



Damned Inspiration

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WHO WOULD SUMMON A FAERIE IN THIS DAY AND AGE?
And in New Orleans, no less?

Gabriel Lanier was a poet, a doomed profession to be sure. But he was of a family of poetic types, some who'd enjoyed acclaim back in their day, and he was in despair. His God-given imaginings weren't enough, or so he said. He required other inspiration.

Though acting as Muse to frustrated humans is far from my proper calling, still I serve the Seelie Court. To serve means to be obeying the ancient ways, such as attending a request rightly made. Truth be told, once I saw the *jeune home*, I minded the intrusion into my reclusive existence less, and after a handful of visitations, was nigh on the brink of enjoying them.

On one such occasion, Gabriel quizzed me on my role at Court, in particular why I still serve the cause of Good. Sorry to say, I had to think on it a bit before answering.

"Why exactly, I don know. I did, once on a time, but dat time's long since been forgot by man and almost too by faerie-folk. Now all's left is de urge to duty and de belief in the rightness of our cause.

"If we remembered it all—de fall from Grace, our final defeat at de hands of de Milesians, bein' given de choice 'tween crawlin down into de *sidbe* or leaving Eire entirely, we'd be mad, all. As 'tis . . ."

I stared through the small, cracked window of Gabriel's walk-up, seeing the waves of heat that rippled the air outside his tiny room. Through the soot-coated glass I watched a cloud

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of mosquitoes turning lazily through a sunbeam. They reminded me of my wee cousins, who used to whirl freely round us in the skies over the land I and the other Tuatha De Danann once ruled. The phantom ache from my missing wings returned afresh at the memory, and I fought down the undignified urge to wail.

Gabriel shifted on his stool, the card table in front of him creaking as he erased some or another thing from his notepad. "I'm sorry," he said, in his Yankee drone. "Was that 'see' or 'she?'"

I sighed and returned my attention to this world, this time. "Is closes' to 'she,' *cha*," I said. "Sidhe are barrows, hollows in de hills."

He scribbled this in his pad and looked up. "Least it's an easy word to rhyme, right?" He grinned at me and if I'd still had wings, they'd have fluttered like a pixie's in heat.

"Y'talk almos' as fast as me," I said. Gabriel traced his lineage to Louisiana and its surrounds, but his parents had chosen a more glamorous life up North. He'd moved back after school to get in touch with the source of his family's poetic heritage, or some such thing.

He grinned prettily. "Yours is much more unique. So, the doonies were stripped of their wings and went into the hollows while the rest of the Tu . . . tooth . . ."

"Tuatha de Danann," I said, my patience waning. How could he so glibly bypass our greatest shame as if describing the mere shedding of shoes? Though our earthly wings had been naught compared to the great double sets we'd worn in Heaven, at least they'd functioned, provided a last connection to our True Selves. Now, though we can assume the shapes of winged beasties for brief moments of time, even that slight comfort is lost.

Still, this rare opportunity for good p.r. kept me from departing. It had been sore long since songs of glory were offered to me and mine, and this fair mortal boy had promise. "I doubt my relations would appreciate bein' called 'doonies,'" I said, forcing a wee smile. "Dey are de Daoine Sidhe, de people of de faerie mouns."

"Right, my bad," he said. He began to scrawl his notes more quickly, intuiting my mood. "The rest of the people of the Lady Danann left Ireland and even today, you all serve as guardians against the faeries of the Unseelie Court, protecting humanity from their ravages."

"When dey bother to ravage," I sighed. "Most are content to steal a babe here, mislead a traveler there. Scarcely necessary are we, against such a lazy lot of evil-doers. Yet still we serve the God who banished us here, in hopes we might someday be forgiven our neutrality during the heavenly Troubles. The members of the Unseelie Court serve the Rebellious One, in hopes he, too, will forgive their refusal to take sides and finally accept them into his Dark kingdom."

"And you yourself wound up in France, then crossed over into Nova Scotia, and then, when the Crown kicked the Acadians out, you came here, to Louisiana."

"An here I be, *cha*," I said, "existin' in tranquility for a decent span 'til your summons. *Pas de quoi*."