

The Boy & The Ogre

Preface

I will report the story as I was told the story. It could easily have been about a girl and the ogre, but since a man told me the story about himself, I thought it best to tell the truth instead of taking license with it. The man, Joseppi, Jr, who told me the story, of course, is grown. Joseppi, Jr cried several times as he talked about the history of how he came to be; nevertheless, he told it so that others could also become a raving success. I thanked him many times, and I promised that I would be faithful to his report.

Joseppi, Jr owns a bakery across the street from where he began his life. His name was not always Joseppi, Jr, though he has never known another name for himself (that confusion will be cleared up as you read his story).

He lives above the bakery in a very quaint dwelling, full of stories lined on shelves and lamplight that colors all the rooms with wondrous possibilities and safeties. All of his baked goods are made with organic flours and non-GMOs, for those of you whose ogres are already dismissing the story as so much bosh or inauthentic. I only ask that you not allow your ogres to stop you here; they can be very, very ornery at times.

White Stone Dwelling

On the edge of a valley stands a gleaming white stone dwelling where a young boy lives with his caretaker. It is clean and ordered, very well maintained. Bushes planted in order around the dwelling bloom in splashes of color in their different seasons. Flowers bloom that glow until the cold of fall stops them. On the edge of the groomed grass, just before the beginning of the unkempt and wild valley, sits a stone bench beside a gigantic, old oak tree. A tire swing hangs from one of the strong lower branches.

A very beautiful young boy, who does not know that he is beautiful, has just slowed the swing to a standstill. He looks out over the valley at the sunset, far, far to the west over the long horizon of trees beyond counting. He is tired of swinging. His eyes are full and his mouth is in a straight line, not unhappy, but serious as in concentration. He knows that supper will be served soon at a very certain time, for which he tries to be grateful; he tries very, very hard to be grateful and on time. Time just doesn't make a lot of sense to him, and porridge doesn't thrill—even though he knows nothing



else. Porridge is the “ultimate healthy food and we need nothing else to survive,” he says to himself and knows quite well by verse. The valley does make sense to him, as does the sunset; however, he has no words, just sense.

He slides out of the swing and heads to the dwelling. The shadows have lengthened to giants, and darkness will come soon. He knows to be alert to the dark, and knows to be inside before it arrives. His caretaker has told him about the danger of darkness, and the stories he reads to the boy tell him why. The unexpected happens in the dark. Even so, the boy takes in a breath that comes out as a sigh before going through the door. He wants to wait until the last minute before going in. The fireflies are so much greener against the darkness, and they make light. He enters prepared and actually is quite hungry. They never, ever eat porridge unless they are hungry. And they are only hungry just after morning daylight, when the sun is most high, and right after the sun goes down.

The boy smells what the caretaker calls the “healthy” scent of the porridge as he enters. The caretaker is bent over the pot as the boy moves toward the cupboard to set the table with the clay bowls, silver spoons, and clay mugs for water. The caretaker turns and half smiles as he moves toward the table. He asks about the boy’s day, showing concern about his thoughts and actions. He warns him, again, to be careful about the drop off into the valley where the groomed grass ends. “Remember there are wild things with cutting teeth in the wilds,” the boy says in his head as the caretaker finishes the sentence. The boy knows to be

grateful for the warning. He wonders, however, why the caretaker tells him every evening, because he also tells him how smart and wise he is since he knows so much about all the things he has been taught. The boy no longer shares what he wonders.

The boy smiles gently and tells the caretaker all about his day since lunch. He says at the end of his story that he likes watching the fireflies. The caretaker lets out a sigh, looking displeased. The boy knows that he has disappointed his caretaker, who begins to patiently explain how the dangers prevent us from things we would like, how he only wants the boy’s good, and then onto the reality of how life works. The boy feels bad about wanting to see the fireflies, ruining a very interesting story—to which the caretaker had been listening pensively.

“Pensive” was the new word he had learned the night before from the big dictionary the caretaker and he read before sleep. The boy was very proud to know the word, but didn’t mention it—because he didn’t. The rest of the meal they ate quietly, the quiet only broken by the sounds of the spoons and the caretaker’s slurping into his crooked mouth.

Joseppi, Jr., did not know that he was a beautiful boy or that the caretaker was quite ugly, hideously looking actually. Joseppi, Jr. showed me a picture of him. Due to my own trained sensibilities, I assumed Joseppi, Jr. was thinking in an impoverished way, since he was, after all, just a baker. After he showed me a picture of the caretaker, however, I had to agree, justifiably. He was hideous.



The caretaker was an ogre. A real one. His mouth was crooked, and it made his teeth protrude from one side of his face, hanging out over his lower lip. A long scar ran from the edge of his exposed teeth up to his left eye. His eyes bulged quite ominously and, Joseppi, Jr. said, watered constantly, which the ogre attributed to horrible grass and tree allergies. The allergies were tolerable, the ogre always told the boy, because the boy was worth all the pain of the work the ogre had to do outdoors to care take him. His head was not round or shapely in any way. I cannot even give a geometrical description but to tell what shape his head was not, so angular and knotty it was.

The boy always felt bad about how much he was cared for when the allergies were mentioned. He tried to feel good about how important he was, but it was very hard because he felt bad, too. So, he didn't mention the allergies. Then, he also felt bad about not doing so. In the end, he just tried to be good. The man, Joseppi, Jr., had a far away look in his eyes when he told me about how confused he had been.

Joseppi, Jr. told me that the ogre moved about slowly with groans and remained permanently bent at the shoulders. The ogre's skin, in spite of the outdoor sun, was pale, almost translucent, showing veins and splotchy patches of scaly skin that constantly sloughed off his face, sometimes into the porridge, which he ate. Joseppi, Jr. told me that he did not know what hideous looked like at the time; however, he did tell me that sometimes he did not finish his porridge and went hungry until next time.

The ogre was very concerned about the boy's poor appetite at these times, so he would try to eat in spite of the nausea. The slurping sounds and the porridge on the ogre's chin did not help either. The boy knew not to wipe it off with his napkin. He did it once, and the ogre's face grew quite still, which frightened the boy into tolerance. The boy was glad when the ogre spoke again, even though he did not mention what had just happened. The boy learned a whole lot about what not to do from what was never said—which left him highly aware and very careful.

After the evening meal, the boy cleaned the dishes at the pump outside, always frightened, and yet grateful to see the fireflies for a quick minute. He was always relieved to shut the door on reentering. He never wondered why he was always warned about the dark, but was allowed to go into the dark to clean the dishes. He just felt brave, and felt relieved, to help the caretaker who did so much for him. The caretaker would do little chores before bedtime. Then, he would read stories to the boy. Afterwards, they prayed about not dying during the night and for the Great Caregiver to take their souls if so. He always said "goodnight" kindly. The boy looked forward to the morning's light.

Also, without a doubt, the boy looked forward to books, any books no matter how scary or duty-bound they were. Stories about dangers, and the need to stay safe, and how smart people are careful, and how foolish people twiddle away their time and wound up hungry, and how the lack of appreciation leads to being alone, and how the grasshopper



dies in winter, but the ant is toasty underground with plenty to eat. He learned sayings, too, lots of them: rolling stones gather no moss; the need to fish; water under the bridge; not crying over spilled milk; taking the heat in the kitchen; pulling one's self up by boot straps; if you're not the big dog, you need to stay on the porch; getting back on a horse after it knocks you off; how the Great Caregiver only helps those who help themselves.

The boy knew all the teachings by memorization, but loved the pictures so much that he could repeat the words to the caretaker while wondering all kinds of things about the horses, cows, chickens, grasshoppers, ants, trees, cradles, pirates, train robbers, banks, coins, ditches, runaway cars, the Great Caregiver, earthquakes, lightning, thunder, mining cave-ins, graveyards, and on and on. He thought the man pulling himself up by his bootstraps looked funny and seemed silly the way his face was red with effort. He also thought that the woman who

always ate her dessert first looked friendly, and he felt somehow sad about her. He wondered what made dessert so strong that she would break the rules.

The boy no longer asked unsuitable questions and gave suitable answers. He loved the way words were shaped in the big dictionary and the small pictures beside some of the words. The caretaker would always end the stories with, “. . . and that is why we are so fortunate to live where we do—so these things don't happen to us. But someday you will be ready to go there.” The boy would always say how much he liked where he lived and didn't want to go “there,” and the caretaker would always say he could stay as long as he wanted with a grunt that seemed to please him. The boy would feel nervous inside his stomach, yet in his heart he wondered what riding a horse could be like and the taste of apple pie. When the light was out, he would always fall asleep wondering.

A Great & Daring Idea

In the mornings after the clean up chores, the ogre went to work on the grounds, and the boy was free to play, invent and pretend. The ogre told him to enjoy his play until meals because soon enough he would not be able to do so. The ogre always told him to be careful and never go beyond the sight of the dwelling. The ogre would set off with his scythe over his shoulder and basket of other tools in his other hand. The boy would often ask to

go with the ogre because he would be scared of mistakes somehow. But the ogre told him it was good for him to play, and the ogre wanted to give the boy what he himself had never had.

Soon, the boy would venture out on to the grounds, inventing games as he went. His favorite game was most dangerous. The manicured grounds in front of their dwelling were covered with carved stones



and statues as far as the boy's eyes could see. He would step on flat stones, which had words and dates carved into them, until he reached the first tall one to lift himself upon, never touching grass. If he touched grass, he would have to go back to the beginning or he would have to become another character that could revive. The grass was where the alligators lived, waiting to devour, or where the ghouls would reach out and snatch the unsuspecting under water, never to return. As long as he could stay on stone, the adventure could take him places. The older the boy became, the farther he could jump, higher he could climb, farther from the dwelling he could go, and the more he wondered--though he had never lost sight of the dwelling.

One day after lunch, the boy had a great and daring idea. He would find out how far he could go. Before lunch he had made it to the stone where the angel stood; he had stood before on the pedestal where the angel's feet were next to his, but the boy had never gone farther. He could still see roof of the dwelling, but barely. The angel held a sword that pointed onward, and pointed up towards the tops of the trees that swayed in the breeze and the giant blue of the sky.

As the sun went down that evening his thoughts were still on the angel. If he could grab the tree branch that hung near the angel's sword and swing out, the boy knew that he could land on the next stone without touching grass. If he could make it. The boy was pretty sure he would be able to see the dwelling and still please the caretaker. The thought scared him, and the desire did, too. The next morning, he decided to set out for the

angel. He, also, made sure the caretaker was occupied in another direction before he set out. The boy felt nervous inside himself for fear of the caretaker's disappointment. Even in his confusion he just so wanted to be brave, but he was very scared.

Brave won. Climbing up towards the angel's sword, he reached back with the branch in his hands and swung out, letting go just as his feet touched the top of the next stone. He wobbled a bit and then gained his balance. He had never been so far from home. He jumped to the next stone and the next, and then stopped suddenly, no longer thinking of alligators or ghouls. Before him was a tall row of bushes over which he could not see. He heard sounds that he had never heard before just beyond the bushes. And he smelled from where he stood one of the most indescribable, freshest, sweetest scents. The scent, which he would discover soon, was the mouth watering, joy-awakening, magical draw of cinnamon bread being baked.

Without thinking, he hopped down from the stone into the alligator pit, because the wonder of the other side of the bushes had just made the grass . . . well . . . "just grass," Joseppi, Jr. told me. Even in his wonder, the boy was very cautious, having been trained in every danger and the danger of danger for the sake of living. He knew what could happen, the ogre's words testified. He ran from stone to stone and crouched behind each one, drawn towards the sounds and scent like a magnet to the mystery as wild as the valley. He entered through the hedge branches and crawled on the ground to the front of the bushes. A black iron fence



ran along the front of the bushes, and he knew protected him from what could harm him. The fence also kept him in he realized quickly.

What he saw made his heart race, and without knowing it, his eyes were wide and his mouth was slightly open and curved upwards. A man walked by carrying a paper and satchel. His shoes were shiny black, and he whistled while he walked. A girl and boy his own age came by the other way riding boards with wheels that he had seen in the books he read—very dangerous without protective gear. They wore none, and laughed as they click-clicked by on the sidewalk. A woman then walked by with a very eager dog on a leash. It made little quick steps to her big ones, and pulled on its leash towards the boy with a “yip-yip” sound. He slid back into the leafy branches for a moment until the lady pulled the eager dog along. It was quickly drawn to some other curiosity as they walked along. All the people the boy saw spoke to each other or smiled like they knew each other. The “hellos” made the boy ponder and look at the ground in wonder.

When he looked back up, across the street he saw a man come out of a store front with a broom. He wore a white apron, a big mustache, and a giant smile. The boy read the words JOSEPPI’S BAKERY written on the shiny window under the red and white awning of the shop. The boy knew where the magic scent came from, wafting out through the open front door; he watched the man greet passersby while he swept the sidewalk in front of the shop. And he watched lots of people go into the bakery.

A bus then arrived, stopping on the other side of the street almost in front of JOSEPPI’S BAKERY as people waiting climbed aboard, and it was off on its way quickly. Just as the boy was about to focus again on the smiling man in front of the bakery, he instead looked straight into the face of a young girl. She was on her hands and knees looking through the fence at him. Before he could gather his wits to run, she asked in plain-old curiosity what game he was playing by hiding in the bushes. Then he did gather his wits, pushed back into the grass quickly, and ran back to his stone dwelling as quickly as he could, not caring about alligators or ghouls at all. He was out of breath when he returned and the ogre was nowhere to be seen. The boy drank deeply from the water spigot before going out to his swing to think and ponder. But he could hardly ponder at all, so drawn was he to what he had seen.

The ogre returned soon enough for lunch, so the boy knew the time. He was still sitting in the swing staring out over the valley, but not seeing it anymore. He, instead, saw the place he had been, and he mostly remembered the smiling man who seemed about to throw his head back and laugh like in the books the boy read at night. The windows were shiny, the red and white awnings were bright, and the scent of cinnamon bread was indescribable—but to his nose and curious hunger.

The mood of the ogre was normal to the relief of the boy, until the boy himself realized he had not performed his typical behavior of moving toward the dwelling for the meal when the ogre arrived. He had forgotten, so lost in reverie and a



strange fear. The ogre said nothing when the boy entered the stone dwelling. The silence scared the boy, and he had to make a decision very quickly. When the ogre and the boy sat for porridge, the ogre talked about his morning labor. Then he asked the boy if he had had a pleasant morning of play with a most minute, very slight, almost unnoticeable, hardly perceptible tone in his voice and look upon his face that frightened the boy. The boy watched this time more than normal. And this time he told a great story of play and escape from the dangers the ogre had taught him. The boy realized in that moment, however, a very strange, even discomfiting, yet stunning thought. He knew that he had been telling the ogre, always, what he wanted to hear—not the truth, like “I’m scared of you being mad at me, and then getting rid of me.”

The ogre seemed not to be disappointed in the story, and the very minute, barely noticeable, only slight, hardly perceptible tone of voice and facial expression disappeared. The ogre, then, went on about his grunting and silence and talk of the afternoon chores. The boy

reached out to pat the ogre’s hand, feeling somehow pity for the ogre. The boy and the ogre then looked at each other for just a moment before the ogre withdrew his hand and looked away—not displeased, but somehow frightened, in a very minor, hardly noticeable way. But the boy knew, somehow this time, that the ogre’s withdrawal was the ogre’s withdrawal, not his own fault. The boy cared about the ogre, and the ogre cared about the boy. The boy had been taught that telling the truth would get him in trouble, so he learned not to share his thoughts and feelings.

The boy finished his porridge with ritualistic motions, but his heart and mind exploded with the joy of seeing a living picture book. People, lots of them, talking and laughing and walking in the wonder of each other. The boy especially remembered Joseppi’s smiling welcome to the visitors who came to his shop, and the eager way he swept the sidewalk. No alligators and no ghouls that he could see, and yet he was very scared to believe what he saw.

“Through the Gate, Silly”

The boy returned to the life he had seen. He hid in the bushes and watched. The girl who had asked what he was doing in the bushes found the boy again; he told her slowly that he was just playing a game by hiding. She asked if she could play, which scared the boy a lot. Without the boy’s answer, she walked away and

then reappeared moments later behind him. He asked, very surprised, how she came through the fence. In a very befuddled way, she giggled, and said, “through the gate, silly” He took the risk of showing her the game of alligators and ghouls, and she loved it. She was very good at it, too. They talked some, and



finally the boy asked about the bakery and the smiling man. She smiled a very big smile and opened her big brown eyes with delight and said, "Oh, you mean my uncle Joseppi, the great baker." They sat with their backs against a stone that blocked the wind and made the sun warmer as they talked. The boy finally asked a daring question that he knew would reveal how much he did not know. He asked about the sweet scent coming from the shop. Very curiously she looked at him, and the boy saw a very kind and delightful look come to her face as she jumped up, grabbing his hand, and said, "Come with me!"

Before the surprised boy could even think to falsely protest, he was running with her to keep up. Through the gate, across the street, past a leaping barking little dog, which later is all he remembered seeing before they burst into the absolutely wonderful, delightful, magnificent, replenishing smell of cooking bread and the sound of Joseppi's laughter as he greeted his niece and her new friend. "Tell him about cinnamon, Uncle Joseppi. He doesn't know!"

"Aaaaah," Joseppi, said, "Hello, my friend, the one who hides in the bushes, welcome to the bakery of Joseppi! The greatest story I tell you about cinnamon is to taste its wonder." The boy forgot to run from the danger of realizing that Joseppi had seen him before, because Joseppi had already reached towards the cooling racks of bread to hand the boy a warm cinnamon muffin. "Go ahead," Joseppi said to the boy who just held the muffin in mid-air, "Joseppi no fool anyone." Time stood still for a moment as the boy stared at the muffin, and the

room was quiet, until the boy took a bite, and the taste was as wondrous as the smell. His eyes opened wide, and he could not help but jump a little in the air as the girl and Joseppi laughed and hopped in their own delight.

Before the boy could even gobble up the muffin and then drink the coldest milk in the universe, Joseppi had begun to open a book of the great world of spices and began to read the names of all of them from A and beyond. He told about the lands they came from, and the boy would never need to go to them because he would one day have them all in the bakery, where the world would come to him.

Suddenly, the boy's eyes became wide with fright. He had forgotten the time so full of life he had been. He jumped from a spinning stool at the soda counter, hollered his goodbye as he headed out the door of Joseppi's place, and ran with all his might towards the stone dwelling as the sun sank into the valley beyond. He arrived out of breath just as the ogre entered the door of their house. The boy ran in just behind him, flush with fear and excitement. His head swam with truth and awakenings, and courage.

The ogre turned on the boy with fury, wanting to know where he had been. The boy stood still in fright and shame, looking into the large eyes of the hunchbacked ogre. In spite of the power of his fright, he remembered Joseppi's smile. Before the boy realized it, he said loudly, "You are fired!" The boy remembered reading that in one of the stories about the dangers of everything. The world stood still again. Twice in one



day. The ogre stood stunned and breathless. Before the ogre could move or breathe, the boy continued, “You lied to me about where we live; you lied to me about what life is like; you lied to me about food and people and kindness and friends. You are fired,” and the boy began to cry tears as big as raindrops. He kept on, through his tears and hiccupping, “I know you want to protect me, and I know you want me not to be harmed, but you did not tell me everything, and I have somehow always known. I have lied to you, and I do not want to lie. It feels so bad.”

The boy began to feel himself get big, but he was not. The ogre had begun to shrink in front of his eyes. The boy stopped talking, and the ogre started to cry and shrink and protest. “I just wanted to take care of you and did the best I could. Everyone will hurt you and love is a lie,” he shrieked with the voice that sounded like a cricket to the boy. “What will happen to me, and what will happen to

you,” the caretaker wailed, as he began to look less like an ogre and more like a cricket, so small he had become at the boy’s feet.

The boy reached to the floor towards the creature. It cowered before the fingers of the boy. Before he could run, the boy gently picked up the tiny ogre and held him in his palm. The boy brought him to his face so he could hear him when he talked.

The boy said, “I am not leaving you. But you are unemployed as to being my boss. You can be my advisor only, and only when I ask. Understood?” The ogre acted as if he were considering his options, but then quickly, though a bit sourly, agreed. “I am keeping you with me all the time. You will be okay.” Then the boy put the ogre in his pocket, packed a bag of books and his spoon, and then ran to Joseppi’s before the sun sank into darkness in the graveyard.

Epilogue

Well, the rest you can guess. The niece of Joseppi, her name is Esmerelda, lived above the bakery with her uncle. Joseppi welcomed the boy into his home, too, as he had welcomed Esmerelda. And the funniest thing happened after the boy put his ogre on the counter. Joseppi placed his little ogre on the countertop, too, next to the boy’s so they could meet. The little ogres shook hands cautiously. They agreed to work together to protect their owners—no matter what. Joseppi, the boy, and Esmerelda laughed aloud to see the meeting of the ogres.

Joseppi grew older, yet still kept his joy. The boy took the name Joseppi, Jr, with great gratitude. He married Esmerelda, never even thinking that anyone else in the world could have a sweeter heart and more beautiful eyes. She did not have an ogre. After they married, the aging Joseppi handed the keys for the bakery to the new couple. The new head bakers made



bread for everyone in town, and guests brought other foods to share. They had a great feast. By the way, one day the two ogres just disappeared.

I met the man who was once the boy. He, of course, became a wonderful baker, who had the whole world in one place. I became curious about his quiet joy, asked questions, and he told me the rest of this story.

He said, “Almost all of us have ogres. Some are tiny; most are middle-sized, and some others are large. And some special people have no ogres at all.” I hope that your ogre is not large. If it is large, you would be scoffing at this report of the boy turned baker. I guess you would not have even finished the story. Joseppi, Jr told me this story and I faithfully reported all he said. Ogres are not bad; they are just blind to seeing who the child is made to be. They take over in care, and to protect, and they do a lot of harm. Sad really.

