

A Fractured Fairy Tale

By Daniel Barclay

Once upon a time there was a poor family of woodcutters living in the woods. They lived a poor and meager existence, but their daughter, having read the fairy-tale books, knew that strange and wonderful things frequently happened to poor woodcutters. Thus, she was not unduly surprised when she came across a funny little man while walking in the woods one day.

“Oh, I remember this!” she exclaimed. “You’re an evil magician in disguise who will cast some horrible spell on me and then . . .”

“Wrong, kid,” the little man growled. “I’m just a crazy old hermit living in a shack in the middle of the woods. I think I’ll kidnap you. You might bring a good ransom.” With that, the little man crudely stuffed the girl into a sack and dragged her to his shack in the middle of the woods, whereupon he locked her up in a dark closet with nothing to eat or drink. But the girl remained confident that a prince would come and rescue her.

The next day, the funny little man rudely awakened the girl when he banged open the closet door.

“Bad news, kid,” he grumbled. “Your miserable parents can’t come up with the ransom money. As you’d probably identify me if I let you go, I’ll just toss you in a nearby lake. Everyone will think it was a complete accident.” The little man cackled fiendishly and started dragging the girl, still in the sack, towards the lake. But the girl still believed that her prince would rescue her.

Once they reached the lake, the little man tied the girl up and prepared to toss her in.

“Wait!” she cried. “A prince is going to come and rescue me any minute now, and there’s nothing you can do about it. So there!” She tried to spit at the little man’s feet, but she couldn’t because of the ropes that tied her up.

“Get real, kid,” the little man said smugly. “Princes don’t come swooping in out of nowhere, just like little kids don’t float. And remember, kid,” he said, hefting her onto his shoulders, “life’s not a fairy tale.” He threw her in. Confident to the last, the girl still was expecting her prince when she sank to the bottom of the lake.

And everyone lived happily ever after, except, of course, the girl, her family, and the little man, who was fined \$200,000 for illegal dumping.