

Strange Arrivals

By Holly Lisle

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YOU'VE TAKEN UP WITH DISTURBING COMPANIONS

*There's a fairy in the garden,
A monster in the closet,
An alien in the back yard,
And a ghost by the refrigerator...*

*One mirror lies,
One dragon makes an ally, One ring bites...*

And they don't make genies like they used to,

Or gorgeous models... Or even princesses.

Ten short, startling fantasy tales from Holly Lisle, author of Talyn, Hunting the Corrigan's Blood, Warpaint, Fire in the Mist, and much more.

SHIMMER

HE CAME AROUND THE CORNER, his cheeks wet with tears. "The cat got her," he sobbed, and held out yet another creature the neighbors' scruffy tomcat had hunted down in our garden.

Bird, I thought first, because of what I mistook for blue feathers, but then I caught the iridescent translucence of wings. Dragonfly?

Fairy had never crossed my mind. Magic has no home in the South Florida suburbs.

But she looked up at me from my five-year-old son's hand, a tiny winged woman, her hair blue and feathery, her eyes green.

She was broken and bleeding.

“Can we fix her, momma?”

I had nursed lizards and ladybugs and baby birds back to health with him, but a washcloth-padded shoebox and a heat lamp were not going to save the creature dying in his hand.

Still, my son’s eyes held a five-year-old’s certainty that his mother could fix this.

“Get the shoebox,” I whispered.

He laid her down on the washcloth inside, gentle and careful from long practice in saving broken creatures. We stared at her.

He said, “She hurts, momma.”

“I know.”

When I’d first realized he was going to keep saving broken creatures, I’d put together a kit for him. Water bowl, eye dropper, shoebox, heat lamp, various kinds of critter food in plastic bags. I saw he had the eyedropper in his hand only when he dipped it into the water bowl and filled it.

She struggled to lift herself, and raised one arm toward the water dropper.

“I’ll lift her head and shoulders,” I told him. “Squeeze one drop to the tip, and hold it close to her, but let her do the drinking.”

He nodded. His entire body became an extension of that eyedropper. I slid a finger behind her and moved her as carefully as I could. He held the dropper out, and she sipped from the single drop.

She reached for his finger. Stared up into his eyes. He looked at her, startled. Her eyes shimmered green, and for just an

instant his did, too.

She was staring like that when she died.

He wept all day, inconsolable.

She was, I thought, his last rescue. Today, my neighbor pounded on my door, shrieking, "The news! The news!" She pushed past me, turned on the TV, and I saw what she had seen, repeated in slow motion.

My fourteen-year-old boy raced out of a burning building just ahead of a fireball, clutching a bundle of rags in his arms.

But not rags. A teenage girl—burned. Dead. The cameraman caught the ball of fire that slammed them into a tree, and I saw my son break, and knew I had lost him.

But no. He sat up, put the girl down gently. Touched her. Her eyes opened, and for an instant, a trick of firelight made his eyes and hers shimmer green. She looked up, filthy and sooty but unscathed. Smiling.

And I remembered. And understood.

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