

*from "Evolution of a Fairy"*

There goes my son, his wings, the color of green beans, drooping as he slogs across the living room and kicks his sodden shoes into a pile. Behind him the train to his fairy costume, falling over the layers of sheen and silk and taffeta that he spent months sewing together by hand, sheds a streak of mud onto the carpeting. He is my Sugar Plum in from a downpour.

“A woman asked me to join her traveling fairy troupe today,” he offers. Christian has been spending his summer weekends as a character at the local Renaissance Festival, where he fits in with the sword swallows, the belly dancers, the fire eaters, the wood nymphs, the walking tree, the gypsies, the ogres and wenches, the knights and kings and, yes, the queens, better than he has fit in anywhere in his life. As he speaks, rivulets of mascara crisscross a frosted golden face that is highlighted by ivy leaves drawn upwards from the corners of his eyes. His right eyebrow, plucked to half its original length in a fit of enthusiasm, has finally grown back in. A year ago, when he was trying to divide his uni-brow and the plucking was still fresh, it looked like the broken signal arm at a railroad crossing. When he raised his eyebrows, it went up and down in that stumpy sort of way that you imagine a broken signal arm would go. Today, though, it’s back to normal, arching up into an inverted V as he presses his gaze onto me. “It’s perfectly legitimate,” he says. He knows me too well. “If you don’t believe me, just go to [www.ibelieveinfairies.com](http://www.ibelieveinfairies.com).”

The fact is I don’t have all that much trouble believing. I have felt the lure of fairies, and all the implications of that word, for most of Christian’s life. By the time he was a toddler it was easy to observe his tendencies – to hear his slight lisp, see the lilt in his walk and the way he floated his hands. What was much better hidden was his Asperger Syndrome: That quirky little

part of him that cannot ... well, that cannot discern the quirky little part of him. Even as he enters adulthood he asks me as he has so many times in the past, “What is it, Mom? What do people see in me? I don’t get it.”

The I-don’t-get-its have presented some particularly devilish conundrums for my son. When he was a child, he didn’t get why other boys wanted to play street hockey or football when he wanted to draw big red lips on the driveway, over and over. And when he was a teenager he didn’t get why it was just a little weird for him to want to trick-or-treat as an Egyptian goddess. Later, when he was twenty, in the incident that most unnerved me, he didn’t get why it wasn’t okay for him to chase after the man who mugged him ... his one-hundred-and-five pounds of skin and bones motivating themselves across a parking lot and up a street, in the bitter cold, in his shirtsleeves, on New Year’s Eve, at three in the morning.

“I’ve had it, Mom,” he told me the day after the mugging, right after he burst through the front door, broken necklace in hand, jolting me out of my reading material with, “Well, your worst fears have come true.” He sliced his hand through the air to emphasize his point. “I’ve *had* it. I decided that I wasn’t leaving until I got my money and my necklace back. I’m done being a victim.”

In Christian’s reality, he has been on the receiving end of more taunting and harassment than any human being should have to bear, his androgynous Aspie persona having for years presented itself as something impossibly confounding to members of the public. On New Year’s Eve he had reached his threshold. The fact that his perpetrator might have had a gun or a knife or a gang of thugs waiting in the shadows did not concern him. In fact, he seemed renewed,

empowered by his own actions as he reported them to me. I watched while he sat more erect, more confident. I watched his eyes transform into beads under his scowl.

According to Christian, he had meant to do a good deed when he pulled money from his wallet to give to a man asking for a handout, inadvertently wielding a \$20 bill, much more than he could afford to give. In the scramble that followed, the bill had torn in half, the man had snatched his wallet, and Christian had given pursuit. When he caught up with the man a fight ensued. My son had been held in a headlock and choked. He had elbowed his way free and snatched his wallet back. The thief had ripped a necklace from around his neck and run again. Christian had chased him a second time. The thief had threatened to shoot him if he didn't back off, but Christian didn't believe there was a gun.

He'd not felt the weight of one bumping him during the scuffle, so there must not be one, he'd reasoned.

"I'm not leaving without my money," he told the thief.

By this time, the thief had lost whatever portion of the money he had salvaged. They went their separate ways, finally, walking away from one another like two people who had been on a disastrous date.

Arrogant and determined as Christian apparently was, I had to believe that he had encountered a merciful thief, or maybe one who didn't want to add a murder to his rap sheet. In the days that followed, when I wasn't physically vibrating from the emotional fallout of his story, I wondered at what must have been the thief's surprise when a scrawny, gay, slightly autistic boy turned on him.

In my opinion, this event was only obliquely related to my son's sexual orientation. It happened outside a gay club. More importantly, I believe it happened because Christian filtered the man's need, and his own need for acceptance, through his autism. He reached to give the man a dollar, oblivious to the fact that the parade of other patrons never stopped its flow into the bar, or even acknowledged the man standing there.

Christian was born in 1987. I began to suspect he was gay on Labor Day in 1990, when, during the Jerry Lewis MDA Telethon, he raced to the hall closet to grab a bath towel, swirled it around his waist and mounted the couch, where he can-canned in sync with a bevy of Jerry's guests. He kicked his bare legs out in front of him and sashayed the towel up so that his white thighs flashed, as if he'd been sashaying since before he left the womb. I had one of those mind/body/spirit experiences Oprah likes to speak about. I felt the surge of epiphany go through me: *Christian is gay!*

I can still feel what that surge felt like. The way a burn went from feet to head. The way my heart galloped.