

A short story by Nigel Coates

# Willow and Blink

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Willow and her father loved to travel around the Australian countryside. He was a sheep shearer by trade, so they were constantly on the move to follow the available work. Some ten-year-old girls would have preferred living in the city, having a big bedroom, and playing with toys such as doll houses and tea sets, but not Willow. She greatly favoured the wide open spaces, the clean fresh air, and being really close to nature.

She loved to sit around the campfire as the shearers ate their dinner, listening to wild stories of amazing people and places. She would hang onto their every word and go to bed dreaming of her own adventures. For as long as she could remember, she had always wanted to be an explorer when she was big.

Whenever her father pulled the caravan to a new spot, she would help him set up the annex as quickly as possible so she could run off to explore her new surrounds. One time, she followed the bank of the Murrumbidgee River for kilometres, being careful not to be seen by the cannibals who paddled close by in canoes. Another time she found a cave but dared not venture too far into the darkness in case she was grabbed by the troll. And there was the time she wandered deep into a field of sugar cane, thinking she was the first person to have ever stepped foot in such a mysterious land.

Willow loved to be consumed by nature.



It was early spring when they parked the caravan at the base of the Great Dividing Range, not too far from the New South Wales-Victoria border. Willow's eyes widened as she looked out the car window at the thick forested hills that climbed sharply from the flat grazing pastures. She was saddened that the sun was nearly gone for the day, for she would have to wait until tomorrow before she could explore. As she helped her father set up their temporary home, he explained to her that this job was different than the regular ones he had been getting.

Instead of basing himself for several weeks on just one farm and shearing all of their sheep, he had to travel around to a number of small farms spread throughout the community to shear just a few sheep on each. He wanted to unhitch the caravan and leave it where it was, just driving to each farm in the car. He asked Willow to accompany him for the next two days on the road, spending the night in between sleeping under the stars at whatever farm he got to, and normally Willow would have thought that exciting ... but as she again looked to the forested hills behind the caravan, she knew where the greater adventure lay.

She begged her father to let her stay at the caravan alone, but initially he gave her a firm “no.” Over the next hour, Willow cooked him dinner *and* dessert, and did all of the dishes and readied the beds, all to prove she was capable of looking after herself. Deep down he knew she was more than capable ... and to reward her determined passion changed his mind and agreed to her pleas.

Willow hardly slept a wink all night, thinking about what mysteries would be hidden in the mountains she would soon get to explore.

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It was well before dawn when her father kissed her cheek farewell. “Stay safe, my beautiful girl,” he whispered, before jumping into his car and driving down the bumpy dirt road. As soon as his car passed out of hearing, Willow thought it a good time for her adventure to begin. She put a match to the kerosene lantern and fetched her backpack. She threw in a long sleeve shirt, and some water, a sandwich and a treat. Willow could hardly contain her joy; Two whole days to play!

As the very first light of day crept gently into the night sky, Willow was already walking along the base of the mountain looking for a good place to start. She found a small trickle of water that ran down the side of the mountain. Although it was only small, it had washed away some dirt, and in the groove that remained Willow could see a natural ladder made from rocks and exposed tree roots. That is where she would begin.

With just enough light to see a short way ahead, she climbed the slippery path doing her best not to slip, for that would land her feet or hands in the sticky mud. The grade was steep, and she gained a lot of height very quickly.

When she reached a spur of the mountain she stopped to catch her breath. She looked over her shoulder to the flat grassy pastures that stretched to the horizon. The sun was just starting to appear as a tiny orange sliver, but Willow knew from memory not to stare for very long or risk not being able to see anything at all!

She looked around at all else she could see. The caravan was now far below. She could see different shades of grass in each paddock – all kept in place by the fences in a grid. There were storage sheds for feed and machinery and two farmhouses, both with trails of smoke rising gently from their chimneys.

Willow waved goodbye to all things manmade before walking down the opposite side of the spur, to where everything was totally natural – seemingly untouched by man.

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Although the sun had just started its long journey across the sky, Willow was again surrounded by shadow as she was walking down the dark side of the spur. Willow noticed how quiet it was, knowing most creatures were yet to wake for the day. The air was still, and she could easily pick the distinct fragrance of the bottlebrushes opening to the new day, the dew-soaked bark, and the moist earth. Willow closed her eyes and breathed deeply through her nostrils to enliven her senses. She didn't have a care in the world ... She was free.

Distant birds started to sing their songs, and Willow listened keenly, trying to pick what type of birds they were. She could hear a currawong, some crows, a few kookaburras and what she thought might have been a flock of finches. Her thoughts were side-tracked on hearing the quiet flow of water from some distance ahead. That is where she decided to head.

Willow ducked under branches and bushes and used her hands to help climb up rocky washouts. How she loved to explore undiscovered forest! The sound of the water continued to grow louder, so Willow kept her path straight.

Only a few minutes further on, Willow came upon a beautiful stream. It ran from sight in both directions, winding its way from high in the mountains to the pastures far below. There was a good flow of water that ran between large river rocks and down rocky cascades. The forest that surrounded the stream was thick – in some parts coming right down to the water.

The bright light of day was starting to catch up to her as she washed her hands in the icy water. She washed her face and the chill took her breath. Willow couldn't help but smile! "What a beautiful place to have some breakfast!" she thought. She stood at the water's edge and planned a path across some half-submerged rocks that would take her to a big flat rock in the middle of the stream. Willow loved to challenge herself with little tasks such as this, knowing one mistake would have her tumbling into the icy waters, leaving her chilled to the bone. She had no problems with this crossing, though. She hopped from rock to rock without disturbance or sound.

Willow thought she should start with her treat. She quietly pulled some grapes from her bag and began sucking them one by one. Most people eat grapes a few at a time, but Willow had frozen them – because *grapesicles* were her favourite! She sat quietly and looked at her surrounds. She watched the shadow of the mountain she had climbed slowly fall down the opposite side of the valley. She saw a flock of ducks fly in a giant vee across the morning sky.

She listened to all that she could hear, smelled all that she could smell, and felt truly happy to be resting in such a magical spot.

Willow sat quietly on her rock, leaning against her backpack. She wanted to see the world wake up around her, as the first direct rays of the sun entered the valley. The water of the stream glistened like a river of diamonds. The morning calls of the forest birds filled the ravine with music.



To her surprise - something flew right over her head and landed on her rock not far from her feet. At first she thought it was a bird, then a butterfly - but to her amazed disbelief, Willow realised that it was a fairy! A Real Life Fairy!

Willow knew she had gone unnoticed, as the fairy was looking downstream, washing her face in the water. Willow also rubbed her eyes to make sure that what she was seeing was true. She had thought fairies were just made up to fill the pages of children’s books, but she was truly mistaken! She was looking at a Real Life Fairy!

The fairy was just a little bit taller than the length of her hand. She was wearing a beautiful white dress that looked like it was made from silk. Her wings looked like those of a butterfly, but she could fold them together till they were nearly nothing. She had tiny flowers in her long blonde hair – and a beautiful crown made from a wrapped vine. The fairy was very, very beautiful, indeed!

Silently, Willow reached out and grabbed the fairy around the body. The fairy was struck by panic and waved her arms and flapped her wings trying desperately to escape. She was not going to be successful though, as Willow could easily hold her securely.

Willow hadn’t planned on scaring the young fairy half to death, but knew if she let her go now, the fairy would fly away and be scared of her forever. She wanted to explain her kind intentions – so she held the fairy forth in her sight and smiled gently.

After a few moments of frightful panic the fairy gave up her fight – breathless and exhausted. She fell quiet, dreading what was to come.

“Are you really a fairy?” asked Willow, still amazed.

“It's Forbidden That We Talk!” snapped the fairy in reply.

“But I'm not going to hurt you.”

“Then LET ME GO!” came the short reply. Willow looked away a moment in thought.

“Answer me three questions and I will.”

The fairy was silent. She was having trouble believing that the stories she had been told when she was young were true. She had thought that humans were made up just to stop young fairies from venturing too far from home! But there was a fairy rule in the Great Book stating that it was “forbidden to be anywhere near a human,” let alone be answering their questions! Unfortunately, she was at the human’s mercy, so she half-heartedly nodded with a grimace.

“Well, then ... let me see ... What is your name?” asked Willow. The fairy looked back in shock. It seemed to her an odd first question, and with only a hint of reservation she offered forth “Blink.”

“Blink!” replied Willow with delight. “What a nice name... How did you get it?”

As the second question, “How did I get it?”

“Yes as the second.” Blink again looked back to the human with disbelief. She knew there were many more valuable fairy secrets than how she was given her name and was not sure of the human’s intent.

“When I was a baby... I used to blink a lot,” she offered, doubting its worth.

“Ha, that’s funny,” laughed Willow. “And lastly, mmm, are you *happy* here as a fairy?”

“Am I happy? ... Yes, perfectly – well, until you grabbed me, that is!”

“Well then - back to happy,” said Willow as she leant forward and gently opened her hand so Blink could hop back onto the rock.

Blink could not believe she was free. She had been expecting a trick! From the stories she had been told, she knew all humans to be horrible! They were all monsters who didn't respect the Earth, or its creatures.

Blink paused just a moment to consider her release – and looked into Willow's eyes for the first time without fear. They didn't seem to her to be the eyes of a monster, but before she continued on her train of thought she remembered that humans were sneaky and treacherous. She flew off like a dart to the cover of the forest for protection.

Willow sat back to think about what had just happened. She was truly amazed! She gave thanks to Mother Nature, believing only she could bless the Earth with a creature so beautiful.

Willow recalled how often she had explored nature and marvelled at the many beautiful sights and sounds and smells and feels – but to talk with a fairy early this morning was certainly the highlight, and she considered herself extremely lucky indeed!

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Blink fled far into the forest. Exhausted, she landed in a heap behind the base of a big tree to hide. Her heart was pounding as it never had before. She took a moment to draw a few deep breaths before looking over her body – hardly able to believe she was unharmed. She had been let go, when she thought the human would have rather eaten her whole!

Blink took a moment to replay the encounter. She was very thankful for her lucky escape, but wondered, out of all the questions the human could have asked, why she was satisfied with just a name and how she felt. It puzzled her rightly.

Blink was glad she had not been seen by any of the other fairies in her clan, for she knew there was great punishment for being seen by a human. She wasn't exactly sure what that punishment was, for only the eldest in her clan had ever claimed to have encountered a human previously – a long, long time before she was even born -- but Blink figured the punishment dire though, for humans were such nasty creatures. Blink had been told in school that humans were the biggest threat to a fairy clan and contact was condemned, so she decided to keep the encounter to herself, considering no damage had been done.

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Willow finished her bag of grapesicles and decided to follow the river upstream to continue her adventure. She looked at all before her with wonder-filled eyes and a huge smile. She felt lucky just to be able to witness things of such great beauty. She felt as though she could have happily stayed in the forest forever! She moved slowly to take in all of her surrounds.

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Blink had become even more puzzled by the human as she replayed the incident. She now wondered if all the stories she had been told as a youngster were untrue. She couldn't go and ask an elder, as they would pry into the motive of the question, so she decided to fly ever so carefully back to the stream to study the human from a hidden distance.

She peered through the holes in the frond of a bracken fern that looked over the flat rock where the human had been. She became filled with trepidation because the human was gone from sight. She immediately thought that the human may be playing a trick, or setting a trap to capture her – before remembering she had already been caught and then let go. Blink surely was confused. She emerged from the shadows of the fern and flew over to the rock where the human had been resting.

Right in the middle of the rock was a pebble like Blink had never seen before. It was a polished gemstone, coloured deep black and broken by ribbons of golden swirls. She became fascinated as she stared, mesmerised by the sight of her own reflection in its surface. Blink had never seen a stone so beautiful!

She flew into the air and with a quick scout saw she was still on her own. She looked at the gemstone and figured it must have been of great value, and decided to return it to the human as a "thank-you" for letting her go. She realised that brought with it many dangers, but after quick consideration, thought she should at least *try* to do it safely.

Flying with the gemstone in her arms was quite a task. Blink had to flutter extra hard just to stay off the ground! She did her best to cautiously and quickly make her way, and was relieved to find the human just a short way upstream - for she was again tired and out of breath.

To pass the human Blink flew up under the cover of the trees and plants that lined the bank. She placed the gemstone fair in the middle of the path she expected the human would take, then quickly returned to the protection of the foliage and sat in the shade, thankful for the moment's rest.

As the human came into sight, Blink could see immediately the respect she held for her surrounds. She looked to different things – but always with the same kind eyes. Blink could not imagine how this girl could be called a *monster*, before wondering what her real name might have been. The human knew *her* name, but Blink had been too panicked to ask for *hers*.

As Willow approached the gemstone, she changed her focus from the things by her feet to the sights high in the treetops. Unfortunately for Blink, Willow walked right past the stone. Blink let out a huge sigh, knowing she would again have to lug it farther up the creek.

After considerable effort, she again placed the gemstone in the human's path. Instead of hiding in the bushes though, she hid behind one of the large river boulders. She knew she could circle the boulder and stay on the far side of the human, hidden from sight for the whole time it took her to pass. Willow again approached the gemstone, but heard some yellow-crested black cockatoos that screeched overhead in flight. She again passed the gemstone without notice.

Blink was pained. She cursed her luck, as she could not imagine herself having the strength to spend the day placing the gemstone in the human's path in hope. "Hey, Human!" she yelled. Willow heard a quiet noise but could not make it out. She turned her head back for just a moment, but did not see Blink standing forth. Blink knew she was breaking many of the rules in the Great Book all at once, but could not resist.

"HEEEEEYYYYYYYYY!!!" she screamed louder than she ever had before.

This time Willow heard her just fine. She turned with surprise to see Blink waving her arms from on top of the boulder. She smiled widely and started to walk towards her.

"AHHH!" Blink yelled, "Don't come any closer!"

Willow could understand that Blink would still be nervous, so she sat cross-legged on the ground to give reassurance she wouldn't again be able to grab her. Blink was reassured and could not see any way possible that this human had a bad nature.

She flew a little closer to the human so she didn't have to yell, still cautious, though, to keep enough distance for an easy escape.

"You left this stone behind, from before."

"Yes, Blink, I left it for you!"

"For me?" she asked excitedly, actually wanting the answer to be "yes."

"Yes, for you. To say thank you for being my friend."

"What? We can't be friends ... You know nothing about me!" replied Blink.

"I know you are called so, because you blinked a lot when you were young - That is something!" She was right, thought Blink; that *was* something.

"Well, then, *friend*, tell me *your* name."

"Everyone calls me Willow, for one time when I was young I ran away from my home and spent the night in a willow tree. Some of the boys at the campsite started calling me *Willow*, and it kind of caught on." Blink laughed at her story.

"Then tell me why all humans try to dominate the Earth and all of its creatures - but you let me go."

Willow thought a moment, wanting to give a correct answer to a very big question. "Yes, it's true, a lot of humans show the Earth little respect, but me ... I could never hurt a creature as beautiful as you!" Blink could tell that Willow's offerings came from a sincere heart. She blushed bright red in an instant, for fairies too can feel overwhelmed when flattered.

The pause in conversation gave Blink time to use perspective. She suddenly realised she was in the middle of a conversation with a human! And humans were not even meant to catch a sight!

Blink quickly looked over her shoulder nervously to see if any other fairies were near. She started to panic at what she was doing. Willow could see her manner change and offered her an easy end to their conversation. "Hey, I thought it was forbidden for us to talk!"

"It is ... I must go," she said, even though she was unsure of what she really wanted to do. In her heart she knew that Willow would do her no harm, but at the same time, the rules of the clan had to be followed.

"Then dear Blink, I say 'see you later,' and that it was a *wonder* to meet you."

Blink nodded and smiled to return the sentiment. She picked up her gemstone and flew downstream more awkwardly than she would have preferred. Willow watched her pass from sight and again pondered a few moments on the miracles of nature before continuing on her adventure.



When Blink returned to her village, her new stone surely created a stir. The commotion of those who marvelled at its uniqueness attracted the entire clan of fairies, both young and old. When asked where she found it, Blink offered "by the river," and said nothing of her encounters with Willow.

When fairy Gretchen, the eldest of the elders, caught sight of the gemstone, she knew immediately it was of human origin. She was one of the few who knew of the human world. She had a quick word in Belina's ear, who was the consult for matters of the village. Belina took Gretchen's warning and immediately sent all of the youngsters to hide underground.

Several of the elders started to discreetly scan the nearby forest for any humans. They stayed high in the treetops, for they knew all humans were land-bound monsters to be feared. If they did spot a human, they could sound a warning to protect those in the village.

Blink tried to appear innocent and could not complain when she was told to make herself scarce. She wanted to tell all of the fairies that Willow was kind-hearted and would pass without concern – but she could not do so without repercussion. Blink hid underground with the rest of the youngsters and had to sit arduously through the elders' stories about how "all humans were terrible monsters."

Willow was spotted hopping along the rocks of the stream, moving away from the village. The scouts returned to the clan and told stories of how she looked like a hideous ogre, and laughed amongst themselves about how wingless critters looked so funny. Blink felt Willow's persecution an injustice, but could do nothing to save her name.

When it was obvious that the human would pose no further threat, Belina announced that the village could return to normal – but far from normal it was to be. Everyone again surrounded the gemstone and swapped ghastly stories about terrible ill-intended humans. Blink felt sad and withdrew from the commotion.

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Willow had continued blessing her wonder-filled eyes with her surrounds and was paying not nearly enough attention to the placement of her feet. Only minutes after the fairy scouts had discontinued their observations, Willow slipped on a river rock and twisted her ankle as she fell. She crashed hard into the creek bed – and was now cold, wet and sore.

After a moment's rest she tried to walk but found the pain in her ankle too great. All she could do was rest on a flat rock in the middle of the stream and hope her ankle soon eased its pain.

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Several of Blink's friends approached her to enquire about her sombre mood. Blink suggested to her friends that *maybe* humans were *not that bad*, and maybe even some of them could be *nice*. Her friends, Rosella, Starlight and Shaylee all doubled in laughter. They all thought Blink hilarious. "A *nice* human!? Ridiculous!"

Blink could stand it no longer and dared her friends to meet her by the falls when the moon was directly above.

"What for?" they questioned.

"I will show you that humans can be nice!"

But before they could question her further, Blink parted their company.

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When the moon was right above, Blink arrived at the falls. It shocked her to see that her three friends had told others about her assumption. There were near fifteen young fairies before her – all intrigued by what was to come, wondering how on earth Blink would try to prove that humans could be nice. Blink had not expected nearly so many and thought immediately they were bound to be caught by the elders.

She suggested they all return to their beds and forget the assumption – but as she turned and started to make her way, the group snickered and made fun of both her and humans.

"What do they know? None of *them* has ever met a human!" thought Blink – but she still withheld her encounters.

"Ok, then, since you all push, let's see with our own eyes the nature of a human!"

The group of fairies looked back confused.

"Who dares to fly upstream with me to view the human from the shadows?"

They all looked back in shock. It wasn't a dare to be taken lightly. None of the grouped fairies had ever thought of chasing a human before, and there was a moment's silence as they all considered the thrill of actually seeing a human, compared to what would happen if the human caught them, or what punishment they would receive if the elders found out.

Trixie, one of the more brazen fairies, wanted to call Blink's bluff, expecting she would simply back down from the dare and look the fool.

"I'll go with you, Blink," she said - but before Blink could answer, another fairy joined.

"I'll come too!"

"And I!"

"Yeah, we all want to see a human!"

Unfortunately for Blink, everyone joined in. Her dare had been accepted – and she didn't feel it was now possible to back down.

"Well, then... we should leave immediately as the human will be a good day's walk upstream. We will need to be back by first light to avoid getting caught!" And with that, they set off at a great pace, Blink out in front, the rest flying in single file, all skimming low over the river rocks.

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Right then, Gretchen, Belina and the other elders flew over the rock to see the situation before them. To one side was the human, who was now stirring a little in her sleep - and to the other was poor little Poppin, stuck helplessly in a spider's web, with the spider slowly approaching! Belina flew close to Poppin and Blink, but the spider drove her back with a snarl of his fangs. Blink still tried with all her might as the spider rested not far from where she flew. He looked on amused. He knew the first little fairy was not going anywhere and was half hoping to catch the other little fairy as well. He took a little time to ponder his delight!

The fairies all flew this way and that - all thinking that Poppin would soon be eaten and fearing the human would wake up. They all felt helpless when thinking of how to challenge the spider and save Poppin's life.

Blink was nearly exhausted as she alone braved the spider's snarl. She turned to the group and caught Belina's eye. She was immediately struck solemn by guilt. She knew it was her dare that got Poppin into the predicament, and she knew it was her responsibility to get her out.

Blink let go of Poppin's hands and assured her things would be alright. She flew over to the human, who had managed to stay asleep. Belina and a few of the others followed her at a safe distance - unsure of what she was to do. When Blink landed right in the middle of the human's chest they all gasped in fear. When she started calling "Willow!" and banging the human's chin with her fists, their jaws hung open in disbelief!

Willow woke with a fright and sat upright like a bolt. Blink was sent flying backwards through the air and crashed to the ground by Willow's feet.

"Blink!?" exclaimed Willow, which confused all who looked on. How did the human know her name? As fast as she could, Blink explained what was happening. Willow jumped to her feet, which scattered every fairy from sight. The spider was not sure what would happen and thought it best he just eat the one treat. He started to cross the web towards Poppin, as Willow ran over to the trees as fast as her swollen ankle would allow.

Willow grabbed Poppin from the clutches of the spider with only a second to spare!

She snapped the tree supports of the web, and the spider fell to the ground and scurried away in fear of being squished by a big human foot. Poppin was now free from the spider, but the rest of the fairies still looked on in horror, knowing she was now at the mercy of a human!

Willow hobbled back to her rock, only just realising how much she pained her ankle in the rescue. The fairies slowly returned and flew around cautiously – all but Blink expecting that the human was a greater danger than the spider. When Blink sat on Willow’s shoulder, everyone again gasped at the danger. Poppin had continued to cry and wasn’t soothed any by Willow’s gentle reassurance that she would be all right.

To comfort the little fairy, Willow held her arm outstretched and opened her hand. Poppin stopped crying as she realised she was being set free. She tried her hardest to fly away but was unable, as her wings were still covered in the spider’s web. Belina darted through in a snap and grabbed Poppin from Willow’s open hand. Belina herself could not believe a human could do what she had just witnessed. She hovered just meters away to see Blink and the human talk. Blink was most enthused as she expressed her gratitude. The rest of the fairies were still scared ... quite unsure of what to think.

Breaking the short silence was Belina, demanding that all fairies return to the village at once. The tone of her voice prompted all of the fairies to action in an instant.

This surely had been an event-filled night to remember for both Willow and the clan of fairies!

Willow pinched her skin to reassure herself that the last few minutes of madness was not all a crazy dream. Her pinched skin, and the pain in her ankle, confirmed it was all true. Left alone, she lay back to sleep – hoping the spider wouldn’t pay her a visit to complain about taking away his delicious snack!



With the first light of morning, Blink confessed all the truths of the previous day. She knew she would be punished for not reporting the human immediately, and for leading the others upstream – but Gretchen and Belina were also thankful that her bravery and quick thinking had saved poor little Poppin from the spider. With Blink’s persistence, all of the fairies were convinced Willow was actually a nice human with a kind heart.

Belina realised they had parted Willow’s company without giving the deserved thanks for saving Poppin’s life. A group of elders set out to return to her rest. They approached cautiously, to find Willow still sitting quietly with her swollen ankle in the cold river, trying unsuccessfully to reduce the swelling.

From a cautious distance, Belina offered her thanks and asked if there was any way they could repay her. Willow told them of her hunger and asked if there was anything they could do to help her ankle. All but Belina and Orion, the fairy who knew the most about bush remedies, scattered to the forest to find leaves and berries for Willow to eat. Orion started to rub an ointment on Willow's ankle, but it soon became obvious that her ankle was just too big for the cream to cover it.

When the other fairies returned with armfuls of food, it was a huge amount for them, but it didn't even cover Willow's palm. She offered her thanks and ate all of the offerings in one mouthful – knowing it wouldn't even touch the sides of her rumbling belly. She laughed at her predicament – and joked the only way the fairies could help her was if she were fairy size herself. It was only Willow who laughed at the joke, though, for both Belina and Orion knew a little *fairy dust* could make that temporarily possible.

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The elders flew into the village not too long after the clan had finished clearing breakfast. They all gathered excitedly; keen to hear further news of the human called Willow.

They all gasped as one when Willow flew into the village as a beautiful fairy! Blink caught her eye and was thrilled. They hugged and spun from the ground as the others looked on. Willow and Blink both smiled widely and laughed excitedly between themselves. "What fun!"

After Willow had been sprinkled with fairy dust, Orion's healing ointment and just a few berries now had her happy and healthy. As a reward for saving Poppin, the elders gave permission for her to remain in the village for the day, playing just as a fairy would! Willow could not believe her good fortune.

She and Blink flew up and down the stream, speedily between trees, and high in the treetops. She played tiggy and dress-ups and made flower chains and was truly the novelty of all the young fairies that day.

Willow found a moment to talk to the elders about the punishment they would hand to Blink. She told them she felt responsible for a lot of what happened, and that it would be unfair for Blink to take all of the blame. After a little discussion the elders suggested that "three full moons" of kitchen duties would suffice, and even Blink considered that fair. Willow was pardoned from any punishment, on the condition she never told another of the location of the village, and she agreed with a smile.



All of the fairies flew with her to the end of the stream, leaving Willow just a short walk around the base of the mountain to get back to her caravan. She hugged Belina and Gretchen and Poppin, and for the longest time Blink. They laughed at the adventure they had shared and both gave thanks that everything had worked out just fine.

Orion sprinkled her with another batch of fairy dust, which returned her to human size in an instant. Blink flew up and sat on her shoulder. Willow said a few words before saying goodbye.

“You are right to be wary of humans. When viewed as a whole, they would not have your best interest at heart. Not all of us are bad, though ... some, like me, will continue to believe in the goodness you stand for, and I will try my best to get other humans to respect the Earth as you do. There is a chance I will return this way in a year, and if so, will again pay you all a visit. If not, I wish you all well – and say I will never forget you!”

Willow blew them a kiss and started her short walk back to the caravan. She looked over her shoulder to see the clan of fairies dart and duck and weave their way back up the stream towards their home. Willow could not help but smile!



As the sun was setting over the western hills of the Great Dividing Range, Willow walked towards the caravan and felt lucky to her bones. She saw her father’s car driving up the dusty trail. They both arrived back to the caravan at the same time.

“There you are, Willow! Been on another adventure, I see!” laughed her father as he picked her up for a welcome hug.

“Yes, Dad, another great adventure indeed!”

*The End*