

BLESSINGS OF AN IMMORTAL

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CHAPTER I

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR

I lived a great many summers indeed. For as long as I can recall, I have dwelt here, in this cozy little cottage atop a mighty timeless mountain. Truly timeless. I confess I do not know exactly how long my own life has lasted, but that I cannot remember the day of my birth. The years of my mortality faded into the sands and the rocks, leaving not a trace for any to follow. All I am is an old man who refuses to let death claim him. An effortless gesture of defiance at this point.

Gates of sandstone long since barred my stained glass windows. To light the space in which I find myself sitting, I utilized a special potion that casts light from any sort of treated object. I have been using stones, as they last the longest. In fact, I only need to venture outside once a month to restock. The mountainside leaves a lush bounty, plentiful enough to suit my needs, and for what it cannot, a village sets at the base of the mountain. The people there are kind enough to lend me wares and food with no thought of reward. I knew them for a while, though I cannot recall any faces.

I am finishing a meal when I hear a quite unexpected noise usher forth from the south. As if brought on by swift winds, I hear a knock at my door. Surprised, I lift up these old bones and make my way over. Honestly, the last time I had a visitor was ages ago, so I cannot entirely remember when that was exactly. It must be the wind, or some animal playing too close. It could be a sick bird flew into my door. No, that last part couldn't be right. The knock came thrice, so it must be three sick birds ... or one quite insane.

The knock comes thrice more, a gentle tone surprisingly. I lift up the latch and swing it open, anxiously awaiting a spectacular vision of six birds, but alas, it is a young man. His hair is a dark hue of brown, his skin tanned from the unrelenting sun beating through the opening. The air is quite hot. It must be summer.

"Excuse me," he says in a timid voice. "Are you the immortal of whom they spoke?"

"That depends, boy," I reply. "What have they told you?"

"Can I speak with you this day?"

"Of course, my boy. Come inside. Company is always welcome."

After he enters, I close the door behind him and flip the latch shut for now. The young man has a determined expression behind his eyes. His clothes are tattered and worn from his travels. He crossed some distance to speak with me, though I imagine I am not the final step in the journey he has planned.

"So you live here, cut off from the world?" he asks.

"It is the only way to keep my sanity, boy. Friends, family ... even you will pass soon, youthful as you are."

"That is why I sought you out, sir," he stammers.

"Please, call me Gregory."

"Gregory, sir, I ... I want to become an immortal ... like yourself."

Hesitantly, I answer, “Really now?”

“I want you to teach me the ways of an immortal,” he insists.

I have neither the knowledge of this young man’s history, nor his reasons for seeking me out, but there is one point I should make doubly clear before we further this conversation.

“What is your name, boy?” I ask him.

“Daniel,” he replies.

“Daniel, your wife and children will wither before your eyes. Everyone you know will fade from this existence, and your great nation ... along with its teachings and ways of life ... will crumble to the ground in a mere century or two.”

“None of that matters. As an immortal, I will live to do great things. I will take all that goes with it if I can change the world for the better.”

“Determined aren’t we?”

“I do not intend to leave without an answer.”

There they are again. His eyes ... determined, though transient. We will see.

“I will not train you based on a moment of passion. Come back in five summers. If you can wait that long, I will train you.”

“Thank you, sir. I will be back in five summers. Mark my word.”

He flips the latch and as he leaves, I call out to him, “Safe travels, my boy.”

CHAPTER II

A DYING WISH

The new day greets my eyes in a blinding coat of ebony shade. I wake up from my bed, scarcely able to see anything as I shake off the tattered blankets made of fine fabrics. Some patchwork will have to fit in there sometime soon, but that can wait. I reach over to my bedside to grab the phials I created from the former afternoon and to feel the handful of rocks worn down from the previous coating. It's an acid, so rocks are the best and most resilient choice. Popping the stopper, I pour the solution over them, coating the stones in a fine light as the liquid potion reacts to their surface. A few seconds, and the tones of light flood the cottage, allowing me to see as clear as if it were daylight.

My body and mind lost their connection with the great shifting earth, but in here, I feel as if it is now morning. Maybe something remains ... or is it that I want something to remain? Truthfully, five summers is quite a long time to wait for the boy's return. I doubt even I am that patient. What was his name again? I believe it began with a 'D.' Danielle? No, I'm certain it was a man.

Wholly to my surprise, I hear a knock at my door not seconds after thinking these thoughts. Another visitor? So soon? The odds the knocking is actually a flock of birds grows significantly higher this time, though I suppose it would be rude not to answer otherwise. I open the door and find my gaze fixated a bit lower than last time. Instead of a young man, I see a young boy not more than twelve years old. He looks up at me with wide eyes and speaks with a stutter.

"M ... my father has ... f ... fallen ill," he tells me.

Listen, "There is no reason to fear me, boy. Say what you need to."

"He ..." he continues with a pause. "He can't come to get it."

"Get what?"

"I ... Im ... Immer ..."

Oh, I see now!

"Ah, so then your father is the man who spoke with me earlier?"

To which the boy answers, "Yes."

"Right then. So, he has fallen ill," I say with a chuckle. "I hardly think it's much to fret about."

However, my words fall short of the boy's lack of interest.

"He ... told me to tell you ... he is not strong enough to come here."

So, my suspicions held some merit, but, "Giving up already?"

The boy shakes his head and tells me, "He wants ... you to give it to me instead."

Oh, I see. Well, "If the old man has given up so easily, what reason should I have to trust you will not as well?"

“I ... I ... don't ...” he stutters as I stare him down. It is true. He doesn't know, but he cares for his father enough to make the trip up the mountain. Let us see if his passion is timeless.

“You can wait for five summers,” I tell him. “Come back then, and I will honor your father's request.”

He stumbles out the door and reassures me, “I will come back.”

However, there is, “One more thing, boy.”

“What?”

“I neglected to tell your father, so I'll tell you. It will be easier seeking immortality if you have no heirs. It makes the transition easier, if you take my meaning.”

“For my father's wish, I will do as you say.”

CHAPTER III

A SPITTING IMAGE

A morning and afternoon passes its way like a breeze through the stagnant air of my cottage as I fiddle with all sorts of contraptions. I've cooked a nice bowl of soup from bits of bird I found outside. It is rather exquisite, to be honest, though the flavor is lacking somewhat. I should take a trip down to the village soon ... ah, but that won't be for at least three weeks. Could I part with routine ... just this once?

As I sloppily slurp the last bit of liquid from my spoon, I hear another knock at the door! Who in the blazes could this be? The pounding shakes my delicate walls, rickety old things not meant for the youth. Fine! I'll answer it this one last time, but not once again until at least five summers.

I swing open the hatch and shout, "What in the lord's green...?" and then I pause.

"You recognize me?" he asks.

"Of course, lad. Come in."

He sits down on a dirt-caked rug, waiting for me to follow suit. The young man looks the same as before, but his eyes are not quite in accord. Nevertheless, I meet his gaze at his level. It takes a few moments for this old man to crouch firmly, but I'm not out of it yet.

"You weren't very sick then, were you?" I question him.

"I never was, sir," he replies.

I see. Well, "Then either you or your boy is a liar."

Surprisingly, he answers, "I don't have a boy, sir. Remember?"

"Not particularly."

"You instructed me not to bring up any heirs."

What kind of game is this? Any fool with half a wit can see through this horribly absurd impersonation.

"Don't toy with me, Daniel!" I shout. "I won't have it!"

"You speak of my father, sir. I've waited five summers, as you asked."

Detestable!

"You waited an afternoon and wasted my time so far ... get out."

"But sir ... master Gregory!"

"I will not be prey to trickery, boy! Five summers was the deal, and five summers it shall stay."

"I ... I waited."

"You are a liar and a scoundrel! Out with you!"

CHAPTER IV

A FINAL REQUEST

The boy has indeed learned his lesson. I doubted at first that my words could change a man's heart, though truthfully, I heard little more than the whipping mountain wind for the past three days. It's a calm silence broken occasionally by the rhythmic tone of mother earth. It fades into the echoes of the mountain peak, and I hardly notice if I don't pay close attention.

Supplies are running dry as of late. The foul are nearly gone and what little morsels are left are beginning to succumb to rot. Even my preservatives are no match for mother earth in the end. Of course, eating rotten food won't kill me, but it won't taste pleasant either. Running out of good stones too.

For some reason, the noise of shuffling catches my fancy, scraping along outside the cottage door. Rodents maybe? Certainly not birds. I'm slowly becoming sure of that by now. The sound of wood knocking on wood comes next, like a stick or staff. It hits once. After a few minutes, it hits again. I hear a large resounding thud, like a sack of potatoes plopped on the ground.

"Hello there? Are you a sack of potatoes?"

A sack of potatoes wouldn't be able to come forth with an answer, but seeing as no answer made itself known, the odds shifted considerably in my favor. I might have a grand soup tonight.

Casually, I open the door to see a winded old man leaning up against one of the outer walls. Clutching his walking staff and huddled on the ground, he doesn't notice much of anything.

"Can I help you?"

He slowly shifts his gaze upward, two eyes filled to the brim with tears. For a moment, the old man does nothing but look, coarsely panting to restore his lungs. After some minutes of silence, he utters a few choice words.

"It has been some time ... hasn't it ... master Gregory?"

"Excuse me?"

"I ..." he stutters, "I realize now. You've no idea ... do you?"

"Apparently not. What business have you with me?"

He stares even more strongly.

"I waited, Master Gregory."

Who told him my name? Was it that foolish boy?

"Am I to suffer these visitations for the rest of my days?"

"I waited years ..." he explains, "the whole of my life. I'm not sure how many days I have left, Master Gregory."

"It is your fate, sir."

He grasps my robes with bony fingers, pleading, "It doesn't have to be. Teach me the ways of being an immortal. You can't possibly refuse me if I can't possibly wait."

Each one more impatient than the last. This is the final straw.

"I won't do it."

"You ... you jest ..."

"If you heard of me from the traveler Daniel, let him know I rescind my offer. I won't teach him ... and I certainly can't help you."

"But ... but you promised!" he begs. The tears roll effortlessly down his parched lips.

"I promised nothing," I answer. "Besides, it takes years to learn. You simply don't have enough time left, I'm afraid."

"I ... I forsook everything," he tells me. "I hold no possessions ... no wife ... no heirs ... nothing ..."

"Then your passage into the next life will be easier still."

"I've wasted my life ... for all of this." His grip loosens and then the old man releases his clutch. With what little strength he has left, he picks himself up by the staff and begins the long journey down the mountainside with a single step. "I will be back. I will be back with an army to cut you down."

Those words ... I believe I've heard them before. It matters little, though. The great sun rises and falls, despite its immeasurable power, but time conquers even that.

EPILOGUE

TIME CONQUERS ALL

Weeks pass as I toil with my potions and machinations. Days roll by one at a time so quickly I hardly notice, but I've been keeping track on a calendar. It's an old piece of stone with markings I've etched for the days and years. It has been nearly a month since I last spoke with the old man. He hasn't returned, despite his feverish intent.

“It's time, I think.”

The last of my supplies succumbed to total rot and an unbearable stench permeates every layer of my cottage. I take the time to gather my supplies. I've an old satchel nearly worn to shreds, but it'll do. Enough to carry some goods. I can trade for a better one with some of my potions.

My wares all wrapped up together, I creak open the door to let in some long deserved moonlight. I'd rather it be day, but the wait won't be long. Starlight riddles the sky. However, as I gaze downward, toward the base of the mountainside, there are a great many flames of red and yellow darting across the landscape. So small. I can hardly make them out from here. Some kind of festival?

“What's this?”

Off down the mountain path a ways, there lies a pile of bones. They look old, the meat cleanly picked from them and bleached from months of sunlight. I'd call it an animal, but a human skull rests amongst the clutter. The lot isn't more than a few paces off. Strange...

“I can't believe I never noticed it before.”