

THE TEN STEPS

Written by

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Based on and adapted from the story:

"Rumpelstiltskin"

By the Brothers Grimm

The night was cold and made everyone retreat into their cozy homes under their blankets. Some of my favorite times were spent up at my grandparents' old country house during the winter holidays. This particular year was the year that changed my life forever. It started out to be just a regular boring year trying to escape the school teachers wrath of detention and avoiding the constant harassment of school yard bullies. I couldn't bear another day, but when the Christmas holidays arrived I could hardly contain myself. Just thinking about all the nights where my cousin, brother and sister and I would stay up late watching old movies and drinking hot cocoa. The snowy days where we would go out and make our very own army of faithful snowmen, oh and not to forget, grandmas' old fashioned cooking. Yes I could smell the heavenly aroma now filling up the big country house.

The drive up seemed to take forever, winding down the thick forest road. My cousin Sammy and I talked and planned out our whole vacation in the back of my mom's car on the way up.

"So what's the first thing you want to do when we get up there?" asked Sammy.

"Oh man, I want to run out in the pasture and build a fort," I replied.

"Well by the looks of it Billy, we'll probably get there after dark. Just in time for supper," said Sammy.

"That's okay, a delicious dinner followed by hot cocoa and watching our favorite movie sounds like a perfect start to our vacation.

The cloudy sky soon darkened and we soon came upon the old street lamps my grandfather had put up leading up to the house. The house seemed very majestic just sitting there atop the snow-covered hill. Grandma and Pop came out to greet us as we pulled up and parked. Grandmother always loved to squeeze our cheeks and kiss them. Mom and Sammy got my brother and sister up and went inside with my grandmother as Grandfather and I got the luggage.

"So how's school going Billy my boy?" my grandfather asked.

"Oh it's going so so Pop; you know how school can be when you're young," I replied.

"Well that's alright, just so as long you do your best. Hey, your grandmother and I put in an extra room. It's in ya'lls kid's room; the door painted like a bookcase leads up to the bonus room. Nothing in it for now, but with time we'll make it to you kids rec room."

"Seriously Pop? That awesome!"

After the luggage was put up, we all had dinner. Once all the savory fixings were eaten up and the plates were cleaned and put away; Pop built a fire in the fireplace and we all sat around and had hot chocolate. The smell of burning logs filled the whole house like fresh smelling incense. Mom and brother and sister sat on the couch together and grandma and pop sat in their chairs. Sammy and I lied down in front of the fire at grandmas' feet.

"Grandma, tell us a story please," said Sammy.

"Oh okay my dear, well what type of story should I tell?"

"Make one up," I replied.

"Make sure its one with magic and fairytales too," said Sammy.

"Oh okay well let's see my sweets, hmm oh here's one about a young boy and his cousin and going up to their grandparents house. Once upon a time there was a young boy named Neal and his cousin Josephine. They loved to go on adventures and pretend they were heroes saving towns and villages all across the land. Their imaginations were very powerful, and so other boys and girls laughed and made fun of them. But since they had each other, they did not worry about playing by themselves. Yes the world was their playground and they especially loved it when they went to their grandparents.

One weekend when they were up at their grandparents' house, they were playing knights and dragons and accidentally stumbled upon a secret room tucked away that their grandparents had just added. The door leading to the room cracked open and Josephine told Neal to listen carefully; and asked if he could hear some sort of music coming from within.

"I don't really hear anything Josephine," said Neal.

"You have to really pay attention Neal, it's faint but I swear there is some kind of music playing from behind the door," said Josephine.

Neal went over to the door and listened, he opened it and behind he discovered a long dark staircase leading up. At the top of the stairs, there looked to be a door with some kind of light creeping out from under...

"Hey grandma, this sounds like you and Pops' house," said Sammy.

"Well my dear, some of the greatest stories ever told are always based upon a little truth and reality," replied Grandma.

"Now back to the story, where was I?" asked Grandma.

"Neil and Josephine were about to explore the stairs up to the secret room," I replied.

"Oh right, so Neil and Josephine start to walk through the door and up the steps leading to the mysterious room with music playing. Neil stepped onto the first step and with that, a slow deep voice echoed throughout the hallway.

"Don't... step on the Tenth step," the voice said.

Both Neil and Josephine both looked at each other with eyes wide open.

"I don't know about this Neil," said Josephine.

"It's okay, I won't let anything happen to us. We're in this together as a team. But if you want to stay, I'll go up alone, it's alright," said Neil.

"No, No, I can handle it. I want to see what's up there. We'll go up together," said Josephine.

The two holding hands raised their right foot and stepped onto the second step. The voice again said, "Don't ... step on the tenth step". As Neil and Josephine proceeded onward, the door that they came through all of a sudden slammed shut. Josephine started to turn but Neil held tight. "C'mon we can do this Josephine," said Neil.

Josephine nodded and so they continued ascending up. The voice got louder and louder as the two got closer to the top. With each step closer, the walls lit up and revealed paintings of scenes depicting a dark figure amongst a blue sky and castle in the background. Every picture showed the figure in a different spot and the castle collapsing each time. By the time they reached the eighth step, the voice was replaced with singing.

"Do you hear that?" asked Neil.

"Yes I do, it sounds like some kind of little person singing," replied Josephine.

They stepped onto the ninth step and stood still for what seemed like an eternity listening to the words of the song coming from within the mysterious room. The voice singing was a bit fast but this is what they could make out:

"Visitors come, Visitors go,
from where they came down below...
If they've come for my magic,
I'll show them what's what
And stop them in their tracks."

The two listened still trying to hear all the words, but most of them were jumbled up with the high-pitched music of some kind of organ playing. Finally, Neil and Josephine looked at each other, holding hands tightly, stepped onto the Tenth and Final step.

Right away, the ground beneath them disappeared and they were swallowed up into a dark abyss. Neil and Josephine still holding tight to each other slid down what seemed like a long slide with darkness all around them. The descent was long and scary, but with a swift jolt they all of a sudden appeared in a room standing on their own two feet where the lights were slowly lit all around them. Neil looked at Josephine and around the room. They spotted the organ, but no music came from it. Just the sound of burning logs crackling in the fireplace. The silence was very creepy. Josephine took one step forward and just then, a voice commanded.

“Stay where you are!”

The two stood in their tracks, shaking and staring in front where the voice had come from.

“So you dared to venture up and try to best me of my magic,” said the dark figure in the corner.

“I..I.. we don’t know what you’re talking about Sir,” said Neil.

“Silence, I’m aware of your tricks, all of you. Everyone that climbs those stairs wants one thing and one thing only. To seek control my magic.”

“Sir, if you will, honestly we mean no harm. We were just curious to what was up here, honest to goodness. My name is Josephine and this is my cousin Neil. We love to explore and use our imaginations. Just like most all kids do,” said Josephine.

Neil nodded quickly trying to hide his shaky nerves.

“Hmm, well maybe you speak some truth, but I will not just hand over your desires and wishes just yet.”

Puzzled, Neil and Josephine looked at each other.

Josephine asked, “Sir, might we see who we’re speaking too? And what might your name be as well?”

Laughing, the figure proceeded to dance around the two kids, keeping in the shadows and singing.

“If you want to know my name,
you got to guess and play the game...
For I’ll give you three chances to get it right,
And if you fail, your souls I’ll claim tonight.”

Upon singing and dancing, the figure finally stepped out of the shadows to unveil himself. He was short, dressed in olden clothing that looked as if it were from the renaissance era. His skin.. well, it was as if he had scales on his body. A well-dressed imp was he and fast too as he danced all around.

Neil and Josephine looked in fear as the imp came closer to them.

“I’m not sure what your name is, so it will be very difficult for us to guess and play your game,” said Neil.

“Yes sir, we won’t be able to guess your name. We’ve never even seen you or anything like you before,” said Josephine.

The imp sneered at Josephine calling him a thing. “Just for that, I’ll count that as one of your choices dearie.”

“But...but... that’s not fair,” exclaimed Neil.

“Don’t talk to me about being fair! Now go ahead and use your last two guesses so I can take your souls and go about my spinning.”

Josephine looked intently at the imp. Looking very pensively for a while before speaking, “you spin, may I ask what?”

“Oh wouldn’t you like to know, spinning, spinning all day long, it clears my mind with each yarn I turn,” replied the imp.

Leaning over to Neil, Josephine spoke into Neil’s ear.

“I think I know who this is, I seem to remember a story with his description in it. And he spins just like the story too.”

“So speak it so we’ll get outta here okay,” said Neil.

Josephine said to the imp, “I know your name and now I’ll say, Rumpelstiltskin go away!”

With that, Rumpelstiltskin screamed aloud and jumped up and down in a hysterical fit pouting.

“It’s impossible, It’s impossible! How you guess so quickly!”

Rumplestiltskin danced fiercely about the room yelling and screaming in all his fury. The outbursts of rage continued but slowly came to a halt as he came to a stand still in front of the roaring fireplace. There he stood with his back facing Neil and Josephine staring into the fire for what seemed like forever.

Finally, Neil responded, "We guessed your name, so we are free to go now right?"

"Oh on the contraire, this is but the beginning. You might have guessed my name, but I'll be requiring more of your services for my bidding. Your souls are yours to keep but there is something much more important that I need that is deep within you. You two are the first to have ever guessed my name and so you must be the ones that was spoken of to break the curse."

"What curse?" asked Josephine.

The sly imp smiled as he turned towards them. "Why, the curse that you were both prophesied to break. The one that speaks of two young ones to reestablish the belief in magic to overthrow the evil forces."

Neil let out a laugh, "Now I've heard everything, you mean to tell me that Josephine and I are some sort of key to an aging prophecy that was thought of, however many years ago."

"Precisely," said Rumplestiltskin.

The imp twirled his fingers and the fire within the fireplace circled out to form a portal of some sort. "Now this is where I must leave you, but I will return soon to bring you to your rightful lands. You might not understand now, but soon you will and know the truth about your existence. For now, enjoy the spoils of guessing my name but tell no one, for fear the evil has ears and eyes spread throughout all the realms."

With that final remark he disappeared in a puff of smoke; leaving the room to unveil its illusion, showing the spoils Rumplestiltskin spoke of...

All of Neil's' and Josephine's' wildest desires and dreams had come true in that room. Toys and costumes for them to use with their imaginations. The room was a true fantasy wonderland.

As they looked upon the children's paradise play land. Both Neil and Josephine looked at one another with relief and puzzlement.

"Do you think he will be back and if he was telling the truth?" asked Josephine.

"I... to tell you the truth don't know what to think or believe. But from what just happened, I think we should expect the unexpected. Let us not tell or reveal what has just conspired here, just in case he is right," said Neil.

Josephine nodded in agreement, "Yes, that sounds like a good plan. But all this does peak my curiosity. I think I will do a bit of snooping and research on any stories, histories or lore to see if anything like this ever was mentioned or spoke of before."

The two agreed to never speak of the incident around other people and to keep the secret room a mystery a bit longer, until at least just in case Rumplestiltskin made his appearance known again.

As they looked back, they saw the door that brought them here reappear and down below were their grandparents. Told them nothing they did until they knew it was safe...

"And they lived Happily Ever After, The End," said Grandma.

"What, no, no, that can't be it grandma," said Sammy.

"Yeah, it can't end like that, there is still so much to tell and find out what happens," said Billy.

Pop got up and helped mama take the younger siblings to bed. Grandma just smiled and looked over at Sammy and Billy, "Like I said you two, every story has or is based on a little bit of truth. Go to sleep for now and we'll continue this tale another time."

Sammy looked over at Billy, "So many questions and answers to be revealed."

"Yes, that was the best story ever that grandma told. Can't wait to hear more and see what happens. Let's go up to the bonus room tomorrow and play, who knows maybe our imaginations will reveal our own little ten steps adventure," said Billy.

At that, both Sammy and Billy went to bed dreaming of the story they had just heard and thinking of new and exciting adventures the two of them to go on in search of answers yet to be revealed.

To be continued...

The End