

# Unseelie Pie

By Bill Ricardi

Mom never told me that fairies got so hungry.

I'm sure she had her reasons. I mean, she probably didn't wanna worry me, right? After all, I was just seven years old when she started to teach me how to cook. Simple stuff: Hard boiled eggs, grilled cheese, flat bread. I was good. I mean, **she** said so. But that's what all moms say, I guess.

By the time I was ten, she had a new word for me. Better than just *good*. She called me a 'prodigy'. I think that means 'super awesome cook'. I learned the normal stuff that ten year olds learn in the kitchen... soufflé, mole rojo, coq au vin, pad Thai. You know, the basics.

With that simple stuff out of the way, mom started to show me **real** recipes. Enchanted honey and chamomile tea, like they use in the love rituals. Nutmeg, will-o-wisp, and basil cookies for protection during a full moon. Cinnamon and lavender bonbons to help the treasure hunters. Lots of folks wanted to try my ritual cooking. When they came back and told mom that it worked real good for them, we started charging money. Just so we could get better ingredients, of course.

That's when I learned about the fae folk... shapeshifters, sprites, and the friendlier monsters. They had the best magical fruits and herbs. Sometimes they took coins. Sometimes, favours.

One night, after mom came back from wine tasting, she told me where dad had been for my whole life. See, he made a deal with the fairies. And not just any fairies... the *Unseelie* ones. They were the bad critters. Well. Not *always* bad. But wild. They liked to gamble, and they got mad real easy.

Anyway, dad bet that he could outcook some great dragon chef. He lost though. So now he cooks for the Unseelie fae all the time, and he can't come home. Mom said some **really** bad things about him, but the next morning she said 'it was the wine talking'. Weird. I still don't know what spell to use to make that kind of talking wine.

Mom said I needed to be ready, just in case. So the next couple years, I not only made stuff for mom to sell, but I also learned how to cook for fairies. I learned about smaller portions, and magical fae spices, and the special ingredients you need to make their holiday food. One day, I cooked for a *super* special visitor: Glenfylidus, a prince of the dark elves from a far off land. I dunno why, but mom was nervous. It was silly, because I *never* messed up the Samhain cake! Glenfylidus loved it. He kissed me on the forehead and told me I could have one recipe from his collection, whenever I wanted. I thanked him and said I would think about what I needed to learn.

Then, it happened.

It was my twelfth birthday. We were making my orange-chocolate cake when mom started bawling. I asked her what was wrong. She told me after I bugged her for, like, an hour.

The deal that dad made with the fae was gonna end. And that meant bad stuff for dad. She didn't wanna say nothin', but I made her. The local fairy princess, Melefenarix, visited her the night before. She heard about my cooking, and offered mom a deal: I could cook for the royal fae, and grow up in the Unseelie Court. Or they'd just eat dad at the next big feast, and the whole thing would be over.

Now, I didn't know dad at all. He wasn't around when I was little. But mom looked **so** sad when she told me that he was gonna get ate. Even though she called him a 'lousy good-for-nothing', and even though the wine said terrible things about him... I could tell she still loved him.

So I was gonna save him.

“You wanna see dad again?”

Mom nodded, real slow.

I asked, “Okay. Can I meet with the fairy princess?”

She started to say something... but words wouldn't come out. I guess she wasn't *allowed* to say 'no'.

I said, “Come on, at least invite Melefenarix to my birthday party.”

She looked ashamed and a little scared, but she agreed.

Guests were cool. My party was just gonna be me and mom. I had school friends, but I never wanted them around too much. They were so... *normal*. I would've invited the treasure hunters and cave divers, but they were out on adventures. So I thought inviting Melefenarix would make things funner.

Golly, I was wrong about that.

Melefenarix was the opposite of fun. As soon as she flew into the room, everything got dark. She was only a foot tall, but acted like she was the biggest person in the room. She poked at everything with her long, black claws. Her gossamer wings left little trails of dust everywhere. She didn't even say hello to me or wish me a happy birthday!

“Mortals, you are now in the presence of Melefenarix, Unseelie Princess of Bath, Magus of the Arts Unfathomable, Daughter of She Who Devours. You may bow.”

We did.

Then she snapped her fingers. “Duncan. Bring the boy's gift.”

A tall, shaggy werewolf bullied his way through the front door of our cottage. His fur was wild and gray, and he was almost too tall for our ceiling! I guess he was named Duncan... what a silly name for a wolf. If he was my gift, he would have been a strange, angry, but pretty cool one.

Then I noticed something weird. The werewolf held a little white silk leash. An unfriendly tug brought my *real* present staggering into the room.

He looked like me. Bigger, taller. A *lot* more scared. Haunted. But he had my brown eyes and russet skin. He was super scrawny, at least compared to me and my cooking tummy.

One look at mom and I knew: This was my dad. I couldn't imagine her looking at anyone else that way.

The strangely familiar man said, "No, please. Not them!"

Almost at the same time, mom said, "Why are you doing this to us?!"

But Melefenarix ignored them. She fluttered right up to me and said, "Your present, dear boy, is to share your father's final meal. That is, of course, unless you choose to take his place."

I told her, "Dunno if I will or not. Let's eat while I think it over."

The fairy looked surprised. I guess she expected me to be frightened. But that never really happened to me.

By the second course, I knew I'd trade places with my dad. He seemed kind, and so worried about me and mom. Besides, they only wanted me for four years, four months, and four days. It wasn't forever or nothin'.

After we all had our cake, I kissed mom goodbye and told her I'd visit as soon as I could. The mean princess cut our goodbye short.

“Duncan. Bring him, we’re done here.”

The shaggy wolf tied the silk collar around my neck. Then I was led off into the night. We entered the woods, and soon stepped into a glowing ring of toadstools, all purples and pinks. Everything became blurry.

Then I was home.

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Not *my* home of course. Duncan’s home. Or den, I guess. He lived in the pantry cave, somewhere between the button mushrooms and the rock tripe. I lived upstairs, next to the most **amazing** kitchen in the world!

It had everything: A huge sous vide machine. A pixie dust collector. Dragonscale knives. A FaeMaster 500 food processor. Even a walk-in freezer.

I signed my service contract, in blood of course. Soon after, I was planning my first banquet for Melefenarix and her royal court. I went with enchanted gooseberries, a chattering cheesecake, and battered rabbit en papillote. It was a big hit! The fairies and fanged puffins and kobolds and dryads and goblins all loved my dishes.

But the next banquet was harder. They wanted more. I thought it was impossible for such small things to eat so much. But their bellies never got full. It took me ten hours to fix all the food, the second time around.

I asked Duncan to help me in the kitchen. He complained to the princess, but Melefenarix told him to do what I say. And the grumbling werewolf did.

Still. The next banquet took me eleven hours. And the next twelve.

That's when I got what was going on: They didn't need me for four years, four months, and four days. They were gonna work me to death **way** before my contract ended.

I needed a plan.

“Duncan!”

The big werewolf loped upstairs. “Whatcha want?”

“I need you to deliver a message for me.”

“Ain't yer mailman, kid.”

I explained, “I think I can get us outta here. Both of us, free and clear. But I can't do it without you.”

The beast scowled, “Why're you tellin' me this?! She'll skin us both alive if she thinks we're plottin'.”

“Because you want freedom. And yer my only friend in this place.”

He folded his arms across that broad, fuzzy chest. “Not yer friend.”

I smiled. “Yeah, you are.”

He barked, “What makes you think that, man-whelp?”

“If you weren't, you'd march out that door and tell Melefenarix that I'm out to get her.”

I waited. A dozen expressions crossed over his fuzzy face. Still, he didn't move.

Then he snarled, “What's the message?”

When his task was complete, I started my plan. I got a brand new recipe, requested from Glenfylidus himself. It was payment for the dark elf's lingering boon.

I learned every detail by heart. And I made Duncan learn too, so that when stuff got crazy, neither of us would hesitate.

Soon I was summoned before the Unseelie Court. Duncan escorted me, silk leash attached. Melefenarix flitted around her throne of bones and apple cores. She was **real** nervous, I could tell by the high pitched whir of her wings. Her goblins and evil puffins shrank away from her in fear.

“The dragon prince is coming!”

Of course he was. Glenfylidus came through for me.

I bowed to my princess. “What lovely news.”

She hissed, “No, no you little idiot! We weren't prepared for this. Our coffers are low, we cannot make a proper offering. We need to impress him with a feast.”

I paused. Then I said, “Well... I *did* just get a cool recipe from an old friend. Do you know Glenfylidus?”

“Of course I know the dark elf prince, you moppet. You have one of his mythic recipes?”

“He gave me secret knowledge of an ancient dish: **Unseelie Pie**. It's filled with dark magic and wonder.”

Melefenarix snapped, “Prince Jelovian will be here tomorrow evening. You must start immediately.”

I murmured, “Some of the ingredients are super dangerous. A small, weak boy like me can’t collect what we need.”

“Duncan!”

The werewolf snarled, “My princess?”

Melefenarix pointed a tiny claw at his muzzle. “I order you to collect these ingredients for the boy. You will do this, on pain of death!”

Duncan let my silk leash drop. A mean looking grin crept over his maw. All teeth and drool.

“Oh... it would very much be my *pleasure*, mistress.”

I did my best to ignore Duncan as he ‘*collected the ingredients*’. Melefenarix’s final cry ended quickly. And fanged puffins just popped like overfilled balloons. But the goblins, golly could they scream.

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It took me all night to bake the Unseelie Pie, stuffed to the brim with the evil fae that Duncan and I once served... and would 'serve' just once more, I guess. I heated the oven with dancing fire elementals. My eyes were drooping by the time the crust started to brown.

I felt a big paw on my shoulder. Duncan rumbled, “Rest. I’ll keep it warm an’ wake ya when he comes.”

I woke just in time to serve Prince Jelovian, who landed right on time. The big black dragon was starving from his flight. He ate every last scrap of the Unseelie Pie, tail wagging happily.

“Delicious, young man. You have truly earned my boon.”



I said, "I think, sir, that Duncan and I just wanna go home."

The dragon looked around at the blood drenched forest clearing. Fae bits were *everywhere*.

"Ah. Yes, that might be wise. You two are free of all bonds, then. Safe travel."

We wished the prince well, watching him fly off into the moonlit night, wobbling slightly from the bulge in his tummy.

I packed up what I could carry. I'd miss the grand kitchen... but I wouldn't miss the long nights of serving a mean old fairy.

I walked to the mushroom circle with a spring in my step. It'd be so much fun getting to know dad! We could share recipes, and learn to be a whole family again.

I felt warm, nervous fingers squeeze my hand.

I whispered, "It's okay."

Yup, one big happy family. Though I might have to explain to mom how to cook for a werewolf.