

Catherine Cree



▲ Paintbrush

Shooting Stars ▶



▲ Chocolate Lily



Yellow Bells ▶

FAIRIES, THOSE BEAUTIFUL WINGED CREATURES OF DREAMS, live here in the Columbia Gorge. No, I'm not crazy, nor do they whisper in my ear at night

In the spring when wildflowers spread across meadows open to sky, my husband, nine year-old son and I hike Catherine Creek's trails. You must look carefully but if you do, like us you'll see elves and fairies here and there.

Look up first. Princess Catherine lives high on a basalt cliff; the Columbia Gorge at her feet. Season following season the mighty river flows and feeds all the flora and fauna. Alas, Princess Catherine can only watch from a distance for she must wait for Knight Michael to rescue her. Thousands of years ago an evil woman encased the Princess in rock, her tresses became long basalt columns. Knight Michael, thrown into the heavens, became a galaxy of stars.

Maidens have served Princess Catherine as the centuries pass, always careful to disguise themselves quickly when mere mortals pass along the trails, bluffs and rivers. In spring fairies dress in costumes of purple petals, ferny fronds and wispy grasses. They live in plain sight. To those two-legged creatures passing they look like glistening jewels of wildflowers.

Older maidens who enjoy working together transform themselves into Grass Widows, their purple hats shield wise eyes. Grass Widows look ceaselessly for signs of Knight Michael coming at last to rescue Princess Catherine. Over the hundreds of years, their wise eyes have learned to discern disguises of good and evil.

Widows train maidens-in-waiting disguising them as they grow. The youngest maidens, Wild Irises and Blue-Eyed Grass, bring the hope of spring and happiness. Teenagers are Shooting Stars just waiting to become Paintbrushes to cover the fields with bright colors. Rare dark skinned maidens dazzle the eye as Chocolate Lilies.

Some maidens have lost loved ones in their battles with evil like Bitter Root and cold Glacier Lilies, beautiful yet sad. Young maidens serve them and try to bring cheer to their lives.

Fairies play in cool pools and streams, rest on boulders and nestle in mounds of soft green moss. When spring melt swells



k Enchantment

Denise McCravey

the creeks, fairies ride dried oak leaves down the rushing water flitting to safety as the leaf cracks into pieces.

Elves stand look out on knarled branches of ancient oaks. Their deer hide pointed-toe shoes sink into soft moss clinging to the bark. Others climb to the nooks and crannies of basalt cliffs to scan the horizon. Their nose smells the slightest breeze; their ears listen for a sound that could be Knight Michael. Will he ever come to rescue the Princess? Eagles and hawks dip their heads in flight acknowledging the presence of the watchful elves. When danger approaches they sound an alarm.

Elves and fairies gather on the whispers of the wind under the tall stone arch that lies against the cliffs. Waiting quietly under the arch, they sense a change in the air for the arch is a place of rituals and celebrations when the moon is full and the hikers have gone home. Maidens shed their flower disguises and dance in the moonlight. Princess Catherine's hair changes from the hard basalt of day to long shining tresses. Maidens brush her hair and while they sit at her feet she tells them to live a life of laughter and joy while they wait for their knight.

Hope prevails in the clan. The moon disappears beyond the west ridges; stars stay in their places, yet the sun rises.

One moonlit night next month or a thousand months from now, a stream of stars will fall and land on this stone arch at Catherine Creek. The stars will swiftly be trans-

formed into Knight Michael, come to rescue his Princess Catherine.

The next time you hike among the wildflowers at Catherine Creek, look closely. Maybe, just maybe you too will glimpse the sparkle in the whimsical smile of a fairy dressed as a grass widow or shooting star or balsam root. Look up at the knarled mossy branches of the giant oaks. See if they might be napping. Peek into the middle of green ferns to perhaps see a fairy curled in sleep.

Or like us, set your imagination free and make up your own fairy tale.



◀ Wild Iris



▲ Grass Widows



◀ Balsam

Glacier Lily ▼



Bitter Root ▶

