

A short story by Nigel Coates

# Enchanted Love

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The first light breached the canopy. The sun's beaming rays were melting the darkness of night, to bring a new day forth to the Enchanted Forest. It was a special day for the creatures that lived there, for it was the winter solstice – and the shortest day of the year is a special time for magic...

The silence of the forest was stirred only by the gentle flutter of wings. The crickets that had chirped all night had fallen silent and the birds were yet to awake. For just a few moments, Clara had the forest all to herself.

Clara was a kind-hearted fairy, whose amazing beauty was matched only by the magic of the Enchanted Forest itself. She wiped the sleep from her eyes, before fluttering between her favourite plants to drink the sweet morning dew from their leaves. She followed the same path each morning, stopping firstly at a jade tree, and then at a maidenhair, and then at a chain of hearts.

The sunlight started its gentle slide down the trunks of the trees, soon to land softly on the forest floor. Beads of dew glistened in the golden light, as if Mother Nature had sprinkled diamonds across the forest for everyone to behold.

Clara flew to a nearby creek to take her morning bath. She liked to undress, and feel the sun's rays hug her body in a warm embrace. A breeze brushed her cheek and she closed her eyes to imagine the touch of a lover. She dipped a handful of moss into the gently flowing water and raised it to the curve of her neck. With her eyes still closed, she started to wash. The sensation of the moss that tickled her skin was intense. To Clara, it was the hand of a man who wanted to adore and cherish. The beads of water that ran down her back and breast filled her with an electric warmth, seemingly more powerful than the sun itself. Clara was filled with want and desire.

The forest birds were stirring. They were always happiest in the morning and would welcome each new day with a song. Clara loved to listen to their symphony and couldn't help but smile.

It was always the call of the whipbird that she would listen for most. It was simultaneously her greatest pleasure and deepest sorrow. The male whipbird would start the call and without a pause the female would finish it. They called like this throughout the daylight hours so they would always know the other's location. Every time Clara heard the whipbirds, she was

reminded of the beauty of love and would fill with hope, before being consumed by the sorrow of loneliness in the silence that followed.

Clara wished for nothing more, than for someone with which to share.

She had befriended many of the birds and animals of the Enchanted Forest, but had never met anyone just like her. Clara believed she was the only fairy that graced the earth, and would often quietly shed a tear.

By the time she had finished bathing the forest was alive. Most of the animals were looking for something tasty to eat, while chatting briefly with their neighbours. Clara looked around and noticed how many of her friends were in love. She again heard the call of the whipbirds. She looked down at her naked body and knew she had become a woman ...

Clara didn't know the importance of the solstice, but couldn't keep it in any longer. She stood proud on her rock and yelled for all to hear,

"I, Clara the fairy, want to feel True Love!"

She had never desired something so much. Her words echoed through the valley, and even carried beyond the boundaries of the Enchanted Forest.

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Clip Clop, Clip Clop, Clip Clop... Mr Hobson was a traveling salesman. He had travelled through the lowland pastures many times – and knew for a fact the rumours were true. He had woken early, hoping to cross the bridge before the troll was awake. His horse also remembered this area and fastened his pace.

Saxon was awoken by the approaching racket and rolled in his bed of mud.

"Arrrrggghhhhhh, Who Goes There? Pay the toll!!!"

Saxon was indeed a troll, and had spent many years hiding under the bridge stealing a toll from those who crossed the bridge unaware.

"Who Goes There? Who Goes There?"

He slipped and stumbled and fell face first into the thick mud of the creek bed. Mr Hobson and his horse both heard the cursing from below the bridge and were relieved to make it across without incident.

Saxon wiped the mud from his eyes and grumbled to himself about having to spend another miserable day under the bridge. He actually had a good heart and meant no one any harm, but stealing from passers-by was all he could do to survive.

He had twice tried to find a better life, by following each direction of the road from which the travellers came and went. But both times he was chased by villagers and had to return to his bridge – resigned to an unhappy life without hope. He believed himself to be the only troll on the face of the earth, and was sad he would always feel lonely.

Saxon was glad the darkness of night had been getting longer – as he liked to sleep to pass the hours. It had been some time since he had woken this close to the break of day, and if it wasn't for the early wakeup call of the passing carriage, he would have slept right through it...

A voice carried across the pastures, and rang in his ear as clear as if it were spoken to him directly. 'I, Clara the fairy, want to feel True Love!'

Saxon had never paid much attention to the forested hills that formed the horizon across the grassy pastures. He had only been concerned with the road that crossed his bridge and lived his life believing there were only two choices he could make. But, 'Who was Clara? And what was a fairy?' Saxon the troll had no idea, but was most intrigued by 'True Love'.

He climbed up from the creek bed to stand on the bridge and get a better look at the hills on the horizon. Saxon had thought this day was no different to any other. He had no idea of the winter solstice or the magic which it could create – but as he looked to the hills he was compelled to confess at the top of his lungs,

"I too, Saxon the troll, want to feel True Love!"

With a new choice before him, Saxon decided to follow the direction of his words, and started walking across the flat pastures towards the unknown.

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Clara had dressed and was being reassured by the friends that could understand her feelings. Jenkins was the wise old owl of the Enchanted Forest, and although he was just about asleep for the day, had always respected Clara for her kind heart.

"Clara," he started, "It is true there is no other like you in the Enchanted Forest. For sense of reason we all know what lies beyond our boundaries is unknown – and therefore represents danger." Clara had heard this many times from all the critters of the forest. "But," continued Jenkins, which surprised Clara, as she had never heard a 'but' on the end of that sentence before.

"Maybe the things you seek are in territories uncharted."

Clara had always been happy to stay in the Enchanted Forest. She had never considered leaving what she knew to be true. She looked at Jenkins for more.

"Be careful of what you don't know – but not fearful. Listen to your heart and know that truth is not always as it seems."

Clara flew to a rock that sat high on the mountain. She wanted to sit alone and think with perspective. She was contemplating what lay beyond the forest she knew and stared across the treetops to the distant lowland pastures.

As clear as clear, she heard a voice roll up the valley from the flats. 'I too, Saxon the troll, want to feel True Love.' She had never heard the name Saxon, or knew what a troll was, but someone who also wanted to explore true love was incentive enough to venture beyond all that she knew. Clara decided she would fly to the lowlands that stretched to the horizon.

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When Clara reached the point of where she had never travelled farther, she paused to confirm her affirmation. She also thought of one of the natural rules she had lived by – that reward is given in return of risk. She continued with confidence.

Clara made her way through the unknown forest, which held trees and plants she had never before seen. She considered reservation, and recalled drinking the sweet dew from the plants with which she was familiar – before realizing her courage had just given her the opportunity to find more favourites ...

After traveling for most of the day, she could see the light of open space emerge through the approaching trees. She was soon to reach the grassy flats.

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Spending the day walking through the pastures opened Saxon's mind to all that he could be. He had only ever known his creek bed, bridge and road.

The moist mud and dirt that had always covered his big round body had dried, and it peeled to reveal a wrinkled and wart covered skin he had forgotten was his. He looked at himself unsurely. He questioned his past – as he knew nothing of his family, or how he came to be at the creek bed. Saxon had the strangest feeling that he hadn't always been a troll ...

He was not sure what would happen if he met Clara, but was happy that he was facing change. The flat stretch of pasture that had lay before him for the entire days travel was starting to shorten. He was now able to make out the individual trees of the forest.

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There was a distinct line in the earth where the lands of the grassy flats started to climb towards the sky. As Clara the fairy took the last few steps, so too did Saxon the troll. They stood face to face – with all that knew behind them. Clara had never met a troll, and Saxon had never met a fairy, but they both knew that it was each other's words that had inspired them to adventure, and the search for True Love.

"Clara?" "Saxon?" "YES!!"

They exchanged words and told each other of their lives. As the solstice sun started to disappear behind the mountains they tried to conclude what had been a big day.

"But how could we be together? We are from different worlds. We are different creatures."  
"You know of the mountains and I know of the flats. How could we be?"

Simple words could not make sense of their situation. The unlikely couple stood in silence and just stared into each other's eyes. They both started to see deeply into the others soul and lost focus of their other differences. Saxon could not see the fairy wings and Clara could not see his wrinkled and wart covered skin. They both felt the magical sensation of Love.

They outstretched their hands and made a connection over the dividing line between the mountains and the flats mere seconds before the last ray of the solstice sun beamed its magic.

With an almighty clap of thunder and brilliant flash of white light, Mother Nature appeared

before them. Clara and Saxon looked on with their eyes wide open. With a click of her fingers, a campfire ignited and she invited them both to sit.

"Clara and Saxon," she started, "You have faced your fears on this special day. You took what you knew – looked at what was – and dreamed of what could be. The power within each of you, and your connection over this divide, will lift the spell cast many years ago."

"What Spell?" they asked as one.

"Your meeting is not purely by chance, for destiny plays its part. Many years ago, you both emerged into this world as the firstborns of two loving couples from the fairy clan of the Enchanted Forest."

"What? I was a FAIRY?!" asked Saxon.

"Yes. Your mothers both gave birth to you with the first light of the summer solstice. It was a magical event known throughout the lands, for it had been prophesized that two joined spirits would emerge – and their love would create a magical power like no other before." Clara and Saxon looked at each other bewildered. It was difficult to believe, even if it was Mother Nature telling the story!

"But what happened?" asked Clara.

"The prophecy never stated what creatures would be chosen to fulfil the legend – and the elves had always expected it would be them. They feared a fairy King and Queen – and with you both only days old they cast a dark spell to separate you forever. Who would have thought... a fairy and a troll not afraid of love? Not the elves! That's for sure!"

"What happened to our families?" "And what happened to the elves?"

"Well after the elves transformed Saxon into a troll and banished him from the Enchanted Forest things became very unstable. The elves thought it their best chance to take power and they prepared for war. The fairies knew it wasn't possible to use force to create peace, so they didn't want to fight back. They used their magic to banish the elves to another dimension, but in order to keep the balance of karmic nature, also had to banish themselves from the face of the Earth and the memories of all of its creatures.

Your families put all of their faith in you - and believed True Love would find a way!"

Clara and Saxon looked at each other again. The story seemed unreal. All they could see was a fairy and a troll ... but as they locked gaze and looked deep within they realized their True Love was True!

Mother Nature told them to sleep, so they curled in front of the warm fire in each other's arms. It had surely been a big day!



As the sun rose both Clara and Saxon stirred together. They kept their eyes closed to cherish their warm embrace, as neither had ever woken in the arms of another. After a few tender moments Clara screamed and jumped to her feet in shock!

"What?" begged Saxon, looking up at her unsurely.

"Oh, it's still you," said Clara, relieved to hear the familiar voice, "You look different!" Saxon looked at his arm and too was shocked not to see the wrinkles and warts. He stood tall and realized he had lost his big round belly. He could not believe his eyes when he looked over his shoulder to see the most beautiful set of fairy wings he could imagine.

"Wow! Would you look at me!?"

"Oh I am," replied Clara with a big smile.

Clara led the way back to the Enchanted Forest. It took Saxon a little while to get use to flying, but he was soon buzzing between trees and over rocks with ease. As they were both so excited they made great time and arrived at the Enchanted Forest while there was still strength in the sun. Clara landed near the creek and waited for Saxon to join her. She heard the call of the whipbirds and smiled at its new meaning. She gave silent thanks for the rewards of her risk. Saxon landed beside her a little out of breath.

"Is this our home?" he asked.

Before Clara could answer, the trees that surrounded the creek started to stir. Fairy after fairy after fairy emerged and made their way closer.

Clara picked her mother by the love in her eyes, which filled with joyous tears as they hugged and spun from the ground. For the first time, Clara felt what it was like to truly belong.

Saxon was also surrounded by his family and smothered with hugs.

"Yes, this is your home!" said his father. Saxon looked over his shoulder towards the distant lowlands. He just knew he wasn't going to miss living under that bridge one bit!

Soon, all of the creatures of the forest made their way closer to the celebrations. They were all very excited too, for their memories had returned with the lifting of the spell. They had spent the day preparing for a party to welcome the return of the fairy's to the Enchanted Forest. A party that would be forever remembered!

Clara and Saxon were duly crowned king and queen, and were the toast of the Enchanted Forest. Balance had been returned with their true love. Not only were they very happy to have found each other, they now knew they had families that loved them. They both knew they would never feel lonely again.

After several hours of music and drinking and dancing and stories they slid unnoticed from the celebrations to a spot more quiet and secluded. Their new love had developed feelings and desires within them they wanted to explore, with this night, just the start of their happy ever after ...



But what of the elves you ask? Well they too re-emerged with the lifting of the spell. They hid quietly in the shadows, fearing that the new fairy king and queen would seek revenge. But with just a little time, the elves soon learned that their concern was not needed ...

Clara and Saxon wanted nothing but harmony for the Enchanted Forest – which is how it stayed, forever...

*The End*