



Isaac and the Garden Fairy

By Greg Krehbiel

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His father said it was moles.

Something was making holes in the back yard. There were soft spots in the grass where Isaac's foot would sink in the dirt. They were eating away the roots of the grass, because no matter how many times his father put down new grass seed, the grass didn't stay for long.

Isaac imagined what it was like underground. Maybe there was a network of underground tunnels, with families of moles crawling around inside. He wished he could shrink down to their size (with a flashlight and a tiny sword) and investigate. Then he wondered what fighting a mole would be like, stuck in a dirt tunnel.

Then again, he wondered what it would be like to make friends with a mole. Maybe they could show him things.

"They can't talk," he figured, "so they can't be that good of a friend."

One lazy Sunday afternoon after mass Isaac wandered into the back of the yard where the trees grew and he noticed a new hole next to the roots of the tallest tree. Something was digging down between the roots, and it gave Isaac an idea.

He ran inside and borrowed the family iPad, then spent an hour doing research, mostly on YouTube. Then, armed with the top half of an old fishing pole and some fishing line, he set a snare next to the hole at the bottom of the tree. It took almost an hour to get the trigger just right, but when he was done he surveyed his work and thought it looked pretty good.

Then he hid behind a different tree and waited. Something had dug that hole, and eventually it had to come out.

Learning about snares and then building one had been pretty fun and kept him occupied, but sitting behind a tree waiting for something to come out of a hole and get caught can get pretty boring. Thirty minutes went by very slowly, and Isaac was getting fidgety, so when mom called him in for dinner, he didn't mind abandoning his post.

Grandma and grandpa came by that evening and they all had a nice chicken dinner with a big salad and plenty of vegetables. But when the grown-ups got to talking, Isaac slipped away and checked his snare. Maybe he'd caught the thing while they were eating!

Nothing.

He waited for a little while and watched the hole for movement, but, once again, mom called him in and he had to lay off standing guard over the little hole in the ground. The

family was going to play Cities and Knights, and Isaac decided that was a lot better than crouching behind a bush, watching an empty hole in the ground.

Isaac checked the snare one last time before going to bed, then said his prayers, spent a few minutes reading about Tom Swift, and fell asleep with the book on his chest.

The next morning Isaac was starting to think the hole might be abandoned, or that his brother Sam had dug it out with a stick. Still, he went out after breakfast to check, and he could see all the way from the back door that something was different. The rod was bent at a different angle, and there was something hanging in the air.

He ran out to the tree and, sure enough, he'd caught something. What it was would change his life forever.

Hanging upside down, caught by one foot, was a tiny little man -- no bigger than six inches tall. He was smaller than a G.I. Joe doll, and very thin. The little guy was dressed in mottled green and brown clothing that made him hard to see, except for his head. His hair was blazing yellow, and his face was bright, as if a small light was shining from inside of him.

The little man saw Isaac coming and he pulled a hood out of the back of his shirt and covered his head. It made him almost invisible. But Isaac knew he was there.

"Who are you?" Isaac asked, and then suddenly wondered why a little man like this should be able to speak English, or even to speak at all. He might have the shape of a little man, but ... maybe he's just another sort of animal. But that didn't make sense. Animals don't wear clothing.

The little fellow struggled to get loose from the snare, but the fishing line was wrapped tightly around his knees and his ankles, and for a little guy like that they might as well have been heavy ropes.

"I'm not going to hurt you," Isaac said.

"Cut me loose," the little man finally said in a surprisingly strong and clear voice.

"First tell me what you are," Isaac said. "Are you a leprechaun, or a fairy, or what?"

"You don't have a word for what I am," the little man said. "But you might as well think of me as a Genie. Cut me loose."

"A Genie? Don't they live in lamps, and aren't they bigger than you are?"

"What do you know about Genies?" the little man asked in a mocking tone voice that made Isaac a little mad. "How can they live in lamps if they're bigger than me? Now cut me loose."

Isaac shrugged. The little guy wasn't very nice, but he made a fair point. Still, didn't Genies live in lamps as little guys and then get bigger when they came out? Now that he thought about it that didn't make much sense either, but that was supposed to be how it worked.

"If I cut you loose you'll fall, and that has to be a big drop for you. It would be like me falling off the top of the roof."

The little man shook his head. "If you drop a toad, does it hurt him? No, because he's small. Small things can fall a lot farther than big things."

"Why is that?" Isaac asked.

The little man put his hands on his hips and glared at Isaac. He was very cross.

"Do you think this is school or something?" the little man asked. "It's because strength comes in two dimensions and weight comes in three, but what's the use telling that to a little boy like you. Cut me loose!" he shouted in a very demanding voice.

"If I cut you loose will promise not to run away?"

The little man thought about that for a moment, then said, "Is that your first wish?"

"What do you mean? Do you grant wishes?"

The little man lost some of his haughty posture and then shrugged as if he'd been defeated.

"Okay, I'll admit it. You caught me fair and square, so I have to grant you three wishes. But don't get too excited. I'm still an apprentice and haven't passed my tests to become a journeyman. I can't grant big wishes yet."

"What kind of wishes can you grant me?" Isaac asked, starting to imagine the possibilities. He could get a pot of gold or a milkshake fountain or a real cannon.

Then again, he always had a sneaking suspicion that this whole wishing business was a scam. Genies and Leprechauns and such are tricksters, and if you wished for one thing, you'd get it, but not in the way you wanted. Like you'd wish for a million dollars and it would be stolen cash and you'd go to jail for having it, or you'd wish for a bow and arrow

and when you shot it the arrow would fly around and hit you in the butt.

"Wishes have to be things I can do, like never seeing you again, or ... I don't know, like retrieving your lost arrow off your neighbor's roof."

Isaac's eyes widened and he drew in a sharp breath. That was supposed to be a secret. He'd tried to shoot a paper cup on top of the garden shed, and the arrow had ricocheted up onto Mr. Johnson's roof. He'd been worried sick about it. If anybody found out he'd shot it up there, he'd get in a lot of trouble.

"But I won't do that," the little man said. "It's guild rules. Apprentices aren't allowed to climb that high."

"So what can you do?"

"I could spy on somebody for you, or fix something that's too small for your great big hands, or retrieve something from down a hole."

"Those don't sound very exciting," Isaac said.

"No, they're not. You can also forget the wishes and I can give you three of these," the little guy continued, holding out a deck of cards. "These are a mix of things. Some are special powers. Others have magical items. I'll let you pick."

"What kinds of special powers?" Isaac asked, thinking the little guy might be trying to trick him.

"I'm not allowed to say, but you can think of it like those cards you get in that game you play with your parents. One card does one thing, and another does something else."

"How do you know what goes on inside our house?" Isaac asked, indignant at the breach of privacy. He realized a little guy like that could be sitting on the window sill, watching everything they did in the house. It made him feel queasy.

"We look in the windows from time to time," the little man said, as if it was the most reasonable thing in the world. "But time's a wasting and I want to get down from here. What do you want, three wishes or three cards?"

"What do you think is better?" Isaac asked.

"I think it would be better if you cut me down and let me go about my business, you little monster."

"Who's calling who little?" Isaac laughed. "Why I could pick you up and throw you over my house if I wanted. How would you like that?"

"I'd like it just fine. I'd land like a leaf from a tree and then I could get away from you, and you'd get neither wishes nor cards. So if you want to throw me over your house, go right ahead."

Isaac thought about that. He had seen squirrels fall from high tree branches and then get up as if nothing was the matter, so maybe the little guy was right. Maybe falls don't hurt little things as much as they hurt big things.

"I'll take the cards," Isaac said, not sure what he was getting into.

At that point something very strange happened. The fellow hanging upside down by his foot was only six inches tall with his hat and boots on, but when he pulled a deck of cards from his jacket pocket and fanned them out for Isaac to take his pick, the cards seemed to grow so that Isaac, with his much larger hands, could grab them with ease, and when Isaac picked his three cards and held them in his hands they were the size of ordinary playing cards.

"How'd you do that?" Isaac asked, looking at the cards in his hand and then back again at the tiny deck in the little man's hands.

"That's not your business," the little guy said testily, "now cut me down at once."

"These cards don't say anything," Isaac complained, looking at the blank cards in his hands.

"They'll stay blank until you cut me down."

Isaac thought that if he just cut the cord and let the guy go, he'd run away, or disappear, or whatever these little fairies do, and then he wouldn't be able to ask any questions he had about the cards, so he grabbed the little guy by the legs and used his pocket knife to carefully cut the fishing line he'd used for the snare. Then with his left hand he carefully set the little guy down, right side up, but held onto his legs while he looked at the cards in his right hand.

Lines and colors started to fill in on the blank cards in his hand, and in just a few seconds he could see a broom on the first card, and the word "sweeping" at the bottom.

"Sweeping?" Isaac said, incredulous. "What kind of a lame super power is that? I wanted invisibility, or laser-beam eyes, or super strength, or adamantium claws, or ... something cool. What good is sweeping?"

Just at that moment Isaac felt a sharp sting in his left hand and he let go of the little guy and pulled away. After Isaac cut the little garden faerie loose he was able to get the long knife he kept in his boots, and now he had it in his hand with Isaac's blood on it. Isaac's finger had a bad cut.

Isaac was about to swat the little creature across the yard, but he suddenly realized that the guy had a right to defend himself, and hanging upside down by your foot is bound to make a fellow cross.

"I'm sorry if I mistreated you," Isaac said as the little guy brandished his knife in as threatening a way as a little six-inch squirt of a thing can do. Isaac tried not to laugh.

"I set the snare to catch a rat, or a mole, or maybe a rabbit. I really didn't expect to catch a little man like you. I'm sure it's humiliating to hang upside down like that."

The little guy nodded, then slowly lowered his knife.

"That's quite decent of you," he said. "Sorry about your finger."

"Oh, a band-aid will fix that," Isaac said. "So ... what are you, anyway?"

The little man cocked his head and looked up at Isaac in a curious way. He opened his mouth as if he was about to say something, but just at that moment there was a sound in the bushes behind him. The little man froze, sniffed the air, then winked at Isaac and quickly disappeared into the undergrowth.

A minute later the neighbor's cat came creeping through the bushes.

Isaac sat down under the tree and looked at his cards.

"Sweeping," he muttered, shaking his head in a sad way. "What a stupid card." But he had two more. Maybe he'd still get something better.

The next one said jogging. Isaac couldn't believe it. He wanted to rip it up, or crumble it into a ball and throw it at the cat. Who cares about jogging?

He only had one more chance. Maybe the last card would be worth something.

It was some sort of a meat pie, made out of some strange bird. Who cares about pies? His mother bakes the best pies in the world. And who would make a pie out of a bird, anyway?

Isaac shook his head in disbelief. He thought this was going to be the chance of a lifetime. He'd caught a garden fairy in his own backyard, and he'd been given three chances at becoming one of the Avengers, or Superman, or ... something cool. And what did he get? Three useless cards.

Still, he didn't want to throw them away. He had to admit the cards looked kinda cool. The drawings were very nice, and each of the cards had a fancy gold design on the front.

After a few minutes aimlessly kicking around the back yard, his mother called him inside.

"Isaac, I need a stick of butter, can you Oh, dear, what happened to your finger?" she said, noticing the bloody streak running down his hand. She hurried off to the closet to get the first aid box, and in a minute she had him cleaned up and expertly bandaged.

Isaac wasn't sure how he was going to explain it. He never lied to his parents, but for some reason he didn't think he should tell his mom about the little guy in the garden. He thought he should keep it a secret.

His mother must have had something on her mind because she didn't ask again. She patched him up carefully, then asked him to run over to grandma's house to get a stick of butter.

Grandma and Grandpa lived a few blocks away. It was farther than Isaac wanted to run, but then he remembered his card.

"Jogging," he thought. "So this is all it's good for, huh? Running to grandma's to get butter."

He shook his head, disgusted at his luck, and took off down the sidewalk. He usually got tired after a block or so, but he was able to make it all the way to grandma's without stopping. Jogging wasn't as good as laser-beam eyes, but ... maybe it was worth something.

"Wow, you were quick," Grandma said with a smile, meeting him at the front door. "I just got off the phone with your mother. Did you fly over here?"

"No, I just felt like running," Isaac said with a grin.

"Well after all that work I think you need a glass of lemonade. Come on in."

Isaac smiled and followed Grandma into her kitchen. She took the glass pitcher from the fridge and poured him a tall glass. Isaac hadn't realized how thirsty he was. He drank it all down in one long draught.

"You really are thirsty," Grandma said. "Do you want some more?"

"No, I'm okay," Isaac said. "I think I'm gonna run back now."

"What's the hurry?" Grandma asked. "Is Sam dying of butter starvation?"

Isaac laughed. "No, I just feel like running."

"Okay, here you go, sport."

Isaac took the stick of butter in his left hand and was out the front door in a flash. He started running back towards home, but this time it didn't feel the same. After a block he started to get tired, and before he was half-way home he was bending over, trying to catch his breath.

He reached into his pocket to find his card, wondering if he'd used it up, and then suddenly he noticed a shadow coming up from behind. He turned quickly, and just in time. Joe McLaughlin was about to take a swing at him.

"Hey, little Isaac," Joe taunted. "You've got to pay a toll if you want to run on my sidewalk."

Joe was three years older than Isaac and a foot taller. He had a reputation as the neighborhood bully.

"I don't owe you anything, Joe," Isaac said, and started to walk on towards his home, but Joe blocked his path. Isaac tried to walk around him, but Joe pushed him back.

Isaac's thoughts wandered to a movie he'd seen with his dad a few weeks ago. It was some sort of martial arts thing, and he remembered a weird move where one guy would go down into a crouch and spin around to knock the other guy down. His dad had called it "sweeping." Isaac wondered ... and almost as soon as he thought about it he had a perfect image in his mind of how to do it. It was as if he'd practiced it a hundred times and could do it without thinking.

In a flash Isaac started to spin to the right. He crouched down on his left leg and kicked out his right leg with his knee bent, then kicked it forward just as he was coming around. The combined effect of the rotation of his body and the kick make his foot hit Joe's leg with surprising force. It also took Joe completely by surprise and knocked him flat on his back.

While Joe was knocked silly from the fall, Isaac quickly jumped on top of him and raised

a fist to punch Joe in the face. Joe turned his head away and called out "Don't."

Isaac said, "Call it pax?"

"Sure, Isaac, pax. What does that mean?" Joe said.

"Peace, you dummy," he said, but then he regretted it. Calling the neighborhood bully a dummy is brave (or stupid) when he's standing on his feet and ready to clobber you, but it's not fair to call somebody a dummy when you're sitting on his chest and ready to give him a knuckle sandwich.

"Sure, Isaac. Peace."

Isaac offered him his hand, and they shook on it. Isaac got up and Joe followed a moment later.

"Where'd you learn to do that?" Joe asked. "That was a pretty cool move."

"I saw it on a movie," Isaac said. It was the truth, if not the whole truth.

"Can you show me how?" Joe asked.

"No," Isaac said. "You'll just use it to pick on people. Just remember, Joe. Sometimes smaller guys know things."

And with that Isaac walked away, grinning from ear to ear.

So maybe the cards weren't so useless after all. Jogging felt pretty cool, and sweeping Joe's leg was one of the most exciting thing Isaac had ever done. He reached into his pocket to look at the cards.

Two of them were blank. Sweeping and Jogging were just white cards with no writing. He'd used them up. And while he looked at them, they seemed to crumble and get thin, the way a piece of paper does in a fire, and after a moment they just blew away.

He only had one card left, but he had no idea what it meant.

A minute later he was standing in his own kitchen giving his mother the butter.

"Mom, what kind of a pie is a magpie?"

"What? Oh, Isaac, you silly goose. A magpie is a bird. It's like a crow, and they're supposed to be very intelligent. But they don't live around here. Why do you ask?"

"I just saw the word and didn't know what it was," which was truthful enough. He didn't need to tell her about the cards. "Can I go outside now?" he asked, and his mother kissed him and said he could play out back for a little while.

Isaac went out the back door and took the last card out of his pocket. He sat and looked at it for a long time, wondering what it was for. He realized now that it wasn't about pies, but about this strange bird.

Just then he heard a big crashing sound from next door. His neighbor was getting out his ladder, and suddenly Isaac felt a cold fear in his stomach, like a block of ice. If Mr. Johnson found the arrow, Isaac would get in a lot of trouble.

Then he looked at the card. Maybe.

He wasn't exactly sure how these cards worked, but it seemed to involve just trying to use them by concentrating on them. Like "playing" them in his mind.

He set the card face up on the picnic table, closed his eyes and thought as hard as he could about a magpie. It was hardly five seconds later that he heard a noise like wings, and when he opened his eyes there was the bird, sitting on the table right in front of him.

The bird looked like a large crow except that it had a bright white chest and white on its shoulder and above its wings. It had a pretty bluish color on its back, and a very long tail. Isaac thought it was a handsome bird, and he thought it had an intelligent gleam in its eyes.

Mr. Johnson was half way up his ladder now, and he was sure to see the arrow once he got to the top. Isaac felt a mild panic, and ... not knowing what else to do, he got the bird's attention, pointed to the arrow and said, "Go get it, Maggie."

The bird flew away in the opposite direction, and Isaac felt all his hopes vanish. It was just an ordinary bird and it flew away, of course. "That figures," he muttered.

He looked across the fence and saw that his neighbor was almost at the top. It was just a matter of time now. He'd see the arrow, and he'd know it was Isaac's. All of his arrows were the same shade of green, and Mr. Johnson had seen Isaac shooting them in the back yard. He'd given Isaac a disapproving stare a few times.

Just then there was a flash of black and white. Maggie had flown around the front of the house and landed on the neighbor's roof, right next to the arrow. He pecked at it with his beak, as if he intended to pick it up, but then he grabbed it with his claws.

To Isaac's delight, the bird pulled the arrow up off the roof, then pointed it straight toward Isaac and came flying down with the arrow in its claws. It was too heavy for the bird to carry and he came down at a dreadful speed, looking just like a torpedo bomber with the arrow underneath him. The magpie barely cleared the fence, then dropped the arrow just before it hit the ground.

Isaac ran across the yard and picked up the arrow. He thought, "I guess I've used up that card and I'll never see that bird again," but when he turned back around, there was the magpie, sitting on the picnic table and nodding its head in a very funny way, as if celebrating its success.

Thinking that the arrow might make a good perch, Isaac walked back to the picnic table and held it out. The magpie hopped right on, and stayed on his perch while Isaac walked over to the back door and knocked.

"Isaac, what in the world?" his mother exclaimed when she saw the bird.

"She's tame, Mom," he said. "Can I keep her?"

END

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[Escape to Mars](#) is another child-friendly book from the same author. Billy Chen and Amber Harris are two 10-year olds who, along with their parents, steal a ride on a next-generation space shuttle to avoid the impending destruction of Earth. Billy's father, a particle physicist, believes he has accidentally created a black hole. To save humanity, a team of six adults and two children are rushed off to Mars to start a new colony. This story is exciting and fun -- and age-appropriate for young kids!

About the Author

Greg Krehbiel is a happily married father of five wonderful children. He's had a distinguished career in professional publishing, including lengthy gigs in editorial, product development, IT and tech development, marketing, and audio and web conferencing. He has a degree in Geology and studied theology as preparation for ministry -- then thought better of it. He's a home brewer (beer, wine and mead), an occasional jogger, an avid writer, and enjoys camping and fishing. You can contact Greg directly at publisher@crowhill.net.

About Crowhill Publishing

"Krehbiel" is a German name that roughly translates to English as "Crow Hill." Or so I'm told. Crowhill Publishing is the imprint for all of Greg Krehbiel's books. Find out more at <http://crowhill-publishing.com> or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/crowhillpublishing>