



PROMPT #1: Your polite new neighbors who just moved in next door have suspiciously pointed ears and speak a language that you can't find on Google Translate.

[untitled]

by **Amanda Hubbard**

“And just as living within mighty tales of old,
Much one learns, and may strong spirit the grottos mold.
Whisps wishing, fawns giggling, and nearby the nymphs dance,
So amongst the elves, may our dreams slip from sleep’s trance.”

I slowly swipe the book from underneath Ginny’s tiny curled up fingers, which I know to be gripping the hand of Titania in her dreams. While I try to creep off of the edge of her pink Sleeping Beauty comforter, I see a faint grin swipe across her tiny mouth, and I know I’ve been caught. She quickly pops one little eye open and glances at me in playful suspicion.

“One more? Please? I wasn’t even asleep yet!” Her little voice carries strong and true throughout the vast, uncharted wonderland of our tiny 2 bedroom apartment.

“Ginny, you know you have to get some sleep...plus, your father thinks we are too absorbed in the stories anyway. He’d prefer us to be reading the hottest print of the Wall Street Journal before bed, I think. He’d suggest that would fix your wild dreams, too! But, you know I love your dreams. And so, we just squeeze the scandalous stories in before he gets home on nights he has work parties,” I whisper, with a quick wink as I tuck the gilded, thickly bound book of dreamt lands under one arm. She nods in reasonable assent, and I kiss her forehead and turn off the lamp.

We never agreed on that. He would rather see the world in black and white, what is done and what is to do, never what *could* be done. Sometimes I wonder why he agreed to have kids, if never to appreciate the wonder and discovery of their world — the realm they allow

us to experience all over again with them. The whimsical doors of childhoods long past they reopen, and long forgotten questions they bring back up, that truly have no clear answer. Her quick whisper of excitement when she thinks she has discovered a new species of “American Fae” within the cracks of the walls in the subway, or her joyous giggle while we dance and skip through the foreign entanglement of the overgrown wilds in Central park — I never want it to end. But he does.

Since the jocund Bizzlebobs moved in next door, a most peculiarly pleasant and tiny older couple, Ginny’s mind has been especially active and he can’t stand it. Just the other day, she approached the sweet couple and inquired where they come from, and what their favorite native fairy tales are; she discovered they hail from the forests of Ireland, with a particular liking to stories of kitchen-garden witchcraft: the nice types.

“You know, another one of our favorite stories is that of the goddess, Lady Airmid. In her noble bravery, she stood in raging battle and healed those injured, saving lives fearlessly. It is so told, by those few from our land still with knowledge of the old world, that when her father killed her brother, she cried over his grave. It was her tears that gave us the flowers and spices we use today to treat the sick. In being separated from her own family, she alone formed the mode of life designed to protect life forever more, so long as the wildlife of the forests is itself protected. It is our job to do so.” Mr. Bizzlebob gazed down at Ginny with a warm smile and placed an old bound collection of Irish fairy tales in her lap. “Of course to many of those back home, this is much more than a tale or legend: to us, it is true and has changed the way of the mysterious world we live in.”

The last days of summer are dwindling, and hours of leisure among the honeysuckles soon will fade, as days grow shorter and life flees from the flowers. Ginny is excited to begin school, thinking the broad unknown to be as divinely mystical as the quite softened mythologies her father tells me she is too impressionable to be exposed to. I am worried for her to grow up and find herself in a world of people just like him. I would give anything to keep her mind from being washed, her dreams from getting smoothed over, her world from dryly becoming decolorated. But, I guess they say that is what it means to grow up. And so, for now we picnic with the seven dwarves and entertain ourselves at bonfires with Hestia.

The next morning, Ginny is back on her most recent soapbox, of declaring our dear new neighbors to be born of “another” world.

“But mom, I mean come on, have you seen their ears?”

“Ginny, one more time about those neighbors and I will homeschool you myself,” her father bitterly snaps over his bagel. I blink while looking at his rather small ears..maybe he’s insecure.

“I mean, it is not particularly nice to point out if someone has weird ears, I guess?” I add, as he gazes at me in an unamused manner, searching for reinforcements in the battle of wits he is continually waging with our six year-old. She also argues points like the Bizzlebobs’ peculiarly small size and the fact that despite the broad extent of languages we are familiar with, both personally and thanks to the hard work of Google translate, when they whisper among themselves it is in a tongue no one can seem to identify. She has also since noticed none of their skillets are cast iron, and they open and close their refrigerator with towels; she has been sure to recount her exact observations to me as they develop, of course with formulated hypotheses attached.

The new neighbors are growing quite fond of Ginny- they are delighted with her giggle and they always allow her to play with their bunny, Gawain. Ginny spends many afternoons there, and we all enjoy tea together most weekdays now. Today, she’s not heard from them, but they did not tell her they would not be home, and she is not pleased. So, we took a voyage to the back balcony, where Juliet can overlook her blissful Veronian garden, still in her beautiful and simple childlike innocence, and Rapunzel may await her charming prince. A bit later in the day, we hear a gentle knock, and I go to check the door. No one stands there, but there is a small envelope with “Eliza” scripted on the front in small, flowered lettering.

Eliza and Ginny,

Apologies for our absence this morning, we are in the process of traveling soon to visit family and the day got away from us.. We would be delighted to make it up to you both over tea, if you would be so inclined. We trust the normal time will suit you? Be sure to bring your favorite books if you’d like, so we may exchange stories and journey to other worlds while we visit!

Yours gaily,

Bizzlebobs

I am relieved to deliver the news of good tidings to our fair and just Lady. Around 4, we are dressed with the grand books and walk down the hall to the first door on our right and knock. The door falls open, and inside we see the normal small table set for tea by the bunny's nook, with no Sir Gawain to be seen. I wonder if we might have come just a few minutes too early, when peeking around the corner my eyes rest upon a great twining arch at the entryway to the kitchen, with wisteria, violets, and roses peeking out of the green wreath gaily. It shimmers and distorts the room behind it, as if within the whisper's grasp of a distant, hazed dream. Enchanted, we slowly step forward, as I am pulling the door shut behind us, up to the gateway of realms gone by, faintly recalled only in folklore. There is the call of beautiful song we are unable to deny, and we are mystified as we approach the ornamented twisting vines. A step, a prance, a jump- gone, the fated string beckons us, to a world where imagination establishes the precepts and dreams reign.

“One day, you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again.”

—C.S. Lewis