

Glittering Eyes

By

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“And above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don't believe in magic will never find it.”

— *Roald Dahl*

We knew we needed Grandad Remmy. Hayden wanted sustenance, everlasting life, though he might have called it something different like “endless food” or “a job.” I needed to get out of there, to find the source of magic. Meant we’d both needed some sort of spell. So we came to Grandad Remmy to see what he could do. We found him, his grey hair cropped tight from old Norm, classy pearl snaps, his grey rimmed bifocals in a cloud of vanilla-tinted pipe tobacco aged in old bourbon barrels. Penaud aftershave. *Tan shoes, pink shoelaces* and other fifties hits drifted out from his 100-CD player and stereo system while simultaneously Mike Shannon’s hoarse, drunk voice dictated the Cardinals game in a beat-up grey radio powered by D-batteries at his feet. The antenna was bent. “You know,” he said as we approached, “I always hated corncob pipes.” He smoked. He sat on this weathered wooden bench about three seats too long for the size of the front porch, most of it made out of old wooden signs from shops he’d known as a young man: Swifty’s and Hank’s and Sweeney’s Pharmacy Diner. “Have a seat on one of these old shops, boys.” A large birdbath occupied the front yard. He crumbled up a stale biscuit and cast it upon the waters like old worries and cares.

“Where’s Water Jim?” I asked.

Grandad Remmy giggled. “Building in the garage. Building a pike wall to keep out bandits.” Grandad Remmy was one of the few people that could make me and Hayden relax in those early days and stop fighting about magic and soil and whose tree could think or grow bigger.

“Grandad,” Hayden said, “tell us another story about prison. How you survived.”

“Prison?” Remmy said. “Who went to prison?”

“You did!”

“Oh right. What do you want to know about prison? Don’t tell your dad I told ya, he’ll shoot me.”

“That’d be bad,” I said.

“Specially cause he’d have to go to prison,” Remmy said.

“You know how to heal from a gun wound?” I asked. There had to be a smell.

He frowned over his pipe.

“What’s it like?” Hayden asked. “Do you get to work a job in prison?”

I was giggling. We were hearing forbidden tales.

“Well I don’t know,” Remmy said. “I don’t think I should tell you about prison, boys, you’ll end up there like me and your Great Great Grandad Patrick who used to tie six packs of beer to the backs of cars of folks that’d just been married. Oh they sprayed and sprayed the whole bridal parties!”

I asked, “Did you ever do anything funny? Pull any magic tricks?” An oriel, a male cardinal, and a flock of starlings landed and started eating the bread on the waters. The starlings didn’t just have spots on their feathers, it looked like real stars in the real womb of the worlds. Some looked like they had nebulas or full blown supernovas on them. When I noticed, all of the starlings looked at me as one. Huh.

Grandad Remmy said, “Funniest story I have about prison and jail didn’t happen to me, though.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Oh yeah,” Grandad Remmy said. “Oh boy, oh boy. Well you see back when I was just about as tall as you,” he pointed to Hayden, the shorter, “and just about as scrappy as you,” he pointed to me, thinner and meaner, “I lived in Odin and some guys got arrested in Bellhammer. Bellhammer didn’t have no jail and county courthouse like they got now, no sir. It was just a first floor for the clerks and then a basement for the jail. But they forgot to build a set of stairs and never had it empty enough or enough money to renovate, so they just cut a hole in it.”

“In the floor?” Hayden asked.

“Yup,” Grandad Remmy said. “Right there. And so they had a rope ladder when they needed it and pistols and a locked trapped door and they’d just throw them old boys right down in there.”

“In a *dungeon*?” I asked, half horrified. “I guess wizards come with dungeons...”

“In a dungeon,” he said. “A oubliette.”

“It’s like a POW camp,” Hayden said. “How’d you make it out okay?”

“They use them oubliettes sometimes in prison,” Grandad Remmy said, “but that’s not the worst one. Worst one happened in my hometown at the time, in Odin. They had no money to build a proper jail, no space neither, not inside anyways and it’s torture to leave folks exposed to the elements like that, you know, but they figured out a way, welders and farmers and whatnot. See they had this small warehouse, or a big shed, whichever way, out in the middle of town that hadn’t gotten put to no use. Got turned into a headstone manufactory or maybe Farthing’s medicine whatever, hell I don’t know. Anyways, warehouse wasn’t occupied. So they needed a jail cause sometimes someone’s disturbing peace or acting like Tom Sawyer or—“

“Remmy Broganer,” Hayden said.

“Or Great Great Grandad Patrick,” I said.

“Oh you two quit, we ain’t that bad,” he giggled. “So you gotta have a place to put ‘em, right? The inmates and ingrates like me?”

“You ain’t that bad,” I said.

He giggled again, a wheezy old man giggle, he hacked, and his raspy voice started back up again: “Well them welders and farmers pulled together some spare steel pipes and welded a nice cube cage with a door. Real nice steel cage, hinges and everything. Bars on the ceiling, bars just off the floor so that the main thing rested on its corners.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Hayden asked.

“Yeah,” I said, “It’s nicer than a dungeon.”

“Nothing’s wrong with it! For two or three people, that is. Once you get about six or seven strapping lads in there, though, they just would reach under there and grab hold of poles like pall bearers and lift.”

“The jail,” I said.

“Oh sure! They’d lift it right up and just carry it out.”

“The jail,” Hayden said.

“Well of course! All six or seven just carry the whole damn jail right out the warehouse door — wasn’t anyone guarding them, was there? They’re all out in the fields or milk carts.” He bit his lip at the word *milk carts*. “So the six or seven or whatever it was would go and find their buddy a welder or their buddy a locksmith and get busted out, leave the whole jail out in a fields and go back to work sober.”

Hayden and I busted up laughing. “So they’d still get to make some money?” I asked.

“Sure.”

“We need to make some money,” I said. “I thought about lemonade stands. How’d you make money?”

“Sold ice.”

“Ice? Like in a freezer ice tray?” Hayden asked. “Why would anyone buy that when they could just make it at home?”

Grandad Remmy laughed. “Oh silly goose, we didn’t have freezers.”

“No freezers!” Hayden said. “I’d starve without half a deer in a freezer and two rabbits! How’d you keep food cold?”

“Ice box,” Remmy said.

“Just a cardboard box with ice in it? Or was it a cigar kind?” I asked.

“Nah, big old cedar thing with insulated galvanized steel blocks and latches and a tray at the bottom where the drippings would go and place for the ice right above that.”

“An ice box. You make that?” Hayden asked.

“Your Great Granddaddy did.”

“Great Granddaddy John?”

“No. Great Grandad Donder.”

“Well how you sell ice?” I asked.

Grandad Remmy said, “Well you’d get the ice man come around selling chunks off the big ice block he got and you’d put that in the ice box so the meat or whatever’d stay cold.”

Hayden started, “But how’d you—“

“Wait, wait,” I said. “Where’d the *ice man’s* ice come from?”

“Well from the ice warehouse,” he said.

“Yeah but... and where’d the warehouse get it?” I asked.

“The shipping yard,” he said.

“And them?”

“Antarctica.”

“You’re telling me they harvested ice like corn?”

“Well where else you gonna get it fore freezers come along? They don’t grow ice on trees?”

Hayden and I stared at each other.

I dreamed up an ice tree on one of my worlds. “It’s like the middle ages,” I said.

“It’s nature,” Hayden said.

“It’s both,” Grandad Remmy said. “Member, I needed both to build that old trebuchet.

It was medieval, but we also had them demo derby cars. We had bows and arrows, but also fire and gunfire. What matters more between the magic and nature is the *tertium quid*.”

“Thirty-um kids?” Hayden asked.

“No, no. Means third thing. The thing that ties both opposites together. That matters more than the either/or, than the opposites. The *and* that makes them *both*.”

We stared. Ice boxes, magic, some weird Latin word...

“But never mind all that magic crap,” he said, nervously looking to the side as he lit his pipe. “Don’t you boys worry.”

“But how’d *you* sell it?” Hayden asked. “Were you selling for the ice man to folks with ice boxes?”

“Nah,” he said. “I’d get the dirty leftover scraps and dust them off and then sell chunks to my friends. *Twice the ice for half the price*. Undercut the pharmacy or whatever. Sold quick to my friends who only wanted a piece or two to cool their tongues.”

“Well we can’t do that,” I said.

“Nope,” Remmy said and smoked his pipe. He tamped it for awhile. He had scars on his arms. Some from building, some from prison fights, some from the great Texarco war. He groaned a bit, arching his back.

Suddenly making money seemed less important — even to Hayden, I could see it on his face, deep in there. “Grandad Remmy?” I asked. “How’d you get to be so good at bearing up all them hurtful and sad things that ever happened to you?”

Remmy blew out smoke. “Honestly?”

“Honest.”

“Magic from The Good Lord.”

“What?” Hayden asked.

“Well around that time I was selling ice, I’d lifted five pound sacks before and set them right back down. Even dragged bales of hay cross the barn floor. So ice wasn't too bad. But when I set to lugging this giant block of ice with Mr. Tolliver's grabber claw, which Tolliver’d let me use, I realized this block was something beyond my realm of humanity and moved on into the realm of the angels. The gods. Or at least the adults. And so I looked at that old block of ice with the dirt on the bottom — one I was hauling for the pharmacist — and asked The Good Lord, ‘Give me the strength of Samson.’”

“And The Good Lord said, ‘No, Remmy, but I’ll give you the long suffering of Job.’

“And I told him, ‘That's a fine joke on me, Good Lord.’

“And he said, ‘But it's just the aid you need.’”

We were quiet for a time.

“So you just prayed for the strength of Samson,” Hayden said. “And The Good Lord gave it.”

“No. He gave me the long suffering of Job,” Remmy said. “And that’s a fine joke on me, prison and whatnot. But it *was* the magic I needed. He gave your daddy the wit of Jacob when your daddy asked and you know how that turned out.”

“Long suffering of Job,” I said. “That’s why you laughed your way through bad wells and getting tools stolen and fires and flood and losing homes and friends and prison and everything else?”

“That’s why.” He giggled. “Some magic to knowing that a thing *is* even though it *oughtn’t*. Kinda like Robinson Crusoe’s list of things saved from the wreck, you know. Spoon’s more than a spoon after a shipwreck: it’s a shovel. Prison can become a church. Poisoned wells can become a sort of cure if they motivate the neighborhood. Oil derricks that fall on your house can get turned into trebuchets.”

“That bit with the trebuchet’s on you,” The Good Lord said.

“I know,” Remmy said. “Don’t I know it.”

“Which is why it’s on me,” The Good Lord said.

“Thankee.”

“Can we do what you did, Grandad?” Hayden asked. “Same,” he pointed to his chest, “same?” He pointed to Grandad’s heart.

I looked at him. He didn’t normally want magic, but that doesn’t mean he didn’t want nothing.

Hayden looked at me.

Grandad Remmy eyed us both. “Sure thing. Pick a story and the virtue and ask for the virtue and he’ll send the Virtue to come and fill you up and give you what you need. Just make sure you ask for His will and not yours, cause let me tell you: strength of Samson wouldn’t a

done me no good what with towers and tricks and trebuchets. Don't help being strong if a haircut does you in."

We were running off his porch, "THANKS GRANDAD!"

He waved his pipe, stuck it in his teeth — the *clack-snap-rattle* of enamel on wood — and smoked it some more, grinning.

We went back to the field and sat down and prayed.

"Good Lord?"

"Yes, Toby."

"If it be your will, would you give me the magic of St. Peter? The keys to the kingdom to bind and loose things on Earth in ways that bind them and loose them in the heavens? To make and destroy here in ways that make and destroy in the womb of the worlds?"

"Well now, why do you want this, Toby?"

"I gotta get out of here."

The Good Lord chuckled. "Why's that?"

"Cause I gotta find magic. More of it. I gotta find where it comes from. Show me the way."

"Okay. I'll give you the hard headed faith of Peter, his making and binding, and the wanderlust of Thomas. Hayden?"

"Yes Lord?"

"What would you ask of me?"

"Only that one time, you know when Elijah was starving?"

"I remember it as it is now before me."

"Well you know how you sent the raven? And then he had to ask a poor old widow and her starving son for their last bread and oil?"

“Something like that, yes.”

“Could you provide for me magically like Elijah? I just feel like I’m not gonna have a chance here. Like I need something safe, some safe joke, some safe thing that pleases me, marriage or a creed or something. Old jokes that get better as I get older. Like Grandad Remmy.”

“I’ll give you the ravens and oil of Elijah, Hayden, that it’ll never run out.”

We both said Thank You.

Lightning struck the same tree, the same branch, set the scorched branch on fire and it fell down burning to the field behind The Blue House. Seafoam shutters. Green grass. Red fire. Wind kicking up white sands in the sandbox Daddy Bren had poured us from out of his new dump truck.

“Maybe I asked for the wrong thing,” I said.

“Tov,” he said. “Fire!”

“It’ll be okay,” I said.

It rained and put it out.

“Maybe I asked for the wrong, wrong thing,” I said again.

“Maybe you had it all along,” Hayden said. “Look at the Easter lily.” He pointed to an unburned part of the field. An Easter lily had sprouted up on the other side of the tree. He said, “Good Lord, it’s magic. It’s a beautiful thing, this flower. It should never have been, yet here it is: yellow as a little sun in the soil. Like one of the things saved in Grandad Remmy’s shipwreck list.”

The Good Lord chuckled.

“See the koro-pok-guru, though?” I asked. I pointed to the little girl cowering under the main leaf of the daffodil.

“The what?” Hayden asked.

“That there Easter lily dryad hiding under that there leaf.”

“Cool,” Hayden said. “But I think I’ll pick the flower for mom.”

“But you’ll take the koro-pok-guru’s home!”

“He’ll find another,” Hayden said.

“She’ll find another,” I said, “Maybe she will. Maybe she won’t! Mom can have another flower.”

She, the little dryad, came out and ran up Hayden’s pant leg.

He squirmed.

The little bundle worked all the way up the inseam, his underwear, shirt, collar, came out on his shoulder and stabbed his ear with a thorn.

“OW! I’m definitely taking her flower now!” He plucked it and flung the dryad off.

I caught her.

She stabbed me with her thorn.

“OW!” I said. “What did I do?”

She gave me an *are you serious?* gesture and then barreled back towards the earth. Like I said, Hayden and I tended to both be right and both be wrong.

Later that year, our sister Avalona came into the world and we moved houses. Avalona, beautiful baby girl. In her first year, she was swimming back and forth across the country club swimming pool quicker than most grade schoolers, no floaties, still in diapers. It was Easter and Great Granddaddy John David died the hour I got dunked and punked in the baptistry and someone said words about it being an Overmorrow — a way into the magical world. I didn’t believe them to my demise.