



“EYES LIKE STARS”: EXCLUSIVE AUTHOR INTERVIEW

By: Mellissa Forget

Lisa Matchev has successfully created an magical new world within the pages of “Eyes Like Stars,” the first in her Théâtre Illuminata series and has graciously invited us along to answer some questions on her creative process, love of fiction and what it is about her leading lady that really sets her apart. With a whole score of cheeky fairies, swashbuckling pirates, an irate air spirit and dozens of other characters from the Bard’s plays, Beatrice Shakespeare Smith finds herself a changeling among the theater. Not part of any play, not part of any family, she’s made friends with the characters and loves her life backstage among the various cast members and costumes. However, when her mischief is cause for an ultimatum from the theatre manager, Bertie must discover the strength inside of her and come up with a darn good reason why she should stay and not be turned out. Secrets will be revealed, new plays will be written, as the curtain comes up this summer.

Lisa has graciously offered to shed some light on her new novel before the curtain is raised this summer.

Where did you get the idea for your novel?

The opening line for *Eyes Like Stars* popped into my head one day: "The fairies flew on wires despite the tendency to get tangled together." So I wrote it as a short story, but it just wouldn't stay short.

How long have you been writing? How did you get started?

I was writing short stories and plays by the fourth grade, so it's been a life-long love. I've been writing short fiction since 2000 with the intent to publish. First I joined the CompuServe IMPs, a critique group, and wrote at least three or four short stories a month until I made my first professional sale (to a DAW anthology) in 2002. That's when I attended my first WorldCon, which is the yearly World Science Fiction and Fantasy convention. After that, there was more writing, more critiquing, more conventions. I joined LiveJournal and began to network with other writers and editors. Later, I joined the staff at *Shimmer Magazine* to read submissions and then later to be an editor. Each bit of work is a tiny puzzle piece in the big picture.

Was Beatrice, the heroine of your novel, based on any strong females you know in real life?

They say your first novel is the most autobiographical, and that's certainly the case here... Beatrice Shakespeare Smith has a love of theater, which I certainly did. She's a bossy, smart-mouthed, cupcake-loving coffee-swilling drama queen... that's all me. But there are differences. I didn't start dying my hair until I was in college.

And honestly, besides drawing on my personal experiences, I'd say Bertie is more an amalgam of literary characters like Alice (*Alice in Wonderland*) and quite of lot of the Shakespearean women (Beatrice, obviously, from *Much Ado About Nothing* and Katherina from *Taming of the Shrew*.)

How does your Bertie differ from others in the past?

I don't think I've ever tackled a teenaged girl before. In my short fiction, my main point-of-view characters were either adult women or younger children, so there's a whole new level of emo going on with Bertie. Lots more love-interest intrigue going on, as well as the really fun stuff: punk-rock-hair, crazy clothes, cupcakes for breakfast, black nail polish. More important than that, she has the devil-may-care, indefatigable, I-shall-live forever outlook on life that goes hand-in-hand with being a teenager

What motivates her in the novel?

She's lived her entire life at the Théâtre Illuminata, and then the day comes that the Theater Manager decides she's more trouble than she's worth, and tells her she needs to make her way in the world. As a foundling child, Bertie is doubly motivated to prove to him that not only can she make a valuable contribution to the theater, but that she should be permitted to stay in case her long-lost mother ever comes back for her.

Describe your creative process in terms of creating characters, plot, story? Carry me through the process from idea to final copy.

I usually start with an opening image that grabs hold and won't let go. Then I try to sit down and sketch out the rough story arc, shoving in as many plot points and characterization work as I can. But there's really nothing like pounding out that first rough draft. My goal is usually about 70,000 words (250 manuscript pages with normal margins, in Times New Roman.) By the time I get that much written, the book has usually veered off the tracks, wandered around the landscaping, come back all muddy. I try to let it sit a while before tackling a revision, then I send it to my agent.

In the case of the theater books, my agent took manuscript for *Eyes Like Stars* and pitched it as the first book in a trilogy over the phone. Once it sold to Feiwel & Friends, I went through three major rounds of edits, copyedits, and three sets of page proofs. All told, it took three years from the start-writing-date to the date it will appear on the bookshelves.

What authors, artists, filmmakers inspire you? Why?

I have a list as long as my arm of authors: Neil Gaiman for pulling back the thin curtain between reality and fantasy, Patricia McKillip for her descriptive work, Terry Pratchett for his humor. My new literary crush is Frank Beddor (The Looking Glass Wars.)

I love Tim Burton's film work (I'm a recent Sweeney Todd addict) and any other movie with lush costumes and fantastic production values. For the same reasons, I like television shows like The Tudors, despite its many historical liberties. I also like reality television that involves the arts, like So You Think You Can Dance? and Project Runway.

Performance companies like Cirque de Soleil and Lucent Dossier have been hugely inspirational for the second theater book, both for music and the videos of their work made available on the internet. I love watching both acrobatics and dance.

As for artwork, it seems like I am constantly discovering new artists that make me happy. There simply isn't enough room on my walls (or money for framing) although I have big plans to have Jason Chan's cover art for Eyes Like Stars framed for my office!

Through the book, Bertie seems to draw strength (and several different personality traits!) in different ways from different characters. Can you describe how those around her effect the choices she makes?

Bertie is a little bit of a chameleon, and even though she is not one of the Players, she certainly plays many parts within the theater. The fairies give her permission to be wild and crazy, encouraging some particularly bad junk food eating habits and staying up until all hours, and while Peaseblossom is Bertie's little conscience, she's so physically small that she isn't intimidating enough to be an authority figure. Bertie is polite-yet-conniving around the adults of the theater, using her acquired skills of badinage and persiflage to charm them into giving her what she want or wheedle her way out of some particularly spectacular scrape.

Bertie's personae around Ariel is also specialized. She and Ariel have history, going back to when she was a child and they would play games together. When they were separated by Management, he became a forbidden thing, an intriguing thing. But he also willingly kept his distance, and she hates him for that. She's far more cutting and sarcastic with him than

she is with anyone else, because his desertion hurt her so badly. A large part of her acting out through her appearance and behavior (crazy hair colors, smoking clove cigarettes) is done partially to annoy him.

Nate has never hurt her in that way, would never contemplate doing something like that. He's a protective force in her life, someone that can be counted upon and leaned upon. In many ways, he treats her the way a protective older brother would, though he's accepting enough of who she is that she doesn't feel the need to play a part for him the way she does for the others.

With all the other characters influencing her, what makes Bertie herself and where will this take her through not only this novel, but in the upcoming series?

At the very core of Bertie's character is the fact that she believes: in the magic, in her friends, in herself. She draws her strength from those beliefs, and in trying to craft her as a real, believable character, her strengths are also sometimes the source of her downfall. She's confident to the point of arrogance, determined to get what she wants to the point of selfishness. She doesn't question herself; if she wants something to happen, she grabs the bull by the proverbial horns and hollers "yes, I can do this!" which makes it all the harder on her when things start going seriously awry.

Despite being a foundling child and the innate desire to know where she comes from, who her parents are, she still has a very grounded sense of who she is as a person, and her very foundation is built upon the knowledge that she is loved by Mrs. Edith, Mr. Hastings, Nate, the fairies. The threat of having that foundation pulled out from under her certainly served as a great motivation for her in this book. And, having freshly revised the second book in the trilogy, I can say in all honesty that Bertie's sense of self is expanded significantly in *PERCHANCE TO DREAM*.