

The Origin of Pixies

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“Once upon a time,” said Zannie, because that was how all good stories started, “there was a deep, dark forest. Squirrels hopped from tree to tree, foxes ran along the ground, and great stags roamed the darkness. No birds sang that deep in the forest and the summer sun barely added any light.

“Beside a creek, tucked into a hillside, there was a tiny cottage. Mossy rocks hid the door from view, even though no one ventured far enough into the dark forest to see it. The door was carved in strange symbols.”

Zannie’s younger brother said, “what did the symbols say?”

The other boys in the group made annoyed noises at Kezim. Zannie turned to him from his seat upon the mossy log, his wings tucked behind him. Zannie said, “no one knows. But, on the full moon, they would glow with power.”

Kezim’s eyes got wide and he said “whoa” in awed tones. Zannie nodded.

“One night, long ago, the owner of the cottage lay very ill. He had been a mighty hunter, a great traveler, and a loyal friend to the fairies of the forest. But more than this, he was also a powerful wizard.”

Tellop, one of Zannie’s friends listening to the story, said skeptically, “a hunter *and* a wizard?” He was nearly as old as Zannie and thought himself wise in the ways of the world.

Zannie nodded. “He was that old.”

Tellop considered this then shrugged, so Zannie continued.

“As he lay dying, the wizard realized he would miss the world. He had been living for so long, that he didn’t want to leave. But, he knew that all things come to an end and that his was near. In a flash of inspiration, he prepared his final spell. A spell that would make him live a hundred times longer.

“He got up from his sick bed and started working. All night he labored over the spell, fine tuning its working, binding bits of it to the earth, other parts to the air. As dawn broke outside the tiny cottage, the wizard knew his spell was ready, and not a moment too soon.

“He opened the door to the cottage and prepared to speak the magic words. Just then, dust from the cottage floor swirled up and into his nose. He sneezed an enormous spray as he spoke the words. Creatures flew forth from the spittle and off into the forest. And that’s how pixies were created.”

The other boys groaned.

“No it isn’t,” said Frenz. He folded his arms across his chest.

“You made that up,” said Tellop, a slight smile on his face.

Zannie leaned back and laughed. Kezim fluttered his wings in annoyance. “You’re not supposed to lie,” he said. He tried for the strict tone their parents used, but it came out as a pout.

“Oh, lighten up,” said Zannie, still laughing. He stood up and stretched his arms and his wings out to the side. He let out a mighty yawn.

Tellop threw a pebble and tried to get it into Zannie’s open mouth. He missed and it

bounced off Zannie's chin.

"Hey!" said Zannie and Tellop just grinned.

Frenz looked hopefully at Zannie. "So, do you know the real story?"

Zannie feigned injury, holding his hand to his chest. "You don't believe my story?"

"Come on," said Tellop, getting up off the ground and brushing leaves off his pants. "I know someone who might know."

Zannie was a little annoyed at having his thunder stolen by another story, but he was curious, too. He didn't know where pixies came from and he was sure it was an awesome tale. The group lifted off the ground on their iridescent wings and zipped through the forest. It was not as deep and dark as the one in Zannie's tale, but it was close.

They flew back to the village, zooming between trees and sometimes through small shrubs. They looped and curved, dove and soared. They made good-natured bets on whether the next story would be better than Zannie's.

Tellop's grandfather was sitting in the crook of a tree, far above the village proper. His feet were propped up on the tree branch, crossed at the ankles. His beard was long and white over his dark blue tunic. He held a long-stemmed pipe in his hand and puffed on it occasionally. His bright, clear blue eyes watched the boys approach. He let his eyes laugh, but kept a serious look on his face.

The young pixies zipped up to the branch and landed a respectful distance away. Their talking had died out as they made the climb. They had all met Tellop's grandfather before, but adults could be weird, so it was always best to be cautious and not rush up to them.

Tellop took the lead and waved to his grandfather. "Hi grandpa Halldom," said Tellop. "Can we ask you a question?"

"What sort of question?" said Halldom in a wary tone. His eyes sparkled as the boys swallowed and looked at each other. He took a pull from his pipe.

"Uh," said Tellop and Zannie elbowed him in the gut. "We want to know where pixies came from."

Halldom let out the pipe smoke with a sigh and laugh. "Oh, is that all?" he said. The boys visibly relaxed. "I thought you were coming to ask me to do some work!" He laughed at his own joke and swung his feet down to dangle off the edge of the tree branch. He motioned to the boys to come closer.

"Come on over and sit down," Halldom said, "and let me tell you the tale."

Zannie and his friends sat down on the branch next to Halldom and waited. Grandpa Halldom took a puff from his pipe and began.

"You boys know what dwarves are, right?"

They nodded in agreement.

"Good, good. Well, a long time ago, some dwarves were digging in their tunnels far beneath the earth. In their digging, they found a small, round stone that was too light to be solid. The outside was black, but sparkled with embedded crystals. The dwarves pondered the meaning of the rock, but none could figure out its source or purpose.

"They carried the rock back up towards the surface, but still deeper under ground than any pixie has ever been. They took the rock to their leader, King Magraffan. He carefully examined it and proclaimed it to be a black dragon's egg, long buried beneath the earth."

There was collective appreciation from the boys. Even Zannie admitted that this was way

better than his story.

“King Magraffan thought that if he could hatch the egg, the dragon would be bound to him and secure his place in history as the only dragonlord king of the dwarves. He commanded the stone to be warmed and guarded around the clock. Years passed and the stone did not stir. No one knew quite how long a dragon’s egg had to be incubated before it would hatch, so they waited. And waited.

“For ten years, the stone was warmed and guarded, but nothing happened. Around that time, another stone, just like the King Magraffan’s was discovered. A young dwarf named Hegim thought to prove the king a fool and took the stone before the king, pretending to offer it as a prize.

“Just before the king’s guard could accept the stone, Hegim smashed the stone on the floor, saying ‘behold your egg, majesty!’ The stone was indeed hollow, but there was no dragon. The inside was lined with crystals that twinkled and glittered in the dim light.

“All eyes fell on the smashed stone. A guard brought a light closer to the crystals. As he did, the light reflected through them. Out of that dark, twinkling light, tiny beings emerged, shaped like dwarves, but far smaller in size.”

“Hobgoblins!” shouted Frenz. He slapped his hands over his mouth when grandpa Halldom looked up at the interruption. Tellop and Zannie glared at Frenz, but Halldom just laughed a warm belly laugh. He winked at Frenz before continuing.

“That’s right,” said Halldom, “the tiny creatures were hobgoblins. Well, King Magraffan was so angry at the arrogant dwarf Hegim that he ordered him exiled to the surface of the earth. For a dwarf, there is no greater punishment than that.”

The boys nodded in somber agreement and understanding.

“But before Hegim was sent to the surface, King Macgraffan ordered the other false dragon’s egg to be brought before him. He commanded Hegim to take the false egg with him to the surface and keep it with him at all times to remind Hegim of his arrogance. The guards escorted Hegim to the surface of the earth and guarded the entrance to the underground against his return.

“Hegim wandered the earth for years, distraught and directionless, carrying the false egg as penance for his misguided actions. As Hegim lay dying on the edge of a large, dark forest, a fairy found him. Hegim told the fairy his tale. In his bitterness, he asked the fairy to smash the rock so that he might know that he was right and that it was not an egg. The fairy complied and smashed open the rock. Inside was just as before, lined with crystals. Hegim lay back, satisfied in his death. The fairy looked more closely at the crystals. And as before, when the light reflected through them, tiny beings emerged. But this time, the creatures resembled the fairy, but far smaller in size.”

“Pixies!” all the boys shouted together.

Grandpa Halldom laughed. “That’s right,” he said, puffing on his pipe.

The boys grinned and looked at each other.

“Is that true?” said Kezim.

Halldom shrugged. “It’s the story I was told when I was your age,” he said.

“So, we’re related to hobgoblins?” asked Frenz.

Before grandpa Halldom could answer, Zannie said, “you surely are, ugly.” He zipped off the branch before Kezim could punch him in the arm and made a face. The other two boys flew off the branch and they all flipped and tumbled their way back towards the village. Belatedly, Tellop called back a hasty “thank you” and Halldom smiled.

After a few hours of mulling over grandpa Halldom's story, Zannie and his friends still weren't sure that it was true.

"I don't know," said Zannie, "a dwarf just gave up his treasure? And why didn't he smash it open sooner or dig his own tunnel?"

"That's stupid," said Tellop, "if he dug his own tunnel, the other dwarves would just find him and make him go back to the surface again."

The other two nodded in agreement.

"How would they even know?" demanded Zannie.

Tellop rolled his eyes. "They're *dwarves*," he said, as if that explained everything.

They sat under a pine bough and watched the gnats and motes of dust float through a sunbeam. The trees were thinner here on the edge of the forest. The boys liked the feeling of danger they got being there. Their parents had forbidden them to venture out of the forest after Zannie had his encounter with a human on a dare. Zannie hadn't told even his friends out his adventures out of the forest since then. There were somethings that were sweeter when no one else knew about them.

They played at sword fighting with the long pine needles for a while, but quickly tired of that. The origin of the pixies wouldn't leave Zannie's mind alone. He needed someone who knew a lot of stuff, but had the time to talk to them. The Elders were not an option. They knew stuff, but they had important things to do. Grandparents were good, but their stories, Zannie suspected, were embellished for their audience. Then, it hit him and he snapped his fingers.

"Let's go ask the teacher where the pixies came from," he said.

The boys looked at him like he was crazy. It was summer, after all, and they didn't have to be at school. Only the really smart pixies went to school even when they didn't have to.

Zannie enumerated the reasons it was a good idea. "Teachers know things," he said, "they don't lie, and our parents will be proud of us for learning something in the summer."

The boys nodded at the last part, seeing the wisdom in getting in good with their parents. Their pine needle swords discarded, the four flew back to the village. They slowed when they approached the large, flat branch that was the village's classroom. There were a few pixies sitting in the front row, listening to the teacher explain something.

Zannie led the boys respectfully up to the group and stopped behind the seated students. The teacher looked up and smiled.

"Hello, Zannie," she said. Her voice was light and playful.

Zannie smiled and said, "we have a questions about history, if you have a moment."

Her smile widened. "Of course," she said, "I always have time for questions."

The boys sat down and the other students made room for them so they could all sit in a half-circle in front of Teacher Kallen.

"We want to know," said Zannie, "where the pixies came from."

One of the students giggled and looked at Zannie like he was stupid. Zannie glared at him and the boy choked off his laugh. Teacher Kallen looked reproachfully at the student.

"Now, now," she said, "there's no shame in not knowing something, as long as you're willing to learn." She turned to Zannie and smiled.

"The origin of pixies is an interesting tale," she said, "though perhaps not as interesting as some you've already heard."

Zannie and Tellop boggled at the teacher, then at Kezim and Frenz. How did the teacher

know they had heard other stories that day? They quickly recovered and returned their attention back to Teacher Kallen.

“Once upon a time,” she said, “not in this woods, but in one very much like it, the sun was setting. A human was traveling alone and had not yet made his camp for the night. He was a traveler from far away and the strange sounds of animals frightened him. He reluctantly made his camp at the edge of the forest and built a small fire.

“As the sun sank lower in the sky, bits of light hopped between the branches of nearby trees. He huddled closer to the fire. Tiny sparks of light from the dried wood burned brightly as they floated up from the flames. They seemed to hover and dance before winking out, lost in the dark trees overhead.

“The human sat watching the fire, the playful sparks, and the dying sunlight. His mind started to work. Perhaps the fire lights were not really lights. Perhaps, the light in the trees wasn’t sunlight, but the flight of some forest creature he could not see. He imagined tiny creatures, human shaped, but with wings flitting about through the trees, watching him.

“For many hours, the human amused himself with these ideas, imagining what the tiny creatures might be doing in the forest. The next day, he continued his journey to the next human town where he told his tale. He told the villagers of the tiny human creatures with wings he had seen in the forest. He called them pixies.”

There were cries of astonishment from some of the students, Zannie included. One of the students raised his hand and the teacher gestured at him to speak.

“So, this human actually saw pixies and he just told people about us?”

Teacher Kallen smiled and shook her head. “Not exactly,” she said. “Pixies didn’t exist until humans started to believe in us. Once they told each other about pixies, we spread to all the forests near human settlements. We are a reflection of their imagination.”

“Ewww,” protested Zannie, “that’s gross! We were spawned from a *human*? Ugh!”

Zannie’s friends concurred. That was seriously gross and way creepier than being spawned from a dark egg that dwarves had found.

Kallen laughed. “I’m sorry, Zannie,” she said, “but that’s the truth. If you don’t like it, I have a delightful story about how pixies were created from the laughter of a druid, or a crystallized sunbeam. But those are just stories. As far as we know, being created from the imagination of a human is the truth.”

Zannie puffed out a breath of irritation. He had his answer, but it was one he didn’t like.

“No,” said Zannie, “that’s okay. Thank you for telling us the truth.”

Kallen laughed. “Of course, my dears. Come back any time.”

Zannie and his friends stood up and waved farewell to the teacher. They zipped off into the trees. They made sure they were well out of earshot before they spoke about what the teacher had said.

Tellop said, “I like the dwarf story better.”

“Yeah,” agreed Kezim and Frenz.

“What?” demanded Zannie, “you didn’t like my sneeze story?” He grinned and darted off before the others could punch him on the shoulder. They followed him, laughing and joking. Zannie realized that knowing the truth was good, even if you still made up stories that said something different.

“Hey!” said Zannie, “let’s go dig a tunnel and see if we can find a black dragon egg. Then we can make even tinier pixies with even more wings.”

“Yeah!” agreed the boys and they flew off into the darkening forest.