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The Dragonfly

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Electric Butterfly

Karl Weber
Lumen

The Dragonfly

Alissa Cichelli

It should be understood at once that pixies love games. They would sooner have their strange little hearts ripped out and poked with iron pins than pass up an invitation to play, and they will only play for a prize. It should also be known that all pixies are apathetic. The intensity of the apathy will vary from one to the next, but all pixies are unfailingly apathetic, and it is this combination of competitiveness and wickedness that makes for such interesting stories.

This particular story concerns a wistful dragonfly that was resting on a reed by a little pond and minding his own business when a great big fish leapt right up out of the water and swallowed the fellow next to him. Startled, and not to mention terrified, our dragonfly abandoned his reed and made for a weeping willow's branch. But within moments of alighting there, an ambitious blue jay nearly ended his life by diving at him with a hungry beak. It was by a great stroke of luck that our harrowed dragonfly managed to perceive his impending doom in time and dodge it like a bullet. He fled swiftly from the willow and made for a quiet lily pad floating peacefully on the surface of the placid pond, but things were no better here. A great green frog with ravenous eyes and a brilliant magenta maw emerged from the depths and lashed out his sticky tongue like a whip to snag our dragonfly, but, thankfully, our dragonfly had excellent reflexes and a fine pair of wings and was able to get away before the thwarted frog could croak in frustration.

By now our little *Aeshna Umbrosa* was thoroughly fed up with being the object of other people's appetites. He buzzed over to a leafy bush to blend into so that he could finally have a rest, and that was when the pixie took notice. Now pixies are crafty things indeed, and besides being competitive and wicked, they are extremely calculating and observant. They look and listen and wait for exactly the right moment to pounce. That is why it is vitally important to take care what you say out loud, for there is bound to be a pixie nearby just itching to grant your wish, whether you meant it or not.

This pixie sat quietly in the branches of the bush and listened to the dragonfly grumble about his unfortunate life.

"I wish I wasn't something that everything wanted to eat," he said woe-fully, and he should have left it at that, but he did not. "I don't care if it's a rock or a cloud or a bundle of sticks, I just don't want to be eaten!"

A cloud will eventually turn into rain, which gets eaten up by plants and animals alike, and a bundle of sticks will sooner or later be devoured by fire, so there was really only one option that the pixie could work with. Now dragonflies, being insects, are used to undergoing transformations at least twice in their lives. They are not strangers to bodily metamorphoses, but changing from a living organism into a rock is a bit extreme. Quite unexpectedly, our dragonfly found himself curling into a ball, his limbs melting into his thorax, his head tucking under his tail and his wings neatly wrapping everything up. He couldn't breathe, move or feel anything anymore, and that was quite horrific. Now that he was solid, heavy and round, he rolled right off the leaf he had been perched on and fell to the ground with a quiet thud. It did not hurt, of course, but the situation was very alarming. Our poor dragonfly could still think and speak, and he cried for help from the shadow of the shrub, but there are few folk out there who can comprehend the language of stones.

Three days passed before our dragonfly was inadvertently adopted by a young lad that lived in a cottage nearby. The pixie had not turned the dragonfly into a plain pebble to be passed over and pummeled by various feet, but a marvelous piece of polished green obsidian that sparkled brightly in the afternoon sun. The young lad, who happened to have a keen interest in minerals, spied the glimmer amidst the grasses at once. He picked it up straight away and brought it home and placed it on the windowsill where it could catch the sun and display its brilliance.

Well, thought the dragonfly to himself, this isn't so bad. At least I am in the sun and not slowly sinking into the earth...or being eaten.

Over the next few days, the dragonfly tried to train himself to be content with this new life, but his efforts were fruitless and agonizing. Freedom was so,

so close, but he was no longer a living thing capable of enjoying the smell of the water, the taste of the wind or the touch of the green grass. He was a rock.

"Oh bother!" he lamented. "How I wish I was a living thing again!"

"Tut, tut! What do you have against being a fetching green rock?"

Our dragonfly-turned-obsidian was fairly startled and surprised to be answered in such a way after being ignored for so long. The same pixie that had taken advantage of our dragonfly's carelessness alighted on the windowsill beside the sorrowful stone and looked down at it reproachfully.

"First you wish to preserve your scaly skin by becoming something inedible. Now you want to risk your scaly skin by changing back. I ought to drop you in the ocean where the sun will never find you, where you can be swallowed up by barnacles and bashed about by lobster legs!"

Up until this point, the dragonfly had had no idea why he'd suddenly changed into a stone, but now that everything was clear, he did what most people in this predicament would do: beg.

"Oh please, won't you change me back? I have learned a great deal and I'll never complain again! Please change me back!"

"Shan't," said the pixie flatly.

"Shan't?"

"Shan't. People get what they deserve and you deserve this. What has learning to do with it?"

The dragonfly, completely dejected, lapsed into silence for a long while, and the pixie reveled in his misery. When he finally found his tongue again, he asked the pixie humbly, "Would you play a game with me to pass the time?"

"I only play for stakes," replied the lofty pixie. "What could you offer up if I win?"

"All I have left is my voice—"

"I'll take it! And if you somehow manage to win, what will you claim from me?"

The dragonfly did not have to think about it. "If I win, you must change me back into a dragonfly."

"Have it your way. What's the game?"

There were really only two choices: Stay Still or Be Quiet. The dragonfly elected Stay Still, which was a very wise choice though he did not know it, for a pixie will chew out its own tongue to win Be Quiet, but staying still is impossible for any living thing to do indefinitely.

And so an hour crept by and neither party yielded, but things became dire when the young lad walked into the room and beheld the little pixie standing on his windowsill. The pixie did not see him as they had their eyes

closed, because blinking would have counted as Movement, so the boy was able to sneak right up and trap them in a glass jar.

Infuriated and humiliated, the pixie squirmed and thrashed and screamed, but it was all to no avail. The lid was screwed on tight, making escape impossible. The obsidian dragonfly observed the scene with great interest, and when the boy finally left the room to do goodness-knew-what, he made a proposal to the captive pixie.

“If you change me back, I could help you escape.”

The pixie was incensed by this, but they were also desperate. “Don’t be ridiculous!” they chided. “A dragonfly could never open a jar! I’ll change you into a raccoon instead. Use your hand-like paws to unscrew this wretched lid!”

And in the next moment, the piece of green obsidian transformed yet again into a large raccoon with a luxurious pelt, an elegant black mask and little hand-like paws. It took him no time at all to adjust to this new body, and he used his strong limbs to climb right out of the open window, leaving the pixie behind. The raccoon that was once a stone that was once a dragonfly ran fast and far, so far that the pixie that had toyed with him so cruelly could never find him again, and he lived quite happily after that and never had dealings with pixies ever again.

Stories like this typically contain a moral or two, and I suppose you could find some in this one if you care to look. But if you are feeling any anxiety about the pixie in the jar, then know this: that pixie, once free, was indeed going to drop our dragonfly into the ocean not to drown, but to suffer for eternity in the form of an iron anchor, something no pixie would ever approach. People get what they deserve, and that pixie deserved to be trapped in a jar and at the mercy of a twelve-year-old boy.

The End.

Becca Filsinger — Photograph



A Dog's Gaze



Gargoyle

John Scrage — Screen Print