

Mary's Garden  
By E. Lynn Cormick

I'm not your typical senior citizen. I don't like bingo and I don't like knitting or crocheting. I do, however, love to make fairy houses and other miniatures. I make them for the grand-kids to put in my garden. I have a lovely clump of Shasta daisies that overlook the rock garden and shelter the fairy houses perfectly.

In the rock garden, there are all manner of flowering plants, a few strawberries and four painted fairy houses. Each house has a door that opens onto a different room. One door leads to the study, with a fireplace and shelves of books and a stuffed armchair to curl up on. Another leads to a miniature kitchen, complete with supper in a pot on the stove. The third door leads to the living room, with a vase of baby's breath on the coffee table and a newspaper on the couch. The last door leads to a fairy's bedroom, with a canopied bed with a crocheted blanket, vanity and a working wardrobe.

The grand-kids helped me decide which rooms to make inside the fairy houses. I was just going to leave them as blank interiors with solid doors, but the kids decided otherwise. "But Nana, how will the fairies get into the houses if you don't make the doors open?" The logic of a three-year-old can be hard to refute. That they'd "do it by magic" didn't wash, so doors were made to open and then, of course, the rooms had to be painted and decorated. The older children helped with the painting and the younger ones helped me decide what to put where. I had a bunch of miniature furniture I'd made. The couch was upholstered, the oven door on the stove opened to reveal a baking sheet with cookies on it, there was a picture of soup in the pot, the newspaper had printing on it and the books could be taken off the shelves, if the fairy desired. Some of the books had text in them, courtesy of an online source for miniatures, and others remained blank, so the fairies could write stories in them, or so my grandchildren informed me. There were fairy lights in each of the rooms that would come on when the sun set behind the house. The circuit was on one of those daylight sensor gizmos.

All in all, the fairy village was ready to be inhabited. In order to please my grand-kids, we left leaves and pretty flowers in shallow bowls at the foot of the village. First thing in the morning, when I went out for coffee and a smoke, I would also bring out some gold beads and transfer the flowers into the fire pit and the beads into the bowls. The children were ecstatic to get 'real fairy gold'.

Once the children got older, they no longer came to play with the fairy houses. I maintained it anyway, leaving flowers and beads, just in case the kids came around. Oh, I wasn't lonely. I had friends come over for coffee every once in a while, and I got out to various miniatures conventions during the course of the year. It was a comfortable life.

One day, after a heavy rain storm, I wandered out to the patio and the fairy garden. The seats under the gazebo were dry, so I sat down to enjoy the warm air and sunset. That's when I first heard them.

In the Shasta daisies behind the fairy village, there was a flash of light that I wasn't sure I'd seen. I brushed it off as a trick of the light, but then I heard what sounded like a squeaky whisper.

"Jaxson, keep the light off! Mary will see you!"

"Oh, she won't see us. The noisy brats aren't here to help her. She's too old to see fairies, so we're safe enough."

"Not us, but the light, you great buffoon! She'll see the light, come to investigate and we won't get supper cooked before midnight."

"All right. All right. Don't get your knickers in a twist."

I didn't move. I wasn't sure I believed in fairies, but you never knew. The voices faded as if the speakers had gone elsewhere. I sat there until full dark, waiting for them to return. The rain started up again and I went into the house. I'd forgotten to change out the gold beads for flowers.

It rained for several days. I had my coffee in the house and thought about what I'd heard. *If there were fairies, and that was a big if, I thought, then they'd probably want more than just an offering of leaves and flowers.* It took three days before I finally figured out what I was going to leave for the creatures. I just needed to wait until payday.

When my pension had been deposited into my account, I went to work. First stop? The local electronics store. I bought a low-light, motion-sensor video camera. Next, I went to the fabric store for quilting needles, scrap fabric from the bargain bin, a couple packages of sequins and two spools of thread to match the fabric. I couldn't make fairy clothes, but maybe they could. I kept thinking of "The Elves and the Shoemaker" and chuckling to myself. If the kids found out what I was planning, they'd put me in a home for sure.

Setting up the camera to photograph the fairy village wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. I had to charge up the battery, of course, but hooking up the camera to the computer proved a bit tricky. I finally routed the computer cable out through the bay window and down the side of the house. It meant that the camera would be a bit further back than I'd wanted, but as it turned out, the camera had a zoom function. I set it up to photograph the Shasta daisies where I'd seen the light.

Next, I put out half a yard of the fabric, one packet of sequins and a spool of thread with two quilting needles. Then I grabbed my coffee and sat in the gazebo until dark.

The next morning, I came out a little earlier than normal. The materials were gone and the bowls empty. I sat back in my chair and pondered the situation. Nothing had shown up on the computer, even with me waiting until after midnight to see. I would check the computer after I finished my coffee and smoke. Before I went in, I checked the camera. It was still working, beginning to record as I approached and stopping when I did. Now to check the computer.

Much to my disappointment, there was nothing unusual on the computer feed, either. The camera had recorded about a dozen minutes of movement but there was nothing to see. It was as if the camera turned on of its own accord and then stopped for the same reason.

I shut down the computer with an angry snap. "Mary, you're too old to be believing in fairies and fairy tales," I chided myself out loud, angry with myself for being disappointed. "But I heard..." I started again and interrupted myself. "At your age, hearing things is not a good sign." "But the fabric..." "Was taken by the neighbor's teens as a prank." I sighed. So much for the magic of seeing fairies. *I may be old, but I still believe,* I thought to myself, wondering at my foolishness. *I thought I'd outgrown that sort of nonsense.*

I refilled my coffee and went out to the backyard to have a smoke and ponder the question. Was I losing my marbles?

I stared at the Shasta daisies, back to the camera and then to the fairy village. Of course! I stood up abruptly and moved towards the camera. I'd been focused on where I'd seen the light. What I needed to do was focus on the village! Hope flared again as I adjusted the camera and widened the angle a bit.

The late night and early morning caught up with me around ten. I fell asleep in the slingback chair. I dreamed I saw fairies and talked to them. I dreamed they'd made me a handkerchief out of the plain material I'd sent them. Could they please have something that would allow them to blend in with the flowers better?

I opened both eyes, wide awake. I checked my watch. It was just after noon. I went to pick up my coffee and realized that I held something. I unfolded the fabric. Not only was it the fabric I had set out for the fairies, but it was neatly sewn into a handkerchief, complete with lace edging and the double M of my initials. I stared at it, not knowing what else to do. Either the kids were playing an elaborate hoax on me or I was losing it entirely. *Or, the little voice in my head said, you were talking to fairies while you slept.*

I yawned prodigiously and grabbed my coffee mug. The coffee was cold, of course. I rose to get another one, and maybe some lunch when the rest of my dream came back to me. “Something to blend in with the flowers,” they’d asked. Looks like the afternoon would be spent in the fabric shop. I breathed deeply of the summer air and smiled. Things were looking up!

Again, I searched through the bargain bins of the fabric shop. I needed something flowery or something stripey to match the stems. The shop clerks must have thought I was nuts. I had almost emptied the bin before I found what I wanted—two feet of green and yellow, narrow-striped fabric and one of a small flower print. If they made pants or skirts out of the striped pieces and shirts out of the flowers, they’d be hidden in the daisies for sure. And a few of the other plants, too. I took them up to the till.

“Did you find what you needed?” the cashier asked, a bit sarcastically.

“Yes, I did, thank you.”

She looked at my purchases. “Are you sure you have enough?” Again, a bit sarcastically.

I grinned. “I’m only making clothes for fairies. I don’t need much.” With that, I took my change and all but skipped out the door. The expression on her face had been priceless.

I set up the bowls as I had done before, material, thread and needles. Instead of adding sequins, as I had before, I added a handful of miniature crystal beads. They just fit over the eye of the quilting needle. If they didn’t use the beads for trim on their clothes, or as buttons, then maybe they could make a necklace or something out of it. I tipped my head, looking thoughtfully at the overflowing bowls. There was something missing. It came to me and I rushed into the house to find the bits of lace I’d stockpiled away from a project I’d done.

I carefully placed the lace into the last bowl, backed away and sat down in the gazebo.

A friend came over for coffee after lunch and saw the items in the bowls.

“Offerings for the fairies?” Anne asked, a smile in her eyes.

I nodded.

“You may not be able to see them, but I’m sure they’ll appreciate the thought.”

I debated, and then told her of my adventures with the fairies to date.

“You might have better luck at seeing them if you took away the camera,” she said. “I know I’d be wary of a place that wanted to take my picture all the time. It’s worse than a nosy neighbor because it’s always ‘at the window’,” she finished, make quotes in the air with her hands.

I hadn’t thought about it like that. Anne helped me bring in the camera and the cables. Just on a whim, I checked the computer feed. There, on the screen, was a small female with trailing wings, a striped skirt and flowered blouse. She winked at me, showed me a gold and crystal beaded necklace and was gone. I turned to see Anne looking over my shoulder.

She cocked her head. “Looks like a fairy to me. A bit of a smart-ass one, but a fairy nonetheless. Congratulations. What are you going to do with the information, especially since the camera was off?”

I started. Anne was right! There hadn’t been a camera on. I tried to rewind the feed, but, of course none of it had been recorded. I paused, thinking. “Naw, they’d still think I was nuts,” I muttered and put the entire feed in the trash bin and emptied it.

Anne was grinning. “Not going to show it to the grands?”

I laughed. “Two old women who saw a fairy? Nah, I like living on my own.”

“Me, too,” she said.

The End