

# A Different Sun

*By Jenny Butler*

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In the clear night air, through the fields around his grandmother's house, he ran in circles shouting into the starry expanse of an Irish sky. She had told him about the fairies that live in the field up past the house, by the fort. To him it didn't look like a fort, just a hill that had been levelled. It had a dip in it and some scraggly trees. Not looking like a house at all, but that is where the fairies live, according to his grandmother. The fort was off-limits for playing because of the "good people". He didn't see what was so good about them.

As expected, she opened the door and called "Liam" in her scratchy old voice. That night, her bedtime story was about a man who after falling asleep on a *ráth* found himself "in the fairies". Finding this hilarious, he imagined a fairy with a human squashed inside it, staggering about. His grandmother didn't find it amusing at all. Annoyed, she said that they could take boys away forever, especially "bold" boys. Seeing his fearful face, and worried he would have nightmares, she made him laugh by tickling him. He fell asleep thinking of the man in fairyland.

Next morning he went and sat by the stump of a tree with the moss on it, beside which was a dip where the roots formed a semicircle. Putting his hands around his legs, and his head on his knees, he cried. It felt so lonely playing by himself. Wishing now to have a mother who would fix things, like Billy's mam – how he loved being at Billy's house! It was hard knowing it was his own fault his mother was dead because she died giving birth to him. In photos, his mother had long dark hair, dark eye makeup and red lipstick. For a long time he thought every woman of this Disney villain colour-scheme was her, not yet understanding "dead". Granny got upset about how his mother never got to see him take his first steps, how he didn't have her there to help him learn how to walk.

Hungry now, "famished" granny would say. When he went to stand up, he couldn't! He simply could not move, hands still grasped to his knees as if superglued in place. His heart raced. Then, they came. Sensing them encircle him, they were watching, waiting. He wanted so badly to get up, to run, to call his grandmother, to scream for help. Unable to move a muscle, his mind filled with dread.

He heard giggling, sounds like laughs stifled. The picture in his mind's eye was of strange small people round him though he could not see them, just the shape of the tree's semi-circular root which now seemed more prominent somehow. They called his name. Utter shock at how they knew it! They sounded like little kids but he knew instinctively that they were not children.

He could hear music, the loveliest music, and singing! He had never heard the song but he knew it and started to sing along. Suddenly feeling so happy, giddy, and his body fluid and light. Desperate now to go toward them, to join in, be a part of this joyous group! This time when he tried to move, he could, nimbly almost like floating and unlike he had ever moved before. He followed the music and the little lights in the dusk, which confused him. Was it not still morning? Surely it couldn't be past lunchtime? He didn't feel hungry anymore, the only impulse to follow the lights, the strange music.

Approaching the hill – oh he wasn't allowed up here, by the fort – but if he could just glimpse who was singing! The lights darted and he jumped after them, not wanting to lose them. He fell down with a thump. Was he in a ditch? Feeling around, brambles, damp stones, climbing out of what seemed to be a hole.

Pressure and pulling on his leg – an animal? A hand! He screamed but the earth was filling his mouth and nostrils. Trying desperately to spit out the grit but his throat was full of it, soil pressing his tonsils. On moving his head he could feel earth packed on either side. Was this a tunnel? So scared he wet himself. He tried to get up but earth was above him now too – a grave? Feeling the fabric of his jeans being pulled, and terrified now, wet earth moving as he was jerked quickly along.

For what seemed like an endless time, days or longer, being pulled lengthways. He was drowsy – had he slept like this? Then, faint sounds getting progressively louder, strange words in a foreign tongue. Abruptly, unexpectedly, he was falling downward and there

was the brightest light! It hurt his eyes. He turned his face toward the tunnel, which was now above and behind him, to shield from the light.

Turning back, his eyes adjusting still, he saw rainbows, kaleidoscope movement. Not seeming like the sea but a multicoloured mass moving like water. Such beautiful sounds all around! Rays of fantastic light shone vertically from the floor but above was dark soil, packed closely.

Lightheaded, expectant, but not afraid now. Following a path of moss and glittering crystals, he saw tiny shrubs unrecognizable to him. The ground seemed molten. He had trouble keeping balance. A dark-haired, pale woman appeared and smilingly took his hand, showing him how to walk, step by step.

She guided him toward a funny-shaped hill; instead of going up the hill, they went inside through a little door and downward through a dark tunnel which opened into a startlingly beautiful meadow. The woman stopped, dropping his hand, at a cliff-edge. She knelt down, leaned and peered over. She beckoned to him, holding out her hand. He knelt down, leaned forward, and took her hand once more. Like this they stayed, blissful, staring down into the sun below.