

Thomas H. Cayne

**The Jim Henson
movie club**

"A thousand years ago, this land was
green, until the crystal cracked.
A single piece was lost,
a shard of the crystal.
Then strife began,
and two new races appeared."

"Flew in from Miami Beach B.O.A.C.
Didn't get to bed last night
On the way the paper bag was on my knee
Man, I had a dreadful flight
I'm back in the U.S.S.R."

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ONE

I was about twelve when I entered the new high school in the big city. I knew nobody there, except for my sisters (twins, a couple of years older than I was, and they didn't want to acknowledge my existence at school, nor anywhere else), and two friends from my old school in the village. Although it was a big school, my friends happened to be in the same class, and that was a relief.

I never succeeded in paying attention in class rather, I dreamed, made drawings, or fooled around with the pretty girls. Sometimes I played chess. Sometimes I was caught and got detention. In fact, *often* I was caught and got detention. Then during detention I dreamed, made drawings, fooled around with pretty (bad) girls. Often I was caught. And then got detention. And so on. I was a regular in after school detention, and I can honestly say that the assistant principal Mr. Jolston became sort of a friend over the years. We often talked during detention hours, and on other occasions I was allowed to do whatever I wanted, if only I kept myself quiet and out of trouble.

Going to school was an exciting thing: it started with a short one mile bike ride to the village station, where I had to wait for

about ten to whatever minutes for the train to come sometimes it just didn't show up, sometimes half an hour late, sometimes on time but stuffed like a turkey on Thanksgiving. "Sometimes" was very important in those days.

Often I have seen trains pass by, when apparently the driver had decided that my station was not worthy enough for a stop. I have seen this in any kind of (icy, wet, bad) weather you can imagine. And then I started walking the nine mile road to school. I loved the train when school was over, and I could go home. I *hated* it in the other direction.

If the train *had* passed by and I happened to be in it, I had a thirteen minute and two stops train ride to the city, and finally a ten minute walk to school, just to arrive barely on time. Every day started with an adventure — a true race against the clock. Not a *Jules Verne* kind of race. But still.

(The twins were very different; they usually took off way too late, missed the train and arrived after the school bells ringed, so that the janitor gave them a hard time. For them, going to school was a war they wanted to lose. Every single day.)

The way to the big school was much harder than in the village days: back then, the typical yellow school bus (Thomas Conventional type) stopped right at the front door, and it dropped you off right in front of the school. Easy peasy.

The school was huge. I came from a very small village

primary school which had about eighty pupils tops; the total number of teachers in the new high school was about three times that number easily. It was a village inside the city: a giant ant colony without the structure of the collective consciousness ants seem to obey. I loved the place at once, although later, on various occasions in my life, I often longed much more intensely to the village school friends and teachers, and the colorful atmosphere of that tiny group of people.

Eventually, it took more than twenty years to reconnect with some of the old friends of the village school, through the magical world of social media.

Going to the village school was life before it got wasted for the first time by the dim colors of the city and the first steps of the adulthood staircase.

It was the fresh painting before the aging at the wall.

Or under a blanket in the attic.

THE CRAB CAKE FESTIVAL

One of the vivid recollections I have from the village days is the *Crab Cake Festival*. Every spring, there was this weekend in which the school staff and some volunteering parents prepared a "crab cake dinner" for pupils, parents and friends of the school, and for a (very) modest price. Then later the (very) modest profit was used for buying a (very) modest school microscope, or a (very) modest school computer. I remember we were one of the first small time schools which ever had a real computer — a *Commodore 64*. This beast, which only had a few kB of memory, came with the "Commodore 1530 C2N Datasette," which is fancy language for a simple cassette player needed for data storage. Little did we know what computers would be able to do some years later — hell, it seemed like magic to us already.

THE WAY THEY WERE

We (being my parents, the twins and I) always went to the Festival. For me, it was *the* top weekend of the year — not so much because I loved crab cakes (which I did), but rather because my parents always stayed till far beyond midnight,

having beers and fun with the other parents, and we could play on the school grounds. Crab Cake Friday was the evening on which time did not matter, and we could stay up late.

Some of the other parents were among my parents' best friends. They regularly had dinner parties where we, the kids, also had the time of our lives. They formed a small community of people in their thirties seeing each other often, having children not only going to the same school, but also attending the same music school or athletics club, and living within walking distance of each other. Being all children of the sixties and seventies, they shared political and (mostly non) religious views, organized talking groups, and were actively involved in various school matters, going from gathering money for a new play area to making ... crab cakes.

Now, more than twenty years later, all of them except my parents are divorced. People got cheated, kids witnessed their parents tear each other apart, some got depressed. Some even didn't make it. Same old shit. (Anyway.)

Most of them eventually moved to different states, going to the next stage in their lives, and leaving this part behind. And most of them probably forgot or at least did not want to *admit* out of self-preservation that this was the happiest time of their lives. The times when the kids grew up, learned to walk and talk, step by step, jump, develop early friendships at the local school. Owning a house, trying to make ends meet,

and loving every second of it. Going to the school's Santa Fest with the kids. Worrying about the cold war and nuclear threat, and hoping for some change. Hearing about how John Lennon got murdered. Going to see *E.T.* just as anyone else. Watching their own parents slowly fade away, and witnessing their brothers and sisters waking up to fight about money.

Making chervil soup on a green summer day when the kids came home for lunch.

And enjoying the Crab Cake Festival which they helped giving shape with so much conviction over those years of love and harvest.

THE HUMAN TORSO

One time, on Crab Cake Friday, me and my best friend Sandy prepared the festival weekend as usual: during music and painting class, we discreetly unlocked a couple of class room windows without opening them, so nobody would notice. In the evening, when our parents were drinking and having a ball, we broke into the class room around midnight during a game of hide and seek; the big festival purchase of the year before a human anatomy torso model was waiting for us at the front of the class room. After a few minutes we had pulled out its lungs, liver, kidneys and most of its other organs, when suddenly flash lights appeared outside the janitor was checking out the school property!

We rushed underneath the class room tables while the flash lights danced their macabre dance slowly towards us. He only had a very brief look into our class room, but I remember my heart racing during these few seconds, and I almost wet myself from sheer excitement. (What made matters worse was the fact that Sandy couldn't help farting his usual reaction in a stressy situation. And I must confess to you, dear reader, that Sandy felt stressed rather quickly.)

Then the light silently danced away, and the janitor went on to check the other buildings.

He never noticed the human organs scattered on the floor.

TWO

MARBLES

In the same class of the new school, there was this other kid who had the same disease I had: D&D — dreaming and drawing. (He had no interest in beautiful women though. He was too young I guess.) And he could draw as well as I did. Well, almost.

His glasses were thick — they made his eyes look ENORMOUS. So I called him "Marbles," and soon the other kids joined me. He didn't seem to mind — in fact, Marbles almost never seemed to be worried about anything: he was a happy son of a gun. A chubby child of Irish descent (and yes, with red hair), he was the kid who was always left as the very last one to choose when during gym class the basket teams had to be formed. And he was the kid who, minutes later, was standing off court because his glasses were ruined, yet again, after some lost ball chose his head, yet again, on its path. He was the best friend of the school nurses, and at least once a week he had to be escorted to their cosy school nurse corner with a nose bleed.

DAISY

Marbles claimed he had this mysterious dog at home named "Daisy" according to him a retired poodle. If in one way or another Marbles lost school books (which often happened) or forgot to bring an assignment to school (which often happened as well), Daisy was the reason, Your honor. Daisy conveniently devoured whatever Marbles was supposed to have with him.

Mrs. Johnson, *Maths*:

"Marbles, please hand in the calculus assignment."

Marbles (sweating, searching his briefcase in panic):

"Eh. My dog Daisy ate it this morning, Mrs. Johnson. But I really *had* prepared it. *Really*."

(Laughter.)

Mrs. Peel, *Music class*:

"Marbles, your guitar misses three strings. Again."

Marbles (slightly annoyed):

"My poodle Daisy attacked my guitar yesterday evening while I was rehearsing, Mrs. Peel."

(Laughter.)

Mr. Haddington, *Head coach*.

"Marbles, you seem to be missing a shoe."

(...)

Daisy Daisy Daisy.

(Curtain falls.)

Daisy became the most popular ghost dog in town. And Marbles was Marbles. We knew he *had* a dog, but the rest of the story was just plain old Marbles nonsense.

SVENN

Then there was Svenn, a smart but far too serious kid that always sat in front, never said a word, and seemed to have some big thing stuffed inside his ... , well, you know what I mean. This was a strange thing if you had met his parents: his father was a Maths teacher who looked like Santa (a proud gingerbread Scottish version instead of the white-bearded Lapp version), and his (very young) mother was a former Danish lingerie model. Just like Marbles's father, he loved cigarillos and sexually oriented jokes, and food food food. And his mother liked the young male friends of Svenn. And various other men.

(Being at Svenn's was always a blast: his father bombarded you with politically incorrect jokes, and his mother defied you with her gorgeous body in tight skirts and deep cleavage. And there was even much more when his father wasn't around, but that is yet another story, my dear reader.)

Perhaps the fact that Svenn's younger brother came out of the closet on his eighteenth birthday was a heavy load (Svenn was twenty-one at the time) — many of us thought that Svenn was gay himself, or bisexual at the very least, and his strange sense of "responsibility" (as he would call it) probably prevented him from coming out as well.

(There was no need to worry, though: *Ginger Santa* uttered through his Jack Daniels cigarillo smell he always suspected that his youngest *putted from the rough*; *Mor Sexy* only smiled mysteriously and fantasized about converting his gay friends to her own heterosexual religion in a rather cosy Danish way.)

In any case, he was never quite successful with women for a man with his looks. Sometimes there *was* the odd girlfriend, but usually something was heavily wrong (lesbian and/or eating disorder).

Eventually, it would take him ages to relax (about fifteen years), and this happened during the time he was granted a tenured Harvard professorship in the physics department. He just stopped caring about what irrelevant people think, and

started to shine. He became politically active, and worked as a highly respected volunteer in a local shelter. Every weekend, he made soup for more than seventy poor, homeless, addicted, lost souls. And many times he told me that the mere satisfaction of doing this kind of good, easily topped proving a great theorem, or publishing results in some hot shot scientific journal. He often invited me to join him, and sometimes I did, and spent a Saturday chopping onions, parsley and tomatoes for the needy. (The fun we had.)

Not much later he died in a car accident, crushed by a drunk driver who didn't give a flying Jesus. But it crushed his family, the people of the shelter. And me.

MARY

The biggest kid in our class was Marvin. When he entered the school, a couple of days later than the rest of us, I could not believe he was our age. He had a young face, yes (we were about twelve at the time), but his twelve-year-old mind was captured in a six feet long, one hundred and ninety pounds heavy body. He was a true giant. And still he had the voice of a girl. So I called him "Mary."

Mary's parents (and Mary himself by force) were Jehovah's witnesses, and in weekends he had to join them and others of their congregation preaching door-to-door with the word of

god, handing out copies of the monthly magazine "Awake!" Because of that, he often was not able to finish homework (and he did not have a dog to blame), or go to birthday parties of school friends and the like. Through the years, I sometimes got the impression that this weighed heavily on his broad shoulders, and that it pushed him to live in fruitful imagination. In fact, if it wasn't for his imaginary world, I really think his parents' fanaticism would have got the better of him eventually.

In only a couple of years, he passed through a remarkable number of stages of personal digestion, going from letting his hair grow to a leather jacket phase via a horror period in which he carried strange self-made gloves with Freddy Krueger-like metal attachments to each finger. I am not really sure how he got away with this at home — probably he changed clothes each and every time right after he left the house in the morning.

And still, on other moments, during class he would try to sell the religious ideas he was so used to repeat day after day after day.

When he was about twenty, he refused to do anymore door-to-door preaching, and ostentatiously burnt a number of "The Watchtower" copies in an ironic *Bonfire of the Vanities* episode, a feat which he taped with a small digicam and uploaded on an early social network website. One day later, his was kicked out of the parental house for good, and his

parents (and uncles, grandfather, sister and other "friends and family") never spoke to him again.

To me, it was clear that he was an even bigger man than his not in the least impressive stature already suggested.

(I met him a couple of years ago by accident during a local film festival in a famous Utah resort. Funny thing was I had outgrown him by a couple of inches. But not by the pounds.)

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