Starfall - By Robert Tackett

Two young lovers found themselves walking deep into the woods, far from any other people. Laughing and holding hands, their attitude was one of young reckless love. First love. Innocent love. It was getting late. Far past supper time.

 “Where are you taking me”? The beautiful young girl asked, demurely. It was the hundredth time, her heart racing in sweet anticipation of what lie ahead.

 Smiling broadly, with a twinkle in his deep brown eyes, he spun her around to face him. He brought her body close to his and kissed her deeply on the lips. Her mouth parting ever so slightly and allowed his tongue to softly caress her own.

 She had no doubt that tonight would be a magical night. She felt so free. So in love.

 Pulling away gently and slowly, he licked his lips savoring her kiss. He breathed a breath of pure passion and gazed deep into her beautiful and vibrant eyes. Guiding her to his side, they continued the slow walk down a very faint path. He began his tale.

 “A long time ago my grandfather told me a story about a pond way out in the middle of this forest. I was about ten at the time, so I do not remember all of it, but I do remember this”…

 “Once every fifty years something special happens at the pond. But not just anyone is allowed to experience this special thing. Only those who have proven themselves to the fairy kingdom will be allowed to witness this incredible event. So amazing that it only occurs once every fifty years. This event is called Starfall. And the legend goes that if two lovers promise themselves to each other under the full moon, the heavens will look down and shower them with a long and happy life”.

 He continued, “My grandfather said that he and my grandmother did witness it. Yet, whenever I asked her, she just laughed. But when she would laugh, she seemed to remember a time long ago when she was truly happy and she would look fifty years younger”!

 Continuing down the starlit path, the breeze was gently blowing. Animals and insects of the night were a familiar sound as they went about their natural business in the darkening woods. This time of the year was especially beautiful as the leaves were just beginning to change into hundreds of beautiful colors.

 “This is incredibly romantic and such beauty everywhere”. She thought to herself. She knew they were young, but her parents approved of him. And tonight, if he asked her to marry, she would not say no. Oh, how she hoped in her hearts of hearts, he would ask.

 Breaking into a slow happy trot, he pulled her forward. “Come on”! He admonished. “We must hurry”! He laughed over his should, pulling her along. “We have to find the pond before midnight.” He continued.

 “Why?” She tried to be coy. “What happens at midnight”? She continued, “How far is the pond”?

 Not slowing his pace, he responded in a happy, jubilant voice. “Starfall happens at midnight! And we haven’t met the fairy king and queen yet. “Come on! Hurry”!

 He had such a sweet voice, she thought. She continued to hurry, not wanting to break the magic of the moment. Moments later they came to a small clearing where the stars shone bright and clear. There was a rather large ring of toadstools centered in the opening.

 “Careful”! He warned. “Don’t touch the mushrooms. Grandpa said this is where the fairies hold their court.

 Gently stepping over the ring of mushrooms, she thought it odd how they grew in such a perfect circle.

 He deftly took off his jacket and laid it in the center of the circle. He guided her to it and bade her kneel facing towards the largest toadstool. She kneeled on his jacket and bowed her head in respect.

 This is so romantic she thought. She would do anything for this man. Her man. She like those words. Surely anyone watching could see they were deeply in love.

 It seemed as if the night brightened just a bit and slowly she raised her gaze, mesmerized by the sight before her.

 There right before her eyes, sat who could only be the king and queen of the fairies. He wore a gold crown and was easily only two hands high. His queen on his left, also wore a golden crown. Vibrant colors and small sparkles of magical energy seemed to bounce out of their ever-beating little wings. Wings! Other fairies sat on all the toadstools. Watching in rapt attention. She felt faint. Was this real? How could this be real? She couldn’t believe her eyes.

 “I must be dreaming”. She thought. “This isn’t possible”.

 “Oh, great king and queen of the fairy world”. He proclaimed. We humbly ask for you to allow us to witness Starfall, here in your beautiful forest”. Nothing more”. He added,

 Her head was spinning. Was this really happening? Her pulse was pounding. She could feel her heartbeat.

 She heard the sound of royalty in her head. “What do you have to offer in trade, young man”? The king queried.

 The young man quickly reached to his neck and undid his necklace. A necklace he had crafted with his own hands. Made of leather, intertwined with horsehair and bound with sinew, hung a beautifully shaped obsidian arrowhead. It was magnificent. She knew it had taken weeks to perfect. He was very proud of it. The young man laid the priceless arrowhead necklace at the foot of the fairy king.

 “And your lady”? The voice of the fairy queen could be heard in her head. Her voice sounded of music, the most beautiful music ever.

 The two lovers slowly turned to each other and gazed into each other’s eyes. “I have nothing to offer”. She sadly thought in quiet despair. She wore no rings or necklaces. She had been afraid she might lose them in the woods so had forsaken wearing any. Oh why? Oh why, had she not worn any? Suddenly she remembered! He had given her a pair of earrings to wear tonight, as they left her home. He had known! He knew she would need something to offer.

She quickly reached up and felt the earrings he given her only hours earlier. The earrings were exquisitely beautiful. Made of a mature red-tailed hawk feather. Woven with a small strip of leather, the same piece of leather his necklace was from! Woven together with horsehair! The same unbridled black stallion’s mane! These earrings were just as priceless as his necklace. She slowly took off the right earring and laid it at the foot of the fairy queen.

“Continue on your journey and may the Great Spirit and creatures of the woods look favorably upon your union”. The fairy king’s voice sped them on their way as the fairy court rose up and quietly flew away into the dark woods.

“Come quickly”! He said. “The midnight hour is almost upon us”! Jumping up to his feet and pulling her over the toadstools, they ventured into the woods once more. She seemed out of sorts. Disoriented. Yet she was unable to resist, she followed quickly.

Immediately on the other side of the clearing they entered the trees. Soon they found themselves at the edge of a large pond. Completely hidden on all sides by a thick growth of trees. Overhead the stars were shing as bright as ever.

She became acutely aware that the breeze had ceased. The creatures of the night seemed to be holding their collective breath. Not so much as the chirping of the crickets. All was quiet. Eerily quiet.

Firmly gripping both of her hands in his, he spun her to face him. “Listen carefully”. He began quickly. When I say, you need to make a wish and leap into the pond”. He looked deep into her eyes. “You understand”? He asked hopefully.

“What”? she stammered. Everything was going too fast. Her mind swan with chaotic thoughts. She couldn’t focus. Why did he want me to jump into the water? She wondered not quite understanding. How deep was the water? Did he not remember I cannot swim? Did he say to make a wish? What wish?

Turning to point up and over the lake, she saw his eyes alive with love. And noticed what he was pointing at…A star began to fall from the night sky.

“Isn’t it beautiful”? He asked. His voice full of emotion and energy. Together they watched another star fall and then another.

“What was happening here”? She wondered to herself. Her mind frantic. “I need to get a grip”. She thought. “I don’t understand what’s going on”! Her mind screamed.

Another star fell. More and more stars were falling. Silently. Soon all the stars were streaking down towards earth, falling from the heavens! It was spectacular!

“Yes”! She finally answered his question. It was beautiful.

“Ready”? He eagerly asked. He was estatic. His eyes were so happy. His smile so pure.

“Ready for what”? She silently asked. What did he think was going to happen?

“Now”! He screamed. “Jump”! As he jumped high into the lake. A huge splash could be heard. Slowly the ripples on the pond faded away into the darkness. Slowly, one by one, the stars winked back into existence. The gentle breeze began and the animals once again began to go about their nightly business.

There she stood. Alone. Her arms outstretched. She had let go at the last moment, afraid. She called out for him. But she felt his presence was gone. She waited for what seemed an eternity.

In a state of confusion and despair, she began the long walk back. Past the quiet and empty fairy circle. Had she imagined all of this? There was no necklace or earring at the toadstool circle. It was just a ring of mushrooms now. Reaching up, she discovered that she still had her left earring in place. Where was the other? She began to softly weep. Her man would be sorely upset to discover she had lost one of the earrings if she doesn’t find it soon.

She continued down the long winding path through the woods, until at last she came upon the road. It was an awful and lonely walk home.

For the next few days, the whole town searched for him in those woods. Even searching the pond itself. No trace of him was ever found. In their haste to find the young man, they had trampled the fairy circle and the path to and beyond was littered and destroyed.

Now, fifty years have passed since that ill-fated night. She had grown older now. That night has long been forgotten about. Even the townsfolk do not talk about it anymore. Her wrinkles easily shown in the mirror. She reflects quietly about her life. It took years for the town to forget him and more for them to forgive her. She remembers going to his grandparent’s house and being unable to speak without crying. She sobbed out the sad tale as his grandmother held her tight.

“Oh, sweet, sweet child”. She comforted. The grandmother gently offered an unspoken forgiveness. “It’s over. What’s done is done”.

She eventually married a good man. Had two wonderful children. She had a full life, but something had always been missing. She couldn’t bear leaving this town and leaving his memory. Looking at her calendar on the wall, she calculated that tonight was the night. She wouldn’t live long enough to have another chance. Glancing at the clock, she resolved that it was time to go. Leaving a short note on the table. It simply read: Thank you for a good life.

She went to her jewelry box and gently took out her one earring, given to her so many years ago. She placed it in her hair and tied it in place with a lock of the black stallion’s mane. She went to her car and drove away without looking back.

Parking her car at the side of the road, she left the keys in it. “I am not sure if I will even be back”. She thought to herself. It’s only a car she laughed. It was easy to find the faint trail. It was burned into her mind’s eye. It had haunted her dreams every night for the last fifty years.

She hurried down the path. As she traversed the trail, it grew darker and darker. She was older now and slower. She had to be careful not to fall on the uneven terrain. The further she got, the lighter her heart felt. And soon she was remembering how happy she had been that night, so long ago. So full of promise and happily running into whatever awaited. She hadn’t a care in the world then. Because he was there with her. Together they could do anything. Then he was gone.

If only she had known.

This time would be different. She had no qualms, no hesitation. And just as suddenly as that night fifty years ago, she came out to the open clearing. And before her stood that infamous ring of toadstools. The same toadstools were in a perfect circle. The bright stars shining brightly overhead now. Darkness coming fast.

She made her way to the circle and stepped over the ring. Her senses were alert at once and she noticed all of the night’s activity. The cool gentle breeze, once again softly blowing her hair. The softly chirping insects and the scurrying of small animals told her all was normal. She realized that it was almost midnight as she knelt and bowed her head.

“Why have you returned, my child”?

Slowly lifting her gaze, she was met with the sad look of the fairy king. The rest of the royal court sat quietly, waiting. So small and beautiful they were, yet they held the key to her future. Her future with him.

“I made a terrible mistake long ago”. She began. “I wish to see Starfall once again. So, I might fix my mistake and be with the one I truly love”. She explained sadly.

“And what does the maiden have to offer in return”? The queen’s voice can be heard in her ear. As beautiful as she remembered. The fairy queen smiled.

Without hesitation, she reached up and removed the earring. The earring she had safeguarded all these years and prized above all of her possessions. She laid it at the foot of the queen.

“Go. And may the Great Spirit and the animals of the forest smile upon you”. The fairy king intoned.

With that parting, the fairy court rose and quietly glided over the clearing and disappeared into the dark woods. This would be the last time she ever saw them, she knew. Turning towards the pond, her heart leapt. For better or for worse, this will all be over soon.

Crossing through the tree line, she found herself at the edge of the pond. The pond which had claimed her true love so long ago. Wild thoughts flew through her head. He had been her first real love. She began to question if it was true love. What was true love anyways? What right did she have at true love after what she had done?

Gazing out over the pond she noticed that the breeze was gone and the night had became suddenly silent.

What would happen next? Would he still be here, somewhere lost in time? Did he still love her? Would he hate her for being afraid? Was all this for nothing? Her mind filled with doubt. She had loved him once and loved him still. This thought caused her heart to leap in anticipation.

Would he have aged like she had? Oh, what a tragic twist of fate if he was still young, while only she had aged. Glancing up to the heavens, she noticed the first star as it began it’s slow descent to earth. Was this true love? Was it enough? Enough for what? What lies in store for them both? The stars were streaking across the sky now, falling, falling. In a moment it would all be over.

Would she have the courage to jump in this time and trust that their love was magical. What did she truly believe would happen tonight? And the stars began to fall.