

Magic
Salesman

—*Benjamin James
Ditmars*

I SELL MAGIC BY THE BUSHEL. YES, I DO, LIKE MY father and his father and all the other fathers in the pantheon of fatherhood. Gnomes know it well.

We help those in need and those with desire. Have you ever seen a beggar wake to be a prince? Why, that's me at work! And I'm spectacular. Perhaps too spectacular.

I shiver to think I've done the world a disservice but between you and me, there was this case, a trifle if you will.

It was just after the thaw if memory serves me right. Winter had ebbed and with it came the first blossoms of a new spring, and as always the foibles of young love.

She came running up to me in tears to say he never noticed her and if I would be so kind to sell a bushel she could set things right. But I was very frank with her.

"There is might and wealth in magic, but no love," I said.

"Oh, but I'm sure it could play the slightest role to even the odds against the other girls that strive to call on him," she replied.

"Lady, I assure you there is not power I possess to conquer hearts."

She bowed to my height then took her leave. I continued selling ware throughout the day to poor and sickly types, sometimes not charging at all and always what they could afford to pay. Charity had always been integral to the identity of gnomes. Our hats indeed were most always sewn by the grateful.

But, I could only stay so long before I needed rest. The sun and human misery had weighed heavily upon me.

Therefore, I retired near a tree along the beaten path. A shady breeze swept my

sweaty form to cool me off. It was therapeutic and astonishingly cathartic. The gnomish afterlife, I thought, so full of belts and pointed shoes, must hold such virtue. I picked an apple off a low-hanging branch to quench my thirst.

As I bit into the crunchy sweetness of its texture my eyes began to droop. The shade and fruit had numbed my woes considerably.

I dreamt a bird was pecking me and squawking. As often as I batted it off, it returned to nip my nose or pull out hairs. But, it turned out as I woke to be the lady, who earlier sought love poking my chest with her comparatively large finger.

"Mr. Gnome," she began, "I beg of you to give me magic so that I may travel to another town. I can't be happy here, to see my love cavorting with another."

Looking at her swollen eyes I pitied her. Reaching for my tote I removed a bluish orb and sold it in exchange for gold. It may not have been the best solution to her problem but I needed rest.

She ran off before I could offer anymore advice. I would have told her, despite my tiredness: *use your brain, and never just your heart or ego.* Or, even better, use all three! But even then I doubt she'd listen.

I sighed exhausted. I had been old much too long to understand such matters.

Sleep took hold once more, but nightmares continued plaguing me. I dreamt another dream in which I sought a lovely gnome in youth. I spent days baking her the perfect acorn pie. And, as I presented it on silver, she did the unimaginable. She spat it on the ground, and then she spat on me. Without so much as a thank you she continued on her way, arm in arm with another gnome; his hat reached so much higher than mine...

In the morning, I woke to flailing limbs. It seems I had begun to run toward the one I used to love, to liberate her from the travesty that called himself a gnome. For awhile I laid contemplating the meaning of such specters before I noticed my tote, once holding an abundance of orbs was emptied completely. Someone had stolen it!

Oh, the tribulations this sleepy town will witness, I thought. I had wallowed in my own reveries much too long. With one orb and illness may be cured and as much as a scar placed upon an enemy. Yet, with the six now missing, homes would certainly burn while murder reigned!

I rushed down the path into the hamlet immediately. Carriages barely missed me several times as I ducked underneath their wheels. I deserved to be hit.

I was careless. Time spent *playing it safe* meant lives at risk. And as I walked onto the pavement of the town, such haste was confirmed necessary. Buildings burned as people screamed. Cries seemed endless every turn.

I went into the nearest house with a sense of urgency to set things right. A mother and father, I noticed, looked mournfully upon what must have been their daughter. She was still without breath but bore no marks of trauma.

"What has happened?" I asked fearfully.

"YOU!" the mother screamed. "You brought this wickedness! Our beautiful daughter is dead!"

I gaped in horror for a minute before checking other dwellings. Mothers and fathers from all of them attempted to maim me in some way. I can't say as I blamed them. Some blows I took in penance, others from slow reflexes. If enough pain could change reality I would have taken all that they could give. But, I had to move on toward the source of all this

misery before attempting such rashness. Absolving my sins would be selfish with a killer on the loose.

So many daughters worthy of a tiara were silenced in a bitter rage. And the best that I could do was search seemingly in vain.

The lady from the night before had only bought from me to see where I kept the orbs, I realized. And I had let her trick me. I was a disgrace. My father had warned me against such things, as had my grandfather and his grandfather.

I continued looking for that woman responsible but could not find her in the alleys, backrooms, nooks or crannies. Only when I made the long walk back to my tree, off the beaten path, did I perceive her worried form.

She held the six emptied orbs in her arms while tears ran down her cheeks. I still pitied her.

"Oh, Mr. Gnome, I never meant to hurt so many. I just saw him with her and used the magic in revenge against her. But I lost control and they all kept dying; even those I knew as friends. Then, the houses started burning..."

"Child, I do forgive you but I can't undo these awful deeds. You will have to keep the

burden as will I.”

“What if you turned back the clock?”

“You’ve destroyed a town with love and now you seek to kill the world with time? These forces, my dear, are untamable and always will be.”

“But you use them Mr. Gnome!”

“I merely coax and nothing more.”

A pause set in. I heard her sniffing. The ground seemed wet around me.

“Let me come with you,” she asked.

I’m not sure why I told her yes, especially so quickly; perhaps because we were labeled the same now; perhaps because we were the only two to understand each other’s guilt. But, I maintain these events will be trifles to the good we’ll do repaying Gob.