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The Beanstalk

by Tara Meddaugh

Jack: Please don't poke my eyes out! Wait—don't leave! I mean, unless that's what you were going to do, poke my eyes out—were you? But otherwise, just, just stay. I—I—I mean, you understand my worrying about that, right? But—well, you don't seem like those birds. Right? And, even if you are, I'm not like those girls. So. It's just—I really am happy to see you. I'm getting a little, well, maybe a little anxious. I don't know if you can tell, but, I'm kind of a little bit stuck up here.

See, I didn't...really...think that I'd make it this far up. I didn't really think it through at all. My mom keeps telling me that's my problem, and I guess it is. I just...saw it, and I've always been a bit of a climber, my mom said. When I was nine months old, she found me sitting on top of the brown cow in the barn one morning. I guess we all have our strengths. I've never really considered myself afraid of heights before, but, it's not really the climbing up that scares me. It's the getting down, Black Crow. It seemed so easy getting here—just put one foot on the branch—if you can call it a branch. They sure don't seem like branches now—looking down. Oh, and, I've tried going down already. I put my foot on a branch, but it seems slippery now. See? It's like the sludge at the bottom of the pig trough. And you do not want be climbing down from the clouds on pig sludge! I'm not a bright boy. They all tell me that, but that is one thing I do know.

And see, that's why this is so, so, kind of tough to swallow. Maybe I was proving something. Maybe I was running away. I don't know. But I was doing something. You know? Climbing up something. Something that wasn't there before, but then suddenly was, and it made me feel powerful and strong and, and, smart. And I liked that feeling. So I kept on going, because the feeling kept on going. And, I'd never felt that way before. I mean, strong maybe, but—not smart.

But now I'm here. And I don't feel very smart. Because a smart person would know how to get down. I can't gain any footing on the sludge branch. I tried sliding down, but the few feet I did it, well, it hurts an awful lot, and I'm not even sure I wouldn't fly off of it and land



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down there in a broken bone pile. And, then everyone would just say, Well, that's Jack. He doesn't know how to climb down, poor slow boy. And I guess they'd be right. So.

(pause)

The other thing I could do...and this probably would show I'm just as slow of a boy. Because it sure doesn't seem like a smart idea. But it's all I can think of to not kill myself falling.

(pause)

See, I'm starting to hear voices. And not like voices in my head. I haven't turned silly yet. These are low voices. Really low. Booming voices, but not too loud yet. If you know what I mean. Like, a low rumble, sort like a bull when he sees his mate. So the idea, Black Crow, is just to...keep climbing up. And maybe there's someone up there, one of the voices, who can help me, who can show me how to get down, or take me down. I'd be ok if someone else carried me down. I'd just ask them to do it at night, so no one in town would see. And I'd keep my eyes closed, so I'd remember it less. And then I could still sort of feel a little powerful. A little smart. So see? I've got it thought out now. At least a little bit. That's a step, right? So. I guess maybe I'll see you up there. If that's where you're going too.

(pause, starts going up)

It really doesn't feel like sludge when you're going up the stalk..



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