

The Child Without Golden Hair

by *Kalina Maleska*

My name is Nomi, and this is how I became a fairy. I grew up in the King's palace, where my mother was a cook.

I was ten years old when the future Queen arrived at the palace. The news of the royal marriage spread throughout the kingdom, but the people were surprised by the King's choice. It was said that his chosen bride was from a very poor family and that the King had chosen her because one evening, his servants heard her say that if the King married her, she would bear him a child with golden hair.

When the King's carriage entered the garden, its window was open, and I saw a woman with the loveliest face I had ever seen. I wished that she were my mother, so that I would be as beautiful as she was. I didn't think my real mother was beautiful, and I considered her responsible for my ugliness as well.

Then, I heard the future Queen say loudly:

"The castle is so beautiful, and with gold on it too! Is it real gold?"



At that moment, a large hand, with a big golden ring bearing the King's insignia, abruptly closed the window, so the beautiful face of the young woman and the large hand with the big ring disappeared from sight.

A few days later, there was a big wedding at the court, and my mother was busy day and night, cooking for hundreds of guests. I was free to run outside the walls of the keep, so my friends and I went to the small lake nearby. All of a sudden, a lady appeared from the lake. I was frightened, but my friends approached her and asked who she was.

“Prekrasnata Ilona,” the lady said.

“Oh, the Wonderful Ilona. Are you a fairy?”

“Indeed I am,” Ilona laughed.

There were a lot of stories in our kingdom about the dangerous fairies who attacked people, robbed them and sometimes even turned them into stone statues. They were able to escape prison cells by turning into snakes.

“Are fairies really dangerous?” I asked my mother a few days after the wedding.

She looked at me for a few seconds.

“Not to us,” she finally said.

“To who then?”

“To those who are powerful, because fairies have even more power.”

“How is that possible?”

“It's difficult to explain.”

I hated that answer. I wanted her to explain everything, but she often thought I wouldn't understand. In that period, I frequently imagined myself being the beautiful golden-haired child of the Queen, who spoke to me as if I was the smartest person in the world. I imagined her being able to explain everything clearly and gently, and we'd always understand each other.

Many months went by, during which the Queen would occasionally come to the kitchen and talk to my mother. Her belly was growing bigger. One day, the Queen explained to my mother how a woman from her village predicted that she would give birth to a boy with golden hair.

At that moment, a guard entered the kitchen and pointed to the door. The Queen immediately got up and left the kitchen. Then I heard the terrifying voice of the King:

“Didn’t I tell you thousands of times not to go to the kitchen? You are a Queen now. You have no business talking to that ugly old cook!”

A few weeks later, voices woke me in the middle of the night, and my mother was not in the room. I got up and went inside the castle. The Queen was screaming. The baby must be coming, I thought, but just a few days ago my mother said it wouldn’t come for another few weeks. A little later, sure enough, I heard a baby cry. Then so many voices at once. The Queen’s screams became different, mixed with words I didn’t understand. Some of the guards said that the King, who had gone on a hunting expedition, should immediately be informed. People ran up and down the halls, and my mother came out of the Queen’s room, carrying in her hands a basket. I couldn’t see what was in the basket. She passed by me and did not even notice me. She took the basket to the river.

The King arrived three days later. He was surrounded by his guards, so I couldn’t see him, except for his angry eyes glowing red in the darkness.

“I don’t want that baby!” the King shouted. “Get rid of that baby! Give him to the cook,” he said to the guards.

When I was alone with my mother, she looked at me. “Should we call him Lan?”

I approached the bed, my heart was beating faster, and my face was covered in sweat. Lan had no hair at all. So, this cannot be the Queen’s baby.

I leaned closer, and one of his eyes seemed much smaller than the other, almost closed.

“I think he is blind in one eye,” my mother said softly.

I touched his hand, and he closed his fingers around my finger.

“He’s strong, though.”

“Isn’t he?”

We smiled at each other.

The next morning, the King’s heralds pronounced that the Queen had given birth to a sickly child instead of keeping her promise to give birth to a golden-haired boy. As punishment, she was bricked up all the way to her neck at the gates of the keep.

The King ordered that everyone who passed through the gate must spit on her. I ran to the gate, and there she was: bricked up, begging the guards to let her go.

“Someone took my golden-haired son and replaced him with that other child!” she cried.

Replaced? I saw my mother carry a basket to the river the night the baby was born.

I ran back to my room.

“Where is the Queen’s real child?” I shouted. “Did you have anything to do with it?”

“What are you talking about? Of course not. There are simply things you don’t understand.”

I was so angry. How could this happen to the Queen?

About a year later, while I was playing with Lan, teaching him how to make houses with pebbles, I saw my mother passing through the gates without spitting on the Queen. The guard said something to her, and they argued. Then she turned and quickly spat on the ground.



When I was passing through the gate a few days later, I also refused to spit on the Queen. I spat on the ground instead, so the guard grabbed me. Then I saw my mother standing nearby. She had a frightened look on her face. She came closer and told the guard I was still young and didn't know what I was doing. He released me.

“Why did you do that?” she asked.

“Why do you do it?” I asked back.

“That's different. I'm an adult; I know the consequences of what I do.”

“So do I.”

One day, I passed near the gate and realized the Queen was no longer there. I was so excited that I immediately ran to the kitchen in the palace. My mother was there cooking.

“Was the Queen's child found?” I asked.

“What?”

“The Queen is not at the gate. Was she released? Did someone find her child?”

My mother stopped cooking and asked me to go outside with her.

“Nomi, the Queen died last night,” she said.

“No, she isn't dead. Her golden-haired child must have been found.”

“There is no golden-haired child, Nomi. Lan is her son.”

“No, he isn't. The Queen said someone took her baby. I saw you take a basket down to the river on the night he was born.”

“Stop! I took the sheets from her bed in a basket to wash them in the river.”

“Then why did she say that her child was replaced?” I asked.

“She was frightened and hoped the King would let her go. But it didn't work.”

“But that’s not fair! Someone should’ve stopped him.”

“Who? The King has great power.”

“But she was the Queen!”

My mother just shrugged.

The King didn’t deserve his power. I knew someone who had more power than him, so I headed to the lake. I asked Ilona if she could turn the King into a stone statue.

“Why would you want such a thing?”

“Statues don’t have power. Can you do that to him?”

“Oh, you want to take away his power?” Ilona smiled. “You don’t always have to do something to him directly. Don’t you know he can lose some of his power if others around him become more powerful?”

“Like you?”

“Sure. The more fairies there are, the less power he has.”

“Can I become a fairy?”

“It is possible for anyone to become a fairy if they are willing to.”

One day soon after that, Lan and I were following a small hedgehog and ended up in the King’s garden, although this was strictly forbidden. Lan’s curls glowed in the sunlight. When the King saw Lan, he said to one of his guards:

“Throw him out!”

I stood in front of the King. Suddenly, his large hand, his terrifying voice, his glowing red eyes became connected into a single body, and I could see all of him in front of me. I straightened up, and his hand with the golden ring no longer seemed so enormous; his voice was just loud, and his eyes were simply blue.

“I will not let you throw out my brother,” I said.



I saw my mother standing nearby. She nodded at me, and that was when I knew I had turned into a fairy.

As I soon found out, not all fairies want to turn people into stone statues, not all fairies can escape prison cells. But I can do a lot of other things, and I'm still alive and able to tell you my story.