

Through A Child's Eyes

By Maggie Kuban

Photo - Landscape

Second Place - Short Story

Maryann's pink wellies glistened as the falling rain bounced off her boots. Maryann's mother clutched her small hand tighter as she threw her arm up towards traffic and ushered Maryann across busy Thornton street. Maryann's father, was a banker downtown in Oxford, England. Today was Tuesday, which meant Maryann's kindergarten class was not in session. But today was special because Maryann and her mum, Clara, were headed into the heart of the city to visit her dad at work. MJ, which her father had affectionately nicknamed her because of her first and middle name, Maryann Jane, adored the city. It was full of unusual sounds and smells and sights that fascinated MJ. But the city also had one more thing only MJ could see. An entrance into another world. Three buildings down from Alger and Lancaster banking where her father worked was this magical doorway. MJ's mother claimed the words read Fraser Law but Maryann knew better. She had just begun identifying letters and the sounds they made together, in order to read words. MJ had absolutely convinced herself that the words carved into the gray building read Fairy Land. Glancing up at her mother MJ began tugging on her hand.

"Mum, Mum, Fairy Land," MJ cried. "Please Mum, lets go look at Fairy Land and see what's inside." Sighing, Clara looked down at her daughter. Her eyes were hopeful and mystified. Over the last few months, MJ had gotten to know the people who worked at Fraser Law because Clara stopped by often to visit friends. They had even met a kind older woman named Ellie, who was the owner of the building, MJ instantly had a connection with her. Ellie insisted that MJ was welcome in the offices anytime she liked.

"Only for a moment, Maryann," Clara told her flatly. "You run ahead." With that MJ's pink rain boots began to make a squish squash sound as she hurried down the street.

MJ's golden curly hair bounced about, as she dashed down Thornton. On the dreary rainy day the large building could seem looming to the business professionals bustling around, however, lionhearted MJ continued unfazed by the weather. MJ squinted up towards the overcast sky to gaze at the words spelling out Fairy Land, smiling to herself, she continued on mm the revolving doors. Ignoring the glances from lawyers chatting by the front desk and the glare from the janitor mopping the floor, she walked forward in the hall leading towards the waiting area.

Gradually, the beige walls and tile floors that supposedly lead to the law offices waiting area transformed into a forest. MJ breathed in the aroma of pine and the dampened earth. A small creek rushed by feeding into a murky brown lake. Padding forward as gently as she could, her feet moved her down a grassy trail into the wooded landscape. MJ's goal each time she visited the enchanted land was to see a fairy. MJ began scanning the forest floor for flowers growing in places where the sun had broken through the canopy. Soon enough MJ stumbled along a large opening in the canopy of trees. Hundreds of thousands of flowers had created their' home in this sunny spot. MJ walked over to the wild flowers, growing however and wherever they pleased, and knelt down to pick some of the blackeyed susans. She knew they were her mother's favorite. Gathering the bundle in her small dirty hands, MJ continued down

the path. The path eventually led to a lake. Normally MJ did not like swimming, but the humidity and sun had been beating against her skin, making sweat stick to her like honey. Deciding a dip in the lake was just what she needed, MJ dropped the flowers on the ground and began to wiggle her boots off.

As she stepped into the water her feet create-d small ripples and stirred up the sand under her toes. MJ walked along the edge of lake, lost in her own imagination. She watched minnows swim in the shallow cool water and admired how the water bugs skimmed along the top of the lake. MJ even saw a frog cooling itself by burrowing down in the muddy bank. MJ even attempted to catch the amphibian but stopped when she saw her hands. They looked like her nanas. MJ decided that her pruny hands meant it was time to get out of the lake. Glancing back at her rain boots and wildflowers on shore, MJ saw what she never expected to see. A fairy leaned against her left rain boot sitting in the shade to cool herself from the hot sun. MJ now filled with glee swiftly waded back to shore. She moved as slow as she could, so she would not scare the magical creature. Kneeling down at the fairy's level, MJ examined the mystical beginning.

“Hello,” began MJ.

“Hello Maryann,” the fairy shot right back, while wiping sweat from her glossy forehead with dainty fingers. “My name is Chloe. My friends and I are so happy you have discovered our world.” Dumbfounded, MJ didn’t know how to reply and was at a loss for words.

“Now that you know about this magical land and the fairies that live here, it is your world too,” Chloe told MJ. “People will try to tell you otherwise, but we are very real,” Chloe said fluttering up onto MJ’s outstretched hand. Perched on the little girl’s hand, the tiny being looked up and seriously gazed into Maryann’s eyes.

“MJ, you must promise to protect this world. More and more people no longer hold the magic and believe in their hearts,” Chloe pleaded with the kindergartener.

“I promise, I will always believe in fairies,” Maryann replied. MJ open her mouth to say something else, but instead of her own voice, her mother’s voice rang out into the landscape.

“MJ, MJ! Dear, it is time to go,” cried her mom. Swinging around, MJ squinted into the distance. Through the thick forest she could see a blurry figure, wrapped in a blue wool coat (her mother's signature jacket) and her hands on her hips.

“Mum!,” MJ called excited as she ran towards her mother. As soon as she got close to her mother the forest faded away and a light misty fog lingered in the air. The further Maryann walked towards her mother, the interior of the law firm began to take shape instead of the forest. “I saw. . .,” MJ quickly stopped herself. She couldn’t tell her mother about the fairies, she wouldn’t believe her anyway. Instead Maryann shoved the flowers towards her mum.

“I picked you some flowers,” MJ told her mother. Her mother's happy expression quickly turned into a scowl.

“Maryann, where did you get these? You can not take flowers out of vases,” Clara sternly told her daughter. Clara sheepishly smiled at the secretary behind the front desk. The woman was failing

miserably at her attempt to discreetly watch her scold MJ, while clicking away at her keyboard with a scowl pasted on her wrinkled skin. Kneeling down at her daughter's level she smiled wearily.

“I appreciate these flowers, but we should probably leave them here,” Clara tried to explain to her daughter. Clara gently took the flower from her daughter’s small dirt caked hands and put the flowers in a vase sitting on an entry table to her left. Still slightly dazed from the interaction with Chloe the fairy, MJ wandered over to the waiting area and sat on the worn floral print couch. The resident tabby cat that lived in the law firm crept over to MJ on the couch and rubbed itself against her arms. MJ smiled at the kitty.

“You see the fairies, don’t you?” MJ whispered to the cat. “I bet that’s what you do at night when everyone leaves. The fairies take very good care of you,” MJ continued to babble while petting the cat.

“Come along Maryann,” her mother said interrupting MJ’s conversation with the feline. Hopping to her feet, Maryann took her mother’s out stretched hand and wandered back out onto bustling Thornton street.