

The Whiskey Gnome

By Shriya Inuzuka

I was going through what I call my luck phase. You know that phase where everything you do turns out right? Right? Well, anyway I was having one of those phases or I thought I was. In the last month I had experienced several strokes of good luck. It all started with me winning a scratch off lottery ticket for \$500. Yahoo! After my big win at the gas station and while turning down a street I had never gone down, I found a *For Rent* sign. I hadn't even been thinking about moving, even though I was unhappy in my dinky apartment. I took down the number and lo and behold it was affordable for me. I was lucky to have come across this small house in such a nice little neighborhood especially for the price. The following day after finding the house, I found out I was getting a \$2 an hour raise, which kicks in next paycheck. Sweet!

Everything went smoothly in getting the place and within the next few weeks I was all moved in. I took time off from work in order to have an easy transition. It just so happened my boyfriend ended up being out of town that week too. With my romantic plans dashed I put my attention on some much-needed alone time and settling into my new place. It was an older home but new to me, so I was getting acquainted with living there, getting to know all its creaks and moans. I expected to feel uncomfortable sleeping in a new place but surprisingly I felt at home right away that is until strange things began to happen.

The second night in my new place, I was listening to some music through my earbuds while tapping along with the beat on my headboard. At one point my earbuds fell out. While looking around in the bed for them I started to hear a soft tapping on the wall behind me. It was exactly the beat I had been tapping. What the hell? I jumped up looking under and behind my bed. There was nothing there. I tapped a few more times on the wall but I got nothing in return. I lay there for some time just listening but after a long time of hearing nothing I eventually fell asleep.

The next night I lay on my side staring at the wall that my dressing table was up against. Above the dressing table was a long window where a light from my neighbors' backyard was creating shadows on my bedroom walls, elongating them across the room. My eyes started to fixate onto one of the shadows that had a funny shape to it. It looked like a little person wearing a pointed hat. I stared at it for quite a while until my eyes started to feel heavy. I closed them for a second but when I opened them again that little man person was gone. I lay there trying to figure out why that shadow just disappeared. The more I tried to figure it out the stranger it became. I started to realize that there should not be shadows on that wall because there was no light source coming from that direction. I looked around the room but now the shadow of the little person with the pointy hat was on the opposite wall. I got up trying to figure out what could be making that shadow but there was nothing I could find that could make that shape. I lay there frozen, watching it when I swore it looked like it moved. It wasn't moving much but every now and then it looked like it was tip toeing a few steps then, stop. I watched it do this a couple of times before I jumped up and turned on the light. My heart was pounding like a jack hammer. I kept my eyes fixated on the spot but when I turned the light off, the shadow was gone. I kept turning the light on and off. Still nothing there. Obviously, I told myself, whatever had made the shadow outside had left. I decided to leave the light on for the rest of the night.

The next afternoon I was in the back courtyard putting up some outside furniture. I sat down on one of the chairs to relax. There was a thick curtain of ivy hanging over the shared wall between myself and my neighbor and I noticed something poking out from under it. I got up and pulled the ivy back only to discover an old beat-up ceramic gnome. It was chipped and faded. It had obviously been out there for some time. The little guy had a pipe to his mouth, but the tip

had been broken along with the tip of his red pointed hat. I looked at the hat and then I remembered the shadow on my wall last night. I stood for a second considering this. Naw! Don't even go there, I thought. I put the ceramic gnome in the corner of the patio and went about my day.

Throughout the week I was busy arranging furniture and unpacking but after a few days I started noticing things of mine going missing. At first, I attributed it to just misplacing things such as scissors or a cleaning rag in all the clutter. No sooner would I put something down than it disappeared, sometimes showing up in random places, other times it was just gone never to be seen or found again. I began to wonder if I had rented a haunted house.

On the fourth night of being in my new place, I decided to light my first fire. The fireplace was one of the main features that sold me on the house, and I was looking forward to having a drink in front of it. I used my lighter to light the paper and kindling before putting it down next to me on the hearth while I poked at the weak fire trying to get it going. I couldn't get the kindling to catch so I reached once more for my lighter, but it was gone. That did not make any sense. It was right here. I looked all over the area and even under the couch, but nothing. This was a bright red lighter that I had used and put down next to me only minutes ago. How could it be gone? Since that was the only lighter I had, I was none too happy about it being MIA. I couldn't shake the feeling that something was playing a trick on me.

"Alright, that's enough. Give it back. I'm getting tired of this game," I said.

My demands were met with silence. Feeling stupid for talking to the air I went into the kitchen to see if by chance I had another lighter. I rummaged around in my utility drawer, but the search was useless. I knew if I was going to have a fire tonight, I was going to have to walk a couple of blocks to the corner gas station and buy another one. I wasn't too happy about having to go out, but I did want a fire, so I grabbed my coat, purse and keys and headed out. On my way back from the gas station I saw, as clear as day in my mind's eye, my red lighter just sitting on the hearth next to the fireplace. Under my breath I said, "If that lighter is there when I get back, I'm going to lose it."

You guessed it. As soon as I walked into the living room, I could see it. I walked up to it hardly believing what I was looking at. What was going on? I had looked all over that area for that lighter and it was not there. I started walking around the room looking under things, moving boxes around and I even got the broom and made a sweep under the couch. I don't know what I was looking for, but something was taking things practically right from under my nose and then returning them. The thing was that animals usually went for food. These missing items were common household items. They weren't the kind of things that small rodents would want.

After poking around in the empty boxes a little while longer, I finally made a fire and this one took. I was still freaked out by the sudden reappearance of my lighter, but I was also feeling gratified that I had successfully lit my first fire. I poured myself a shot of Irish whiskey and lay there looking into the flames. That's right! I'm a whiskey girl and there is nothing better than a shot of whiskey while sitting next to a fire. I eventually ended up falling asleep on the floor next to it. A few hours later in my whiskey haze I thought I heard something next to my head. I opened one eye to see what it was. The fire had died down to embers and the glow of the coals shone red on the floor.

By the time I turned my head, whatever it was, sounded like it was moving around inside one of the boxes in the packing paper. Great! I got mice. I sat up to investigate it when a loud pop came from the dwindling fire and a piece of red-hot coal fell onto the floor. I pushed it back onto the hearth and got up to close the screen over the fireplace. I checked out the box that I thought the rustling was coming from, but it was empty. I was too tired from moving and putting things away to investigate further. My eyes were heavy with sleep and whiskey, so I drug myself to bed and practically passed out as I hit the mattress.

The next few days were a blur of putting things away, tearing down boxes and getting settled into my new surroundings. I didn't put out traps for mice because, first of all, I don't like

traps and secondly, I never saw anything that would lead me to think I had mice. It wasn't what I saw, it was what I was hearing at night that alerted me. I kept hearing strange scurrying noises and what sounded like someone puttering through drawers but every time I went to investigate there was nothing there and nothing seemed out of place. All these strange occurrences made me feel generally ill at ease and it began to impact my sleep.

By the time the weekend rolled around I was ready to stop working and relax in my new space. It was a fine summer evening, and I was sitting in the little courtyard to the side of the house enjoying a shot of whiskey. I was considering again; how lucky I was to have come across this small house. Most of my household items had been put in place but I still had the garage to clean out and the back courtyard to finish but I was exhausted and was looking forward to enjoying my shot of whiskey. I took a sip or two and started thinking about the faery story I was writing. I was realizing that this little courtyard was a perfect place to contemplate my stories.

The filtered, golden light from the sun poured through the trees. Ivy grew thick on this side of the house and had grown over the fence on all four sides of the courtyard and hung down to the ground like an ivy curtain. On the other side of the back fence was my neighbor's garden. It was a huge garden of flowers, vegetables and several fruit trees.

As the evening set in and the last vestiges of sunlight gilded the grape vines, that ran along the top of the fence, I noticed something out of the corner of my eye that was hovering next to a large sunflower in my neighbor's garden. At first, I took it for a bee. I sat there quietly observing it, hovering around the dark face of the flower, when I realized that the filtered light of the setting sun back lit what appeared to have two legs, two arms, a head and a pair of wings. I frowned, sat my whiskey down and stood up to get a better view.

I was shocked! My conscious mind said, "That was a bee." But my sub-conscious said "That was no bee! What in the heck was that? I swear, it looked like a damn faery!" I glanced over to the faded ceramic gnome that sat at the corner of the courtyard. It kind of creeped me out since as a child I saw shadows that looked like dwarfs marching behind the wallpaper of my bedroom at night. I considered getting rid of it, but I wondered if that would be a good idea. Weren't they considered to be lucky for the homeowner? I mean, my luck seemed to have gotten a lot better.

I picked up my shot glass just to make sure how much I had left. It was practically full. Certainly, I had not had enough to hallucinate. Common sense started to take over and I thought to myself, it was probably an insect of some type, but then I thought, what if it wasn't? My heart fluttered with excitement. What if it really was a faery? Peering through the grape leaves I stood very still not wanting to startle it. It kept darting back and forth across the sunflower's dark chocolate face and then suddenly it flew straight up to the branches of a tall, eucalyptus tree before disappearing from view.

Trying to make sense of what I had seen, I went back to the table, sat down and took another sip of my whiskey. Could it have been a real faery? As a child, I thought I had seen them, but all the adults just chalked it up to my vivid imagination. However, I began to consider that if there were faeries around my house maybe I should leave an offering or gift for them. I had learned from faery folklore that they liked gifts such as porridge and honey milk. I looked at my shot glass and chuckled. Maybe they might like some whiskey, I thought.

I held my glass up high and gave a toast. "This is for any gnomes, leprechauns or brownies that might be passing by," I said, as I poured the shot glass full of whiskey and left it on the ground for easy access.

I went back into the house and by the time I went to bed I had forgotten all about it. However, in the wee hours of the morning, I was startled awake by what felt like tiny feet running all over my back. I turned over abruptly and yelled without hesitation, "Hey! What are you doing?"

What I saw made my blood run cold. A small stocky man, approximately a foot high, wearing brown britches, a green shirt and a red pointed hat, was stumbling drunk across my covers. I could barely breathe and felt frozen to the spot. He suddenly lunged at my toe wrapping his legs around my entire foot and started humping it. I shook my foot as hard as I could to get the little guy off, but he held tight.

"Stop it!" I yelled frantically. "What do you think you're doing?"

But he would not stop. He just kept dry humping my foot. I was afraid to touch it, so I started shaking my foot violently to get him off, but he held tight as if he were in a tempest at sea holding onto the mast for dear life. I didn't know what to do so I took my finger and flicked him on the head. His pointy red hat flew off over the foot of the bed and he shocked me by taking a flying leap trying to catch his hat in midair.

I sat up on my knees looking around the edges of the bed wondering where he went. As much as I didn't want him on me, I also didn't want him running around in my bedroom and I certainly didn't want any more foot humping to go on. I peered cautiously over the end of the bed. There he was, climbing up the comforter, like a tiny mountaineer, with his hat back on his head. I slowly scooted myself back towards my headboard. When he got to the top of the bed, he adjusted his hat. He did not look happy. He began jumping up and down yelling, what I surmised were curse words. I couldn't understand the language he was using but it was clear he was reaming me a new one.

He took a few steps towards me and looked me square in the eye. I reared back not knowing what he was going to do. I had visions of him jumping onto my face and taking a bite out of my nose. Thankfully, he did not jump or bite but instead crossed his arms across his barrel chest. "You don't treat your guests very kindly," he said accusingly, as he glared at me.

"Guest!" I said in surprise. "When did I invite you?" Was I really sitting there talking to a little man?

"If you thinks back to the morrow you might remembers sitting out a bit of whiskey and making a call to the faery folk to give it a try. That be an invitation where I comes from," he said tersely, placing a hand on his hip.

"Oh!" I said weakly since I never really believed anyone was listening. I mean, what are the odds of a faery passing by right then or at any time as far as that goes?

"There I was," continued the little man, "mindin me own business, as it were, just sittin for a spell behind the ivy when I hears a voice announcing that any gnome, leprechaun or brownie within earshot could take a sip or two ... and so I did."

I sat there dumfounded in utter amazement. Who would believe such a thing was possible?

The little guy staggered his way across the covers and ended up leaning against a pillow. "And a mighty good sip it was," he said, closing his eyes remembering.

That made me smile because that was also my favorite whiskey. "So, which one are you? A gnome, leprechaun or brownie?"

He opened one eye to look at me. "Well, faith be! What do you think I be?"

"Huh, I don't know. A brownie?" I asked, hazarding a guess.

"Do you see me wearin all brown running around tidying up the place?" he said, as though he were explaining something so obvious to a complete moron. "I'll give you one more tries at it and if you can't answer proper, I be on my way, whiskey or no," he warned.

I sat there contemplating the answer and was hoping I would get his name wrong. Even though I write about faeries and have believed in them since I saw them as a child, being face to face with one in the middle of the night running around on my bed dry humping my foot was creepy.

"I don't know," I conceded. "I'm not a faery expert but if I had to guess it would be a gnome."

At that the little guy started jumping up and down and dancing a jig. "Then you be right and for that you be gettin a gift. But first, how about a splash more whiskey?" he asked slyly, eyeing the whiskey bottle.

"There's nothing to pour it into. I left the shot glass outside." I said, starting to come up with what I thought was a fool proof plan to trick him. "I'll just open the door and you go out and get it," I suggested trying to sound nonchalant.

The gnome put a finger up to his temple and began tapping it considering this suggestion. His eyes opened wide as though an idea had just been dropped into his little gnome noggin. He took off his pointy hat and held it out with both hands. "Here! This be good enough. Fill it to the brim!"

"In your hat?" I asked, in dismay at the turn of events.

"Where do you think the sayin, pour it to the brim, came from?" he asked, laughing heartily.

With my plan to get him out of the house gone awry, I felt deflated. "Yeah, that's funny all right," I said, while he held the hat up even higher.

"I don't know if that's a good idea," I said. "I don't want you to pass out on my bed."

"It would take a great deal more than that for me to pass out. Go on lass! Pour us a full one," he encouraged.

Seeing that there was no way to get around it I poured it, as he said to the brim. He put it to his lips, tipped it up and started chugging it down. Gulp after gulp he took until it was all gone. He then shook the excess whiskey out of his hat and put it back on his head.

"Okay, you've had your whiskey now where's my gift?"

"I'll give you one question," said the clever gnome.

"Oh, that's what you'll give me? An answer to a question. What kind of gift is that?"

The gnome lifted his hands up into the air as if beseeching a higher presence. "Aye, but I have a slow one here. Can you not see the merit of this you bein a writer of faery stories and all," he said?

From underneath his red, pointy hat, a thin stream of whiskey started running down his craggy face. It sluiced its way down a deep wrinkle to the corner of his mouth. His tiny tongue flicked out involuntarily and licked it up.

Actually, I was starting to see the merit of his gift. "You're right, but I have a lot more questions than just one," I said, in hopes he would relent to a least two.

"One question is what I offer. Don't be greedy or I'll take that one back as well," he warned, with a stern look of disapproval.

"This," I said, "coming from the gnome who asked for two drinks after only one was offered."

He looked a bit puzzled. He took off his hat and started scratching his head as if trying to figure out a clever comeback but failed miserably. "You've got me there lass. Two it be then," he conceded.

I gave him a triumphant smile. "First question. I think I saw a faery yesterday in the next-door garden and I'm wondering why I don't see fairies on my side of the fence."

"Same reason I had to go through the hole. It's the iron horseshoes you've got along the length of the fence," he said. "Faeries don't like iron. You've put up a natural barrier that they won't cross. What do you think the putting up of horseshoes is all about?"

"I didn't put them up. They were already here. I didn't even think about it to tell you the truth. Why don't they like iron?"

"Iron is for the dense and heavy humans," said the gnome. "It was during the iron age when humans claimed Christianity as their new religion, turning their backs on the Fae and nature itself. Only the metals of silver and gold are pure enough for a faery."

"You're a faery and you came over into my yard," I said, a little confused.

"I didn't go over the back fence. I used that hole under the ivy that divides you and your next-door neighbor. It's the same hole the rat's and gophers use. When I saw one of them go through it, I did too! And now that I know whiskey is on this side of the fence, I reckon I'll be comin over more often," he said licking his lips in anticipation.

I was more than a little alarmed at this confession. I wouldn't mind so much if he stayed outside but apparently, he was able to get into the house with no trouble at all whether that was through another hole or he was just able to appear and disappear at will. Faery or not, the idea of a miniature gnome running around inside my house gave me the heebie jeebies. "How did you get inside?" I wondered, making a mental plan to cover it up so he couldn't do it again.

He started to laugh and dance around maniacally. "That's for you to discover as I've already answered question number two" he laughed gleefully. "And that's the end of you."

With that he ran to the edge of the bed and made his way down the covers like a mountain climber descending the summit and ran lickety split right into the closet. I quickly ran over and threw open the closet doors, but he was nowhere to be seen. I picked up clothes, turned over empty boxes, and shook out my shoes, but found nothing. He had quite literally disappeared.

I got back into bed and sat there keeping watch in case he had any ideas of sneaking back. I kept my eyes open for as long as I could but before I realized it, I had fallen asleep. When I woke up in the morning I was left to wonder. Was that a dream or had it really happened? Since it was my habit to write my dreams down every morning, I sat at my computer to write it down. As I got to the part about the iron horseshoes. It hit me! Voila! The influence of iron upon fairies was just what I needed to use in my story for my Elven hero to be captured. Brilliant!

I still wasn't sure if it had been a dream or not, but I considered it an important and integral gift, for my faery story, whether from a real gnome or a dream. By afternoon, I had convinced myself that it must have been a dream. I mean, even though weird things were going on in the house I was leaning towards ghostly activity not gnome activity. For the next few hours, I began to write on my faery story now that I had the piece, I needed to finish my scene. I finished the first draft before standing up and stretching. I went to the back door and opened it and there stood that creepy, old ceramic gnome and in front of it was the empty shot glass I had left outside the night before. I looked at it in horror. It had not been a dream. The message was clear and literally in my face. Give me whiskey and I will let you in on what I know.

I put the ceramic gnome back into the corner of the courtyard, which freaked me out, since I was wondering if it was the statue that was coming alive at night. I thought that the statue coming alive was creepier than a real live gnome running around so I completely dismissed that idea. Later that night, I placed a full shot glass of Irish whiskey in front of the bunged-up statue with a note that stated, *Terms of agreement: I want information on the Fae's. You want whiskey. When I leave the shot glass full you have permission to come into my dreams to answer one question for me. You do not have permission to enter my bedroom and run around like a drunk crazy ass gnome. That is my human sanctuary. I do not go tromping around in your gnome sanctuary so show some respect. Also, stop taking stuff from me. It is not yours and it is not funny.*

"All right little guy! Drink up, cuz you and I got some shit to shoot!"

It might have been my imagination, but I swear when I started walking away, I could hear a little chuckle from that little whiskey gnome.