

The Triangular Coin

I'll start with where I grew up, why not? The house that my parents owned was just a regular semi complete with a sixty-foot garden that stretched out from the rear. At the end of the garden there was an old wooden gate painted in green, and ridiculous as it may sound, I always asked myself the question of why that gate was painted green, and every time I asked that question, the reply in my head was always the same: 'because all boundaries are green.'

That old gate led directly out onto sweeping hills of shingle that had been battered into shape by the violent storms I remember all too well throughout the winter months. I knew however, that that old gate with the peeling paint would protect me from the storms. If nothing else, it was green, and all boundaries were green.

I ask that you consider whether you want to read any further, although if your curiosity is anything like mine, I know that you, dear reader, will want to read more, and so I pose the same question to you: Why had I refused to go with my parents for a walk along the beach that night? In these pages, I enlighten you with the answer.

I found something. Near the back of the garden when I had been digging up weeds in the flowerbed, I had found something. We found things all the time in the garden: old bones, bits of twisted metal, giant shells that had no doubt once belonged to some marine animal. But this was different. The protruding object I had uncovered from the earth whilst I had been weeding the flowerbed seemed to pulsate. I went to touch the thing, but withdrew.

'How are you getting on out there, Pete? There's a nice cup of tea waiting for you here.' My mother said, although her words never sunk in. I reached for the triangular shaped object again and heaved at it, desperately trying to free it from the ground. It appeared to be of the same size of a standard fifty pence piece, so why the thing wouldn't budge, I had no idea. It was then in that moment that I knew I would need some time alone to discover what this artefact was; and that was why I stayed behind on that hot August night whilst my parents went for their mid-night stroll along the beach.

It seemed strange standing out there in the garden at mid-night knowing that I was the only one in the house. I may even have been the only person still awake. The night air was still and claustrophobically close. It seemed to instantly wrap around me like a cloak as soon as I stepped outside. The sky itself seemed to be glowing a sickening yellow-black light. I approached the flowerbed with a couple of my dad's tools that I'd managed to borrow from the garden shed before it had been locked up for the day. Somehow, I had managed to sneak past both of my parents and up to my bedroom carrying a large chisel and hammer. That hammer now chinked against the chisel as I carried them, as if even now they were trying to foil my grand plan.

Getting down on my hands and knees my heart missed a beat as my eyes turned up nothing when I started to look for the coin; but I had only misjudged where it had really been by a couple of feet to the right – things looked different in the dark. Shifting on my knees and almost crying out as one knee met with a piece of hard cold stone, I positioned myself above the coin and began to chisel away at the ground, being careful not to touch the coin itself.

Time passed, and in my increasing frustration, I must have chiselled at the surface of the coin a dozen or more times, although each time that happened no scratch appeared on its gleaming surface. Despite my efforts, the coin still would not budge! At the end of my tether, I beat at the coin with my dad's hammer... and then I stopped.

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I sat still, just looking at the coin but not really seeing it. I had a deep ingrained feeling of being watched. Glancing up, I jumped backwards landing on my bottom.

‘What you got there, son?’ The old man leaning across the flowerbed said.

‘An old coin, that’s all.’ I managed to say. I was suddenly shaking all over although the night air was far from cold. The old man was clad all in black. I knew who this man was, and when this man grinned it made your blood run cold. Everyone in the neighbourhood knew this man, and tales were spun about him at school. In fact, it was just the other day when Steve – my best friend – had told me why Stuart (a quiet kid in our class) had been away from school for so long. Steve said that Stuart had climbed the garden fence to get a ball that he’d kicked over by mistake and that Old Willy had got to him. Willy had taken him into his work shed at the bottom of his garden and had got to him good!

We called this man Old Willy, but the more senior members in the neighbourhood knew him as Mr Hemshore. In any case, names didn’t matter, not when you were dealing with a monster like this.

‘You won’t get that out using those!’ Willy said looking at the hammer and chisel. I said nothing; I was too scared to say anything. And then, with blinding speed you would never have imagined coming from an old man looking like Willy, he reached towards me and would have grabbed me for sure had he not suddenly stopped a few inches from my shirt. He backed off, said something very strange to me, something like: ‘You’re too *fragmented* for me.’

He turned to move away and then turned back to face me, took another look down at the coin and said, ‘You want that, huh?’

I nodded.

‘You know,’ he continued, ‘not everything rises to the heavens when it passes on. Some things return to the ground.’ With that said, he bent down and simply plucked the coin from out of the ground. My eyes widened in amazement, and before I knew what was happening, the coin was in my hand and Old Willy had gone.

That night I lay awake for hours, turning the triangular coin around and around in my palm. The voice of Old Willy circled like a flock of crows constantly in my mind saying that I was too fragmented for him. And what if I had not of been? Would I have ended up like Stuart?

Even now, years later, I still don’t know why I did it; but there in my bedroom, I took that coin and pressed it against my forehead. I felt an almost electric feeling, and when I lowered my hand the coin had disappeared. It was as if it had somehow melted through my head and into my brain. It was then that I heard the voices for the first time.

At first the voices seemed to all merge into one; they were indistinguishable. If I had to explain what that sounded like, at the time I would probably have said that it sounded like the school assembly before we were all told to hush for the speaker. Eventually, I was able to tune my mind at will to the voice or set of voices that I wanted to hear. I’ve never written this down before, and I’ve never spoken of my loss and mental anguish about when my brother past away. I was five when my older brother went missing, and we never heard from him since.

The reason I mention my brother is not because, dear reader, I want you to feel sorry for me. It’s because his voice was the one I heard first, and the first thing he said to me was heavily distorted as though he were shouting as loud as his voice box could manage. I can’t tell you exactly what he said, but it was something like: ‘I’m down here with the others! I’m down here where the worms feed.’

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Goosebumps rippled through every inch of my skin when I heard those words, and they ripple through my skin now as I write them. And had Old Willy a.k.a. Mr Hemshore said something about not everything going to the Heavens when it passes on? That some things return to the ground? Yes he had. And that was too close a parallel with what my brother had said.

I quickly grasped the ropes of my newly acquired skill, and soon I was distinguishing other voices as well as that of my brother. If I had had any doubt whatsoever about my brother still being alive somewhere in the world, those doubts were now well and truly shattered. They were shattered because the second voice I isolated from the chorus sounded like that of a friend I used to know called Jake – he disappeared from the neighbourhood in similar circumstances to my brother. Jake was saying, no not saying, Jake was screaming out the same sort of things my brother was, and they were not the only ones. There were hundreds of voices, all saying that they were down under the ground, and all saying they were with the worms. I even heard voices in French and other languages I could not name.

The moon rose from the East to cast a silvery light over my room like some signal from beyond beckoning me out. Across the room something glinted in that blessed light, and for a reason beyond my comprehension, I grabbed that glinting object, left my room and went down the stairs. It was dark without the moonlight, and despite knowing where every creak in this staircase lay, I still managed to find every single one. Outside, I saw how the moon had risen just enough that from this viewpoint, it appeared to be resting exactly on top of the old forever faithful gate, and it was in that moment I knew that there was something just past that gate (maybe a different kind of gate). I walked up to the gate, opened it, and went out closing it behind me. Feeling stupid, but compelled at the same time, I groped around for a handle or a knob of some kind that wasn't there, and suddenly, my hand clasped around something my eye could not detect. As one might do with a doorknob, I twisted the invisible thing and pulled it towards me. As I pulled, the very space in front of me seemed to open; it started as a line of bright light, but the more I pulled, the wider it got. It grew so bright that I had to shield my eyes from it for a moment. It grew so wide that should I wish, I could have gone through...and so I did.

Once through, I found myself in what looked like a mustard field. Ahead of me and slightly to the left was forest with a single path leading into it. To the right there was a lake where bird like creatures skated across the surface like water boatmen. I realised my mouth was hanging open, so I shut it. Panic washed through me – where the hell was I? And how long would that rectangular window back to my garden and house stay there?

This place really was beautiful, but there was something rotten here. It was the smell of some large animal decomposing. The sun had already started to throw long shadows across the field, and I had the distinct feeling to hurry. That whatever it was I was going to do here, I should do it fast. Do it fast, and get the hell out of here. Get out of here before it got dark. I knew this was a place you didn't want to find yourself after sundown. And as if that was my cue, I heard those same screaming voices, not distorted this time as they had been. They weren't in my head like before, this time I could actually *hear* them!

The voices came from the wood. Where else? And so I took my first steps along the path leading into the forest with the sun setting to the West (I assume it was the West), my shadow projecting long and elongated in front of me. It grew cold, and the smell of rotting meat grew stronger, and with these things my fear grew too. I gripped my late Great Grandmother's crystal ball tightly (this had been the object that

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had glinted in the moonlight as if begging to be brought along). My Great Grandmother said she used to be able to perform magic. No one else believed her stories – I did.

The forest loomed up faster than I had expected, and before I knew it I was venturing deeper into its domain. I could no longer see the doorway back to my back garden, and was about to turn back when my eyes happened upon an old wooden work shed. Seeing it made my skin crawl. It was exactly as I'd pictured Old Willy's shed to look, the one that he'd done something to Stuart in. I would have turned and ran all the way back had it not been for one thing: the voices were coming from *that* shed.

Without even thinking, I opened the door of the shed. The stench was unbearable, and so was the sight. The shed was stacked full of children's bodies, hundreds of them, and it was much larger on the inside than it had looked from the outside. The bodies were somehow hung in mid-air and appeared to be covered in a slime trail that looked much like the ones left behind by a snail. I knew that my brother was in here somewhere; and was this what Old Willy had meant when he had said that some things go back to the ground when they pass on? Yes. I think that's exactly what he had meant.

A sound that I can only describe as that of a roaring Walrus came from the back of the shed, and along with the sound came that all too familiar smell of rotting flesh. I backed out of there and I ran. You bet your last pound I did. I ran so fast and so hard I thought my heart was going to pound a hole right through my chest. But that was better than being caught by whatever had been in that shed, and you can bet your last *penny* on that!

The forest wasn't going to let me out though, and gradually my run turned into a jog, then a walk, then into a stagger. I heard a noise behind me and I turned to face my fate. I was not surprised to see the shed only a couple of feet away. In front of the shed stood Old Willy.

'You!' He said. I said nothing, couldn't have said anything if I'd wanted to. Old Willy smiled, and when he did I could see that here, his teeth had been filed down to fine points. That wasn't the only thing different in this world, however. Apart from his head, Old Willy looked nothing like a man at all! He looked more like a giant slug. Behind him was a trail of slime, the very same slime that had been used to suspend all those bodies in that shed.

'I said you were too fragmented for me, child. But I guess in this case I'll make an exception!' He said. At this, he lunged towards me with such speed I never even had time to think. What happened next happened out of pure reflex. As Old Willy lunged towards me I threw my Great Grandmother's old crystal ball down so hard that it must have vaporised on impact with the ground. Old Willy shrieked out and seemed to melt into the earth leaving a nasty smelling puddle of bile behind him.

(Sometimes some things go back to the ground)

I never went back to the shed after that. I didn't need to. After Old Willy had vanished into the ground I felt something lift, and the voices that I'd heard before were no longer there. In some way, I had managed to release them from the ground. At least, that's what I hope I did.

Even though I was curious about this strange world, I didn't hang around; the sun was about to dip below the horizon, and I had a feeling that there were worse things lurking around here than Old Willy at night.

I made short work of the wood this time, and saw the doorway in sight, dead ahead. As soon as I jumped through the doorway, it blinked out of existence behind

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me, and shortly after that, the triangular coin dropped from my forehead into the dirt of one of my father's flowerbeds. For the next couple of days I kept on trying to pick the coin up using hands, hammer, chisel – it was useless, and I knew in my heart that I'd never be able to pick up that coin again.

I'm ninety-five now, and looking back at the pages of my life, I can honestly say that nothing in particular stands out to me any more. You have to understand, dear reader, that my age is such now that I tend to forget things. But I will never forget that night when I had held the triangular coin in my hand.