

# Cora's First Sighting

*a Forgotten Relics short story*

I was five the first time I saw anything unusual. Well, more unusual than the world already is to a little kid. So let's call it "supernatural" and move on.

Our house in Kansas City wasn't anything to brag about. We moved in before I started school and didn't leave until I got old enough for my folks to worry about me becoming the subject of an after school special. A single whitewashed story in a borderline low-rent neighborhood with a sketchy park, two tiny bedrooms, a leaky roof, and this weird smell that came out of the vents in the winter. But it had a massive overgrown backyard that Mom fell straight up in love with and Dad never could tell her no. So that was that.

Because I was born in November, I wasn't able to start kindergarten with the rest of the rugrats in my preschool class; I had to wait another year. And rather than shell out for another year's worth of naps and storytime with strangers, Mom opted to stay home with me. She'd been wanting to take a sabbatical from her transcriptionist job to see if her greenhouse idea had legs anyway, and Dad had just landed a raise, so it seemed like a perfect setup.

Every morning on his way to the library, Dad would grab his coffee from the kitchen counter and his keys from the hook by the door, then kiss us both on the forehead and disappear for the day. Except sometimes his keys wouldn't be there. Which was weird because Mom dutifully rehooked them every evening when he spilled them on the coffee table instead of putting them away. He'd check his pockets, the hook, his briefcase, and then his pockets again. A house-wide search would follow, accompanied by Dad's Gaelic cursing and Mom's genteel reassurance that everything is somewhere and they'd turn up.

One of these times, I got it into my little peanut head that I'd help Daddy find his keys. My folks were tearing up couch cushions and turning down their bed, and I toddled off to look in my room. Seemed to make as much sense as what they were doing.

As I went to push open my sticker-covered door, I heard a faint tinkling noise behind me. I leaned over to peer down the hallway, but all I saw was the continued

whirlwind of adult annoyance in the living room. Again, the metallic sound came from behind me, a little further away this time. That piqued my curiosity. Not that it's hard to do at five, but still.

I abandoned my room and instead toddled into the kitchen to chase the sound. The jangling continued, leading me on my stubby little legs out the back door and into the scorching summer heat of the garden. I froze for a moment, remembering the last time I'd wandered outside unsupervised - I imagined I still had a palm print on my butt - but I couldn't resist the temptation to hunt down the noise and so I headed down the stone path between the flower beds and tomato lattices.

Fortunately for my tiny attention span, I didn't have to look very long. I'd rounded the jalapeno patch and was about to rummage through the ferns when all of the sudden, there it was: a blue-bearded man with tiny translucent wings, standing only slightly taller than the silver keys he held.

We stood there for a long moment staring at one another with eyes wide and mouths open. He seemed just as astounded I could see him as I was.

Eventually, I remembered what I was doing and said, "You stole my daddy's keys," pointing accusingly at the treasure he clutched to his chest. He flashed a mouthful of razor-sharp teeth in my direction and hissed like a cornered alley cat. I jumped but held my ground. "Give 'em back!" I demanded, holding out my chubby hand with the authority of an empress.

The tiny man narrowed his purple eyes at me, then looked down at the keys he held. He didn't try to speak - I guess he knew I wouldn't understand - instead, he thrust out his free hand and shoved it towards me. It quickly dawned on me that he wasn't just copying me; he wanted me to pay him. Playground Rules: You want something good, you gotta trade something good.

Digging in my overall pockets produced a lint ball, a Barbie doll head, a handful of pink sequins, and half a green crayon. I laid the objects down in a neat row halfway between us and respectfully retreated so he could look them over. I used all my toddler willpower to stay calm long enough to make the deal; Daddy was depending on me. The winged thief inched warily forward, dividing his attention between admiring what I'd laid out for him and monitoring me for any sign of treachery. Another long moment passed before he made the tiniest of satisfied squeaks and, lightning-fast, dropped the

keys to the pavement, snatched the Barbie doll head, and vanished under the thick fern foliage behind him.

Totally forgetting my treasures on the ground, I made an excited squeal of my own and seized the keyring in both hands, then barreled through the back door straight into my parents' bedroom where they were desperately excavating the dresser. I waved my prize wildly in the air as I plowed directly into my father's knees, nearly taking him down.

"Daddy, Daddy! Lookit!"

"Cora, don't..." he started. Then he saw what I had in my fist. His eyebrows came together in a red line over his grey eyes as he knelt down to my level. "Where did you find these?"

"The little blue man in Mommy's garden took them! I traded him Annie's head!" I crowed.

Dad looked up at Mom, who shrugged, then back to me. He smiled faintly for a few seconds, then laughed in a strange way and gently unwound his keys from my sweaty hand. Lifting me into Mom's arms, he kissed me on the forehead.

"Thank you, *piskie*," he said. "You're my hero."  
He never lost his keys again.

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