

The Fly Trap

YESTERDAY I caught a fairy in a fly trap.

It was on one of those long sticky coils that you pin to the ceiling. I'd only put it up that morning because I was fed up with the incessant buzzing.

It was about 6.30 in the evening and I was about to go up to the village store to put my lottery numbers in when I saw it. I watched as it flapped frantically. It glowed, or rather shimmered as it struggled but eventually I saw its struggling get slower and its efforts become more laborious.

I found a magnifying glass in the dresser drawer, cleaned it up a little with a tissue and examined the thing, now a few times larger. The flies around it looked revolting; huge hairy creatures with wings that occasionally quivered with the last remnants of life. But this fairy had long golden hair and was obviously female. She exuded light somehow. I remember thinking that it looked as if she'd been plugged into the electricity supply.

As I watched, the glow started to fade.

I decided to take down the fly trap and rescue her. My wife, Sandra, was due home in an hour and I really wanted her to see.

I prised the drawing pin out of the ceiling and removed the coil. Then I held it at arm's length for a few seconds, disgusting thing. I laid it out on the draining board and quickly put the pot holding the kitchen utensils on one end and the edge of the chopping board on the other before it recoiled. She was sticking to the trap by her hands and knees but her hair and wings were beginning to get soiled with traces of glue. I prised her away and lifted her onto a tablemat with the help of a cocktail stick and my wife's eyebrow tweezers.

In the kitchen drawer I found a very fine paintbrush of pure bristle. I'd seen it there only days before when I went to look for a battery. I squeezed some washing up liquid into a basin to

make lukewarm suds and bathed the fairy using the brush. Eventually she became still, weighed down probably by the soapy water. When I looked through the magnifying glass at her face she was pale, even bloodless. A tiny replica of Sandra.

I washed her as thoroughly as I could, taking special care with her wings. Then I lifted her onto a piece of kitchen paper and left her on the windowsill. There was still some sunlight seeping through and it was very warm.

As a precaution against her flying away, I shut the back door and closed the window. Then I went into the lounge and closed the window in there too, just in case. I had this uneasy feeling that if Sandra didn't see her she wouldn't believe that there had ever been a fairy. I could picture her coming home and staring at me with that chin against chest, under-lidded look. Or going off into raucous laughter at another of what she calls my "ridiculous episodes". Then she would be narrow mouthed for ages.

Eventually, as the fairy dried, she stirred. I could see her light returning and as I watched she raised herself on one arm, pushed her tiny hand through her long hair and sat up.

I said, getting down to the real business: "Do you grant wishes?"

She gazed at me. I could see her features clearly through the magnifying glass. "Would you like one?"

"I couldn't believe my luck. "Really?"

"I can give you one wish only," she said.

"They weaken me. I am only allowed so many in my lifetime. Yours will be the last, I'm afraid."

I grinned to myself and could hardly contain my excitement. "Could I win the lottery? Tonight? There's a rollover jackpot of fifteen million pounds."

She was quiet for a moment or two, obviously getting her strength back, then she said, "Your wish is granted. I will give you the winning numbers."

I rushed to find a piece of paper and a pen, scribbled them down and immediately began to panic. There were only ten minutes to the 7.30 deadline. I checked that I had a pound coin, grabbed my car keys and raced out. I tried not to fumble unlocking the door and starting the engine and although the village Co-op wasn't far away I drove there as fast as I could, slamming on the accelerator and cutting a few corners.

I was sweating by the time I arrived at the shop. Three men in front of me were marking their numbers. One, a big man from the housing estate round the corner, was completely blocking my way. I had to reach round him to get my ticket. He saw me and said, "You'd better hurry up mate, there's not much time. But on second thoughts don't bother. It's my lucky night tonight." He snorted a laugh, looking at the other two. I chuckled to myself. If only he knew.

After wasting time hunting for his money and chatting up the girl behind the counter, he left. I blocked my six numbers and waited, getting more and more anxious while a youngish chap, about my age but in a flat cap, and an elderly man who kept dropping his pound handed over their papers and paid their money.

This would be it. Yes. At last, after all these years. I must have spent a fortune trying to win.

I handed my ticket to the girl, a young thing in an unflattering overall. She had a name badge on her right breast that read *Tracy* and underneath *Here to Help*.

"You're too late," she said.

"What do you mean, I'm too late?"

"Sorry. The machine has shut off."

"What?"

"It's 7.30."

"But I'm winning tonight!"

She laughed. "Try again next week." And she went on to serve a spotty youth who was next in line.

"You don't understand," I whispered. "I have the winning numbers."

That was it. It had been my imagination. What was happening to my brain? Maybe I was hallucinating. Maybe I was crazy like those people in the hostel up the road. They saw things that weren't there. Maybe there was some weird ingredient in the meal for one I had eaten earlier that didn't agree with me. I

did in fact feel a bit queasy.

I managed to get home and had started to feel better by the time I switched the television on for the lottery results. I sat back on my leather sofa and was just in time to see the lead up to the draw. The entertainer of the week took his time as usual with his jokes. As the fanfare of trumpets blared out - usually one of the bits I enjoy - and the TV screen filled up with the words *The National Lottery*, I felt resigned to the fact that it wouldn't have happened to me anyway. The popping pastel balls bounced around the drum, each one teasingly numbered. The individual winners plopped one by one down the chute as the compere belled them out and the audience cheered.

Every one was mine.

Every one of my numbers was a winner.

How could she give me the right ones and then let me down? After all I'd done for her? I could have won a fortune. I was racked with grief for the lost millions.

Then, out of the corner, behind the lamp, came the glowing figure, flying like a floating feather. She landed on the coffee table and sat cross-legged.

"What's the matter? Aren't you happy?"

"I was too late. I got there too late. Surely you could have known that I'd be too late?"

"I've got no control over time," she said.

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry?" I sobbed. "I've lost fifteen million pounds."

"But you never had it to lose," she said.

"And look at all you have already." She purred sweetly. "You've got a beautiful home, a delightful garden and a lovely wife."

That was as much as I could take. I rushed into the kitchen and grabbed a fly swat from the nail behind the cupboard door. There she was on the coffee table, a buzzing little insect creature.

She flew up when she saw me, her hair flowing out behind her. I saw the fear in her face as she dived to the window but it was shut and I slapped her with the fly swat as she struggled against the double-glazing.

I had to get a tissue then to wipe my eyes and nose. I sat down on the sofa and opened my shirt buttons.

A few moments later there was the sound of a key in the front door and Sandra came in, looking cool in a crisp cotton dress.

"The lottery's been on then," she smirked.

"How many millions have we won?"

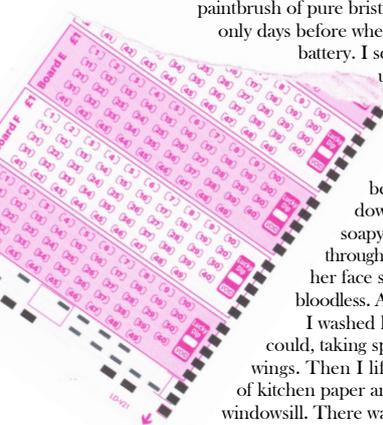
I didn't answer.

"It's hot in here." She stared at me. "What's the matter? You look awful. Why don't you open the windows?"

She walked over and saw the flattened mess on the glass.

"Ugh! Whatever's that?" she asked.

"Another bloody fly." I said.



ABOUT BROADSHEET STORIES

BROADSHEET STORIES are intended to give writers the kind of audience artists can reach by hanging their work in coffee houses and local galleries.

We publish a story a month, printed on newspaper-sized sheets (hence the name) and distributed free at venues in the west of England.

If you are a writer, we are looking for contributions. Stories should be between 1,200 and 1,900 words in length. We pay a token fee of £25.00 for each one published. For more details email submissions@stiltjack.co.uk or phone Martin Cooper on 07894 340970.

You can find examples of broadsheets published so far on our blog at <http://broadsheetstories.com/> or at the following venues:

In the south-west

Fisherton Mill
108 Fisherton Street
Salisbury
Wiltshire SP2 7QY

The Forum Cafe
34 Salisbury Street
Blandford Forum
Dorset DT11 7PR

Oliver's
19 Cheap Street
Sherborne
Dorset DT9 3PU

The Town Mill Bakery

Tudor Arcade
South Street
Dorchester
Dorset DT1 1BN

Turnbulls
9 High Street
Shaftesbury
Dorset SP7 8HZ

In the south-east

Martello Bookshop
26 High Street
Rye
Sussex TN31 7JJ

