



JACLR

*Journal of Artistic
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"Mate"

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The hospital bed seemed utterly uncomfortable. Stuart couldn't stand it. He would move around in it, trying to find some way to fall asleep, but he couldn't. He just couldn't fall asleep knowing that he might never open his eyes again. He lay there, staring at the ceiling and thinking of nothing. The light was turned on and Stuart quickly lifted up his right hand to cover his eyes.

'Hey, mate! I'm here. How are you? I've heard your condition has worsened. That's not very good news, isn't it? I know I should've come earlier, I know, I know. I'm sorry, I'm terribly sorry. But now I'm here, and I'm going to help you.'

'Leave me alone. I don't want any of your stupid help. It's pointless' said Stuart, without even turning around to look at his visitor.

'Come on, Stuart! Don't be like that! We've been friends for ages. I've known you since you were a little child, do you remember the first story I ever told you?'

'I said leave me alone. It's not the right time to remember any old story, that's just nonsense. If you've heard about my condition, then you'll probably know how bad it is. I'm about to di...'

'Don't say that.' the visitor interrupted Stuart. 'That's not true. You're undergoing surgery tomorrow, and I wasn't talking about that. I simply asked you if you remembered the first story I ever told you.'

'No. No, I don't' replied Stuart, frowning.

'Of course you do. It was this story about a boy, who was just like you, who became a wizard and entered a world of magic where he met the greatest friends a boy could ask for, but also the most dreadful foes any hero has ever confronted. You used to love those stories, you spent hours trapped in that world of magic, in which nearly anything could happen. I remember that as if it had happened yesterday. And once you finished each story, you came to me and demanded the next one. That was when I had to teach you that there's a time for each story, you can't rush them, and that it's essential that the characters become ours so we can dream new adventures for them.'

Stuart stared at the visitor. They remained in silence for a few minutes.

'You're making that up. I didn't love the stories of that dumb wizard kid. I just wanted to know about them because they were what everyone else was talking about. That's all.'

The visitor sighed.

'Sure. Whatever you say. I'm not here to argue with you. Do you remember high school?'

'That was a long time ago, but I guess I do remember it, yes. Why?'

'I told you several of your favorite stories when you were in high school, you can't deny that. I'm sure you recall perfectly the story of Jim, you were about his age at the time, and all the trouble he had with the dreary pirates who were looking for a treasure buried on an island. And what about Tom and Huck? You told me many times that you wished your best friend and you could live such thrilling adventures as the ones they had in that southern river. Sometimes you even felt like the main character from one of your favorite stories, the one in which a young boy runs away from school and finds himself lost in a big city full of crazy grown-ups.'

'Stop it, please' Stuart complained. 'I'm not in the mood for that. I don't need you here.'

'Oh, yes you do. You know what the song says, "I'll get by with a little help from my friends", I guess that's why I'm here. Not to talk about songs, I'm afraid, but about stories.'

'Great.' Stuart rolled his eyes in despair.

'Have you forgotten about the nights you spent home alone while your parents were away? I had to babysit you, which would have been a nightmare, frankly, if I hadn't had my stories with me. You stood up all night listening to the tale of an aristocrat from ancient times who drank the blood of young women, and you were terrified by the story of a young man responsible for so much wrongdoing that he didn't even dare to look into his own picture.'

'Well, you just made a point there, those were really good ones.'

'Of course they were. They were the stories you needed at the time. Do you remember when you began going to college? Those were hard times, I guess, times of many changes, but I stood there by your side, willing to tell you new stories, didn't I?'

'Y-yes. Of course you did. It's just...that I didn't have the chance to tell you how much I appreciated it.'

'You didn't need to. I could tell, by the look in your eyes, how much you enjoyed them. By Jove, you were thrilled with the crimes that had to be investigated by the greatest detective the world has ever seen! You loved that man and his methods.'

'Yes! I loved those stories, and I still do. They meant a lot to me. I was deeply touched by that one about the endless journey of a father and his son in a devastated, barren land; and also amazed at the way those seamen travelled all around the ocean to hunt a white monster... God, I miss those stories! I wish... I wish they could come back, but they'll never return, and I'll never get out of this hospital bed.'

'That's not true, Stuart. Those stories, and the ones that are yet to come, will stick with you forever, they'll never leave you, no matter what. That's why I am here, to remind you of that.'

Stuart looked at his friend with tears in his eyes.

'But, how am I supposed to get out of here? There are no more stories for me, Mate, no more, I'm afraid this might be the end.'

'My dear Stuart, there are always stories to be told. Let me tell you a little secret: you can be a storyteller yourself, and one day, who knows, maybe you'll become one of the greatest the world has witnessed.'

'Do you think so?'

'Absolutely'

'And how am I supposed to do that?'

'Well, let's see. Why don't you start by telling me the story of how you got out of hospital?'

The next morning, the nurses came into Stuart's room. As they led him through the hospital corridors to take him to surgery, the nurses realized that Stuart was deeply asleep. There was a big smile on his face and, on his lap, he was holding a book.

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