

Moon Night, Garden Light

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Leslie has a lucky friend
who has two red birds and a wren
that have taken upon themselves to guard
the trees that shade her best friend's yard
during the day
when she and Leslie play.

And sometimes in the early morning
brown rabbits appear without warning.
Squirrels climb trees
and flowers bob with bumble bees,
while hornets take their stations
on gardenias and impatiens.

And all about the yard stand
magnolia trees that often take command
of all the other scents,
which only offer hints
of who they are
—their fragrances cannot travel far
but bend and blend
in the magnolia scented wind.

And often on a day that's warm,
especially one before a storm,
Leslie and her friend
sometimes pretend
the yard and garden are magic,
sometimes wonderful, sometimes tragic,

ruled by kings
or nameless things
that shake the leaves
that turn into green infantries,
rustling their shields
over bluegrass fields.

But once at night
she and Leslie saw a sight
they could not explain
or hope to gain
an understanding of,
when they saw above
them, through the bedroom window,
moon glow
twice as bright
as any other night.

And down in the yard the shadows danced,
the red birds fell into a trance,
the wren took flight
in the milky light
but couldn't find her usual tree,
not being able to see
her way around
above the shadowed, yellowed ground.

Rabbits marched to and fro
up and down the garden rows,
single file and military,
led, the girls thought, by a rabbit fairy.

The fairy waved a wand of myrrh
and wore, it seemed, brown rabbit fur.

Fire-flies floated in the breeze
among the elm and dogwood trees,
flashing on and off their tails
they moved like tiny boats with sails.

And in the garden a group of squirrels
did pirouettes and twirls,
tossing tomatoes,
biting potatoes,
making little horns
from stalks of corn
and playing a syncopated tune,
a fugue to praise the moon.

And the girls saw
watching it all
a neighborhood cat,
who just sat,
moonstruck, in a daze,
unable even to raise
a paw
even though it saw
a tasty little finch
not more than an inch
in front of its face.

Had this bird forgotten its place!
It strutted about, flaunting it,
while the cat sat mute, yet wanting it.

And then to the girls' surprise
they slowly began to rise
like balloons
on a windless afternoon.
They floated
above the yard, noted
the lay of the land,
how the roses ran,
the hawthorn and the mistletoe,
and the garden corn in three long roles.
And then at last a gentle breeze
set them down between two trees.

And there they were among the squirrels.
Imagine, two ordinary little girls.
The squirrels were dressed as cavaliers
—a group of mice their pistoleers.
The rabbits, not to be outdone,
wore French berets and cummerbunds.
Everyone was really smashing,
so debonair, so dashing!
And to the girls' surprise,
they and the animals were the very same size!

And everyone was quite at ease,
everyone was really pleased
to be together
among the plants and common heather,
beneath the too bright moon
that made the yard a kind of milky noon.

The girls introduced themselves
—the animals thought they must be elves.
They shook hands all around,
gave their names, ages, home towns,
what they liked to play,
their favorite time of day,
a favorite food
or mood.

The fairy, who seemed to be in charge,
was small and neon blue, with large
transparent wings
trimmed with tasseled, glowing things
that blinked
and winked.

And on the fairy's command
the fire-flies joined by holding hands,
formed two rings of light,
took flight,
and because of something the fairy said
landed on top of each girl's head
and formed two blinking crowns
that made some little buzzing sounds.

And then they played!
They ran, they laughed, they made a promenade
between the heather and the roses,
said silly thing, struck silly poses,
put each other under spells,
practiced with each other's yells,
talked about the Universe

or simply shared a little verse.

All night long and never stopping,
the somersaulting, rolling, hopping,
the climbing of trees
without fatigue, with ease,
continued on and on.

The birds organized the songs,
the bees provided the sweets,
the squirrels brought lots of nutty meats,
and the fairy asked if the fire-flies might
provide a little extra light.

And after what seemed like many hours
of writing plays and arranging flowers,
some clouds came up, the moon began to wane,
and they felt some drops of warm spring rain.

Then Leslie and her friend sat on the ground,
the animals gathered round,
and as the scene before them blurred,
near the horizon both girls heard
a roll of distant thunder.

The girls began to wonder
if something was wrong
—though not for long,
for just before the yard was swept
by sheets of rain, they slept.

And early the next day
the girls ran out to the yard to play,
and they pretended the yard was magic,
sometimes wonderful, sometimes tragic,
ruled by kings
or nameless things

...and the hours ran into days.