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The Silver Spoon

The morning was cool and damp, like most mornings in April. The mountains wore wisps of fog as cloaks around their peaks. At Margaret Miriam's home, nestled in the side of a wooded mountain and hemmed in by ever-expanding layers like it, the sun would not penetrate the lithe clouds until a little after nine in the morning. However, the sun did reach through the branches of the trees lining their driveway, bathing the front yard in a gold and white ethereal glow. The air felt chilly on Margaret's arms, but she knew that with the disbursement of fog, the cold would also flee.

She walked across the yard to the chicken coop to feed her family's chickens and gather eggs. *Ooh, yay! Seven!* Margaret counted to herself. In her excitement, she forgot to look where she was going. She felt her right foot slip slightly and furrowed her eyebrows together as she looked down. At ten years of age, she was thoroughly immersed in farm life, but there were times it caught her by surprise.

She walked carefully back to the porch and put her shoes out of the way of the walking path before carrying the straw-lined ice cream bucket of eggs inside. Their house was a square-shaped double wide trailer with bright yellow siding that made Margaret's parents crack up when they saw it because it was so ugly. It was a little older, but Margaret's family kept it up well; in fact, Margaret would have never known it was a double-wide if they hadn't told her.

"Wash up, M&M," her mother told her from the stove in the kitchen.

"Yes ma'am."

"How many eggs did you get?"

“Seven!” Margaret replied over the running water. “What’s for breakfast?”

“Sweet potato chocolate chip muffins!”

“Oh boy! Thanks, Mama!”

“You’re welcome. Go get your brothers and sisters to come eat, please.”

There were five children in all; Margaret was the oldest, then after her Ruth was eight, Gracie seven, Danny five, and Joey nearly three.

“Can we eat now?” Danny asked as the children noisily came to the table. He was always hungry.

“Just a minute, Buddy, we have to say the blessing first,” Margaret’s father spoke up and looked around the table. “Who would like to say it?” Gracie volunteered.

After breakfast was put away and Margaret’s father left for work, Mama pulled out school books for Margaret and her sisters. Her brothers were too young yet to start. Margaret groaned when Mama pulled out her math book.

The sooner I get done with this, the sooner I can go read Nancy Drew, she told herself.

After thirty minutes of math, Margaret’s mother moved her to English and turned to help Gracie with her spelling.

Margaret briefly stared out the window. Rather than turning sunny like she originally thought, the clouds were gathering over the mountains, and it was becoming darker.

“Mama?”

“Yeah, M&M?”

“As soon as I finish these two pages, can we go play outside before it rains?”

Mama looked up from Gracie’s work to peer out into the yard. “Yes, that’ll be fine. But as soon as it starts raining, or forty-five minutes is up, you need to come back in.”

“Ok! We will!”

Margaret speedily finished her English work and went to put her tennis shoes on. She grabbed her robin blue hoodie and ran up the bank behind her house to their play fort. Ruth and Gracie followed a few minutes later.

The fort was not as much as fort as it was a small, groomed area of the woods. At the edge of the bank, there was a small, wooden, green fence section lying atop two thin trees. Margaret did not remember how her parents found it, or even who built it, but it provided a nice fence to keep Margaret’s younger siblings from tumbling down the dirt bank. Around the top of the bank was a stump or two for seating, and from the back, the “fort” melded into the rest of the woods.

“Come on, let’s explore for a few minutes before we go back inside!” Margaret said.

“Ok!” Ruth and Gracie echoed. They were game for most anything their older sister proposed. They trekked up the mountain, staying within sight of the house (for that was their parent’s stipulation for exploring, at least for now). They were not looking for anything in particular. It was just nice to be out of doors. Occasionally, they would find old items left behind from the people who settled the area a century before, like old nails, pottery, and every so often, glass bottles or shards. Thirty minutes later, Ruth looked down at her watch.

“Uh, Mar? We need to go ahead and go if we don’t want to get into trouble.”

“Yeah, and it’s getting darker,” Gracie observed.

“Ok,” Margaret turned to follow them down the hill. When she did, what little sunlight was left reflected its light from an object on the leafy brown and faded orange ground cover.

“Just a second.”

She walked over to where the light shone off the ground and picked up the object. It was a silver baby spoon.

“What is it?” Ruth asked and ran over to her. Margaret showed her and Gracie the spoon.

“It says ‘Scotland’ on one side, kinda in the middle on the back of the spoon,” Margaret said. “And on the front near the tip it has M written in cursive.”

“Huh.”

“I wonder whose this could have been,” Margaret mused, but not for long. The wind picked up and sent leaves and the girls’ hair flying in all directions. The storm was nearly upon them.

“Come on, let’s go!” Margaret shouted and ran down the hill. A couple minutes later, Margaret and her sisters made it back to their yard. Or so they thought. Instead of their house, a quaint log cabin stood in its place. And in place of their driveway, a nearly vertical mountainside greeted their eyes. Thirty men dressed in overalls and long sleeve cotton shirts led pairs of mules a few feet away from them, pulling groups of five or six logs chained together behind them. Margaret rubbed her eyes and looked again. There they were, clear as day!

“What’s going on?” Gracie looked up at Margaret and reached for her hand. “And where’s our house?”

“Did we drop into the wrong bowl?” Ruth asked.

“No, I know we came the right way down,” Margaret told them. “Although I don’t know of any sort of logging work going on near us, so that is rather puzzling. But don’t worry, as long as we keep a level head, we’ll be fine. Let’s ask someone what’s going on.”

As the girls talked, a tall, kind looking young man in his late teens slowed his team to speak to them. He wore a white long sleeved shirt under a pair of faded blue overalls, and had dirty blond hair and hazel eyes.

“I don’t believe I’ve seen you girls here before,” he said. “What are you doing here?”

“We’re not entirely sure ourselves,” Margaret admitted. “We were playing near our fort, and when we came back down to go inside, we ran into y’all.”

The young man looked around and gestured for them to walk with him. “Were you playing where we were felling trees?”

“No one was felling trees when we were up there,” Gracie truthfully admitted.

“She’s right,” Margaret carried on with her explanation. “We were exploring the woods like we usually do, and then we found this spoon,” she held it up to him to see. “And we were going to take it home, because it looked like it was about to rain, so we came back down here. But we must have dropped down the wrong bowl to find you.”

“That’s possible,” he nodded. He looked closely at their clothes. Each girl wore a thick shirt with a trapezoid shaped front pocket and a hood on the back, blue jeans, and low laced up shoes. He tilted his head. “Forgive me for asking, but where are you’uns from?”

“Just over the mountain,” Ruth pointed. “Why?”

“I was just curious. No girls around here have those type of boys’ clothes. And whatever shirt that is.”

“It’s a hoodie,” Margaret giggled. “And these *are* girls’ clothes.” She looked back up at the man as a thought came to her.

“This may sound silly, sir, but what year is it?”

“1924, why?”

The sisters looked at each other with wide eyes. They would be in trouble now, for sure!

“Well, sir,” Margaret hesitantly began, “this may be shocking for you to hear, but we live on this mountain too, just eighty years into the future.”

The young man glanced at them and snickered. “You’uns are pullin’ my leg!”

The girls shook their heads and remained silent. The young man stopped for a moment and stared ahead. He eventually regained his voice and asked them, “Eighty... how is that possible?”

“We don’t know,” said Ruth. “but we would sure like to find out!”

“Yes, I’m sure you would,” the man mused. “Come with me, and I’ll take you to my mama. I believe she can help.”

As soon as he finished his chore, the young man, whose name was Jim, led the way back to his log cabin. The cabin was set in a small but comfortable hamlet carved into the side of a mountain. The cabin struck Margaret as being small as well. There was a good sized garden sloping downward just off the house, as well as a chicken coop and modest-sized barn. Jim’s father joined them on the path. They walked up to the front porch and Jim’s father yelled, “Maggie, we got company!”

“Who is it, James?” a woman in her mid-thirties came to meet them and gave her men a kiss on the cheek. “Who are these girls?”

“This is M&M, Ruth, and Gracie,” Jim introduced.

“Hello, ma’am,” the three greeted in turn.

“What sweet manners! Come in and wash up, I have rabbit stew ready.”

Everyone did as she said, and came and sat at the table where James blessed the food. Margaret and her sister looked around the cabin. It was one room, just like the pictures in their

history books, but there was much more color and life to it. The fire bathed the room in an amber glow, and there were four or five multicolored quilts on the rocking chairs and on the beds. Maggie also had some herbs hanging upside down from the roof over the table. Jim's family of three was small, both in the amount of people and the amount of material possessions, but Margaret could tell they were content with their lives by the kind way they talked to and smiled at one another. It was like her family, so she and her sisters felt safe. She smiled at her hostess and took a large bite of stew.

"This is delicious, Miss Maggie!"

"Thank you, M&M right?" she asked.

Margaret nodded. "It's short for Margaret Miriam, M&M's just easier."

"I agree," she smiled. Looking at the other two girls, she asked, "So what brings you this way?"

"Show her the spoon, Mar," Gracie said.

"What spoon?"

Margaret pulled the silver spoon from her pocket and handed it to her. "We were exploring in the woods around our house, when we found this slightly buried in the ground. And it was about to rain, so we took off for home, and we ran into your son and realized we were much farther from home than we thought."

"And where do you live?"

"*When*," Jim corrected.

Maggie looked straight at him and furrowed her eyebrows.

"Apparently they're from the next century," he explained.

"And you need my help getting home," she finished.

The girls nodded. “And we would like to know who the spoon belonged to,” Ruth said.

“Naturally.” Maggie looked hard and long at the spoon for several moments. Ruth and Gracie shifted in their chairs while Jim’s mother took her time. At last, she looked up at them.

“I *do* know whose spoon this is,” she gently smiled at her captive audience. “But it isn’t mine. It was my grandmother’s.”

“Do you mean Grandma Mary?” Jim asked.

“Aye,” Maggie replied. The girls giggled and Jim smiled.

“My grandmother came over from Scotland with her family in 1827. They carried many items of value, since her father was a well-respected gentleman, and that included some silver, like this spoon. Well, they settled here, I’m told because it resembled the Old Country, and they began to make a life for themselves. When my grandmother was a little older, a fire broke out one night in the cabin. The next day, my grandmother and her family desperately searched for anything that survived the fire. Not much did, and the spoon was lost. Until now.”

“Wow,” Margaret said. “How did they get along?”

“Neighbors helped, and they worked to get back on their feet, which they did eventually.”

Margaret thoughtfully nodded and looked at her sisters. They were all thinking the same thing. “You can have your spoon back,” she pushed her hand toward Maggie. Ruth and Gracie nodded.

“Thank you, dears,” she smiled again. “But I believe this spoon is going to be your key home.”

“How’s that?” Jim asked.

His mother's eyes glimmered with a hint of mischief. "Once we're through here, get up and take the girls back up to where you found them, Jim. Then you three can bury the spoon again. The rest should work itself out."

Margaret and the girls did not seem sure of Maggie's plan as they hiked back to the mountain side by lamplight where Jim first found them, but they were willing to give it a shot. They arrived thirty minutes later.

"Jim," Margaret asked. "Could you write your name or something on a piece of paper with the year on it? Our mother is never going to believe what happened."

"You're a clever girl," he grinned. "Sure." He handed Margaret the lamp, tore off a page from a small notepad, scribbled something, and handed it to her as she returned the lamp.

"Don't lose it," he winked.

"Will do," she laughed and put it in her jeans pocket. "Thank you for all your help."

"Anytime." He looked at each of them and smiled before he walked away. "Come and visit anytime."

"We'll do our best!"

While Jim turned and walked down the hill, Margaret used the spoon to dig a three-inch deep, narrow hole to put the spoon in.

"Do you think this will work?" Gracie asked.

"There's nothing else at this point," Margaret covered the last of the dirt over the hole.

"Now we just have to hope for the best."

They waited for a moment, then two, and then a minute. The wind began to pick up, and the clouds obscured the setting sun yet again.

“Come on!” Margaret excitedly shouted and ran down the mountain. The rain was here yet again, but they knew these were no rain clouds.

Halfway down the mountain, the sun brightened, and they reached the ledge where their house sat!

“It worked!” Ruth shrieked. The girls jumped up and down, never more excited to be back in their time. At least, they hoped it was still before the time Mama told them to be back. They took off their shoes and ran inside.

“There you girls are! That was a little more than forty-five minutes, though,” their mother said, though her voice lacked harshness. “Where did you go?”

Margaret handed her the note. “I think *when* is what you mean.”

Their mother stared at the signature, *Jim Cochran, 1924*, for several seconds before looking back down at her daughters. There was a curious, excited gleam in her eye.

“This is your great uncle, girls.” Margaret, Ruth and Gracie were so shocked they couldn’t speak. Their mother, however, wore an impish smirk. “Tell me everything.”