



# *A Tale Of Fairies and Fireflies*

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Kids, Mystery

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Long ago, in a small village in the Himalayas, lived a girl named Maria. Maria was a poor and orphan girl. She and her younger brother were all alone in the world. Maria, barely 10 years old, looked after herself and her brother too. She was very kind, polite and helpful by nature. She used to work in the village landlord's house for livelihood. Her mistress had nine daughters. She was a nice lady and would often help her with food and clothing. But her daughters for no reason disliked Maria. The eldest one was named 'Fennie', second one as 'Innie', third one 'Rinnie', fourth one 'Emmie', fifth one 'Fena', sixth one 'Lara', seventh one 'Ina', eighth 'Esha' and the last one 'Sana'. Actually, they were all jealous of Maria. Maybe because Maria, being good in studies and behaviour, was apple of everybody's eye. Whether in school or in the village, everyone praised Maria. However Fennie and her sisters would never miss a chance to insult her.

Every day after school Maria would go to Fennie's mansion and work till late in the night. Only after cleaning the dinner dishes would she return. Often it would be very late by the time she returned home. But her brother would be well awake and waiting patiently for any leftovers that his sister might bring home.

Maria's house was on the outskirts of the village, well beyond the fields and meadows. She had to cross a steep valley to reach her place. Nobody dared to come that way during night. Especially during this time of the year as the place turned into a cold dessert in winters. In the valley, there was a beautiful star shaped pond which strangely remained unfrozen throughout the winter with beautiful rainbow coloured bubbles floating over the water. At the centre of the pond, there stood a Berry tree. It was so high that it seemed to be reaching the clouds and so dense that its branches formed a giant umbrella all over the pond. The fruits of the tree were red and juicy. Strangely, the fruits of that tree would never fall down. Though no one had ever tasted them, but the villagers used to say that those were the most delicious fruits on earth. There were some mystical tales and beliefs about the place. It was believed that the tree belonged to the angels and that the spirit of a holy saint

guarded it. The angels would come on the Christmas Eve and pluck away these mysterious fruits. They believed that these were celestial fruits and hence not suitable for humans. Anyone who plucked the fruits angered the saint and was turned into a bubble floating over the pond water.

Last year, one winter night, when they had nothing to eat, her mother had come out in search of food and that was the last they saw her. She never returned home. People say that she tried to pluck the celestial berries and was hence punished by the holy soul. She was the lone bread earner of the family and worked in the landlord's house. Since her sudden disappearance Maria had been working in the mansion. Villagers had experienced strange things in the valley like some had witnessed the pond enveloped in a glittering light and some others would talk about a mesmerizing music being heard in the area and the rainbow bubbles dancing to its tune. Whatever may be the reason and the truth behind these tales, one thing was sure that villagers avoided the place after dark and that Maria had indeed lost her mother that fateful night.

Maria had to pass through the valley every night. She had decided never to let herself attracted towards the juicy celestial fruits. She would try to look in the other direction and walk but the sparkling water and the bright red berries were too tempting. Although she never saw anything strange like what was spread about the place but the pond did shine even in the darkest nights.

One day, it was Christmas evening again and there was a grand function at her master's house. Maria was there to do her job as usual. Fennie and her sisters, dressed as princesses danced till late in the night and so the dinner was served late. Accordingly, Maria had to stay back longer. By the time she finished washing the utensils and cleaning the place, it was past midnight. But she was happy as her mistress had given her a Christmas cake to take home. She remembered her mother's special flower cake.

As usual, after finishing her work she started back home. It was quiet and breezy. Not a soul in the sight! Only the bats and occasional howls of the mountain wolves showed some signs of life through the sleeping valley covered in white blanket of snow. It was a full moon night. She was stunned to see the pond which was shining brightly in a glittering luminescence. It was a sight too beautiful to be real. A captivating music made the place even more unrealistic and heavenly. Hypnotized by the melodious music she sat there looking at the dancing bubbles. But soon the glittering luminescence disappeared, the music began to fade and everything came back to normal. When the music stopped she could hear some feeble cries. She looked around, but could not find anyone. 'It must be from the pond or maybe from the tree' she thought. She could notice something strange on the tree. On getting closer she saw a snow white baby reindeer with dark blue eyes clinging onto a branch. He looked terrified. It seemed the poor baby was accidentally left behind by the herd. Maria could not believe her eyes. She had never ever seen or even heard of a white reindeer. She took him home and tried to feed him food

but the reindeer won't eat. Maria thought maybe he feeds only on the celestial fruits. She kept him hidden from the neighbours.

Next day, while returning from work, she decided to pluck those celestial berries. She could easily jump and climb on a low branch. But as she tried to reach for the berries, they seem to move higher and higher. Maria climbed up and up but the berries still seemed at an arm's length. After trying for a long time she got tired and gave up. And as she turned to return and looked down, "OMG!" she gave a huge cry. She was on top of the world. Everything seemed so small from up there. She could see the ground below as white and green patches. She had reached the clouds. Fearing the height she entered the clouds. Wandering and making way through the clouds she remembered her mother and thought if she would bump into her. And true to her surprise she did notice someone at a distance. She went closer. A beautiful little fairy was sitting on a big pearl. Maria thought it was all a dream! She had heard of fairies only in the fairy tales! She stood there speechless with wide open eyes. The fairy was of her age and wore glittering red robe. Her wings were golden and she was wearing a diamond studded tiara. She wore a dolorous look but on seeing Maria she smiled and her face suddenly brightened. She asked "Are you coming from down below? What's your name?" Maria, in the meanwhile had calmed down and tried to look normal. She replied "I am Maria. And yes, I stay down on the earth. But who are you? And why do you look so worried?" The fairy replied "I'm Glazy, a fairy princess. We stay in the Fairyland, here in the clouds. There is no water in the Fairyland. So once a year on Christmas night we climb down the tree to get water from the pond below." Maria was listening in disbelief and said "I see! That is the reason why the atmosphere of the pond becomes heavenly on Christmas night." The fairy again became sad and said. "This Christmas, I too had gone along with the other fairies and with my pet reindeer. But he seemed to have liked the red berries so much that he did not notice us return. While we all came back here he was left behind. Now I cannot go down until the next Christmas Eve. I am worried for him. He is too young to defend himself from the wild wolves and boars." Maria beamed at her and said cheerfully "Is he white with blue eyes?" "Oh yes! Have you seen him by any chance?" Glazy asked promptly. Maria said "Hey relax. He is at my place. He is safe and sound. I can bring him to you." Glazy was all thanks for her and said "You are such a kind and helpful person. Can I be of any help to you?" Maria asked hesitatingly "Do you have any information about my mother who went missing from the pond last year." Glazy replied "Your mother must have come for the berries and these berries have a magical power to keep themselves at a distance from anyone who wants to pluck them. One can pluck them only after reaching the top. Your mother too must have reached the top in such an attempt and must have entered the Fairyland. Why don't you come with me to the Fairyland and we can search for her together."

Glazy, holding her hand moved swiftly over the clouds. Very soon they reached the gates of Fairyland. Maria said “I didn’t know that Fairyland was so near to our planet.” Glazy replied “No. The Fairyland is several light years away from planet Earth. It is just that the tree in the pond provides a time travel path between the two worlds.”

The gate was a huge Rainbow which seemed transparent and easily penetrable but as Maria tried to enter, it gently pushed her back, making it impossible for her to enter however hard she tried. Glazy explained to Maria that no one can enter the rainbow gates without answering a question. The rainbow gates then asked to Glazy “Do you promise to be an honest person inside this gate? And remember, if you break your promise, you will be punished severely.” Glazy replied “I promise to be so”. The gate then said “I welcome you princess Glazy.” And she was let in. It was Maria’s turn next. The gate asked “Outsider please tell me your name. Do you promise to be an honest person inside this gate? And remember, if you break your promise, you will be punished severely.” Maria replied “I am Maria. I promise to be so.” The gate then said “I welcome you Maria.” And she too was let inside.

The world inside was amazingly colourful and cheerful. There was no ground underneath but white shiny clouds. She found it very difficult to walk. The trees were lush green and laden with juicy fruits. The fairy clowns sitting on the branches were helping everyone to pluck the fruits. Little fairy kids were playing in the park. There were infant fairies too who were learning to flap their wings to fly. Maria was simply awestruck with the view around. Glazy introduced her to other fairies and they were all so glad to meet someone from earth. All of them felt sorry for her mother but no one had seen her. She was finding it extremely difficult to walk over clouds because one was supposed to float and not walk over the clouds. Glazy said “Don’t worry. You will be guided in this regard. But since you are an outsider, you will have to pass through some tests. And only then you can proceed to the palace.” A golden chariot driven by flying horses was waiting there for Glazy. Glazy said “See you at the palace!” She waved to Maria and flew away.

As Maria stood there wondering where she was supposed to go and what was she supposed to do, she heard someone calling her. A huge bubble tree was talking to her. It said “Hello Maria, you are welcome! You are our special guest.” And it pasted three magic bubbles on her for balancing, one on each shoulder and one under her feet. The bubble tree continued “These bubbles will help you move here. Your goodness will keep them intact and bad behaviour will destroy them. Always remember your promise at the entrance. Have a nice stay!”

Thanking the tree, Maria moved ahead. Now she could easily float over the clouds like others. Moving ahead, she met a flying horse. It said to Maria “Hello dear, I have a thorn in my toe. Can you help me remove it?” Maria readily helped the horse. Her balance bubbles became stronger. The horse said “ride on me and I’ll take you to

the next destination.” She sat on the horse which flew away swiftly. The horse then stopped near a silver pond. There was banyan tree near the pond and an old parrot with long and shiny multicoloured feathers, sat on a branch of the tree. The parrot said “Hello Maria, I am too old to crack these nuts. Can you help me to eat them?” Maria happily cracked the nuts and fed the seeds to the parrot. The parrot smiled. Her balance bubbles became even stronger. Parrot said “You are a nice person. Take two dips in this pond.” She obeyed and went to the pond. As she took the first dip, her skin became as clear and glowing as the moon. As she took the second dip, she was adorned with beautiful clothes and jewellery. She was looking like a princess. She thanked the parrot. The parrot said “It is just what you deserved.” The horse said “Ride on me and I will take you to the palace.” It then flew her up to the palace. The palace was crafted with giant rubies and diamonds and it shone brilliantly over the white background. As she entered the palace, she found Glazy waiting for her. The palace was a magnificent masterpiece of gold, silver and all types of precious gems and stones. The king and the queen were glad to meet her. Maria had a royal feast with the royal family. “Have this special cake. I bet you must have never tasted such a delicious cake ever before.” said Glazy passing the cake towards her. Maria jumped up in joy. It was the same flower cake that her mother used to make at home. “This is by my mother. I’m sure about it. That means she is somewhere around.” They all rushed to the royal kitchen and Maria found her mother sitting near the fire. She ran into her arms. Mother and daughter hugged each other tight with tears of joy rolling down their cheeks. Glazy too couldn’t hold her tears back.

Maria’s mother narrated the entire episode of reaching the Fairyland and then her helplessness to go back. She said “That fateful night I could not find food anywhere so I dared to climb the tree to pluck the celestial fruits. But however hard I tried to reach my hands to them, they seem to be a little away ever time. And so I climbed higher and higher and reached here, in the Fairyland. I was overjoyed to see the fruits laden trees here. I was fortunate to pass the strangers test and was hurriedly moving with the help of bubbles. I began collecting fruits. When I had collected enough and my bag was overloaded, I decided to leave. But then I noticed a young fairy with injured wings. Due to the injury she was unable move. I felt very bad for her and I gave her my bubbles for time being. When she is fine she will return my bubbles. So I have been waiting here since last few days.” “Few days? Mama you are here since last one year. We were so worried about you” said Maria while her mother looked at her in astonishment. The king then explained that one day in Fairyland is equivalent to several days on earth. Just then the fairy who had borrowed the bubbles from her mother came to them. She was fine now and no more needed the balancing bubbles. She returned them and was all thanks and praises for her generosity. The king and the queen too were touched by her kindness.

The mother and daughter were given precious gifts by the king as a gesture of love and thanks, before leaving.

Glazy promised to meet her at the pond next Christmas. The fairy mother requested them not to let the secret of fairies coming to earth on Christmas nights, be disclosed to anyone. They promised her so and waving hand at them began to descend. They could swiftly float down to earth because of their balancing bubbles. As soon as they touched the earth's surface, the bubbles gently vanished on their own.

Maria now lived comfortably with her mother and brother. They had sufficient money and they did not go to the landlord's house for work anymore. Her mother made cakes for a living. Maria and her brother wore dresses better than Fennie and her sisters. But this did not change her nature. She was as kind and generous as ever. She would never refuse anyone who came to her doorstep asking help. This made Fennie and her sisters more jealous and suspicious.

Fennie asked her youngest sister Sana to be friends with Maria and try to find out the secret of her sudden prosperity. Sana once stayed back at Maria's house. She was amazed to see the amount of wealth she had and how generously she helped everyone. She saw her preparing gifts for some special friends which she would be gifting them on Christmas Eve. She also saw the unusual snow white reindeer in her garden. When Sana came back home, she told everything to her sisters. They found something fishy and decided to find the truth.

On the Christmas night, all the nine sisters quietly followed Maria. Maria was carrying the reindeer in her arms and was going towards the valley. Fennie and her sisters were scared and hesitated to follow her any further. But eventually their greed overpowered their fear and they started to follow her to the valley. On reaching the pond, they were simply stunned to see the heavenly sight. The pond and its surrounding area were glowing in the dark due to the presence of fairies. They understood that Maria got all that wealth from these fairies and made a cunning plan. While the fairies were playing and relaxing near the pond, all of them quickly slid and hid themselves in their beautifully decorated silver pots. After some time, Glazy and other fairies bid goodbye to Maria and flew away with their pots. Glazy was carrying her reindeer.

At the Fairyland entrance, the rainbow gates asked "Do you promise to be an honest person inside this gate? And remember if you break your promise you will be punished severely." Fennie and her sisters, sitting inside the pots could hear the fairies say "I promise to be so." They saw all the fairies giving this answer and entering the gate one after another. When all the fairies had moved in, the pots queued behind them started floating inside one after the other. All the pots, except the nine pots, were allowed inside without having to answer any question. These nine pots had Fennie and her sisters hiding inside them. They got lined up outside the rainbow gates. The rainbow gate asked "Outsider please tell me your name. Do you promise to be an honest person inside this gate? And remember, if you break your promise, you will be punished severely." The sisters decided to hide their identity and instead said only the initial letter of their names. Fennie said from inside the pot "I

am F and I promise to be so.” The gates said “I welcome you F” And the pot with Fennie in it, was allowed inside. One by one all the sisters said their initial letters instead of their name and made the promise. So they all were welcomed and their pots floated through the rainbow one behind the other. So inside the Fairyland they were to be called by the first letter of their names.

Once they entered, they came out of the pots and were simply awestruck to see the beauty all around. They could not walk properly but they didn't mind as they were looking around for wealth. As they passed by the bubble tree, it said “Hello F, I, R, E, F, L, I, E, and S you all are welcome! You are our special guests.” And pasted three magic bubbles on each of them for balancing, one on each shoulder and one under the feet. The bubble tree continued “Your goodness will keep them intact and bad behaviour will destroy them. Always remember your promise at the entrance. Have a nice stay!” They all gave it a frown look for sticking the bubbles on them and grumbling at it moved ahead. But they were surprised as now they could easily float over the clouds. Moving ahead, they met the flying horse. It said to them “Hello F, I, R, E, F, L, I, E and S, I have a thorn in my toe. Can you help me remove it?” They shouted angrily “Why should we waste our time on you. Get out of our way!” As they yelled, one of their bubbles burst, making it difficult for them to balance. But they somehow managed to move ahead and began searching for wealth around. When they reached the silver pond, the old parrot said “Hello F,I, R, E, F, L, I, E and S. I am too old to crack these nuts. Can you help me?” They yelled again “You old parrot! Why should we even bother to help you? We are here to get the wealth. Don't waste our precious time.” No sooner did they say this, the balance bubbles on their other shoulder also burst. This made their moving over the clouds very difficult. The parrot smiled and said “Take two dips in this pond.” They went to the pond. As they took the first dip, their skin became as clear and shining as the moon. Then they took the second dip, and found themselves adorned with beautiful clothes and jewellery. Their greed was not satisfied at this. They thought that the third dip might give them the wings like fairies and they took the third dip. But, this proved to be a horrible mistake! The third dip had enormous amount of power and was meant only for the fairies. They could not bear the intense power of the third dip. They did get the wings but got themselves burned into black moths with a burning fire on their backs! Because they did not obey the instructions, the last balance bubble on their feet too burst, unbalancing them completely. They began to fall down towards the earth. Fluttering their tiny wings they reached the earth's surface. Since then they roam throughout the earth and are called FIREFLIES. They come out in the night and hover over water bodies to get some relief from their burning back. On Christmas nights, they desperately search for the fairies near water sources. Ever since then, they have been in search of fairies. They wish and hope that the fairies might forgive them someday and free them from this curse. But alas! The fairies do not come to earth for filling their pots anymore. They have

stopped coming down to earth, as their secret of visiting the earth on Christmas night, is out!

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