a surprising lack of shock, that her scales were brown, not green. That earthy, smoky smell filled the room just as she did, reaching up towards the ceiling with her massive length.

"Oh my..." he breathed just as the Dragon Lady bellowed, a hot jet of lava-hot flame spilling from her maw straight at him. He grabbed his briefcase and lifted it up in the air. The fire struck it, knocking him to his knees where he dropped his knife, and continued to spew

around the edges of the case nearly singing his fingers. He felt the hot, thick miasma that came off of her breath stealing the air from his lungs, making him gasp for each precious mouthful of clean air until the deluge of flame was over.

Dragon Lady stared down in surprise as she saw the salesman deflect her attack. That briefcase... something about it wasn't right. When the leather peeled and melted away under her breath, she saw a metal plate beneath, with a crest representing a man holding a shield above his head, sword in other hand. "SLAYER!" she hissed.

Jason retrieved his knife and unsheathed it, hefting his briefcase with one hand and looking up, unafraid, to the dragon in front of him. "That's right, madam. And you're an Earth Dragon. I recognized the scent when I came in the door. Correct? Good. I don't have to worry about you flying away."

The Dragon Lady, now fully revealed as a Dragon, let out a screeching roar before darting her head down to snap at him. Her snout bounced off the metal plate of the briefcase, sending her into a fury. She slashed down at him with her clawed hands, trying to get past that wretched metal. It had been wrought in the old days when creatures like her had ruled the earth. Each swipe was repelled by an expertly timed thrust of the briefcase,

and Jason smiled his best salesman's smile. He had her angry now, off balance. That was all he would need.

She was an old one, that was for sure. Probably on her last legs already. Her hide was starting to shed for the final time, but that could take centuries more. Luckily for him, he hadn't been alive when the world was young and these things were in their prime. No, he was the new breed of dragon slayer and almost all of the young ones had died off by now.

Jason hefted his knife in front of him, holding it like he would a sword. "You know what I am, madam, and what this is. But allow me to offer you this in-home demonstration anyway!" As her arm came down again he slashed above his head, severing the clawed hand at the wrist, ears ringing with her sounded fury as the enchanted titanium split through her scales and past her bone, leaving a clean wound behind it that would refuse to heal, even under her arcane powers.

Dragon Lady staggered back and roared, sending a jet of flame straight up. It roasted over the ceiling, but did no damage. Naturally, it had been enchanted to withstand the heat she could produce in a fury, otherwise it would have burned down long ago. These enchantments didn't help when her rear end broke through the wall behind her though, nor did it help the precious objects in the adjoining

room when her tail thrashed back and forth furiously.

“Slayer!” she snarled in her gravelly voice. “What have you come for? Honor? Glory? It’s nothing compared to my Hoard! I give you free pick of my treasures if you leave here now!”

Jason had been trained by big wigs of Fantastic Cutlery. He knew better than that. A dragon spoke only lies, particularly when distressed. “And what treasures are those, madam? The ones picked off of all of the salesmen who never left this cursed hill you’ve perched yourself on?”

She snarled and sent another curling bolt of fire down at him, this time in the form of a ball. He hefted his briefcase and swung it through the air, slapping the ball of flame with the flat of it, sending it hurling back towards the couch where she had tried to spring her little trap, the impact of which sent the divan flying into splinters. It was then that he struck, leaping forward and jumping off of the ottoman under him to shove the enchanted blade into her breast. “Don’t shop smart, shop sharp!” It was as good of a war cry as any. Besides, he sort of liked people thinking of him as a salesman rather than knowing the truth.

Dragon Lady screeched one last time as the enchanted knife slid between her scales and into her heart. She fell

back, right through the wall she had broken open already and into the adjoining room, crashing down through the bed and onto the floor with a resounding crack as the floor broke under her. It was with idle curiosity that he inspected her while he retrieved his knife, looking down to see the glimmer of gold in the hole she was slumped in. "So there is a hoard..." He cleaned off his knife, and calmly looked about for his briefcase. It was better for people like him not to stare at a dragon's hoard; it had strange effects on people, and would have to be picked over by the wizards before anyone could retrieve it.

Tipping his imaginary hat to the Dragon Lady, he slid the knife back in its sheath and put it in his pocket before walking back out the way he came. A hand fished for his cell phone, and he hit the first number on his speed dial.

"Yes, boss? Mmmhm. One dragon clean up at the Hilltop. That's right, earth dragon. So do I get the Bonus? *What?* I need one *more?* Double shifts! Hmm... bridge troll, you say? And it's not far from here?"

Jason let out a sigh and hung his head, "Alright, yes, yes, I know. Chin up and all of that. Call the wife and tell her I'll be in late tonight." And with that he hung up his phone and got back into his car, the door pulled shut and turned the key, causing the engine to roar to life. "Bridge Troll after a dragon? Going to be sore tomorrow. But hey,

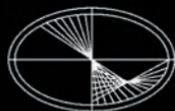
it's better than selling knives door to door!" He chuckled and pulled out of the drive just in time to see several black vans with tinted windows at the bottom of the Hill. Once the mess was cleaned up, he'd get his share of the Hoard, and after this bridge troll business, it would be time for a Bonus, and some much needed time off. Then it would be back to selling knives until the next big job came up. All things being equal, he'd rather deal with the trolls than the snobby people on Hilltop.

*For more information about Divertir Publishing  
or to purchase this collection,  
please visit  
<http://www.divertirpublishing.com/>*

Some people never “grow out of faerie tales”. For some, they’re a part of everyday life and there’s no escaping the magic and mystery that lurk around every corner. Unfortunately, sometimes that magic is downright irritating. “Damn Faeries” is a collection of faerie tales for those that never quite grew out of them. There’s no telling what surprises and horrors lie around every nook and cranny of this book. The tales within are designed to amuse and delight, inspire and entertain, and remind us that magic is only ever a pixie’s wing away.



US \$10.95



DIVERTIR  
PUBLISHING

<http://www.divertirpublishing.com/>

ISBN 978-0-9842930-2-5



9 780984 293025