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Some Kind of Fairy Tale: A Novel

By Graham Joyce

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Acclaimed author Graham Joyce's mesmerizing new novel centers around the disappearance of a young girl from a small town in the heart of England. Her sudden return twenty years later, and the mind-bending tale of where she's been, will challenge our very perception of truth.

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Award-winning author Graham Joyce is a master of exploring new realms of understanding that exist between dreams and reality, between the known and unknown. *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* is a unique journey every bit as magical as its title implies, and as real and unsentimental as the world around us.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Here is a keenly observed tale of a family in crisis, one that mixes fantasy and psychiatry in a potent cocktail."

Stephen King: The Best Books I Read in 2012, *Entertainment Weekly*

"Joyce's ravishing novel is about disruption and grief, about the risks of being charmed or stolen away from what we love. Though he draws faithfully on English folklore, Joyce has clearly gone beyond book-learning and made the "crossing at twilight" to the fairy kingdom himself. His writing is enthralling, agile and effortless."

New York Times

"Graham Joyce's new novel *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* is one of the most impressive fantasy books we've read in ages.... Graham Joyce has obviously steeped himself in fairy-tale lore, and his attention to detail (and to the significance of those details) is pretty astonishing. But what really makes *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* stand head and shoulders above most other fantasy novels I've read lately is the strong focus on the characters. Joyce's slow, careful narrative style draws you in to a story that's as much a family drama as it is a magical adventure.... Joyce takes a steady, masterful approach that explores one simple story from every angle, holding it up to the light until we see the hidden images revealed by each separate facet. Joyce has written a brilliant book that will make you think about the meaning of fairytales in a new way."

io9.com

"Ultimately, it isn't Joyce's clever self-awareness that pushes *Fairy Tale* into the stratosphere. It's the way he weaves these twisty ideas into a straightforward, achingly resonant story of a broken man who's found his long-lost sister. His prose and dialogue, even more than usual, are carved with balance, clarity, and subtlety. As a writer, Joyce is often praised as "unsentimental." That couldn't be further from the truth. Sentiment underscores everything in *Fairy Tale*, from Tara's struggle to establish her sanity to the heartsick people who loved who she was—and are trying to love what she's become. That sentiment, though, is rarely precious, and it never comes cheap. As its title trumpets, *Some Kind Of Fairy Tale* meditates on the nature of what it means to tell stories. But wisely and hauntingly, it does so through a spellbinding story of its own." (grade A)

A.V. Club

"Joyce's fiction is an unusual—and unusually satisfying—hybrid. He's interested in all the things that preoccupy literary novelists: finely drawn characters, the beauty and sadness of life's inevitable transitions, families in all their ambiguous and endlessly fascinating complexity. His prose is precise and unsentimental. Yet into the fabric of these relationships he weaves elements of folklore and myth, which he presents both as real and as manifestations of primal aspects of the human experience."

Salon.com

"Haunting, brilliant...Few writers today can match Joyce in evoking the beauty of that delicate balance, in conveying the fantasy of ordinary life or the ordinariness of the fantastic. People, pay attention."

Gary K. Wolfe, *Locus*

"Dark and haunting."

The Free Lance–Star

“Absorbing...Keep an open mind.”

Kirkus

"Fans of novels featuring dark, haunted woods, overgrown English moors and changelings hidden in the dense brush will be absolutely delighted by the hypnotizing mystery of Graham Joyce's *Some Kind of Fairy Tale*. Joyce opens with the promising setup of a returned, thought-for-dead protagonist, blending reality with imagination as he explores what *really* happened to Tara Martin."

Bookpage

"Reading [*Some Kind of Fairy Tale*] by Graham Joyce is a little like stepping into an enormous, brilliantly camouflaged mantrap. At first, you don't even realize what's happened. Then, slowly, you discover that he has drawn you into a strange, dreamlike place, and you can't leave, even if doing so simply means closing the book. Not that you'd want to. Joyce's books are as seductive as anything you'll find in contemporary fiction."

Richmond Times-Dispatch

"In sum, *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* is fantastically formed, complete with a gently portentous premise, a marvellous cast of characters, and a narrative as smart and self-reflexive as it is at first old-fashioned. Enigmatic and intellectual, yes, yet readily accessible and massively satisfying, Joyce's latest is a joy."

Tor.com

"Reality and fairy tale are beautifully interwoven in this contemplative story about relationships, love, and dreams. In a unique blend of thriller and fantasy, Joyce creates a delightful page-turner that his fans and newcomers alike will find hard to put down."

Booklist

About the Author

GRAHAM JOYCE, a winner of the O. Henry Award, the British Fantasy Award, and the World Fantasy Award, lives in Leicester, England, with his family. His books include *The Silent Land*, *Smoking Poppy*, *Indigo* (a *New York Times* Notable Book of 2000), *The Tooth Fairy* (a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of 1998), and *Requiem*, among others.

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chapter one

But we are spirits of another sort.

Oberon, King of Shadows. William Shakespeare

In the deepest heart of England there is a place where everything is at fault. That is to say that the land rests upon a fault; and there, ancient rocks are sent hurtling from the deep to the surface of the earth with such force that they break free like oceanic waves, or like monstrous sea creatures coming up for air. Some say that the land has still to settle and that it continues to roil and breathe fumes, and that out of these fumes pour stories. Others are confident that the old volcanoes are long dead, and that all its tales are told.

Of course, everything depends on who is telling the story. It always does. I have a story and though there are considerable parts I've had to imagine, the way I saw it was as follows.

It was Christmas Day of that year and Dell Martin hovered at the double-glazed PVC window of his tidy home, conducting a survey of the bruised clouds and concluding that it might just snow; and if it did snow then someone would have to pay. At the very beginning of the year Dell had laid down two crisp twenty-pound notes on the bookie's Formica counter, just as he had done every year for the past ten. The odds changed slightly each year and this time he'd settled good odds at seven-to-one.

For a White Christmas to be official—that is, to force the bookmakers to pay—a flake of snow must be observed to fall between midnight on December 24 and midnight on December 25 at four designated sites. The sites are the cities of London, Glasgow, Cardiff, and Manchester. The snow is not required to lie deep nor crisp nor evenly upon the ground and it doesn't matter if it's mixed with rain. One solitary flake would do it, fallen and melted, observed and recorded.

Living in a place somewhere between all of those great cities, Dell had never collected in all those ten years, nor had he seen a single flake of Christmas Day snow hanging in the air of his hometown.

"Are you going to come and carve?" Mary called from the kitchen.

This year they were having goose. After decades of turkey dinners on Christmas Day they were having a change, because a change is as good as a rest, and sometimes you needed a rest even from Christmas. Nevertheless the table had been laid out, just as in previous years. Crisp linen and the best cutlery. Two heavy crystal wineglasses that, year round, were kept in a box and stowed at the back of a kitchen cupboard.

Dell always carved, and he carved well. It was an art. He'd carved well when the kids were small, and he carved well now that there was only Mary and himself to carve for. He rubbed his hands together in a friction of delight, passing through to a kitchen warm and steamy from simmering pans. The cooked goose rested under silver foil on a large serving plate. Dell pulled a blade from the knife block and angled it to the light at the window. "Gone a bit dark over yonder," he said. "Might snow."

Mary was draining vegetables through a sieve. "Might snow? You haven't put money on it, have you?"

"Hell, no." He whisked the foil cover off the goose and rotated the plate to get a better purchase with his knife. "Just a thought."

Mary tapped her sieve on the lip of the sink as Dell began to carve. "Hasn't snowed on Christmas Day in ten years. Plates warming in the oven. Bring them through?"

When Dell had finished carving, each plate boasted a plump goose leg and two neatly carved slices of breast. There were roasted potatoes and four types of vegetables, all steaming in serving dishes. The gravy boat was piping and there was stuffing and sausages wrapped in bacon, and cranberry sauce.

"I went in for an I-talian this year," Dell said, pouring Mary a glass of ruby-red wine and then one for himself. He pronounced the I in Italian the way you might pronounce eye-witness. "I-talian wine. Hope that goes well with the goose."

"I'm sure it will be lovely."

"Thought we'd have a change from the French. Though I could easily have had a South African. There was a South African on offer. At the supermarket."

“Let’s see, shall we?” Mary said, offering her glass for the clinking. “Cheers!”

“Cheers!”

And it was the cheers moment, that gentle touching of the crystalware, that Dell hated the most.

Feared it and detested it. Because even though nothing was ever stated and even though the faultless food was served up with wide smiles and the clinking of glasses was conducted with genuine affection from both parties, there was always at this moment of ritual a fleck in his wife’s eye. A tiny instant of catch-light, razor-sharp, and he knew he’d better talk over it pretty damn quick.

“What do you think of the I-talian?”

“Lovely. Beautiful. A good choice.”

“Because there was also a bottle from Argentina. Special offer. And I nearly went for that.”

“Argentina? Well, there’s one we could try another time.”

“But you like this?”

“Love it. Lovely. Come on, let’s see what you make o’ this goose.”

Wine was one of the fixtures of Christmas dinner that had changed over the years. When the kids were small both he and Mary had been content with a glass of beer, maybe a schooner of lager. But beer had been displaced by wine on the table for Christmas Day. Serving dishes were a recent addition, too. Back in those days everything was heaped on the plates and brought to the table, a ready-assembled island of food floating in a sea of gravy. Cranberry sauce was exotic once. When the children were small.

“Well, what do you think of that goose?”

“Bloody beautiful. And cooked to perfection.”

A tiny flush of pleasure appeared on Mary’s cheek. After all these years of marriage, Dell could do this. Just the right words.

“You know what, Mary? All these Christmases we could have been having goose. Hey, look out of the window!”

Mary turned. Outside, a few tiny flakes of snow were billowing. It was Christmas Day and it was snowing; here, at least.

“You have had a bet, haven’t you?” Mary said.

Dell was about to answer when they both heard a light tapping at the front door. Most people rang the electrical bell, but today someone was knocking.

Dell had his knife in the mustard pot. “Who the hell is that on Christmas Day?”

“No idea. What a time to call!”

“I’ll get it.”

Dell stood and put his napkin on his seat. Then he went down the hall. There was a figure outlined in the frosted glass of the inner door. Dell had to release a small chain and unlock the inner door before opening the porch door.

A young woman, perhaps in her early twenties, gazed back at him from behind dark glasses. Through the dark glass he could make out wide, unblinking eyes. She wore a Peruvian-style woolen hat with earflaps and tassels. The tassels made him think of bells.

“Hello, duckie,” Dell said briskly, not unfriendly. It was Christmas Day after all.

The woman said nothing. She gazed back at him with a timid, almost fearful smile on her lips.

“Happy Christmas, love. What can I do for you?”

The woman shuffled from one foot to another, not removing her gaze. Her clothes were odd; she seemed to be some kind of hippie. She blinked behind her dark glasses and he thought she looked familiar. Then it occurred to him that she was maybe collecting for some charitable cause. He put his hand in his pocket.

At last she spoke. “Hello, Dad,” she said.

Mary came bustling from behind, trying to peer around him. “Who is it?” she said.

The woman switched her gaze from Dell to Mary. Mary stared hard at her, seeing something familiar in the young woman behind the dark lenses. There came a slight gagging sound from Mary’s throat; then Mary fainted clean away. Dell stumbled and only half caught her as she fell. Mary’s unconscious body hit the stone tiles at the threshold with a thud and a sigh of wind.

On the other side of Charnwood Forest at a ramshackle cottage on the road to Quorn, Peter Martin was stacking the dishwasher. Christmas dinner had been trashed a couple of hours ago and he was still wearing an acid-red paper crown from a Christmas cracker but he’d forgotten it was there. His wife, Genevieve, had her bare feet up on the sofa, exhausted by the responsibility of coordinating the domestic crisis of Christmas in a house with a dreamy husband, four kids, two dogs, a mare in the paddock, a rabbit, and a guinea pig, plus sundry invading mice and rats that kept finding inventive routes into their kitchen. In many ways it was a house weathering a permanent state of siege.

Peter was a gentle, red-haired bear of a man. Standing at six-four in his socks, he moved everywhere with a slight and nautical sway, but even though he was broad across the chest there was something centered and reassuring about him, like an old ship’s mast cut from a single timber. He felt bad that they’d had Christmas dinner without having his mother and father over. Dell and Mary had been invited, of course, but there had been a ridiculous dispute about what time dinner should be served. Genevieve wanted to sit down on the stroke of one so that they could all get their coats on in the afternoon and drive up to Bradgate Park or Beacon Hill for a healthy blast of wind. Mary and Dell liked to eat later, and at leisure, and certainly not before three; they’d done all the walking and blasting they cared for. There wasn’t actually a row. What followed was more of an impasse and a sulk, followed by a default decision no party was happy with, that this year they would sit down to separate dinners.

Peter and Genevieve anyway had a daughter who was fifteen, a boy thirteen, and two more girls of seven and five. Whenever they went over to Mary and Dell's they garrisoned the place, moving in like a brutal occupying army. It was always easier and more relaxed to stay put in the cottage, and this year that's what they did.

Meanwhile Peter had bought thirteen-year-old Jack an air rifle for Christmas, and Jack was sitting in the yard hoping for mice or rats to turn up. He lounged on an old exploded sofa his dad hadn't gotten around to taking to the dump. Like a grizzled old-timer from a shotgun cabin he held the butt of the gun on his thigh and pointing skyward.

Peter put his head outside the back kitchen door. "Don't wave that fucking thing around. If you catch anyone I'll rip your head off for sure," Peter said.

"Don't worry, Dad, I'm not gonna shoot my fuckin' sisters."

"And don't swear. Right?"

"Right."

"And don't wave it around."

Peter went back inside to stack the dishwasher. He went through to the trashed dining room and was dithering what to do with the carcass of the turkey when the phone rang. It was Dell.

"All right, Dad? I was just going to call you. When I get the kids lined up to say happy Christmas and all that."

"Never mind that, Pete. You'd better get over here."

"What? I've had a few drinks. We're about to go for a walk."

"Come over anyway. Your sister's here."

"What?"

"You heard me. I said your sister's here."

"What?"

Peter felt dizzy. The room swam. "Dad, what are you saying?"

"She just showed up."

"She can't have."

"Come over, Pete. Your mother's had a bad turn."

"Dad, what the hell is going on?"

“Please come over, son. Please come over.”

There was a note in his father’s voice he’d never heard before. Dell was clearly very close to tears. “Can you just tell me what’s happened?”

“I can’t tell you anything because I don’t know anything. Your mother fainted. She fell badly.”

“Okay. I’m coming.”

Users Review

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Noel Stevens:

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