

Down the Well

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Do not wish in the wishing well.



Published on
Booksie

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In a garden surrounded by a stout brick wall, two children played. They ran about in the shade of an ancient house which looked like a miniature castle, dominating over the grounds. Mandy and her brother Eric were visiting their Granny, as they did every Saturday. Today however, they had found her surrounded by photographs and empty bottles, and she had told them to play outside. This was very unlike the friendly Granny the children were used to.

At the highest point of the garden was a well. The children had never before been allowed to wander freely throughout the garden, so had never gone close before. They walked up to it, intrigued. Hanging from a thatched roof above the well was a sign which read, "*Do not wish in the wishing well*". Inside the well was an equally odd ladder, stretching down.

"What do you think that means?" Mandy asked her younger brother.

"They probably just want the wishes for themselves," Eric replied.

Mandy picked out a 10 pence coin from her pocket. She promptly dropped it into the well, where it was received several seconds later with a "splash".

"What should I wish for?" she asked.

"Chocolate? No, a dinosaur!"

Mandy laughed. "That's silly! Er... I wish that Granny would be happy today."

"Yeah. I wish that too."

Suddenly, the ground began shaking. The children looked at each other in anxiety. A high-pitched roaring sound bellowed from beneath them. With a crash, a storm of blurred yellow and black poured out of the well, annihilating the roof, and spread out into the sky.

"That's... wasps..." Eric gasped.

"Run!"

Mandy grabbed his arm and they sprinted back to the house as the wave of wasps flooded through the garden. They saw Granny staring through the window before covering it with a wooden board. Buzzing echoed around them, as the wasps advanced further around the house. They reached the door and charged through it as Granny slammed it shut.

"Get down!" Granny yelled, throwing another board against the door, manically hammering nails as the wasps thundered into it. She grabbed more boards and proceeded to run across the house, boarding up every nook and cranny.

"Is this a dream?" Eric cried out, huddled with his sister at the bottom of the stairs. "I want Mum!"

"It'll be okay," Mandy lied.

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Eventually, Granny came back downstairs and sprawled down on her usual chair. Her exhaustion soon turned to fury.

"Do they not teach you to READ at school?" she barked, shaking with fury.

"What's happening?" Mandy asked. "You were prepared for this?"

"Yes..." Granny wheezed. "You leave me no choice but to explain. Sit down."

They both sat down on the wooden floor in front of her.

"A long time ago, before either of you tots even existed, your Grandfather and I were in love." She pointed at a picture of him, where his scrawny hair and long nose Mandy recognised in herself. Granny hesitated.

"Granny?"

"Yes, sorry," she answered, rocking on her chair like an unbalanced seesaw. "But one day he was... murdered. By an evil wizard. Who I threw down the well, and trapped him there. Only with my death can he escape, which is what he is trying to do with the wasps."

Mandy laughed. "What?" She was cut short by a window smashing upstairs.

"We're going to die here!" Eric cried. "They'll get us and... I hate wasp stings!"

"You will not die!" Granny shouted, rising from her chair to tower over him. "But you need to do exactly as I say."

"There's only one thing you can do," Granny ordered, hobbling over to the wardrobe. She began throwing clothes onto the already cluttered floor, and eventually pulled out two small bee-keeper suits.

"No way," Mandy yelled. "We're not going out in that!"

"It's the only way," Granny sighed with regret. "You have to go into the well and convince the wizard to withdraw his wasps."

"And how do you suggest we do that?" Mandy demanded. She became aware of Eric sat in the corner, pinching himself.

"You'll find a way," Granny said. "Now, there's not much time!"

Within five minutes both Mandy and Eric were in the tightly fitted costumes, which stank of honey. The overbearing buzzing grew ever louder.

"Don't forget to run quickly, so they don't have time to get through your suits!" Granny advised with a wink. She then shut herself into a nearby wardrobe. They could just hear a muffled command - "and close the door!"

"Ready?" Mandy shouted to Eric. He shook his head. "Let's go!"

She opened the door and Eric ran through it. Mandy followed, slamming the door behind her. They swam through the sea of wasps, stings covering the suits. Wasps flapped about over the net covering their faces,

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blocking out most vision so that they could barely see where to go. Mandy realised just one tear in the costume could kill them. Crushing wasps with every step, they got closer to the well. Eric was now gripping her hand so firmly it hurt. Not nearly soon enough, the well became visible through the mist of wasps.

Mandy threw herself over it, and looked down. The ladder was still there, and was wasp free.

"How are you?" Mandy shouted to Eric. His face was white as paper, but still conscious. He didn't answer.

Mandy climbed over the wall and put two feet onto the ladder. After helping Eric do the same, she began climbing down. Light flickered from the bottom - the wizard must be ready for them.

"How... do you suggest we, you know..." Eric mumbled.

"We'll worry about that when we have to."

They eventually reached the bottom. Ahead of them was a long corridor which went on forever. The walls were merely rocks like in a mine, though there were no props holding the roof up. It reeked of rotting flesh and was lit by torches stuck into the rock. Behind each of these were empty wasp nests.

A figure appeared along the corridor, walking towards them. He wore ragged clothes, and wheezed with each step. He had grey, dirty hair, his face covered in wasp stings, though his long nose could be seen in the light...

"Grandad?"

Their long-lost Grandad hobbled over and collapsed against the wall, holding himself up over a torch. Mandy and Eric ran to help him.

"What are you doing here?" they cried.

"Your grandmother... I've been down here for... *decades*." His wheezing was gradually getting worse.

"She told us an evil wizard lived down here."

"An evil wizard? *Ha!* It's me. I... I had an affair, many years ago, so she threw me down this well with her bare hands! I've been cursed to live among these wasps ever since." He paused to have a coughing fit, before carrying on. "And then you threw down that coin, and I had a link, to send out the wasps and *kill* her!" Chucking, he added, "On our anniversary!"

"You have to call them back!" Mandy demanded.

"Never! You have no idea what *agony* she has put me through!"

"We can convince her to release you," Mandy said, having no idea how she'd achieve this.

Grandad seemed to consider this for a moment. He said, "you're sure you could do this?"

"...Yes."

"Very well." He snapped his fingers, and the whirring monsters came thundering down the well in a whirl of yellow and black, before settling inside the nests and becoming silent.

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"Go. NOW!"

The children turned and frantically climbed up the ladder, racing for the top. They bundled out and looked out at the house.

Except the house was gone. A square, flat pile of gravel was all that was left, along with a cracked photo of Grandad. Granny had fled.

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