DGM - 4000

The Present – Act 1

It is a brisk dreary fall evening that cascades through the mountainous region of the American Midwest. In a small shanty town built for an age long forgotten there lies a quiet forest just outside the qualms of modern society. Within its winding curling embrace, there lives a rickety well-forgotten bridge waiting for its companion to return.

Its companion is an old gentleman shrewd from his many years working in an iron factory. His head is wrinkled with the many waves of time that have flown over him. Adorning his body is a rugged, worn pair of denim overalls fastening his favorite baseball jersey t-shirt. Namely what attracted this bridge to his companion the most was his callused dry hands that often adjusted his heavy boots upon its span.

However, it has been quite some time since we last heard from the man. As his last visit was nearly 12 years ago. Back then he used to visit quite often giving the bridge a light sanding or a couple of spare nails. Although his final visit was quite peculiar. This time the man came empty-handed.

“It is always a wonderful day out in the fall around this time.” The man said. “I wonder how my favorite bridge is doing today.”

As he walked his usual route, he came upon the single bridge perched above a ten-foot drop overlooking a roaring river. It had become a tradition at this point for the man to stop and admire the bridge for a time. First, he would admire its subtle expanse in the cold blue overcast light. Next, he would inspect its many rivets and nails ensuring that everything had a tight fit. Finally, after a thorough inspection, he leaned over the side of the bridge to absorb the soothing sounds of the churning splashing river.

As he opened his eyes and looked down into the depths of the river, he noticed something peculiar. There he saw a small crimson bell off the shore of the river glimmering in the dimly lit ramparts of the forest. The man stared at the bell for a moment and spoke to himself as if someone were listening.

“Who could have left litter in a fine place like this?”

Upset the man crossed the bridge and slowly made his way down the sharp jagged incline that leads to the bell. After many excruciating minutes of maneuvering down the slippery slopes, the man finally reached the bell.

“It’s quite a shame too that someone would throw this out. It is quite a lovely bell.”

Leaning down the man picked up the bell in one hand and admired its glossy chrome finish. However, at that moment the sky turned black. A massive swirl of ethereal smoke created a column of dense purple smoke in front of the man over the now calm river. Startled the man fell onto his back sheering his arm up against a razor-like rock. In a panic the man grasped his arm bellowing out into the distance his cries of pain. Soon the smoke dissipated to reveal a large figure cloaked in an elegant black and purple dress. Stunned the man looked up in horror as the figure spoke.

“I see you have found my little red bell.”

Soaked in an emanating fog, the figure smiled with a burning red fire. It looked down at the man as he tried to run away. Looking for any way out, the man exasperatedly clutched at the wet rock failing to find any proper hold.

“The devil has come to take my soul!!!” The man shouted.

“Devil? No… I am but a conjuror.” The figure paused as it reviewed the mans failed attempts to climb the slope. After a moment of thought, the figure raised one finger to its mouth and spoke. “Although… I’d be more than happy to be your devil if that is what you wish for returning my bell.”

With a fluid motion of its hands, the figure waved its arms and enveloped the man in a cloud of black smoke. Screaming the man writhed as the smoke consumed his being. Finally, the figure gave the man one last look with a smirk on its face.

“If you really don’t want my present then you’ll have to retrieve my bell once more. I’ve hidden it within your final destination if you have the gall to refuse my generous work. Good luck young man. You will need it where you are going. HAHAHA!!!”

A bright flash of light enveloped the forest returning it to its prior state. Water continued to flow, birds continued their song, and the bridge maintained its solidarity. Still screaming and grasping his arm the man awoke to find no blood and no figure. In a panic, the man stood up to get his bearings surveying his surroundings. As he soon came to realize he indeed was not in the same world anymore.

Act - 2A

The man climbed back up onto the bridge and started to look at the world around him. It all seemed familiar, but there was something that was off about all of it. He went around the bridge and started to look closely at all the bolts and the screws that held it together. Everything was exactly the same.

He started to walk down the path back toward his home. What just happened to him didn’t seem real.

“Did that really just happen?” he asked himself. He wasn’t sure if he had just experienced it, or if it was all in his mind. As he was walking down the path, he came across a man selling wares on the side of the road.

“Trinkets and carvings, and all sorts of wares! Sir, do you need something to give the missus? A candle, or maybe a bell?” the salesman hollered at the man. He stopped and turned towards the salesman.

“What kind of bells do you have?” the man asked cautiously, this couldn’t be a coincidence.

“Oh, I have many bells, gold, and silver, big and large! What might you be looking for?” the salesman cheerfully answered, hopeful to make a sale.

“Would you happen to have a red bell?” the man asked. The salesman stiffened up and turned back towards the man.

“A crimson bell?” the salesman asked, his once cheerful voice turned dark and broody. “That is a bell that only the cursed seek to find. I cannot do business with you, but I can offer you this.” The salesman turned back toward his cart and reached into a cubby along the side. He pulled out a rolled-up parchment, with a red piece of ribbon tied around it, and handed it to the man.

“Here is a map, it has the answers you seek, read it well, and be careful, for the conjuror has many tricks up his sleeves.” The salesman went back to his cart and started to push it down the road. The man unrolled the map and looked at its scribbled drawings, trying to decipher where he should go next.

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The last of the smoke curled around her feet as the sun started to shine again. The woman was in the same place as before, along the road next to where the beggar once stood.

‘I shouldn’t have helped him, helping beggars never turns out good,’ she thought to herself. The woman turned and started to walk toward the city, but the thought kept nagging at her, she must find that bell. The interaction played out again in her head

The beggar had called her over and asked for money, as she was looking through her bag a small sound came from the ground as a little red bell hit the dirt. She reached down to pick it up, and as she went to hand it back to the beggar his face had turned into another, his smile looked as if it were on fire.

‘I should have never picked up that bell’ she thought to herself. ‘There’s not much choice I have now though.’ The woman pressed forward toward the city, searching for answers about the bell.

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The man walked along the road, following the map that had been given to him by the salesman. This world was different than his own, it seemed like everyone he met knew about this conjurer, and each one of them gave him a clue about where to find this little red bell.

It had been weeks following clues and the map from town-to -own, a tedious journey that finally lead him to this moment. He walked to the base of a trail that led up the mountain. This was where the map stopped. He only had clues left, and they weren’t very specific either.

Suddenly mist started to curl around his feet and gathered a couple of yards in front of him on the trail. The mist formed into a pillar, out of which the conjurer stepped.

“You have made it this far,” boomed the voice of the conjurer that stood before him. “It will only be harder from here. You have been resourceful, but now comes the true test. This realm will start to collapse a few days from now. If you find the bell, I will let you return home, but if not, you will collapse with the world.”

ACT 2B

In a moment’s notice, the conjuror disappeared in a thick layer of dark smoke. The man was left to ponder what he had just witnessed. He was now on a timer to finish this daunting journey he was forced upon.

The man began to follow the path where the map had led him. His final clue had to be at the top of the massive peak overlooking him. There is no other reason he would have been brought here and visited by the conjurer if it wasn’t. He was on the right track.

The ascent up the mountain began rather peacefully. There was a slightly chilly breeze that brought the all familiar smells of a mountain. Small critters could be heard rustling in the bushes and up the trees. The man was soaking it all in as he enjoyed the solitude of being out in nature.

The bliss did not last forever. The path became steeper and rockier as he made his way up the mountain. Navigation was getting trickier and was beginning to put a strain on the man’s legs. It was also now past sunset and was getting very dark. He decided he was going to quit for the night after finding a good location to sleep under an overhang to stay covered in case it decided to rain.

The man ate an apple and some nuts he had packed away in his bags. He didn’t have much food left, but it didn’t really matter. He was doomed anyway if he couldn’t find the bell. This realm would soon be collapsing, and he couldn’t let food stop him from finding his way home. He drifted away to regain some strength for the rest of the journey that would be brought upon him tomorrow.

He woke at first light and continued up the path. It was a quiet morning. All that could be heard were the footsteps beneath his boots. Every creature was still in a deep slumber from the night before. It was almost eerie. It felt as though someone, or something was in the man’s presence. He had to ignore it and continue to the top of the mountain.

It was a cloudy morning and rain was set to fall at any moment. The peak was in sight and could be reached by mid-day. The man still had no idea what to expect at the top of the mountain. His clues had only led him here, they hadn’t prepared him for the final moments of the journey he was about to endure.

The man was getting closer and got interrupted by the sound of footsteps behind him. They were moving very quickly, trailed by something louder and more substantial. He turned around to see a woman running toward him in a sprint. The path behind her was collapsing.

“Run!” The woman was screaming as soon as she noticed the man in the path.

Without overthinking the situation, he chose to do as the woman said because the other option was to fall to his death. It was not easy to navigate up the trail. He had to continually monitor his feet to ensure that he didn’t trip over the protruding rocks littering the path. One wrong step and he wouldn’t be able to recover from the mistake.

The woman eventually caught up and surpassed the man on the path. They didn’t bother to exchange greetings as they had more significant problems to worry about. The dissolving path was also inching closer by the second. He would be taken down with it in just moments.

There was a sizeable gap up ahead in the path. There was no other route to take, and they were going to have to make the jump across to the other ledge. The woman came upon the gap first and made the jump in one fluid motion, continuing her sprint on the other side.

The man was next to attempt the jump. His did not go as smoothly. His leading foot landed halfway on the opposing ledge and slipped under him. He began to fall and reached out to attempt to grab the edge to avoid the plunge to his death.

He was able to stop himself and hold his weight up with his forearms. He was in pain due to the impact and would not be able to keep up his strength very long. He was struggling to keep his arms on the ledge and could not pull his feet up to the ledge. “Help me please!” He screamed as he knew he was not going to last long on the shelf.

The woman heard him and turned around. She was shocked at the sight but quickly relieved as she noticed the destruction was ending. The path behind was no longer collapsing, and the sound of the damage was dissipating. She rushed over to help the man up.

She got down on her stomach and extended her arm to grab on to the man’s arm. She then grabbed the same arm with her other hand and pulled with all her might. Slowly she was able to pull the man up until he was able to shift his weight and bring himself to safety. Exhausted, she rolled onto her back to catch her breath.

“Thank you kindly, Madame, I owe a great debt to you.” The man panted in gratitude.

“It was nothing. I don’t know what happened. One moment I was walking up the path and then the path started collapsing behind me!” The woman exclaimed. She continued to struggle to catch her breath and said, “Hey, by any chance have you heard about a crimson bell?”

The man immediately sat up and widened his eyes. He exclaimed, “Yes! That is why I am here. I am searching for it!”

The man and the woman exchanged their stories of how they ended up in this realm. They also described their journey of finding clues to get to where they were now. They determined the path dissolving away must be the beginning of the realm collapse the conjurer had mentioned. They decided they would travel together to find the crimson bell together.

They weren’t walking long before they noticed a cave entrance. Inside the cave on top of a pedestal, there was a box. They began walking toward the cave sure what was inside of the box. They were both anxious to end this journey and return on home.

Suddenly, the ceiling of the cave began to collapse in. Very quickly the cave was filled with rubble and debris. There was no way the box could not be reached unless the wreckage in the cave was excavated one by one.

A mist began to form, and the conjurer appeared before the two devastated travelers. In a chuckle, he said, “I see you have banded together and found my crimson bell. I apologize for beginning the destruction of the realm a little early, but I have other matters to attend to. You will still need to retrieve the bell and return it to me. Also, I will only accept it from one of you!” The conjurer disappeared in a cloud of smoke nearly as quickly as he had appeared.

The sat resting from the struggles, both of their minds were swirling in the thought, “Why only one?”

ACT 3

The woman stood first and began to move the debris, rock after rock was pulled from the pile and tossed to the cave opening. The man watched for a moment and noticed both how strong the woman is and how after a bath to remove the dirt from her face, and dressed in fine linens, she would be a beauty with strength.

She stopped, as though she had heard his thoughts, and turned to face him. “Well is this a one-woman show?” she asked.

“I’m sorry,” he replied, “I was caught in the thought how did you get here? I understand my circumstances, but why are you on this journey? Why here and now?”

She sat on a nearby boulder and smiled. “Every year I travel to an old bridge and place flowers on the posts. I understand you may think me daft, but my mother did the same thing for four years. Then one day a man crossed the bridge; they were wed within the month. I hoped the same miracle would bless me.”

“How many times have you visited the bridge?” He asked. “Have you met the one you seek?”

She frowned and looked to her feet. “I have not met the one; after ten years.” With a deep sigh of regret for the time, she felt she had wasted. “And how did you befall this curse?”

“I travel once a year to see my family lands; every year I cross an old bridge. I noticed it needed repair, so every year I would replace broken planks or tighten the loose rail. This year, that conjurer placed a red bell by the river and when I picked it up, well here I am trying to recover the red bell in hopes I may return to my world.”

“The conjurer said only one could return. I assume it will be me as I am the only one moving the rocks,” and with that, she returned to the task.

The man stood. “Then I will help you return,” he said as he began to clear the rocks.

Together they cleared the rocks from the collapsed ceiling and moved them to the front of the cave without thought, an arduous task but necessary labor if either could return.

Finally, the box and pedestal were reviled, unharmed from the stones. Both stood admiring the velvet box, contemplating what should happen now. The woman smiled at the man and said, “Take it.”

“No,” he replied. “I othered for you to return and find what you seek. It is yours.” With that, he stood back.

She too stood back contemplating the situation. “If I take the bell, I will return, and you will be left in this cave. If you take the bell, the same fate befalls me. One wins the other loses.”

He nodded accepting the fate before him. “I have only me, it will not be a great loss.”

“And I only me,” she responded.

Time seemed to freeze as each weighted the options.

She took his hand, kissed his cheek with tears falling from her own. “Take it,” she whispered.

The smoke quickly filled the cavern, and the conjurer appeared. “It is time to decide,” he demanded. “One to go and one to stay.”

Both stood, no longer afraid of the conjuror or they own fate.

In a moment of thought, the man looked at the conjurer. “Why only one?” He asked. Then he turned to the woman and took her by both hands. “Why not two?”

Each nodded to the other, reached for the velvet box and the bell it held. “NO!” The conjurer screamed, and all became shallowed in black smoke.

When they awoke, both were lying on the bridge; he with his worn boots and tools to repair the bridge; she with a hand full of fresh flowers. The stood happy to be back at the bridge. She hugged the man, stepped back and offered her hand. “My name is Hope,” she announced with a giggle.

“And mine Luis,” he replied as he bowed slightly. “Is this your bridge?”

“Yes, indeed it is. And yours?”

He smiled, “The very same.”

Thereafter, every year, Hope and Luis; would return to the bridge with flowers and tools to repair and decorate the bridge. They would feast on fresh quail and boiled potatoes, and tell their children of how they met, defeated the conjurer, and solved all obstacles that befell them; together.

The bridge blessed them with long life and abundance.