

Whispering Voices

by James Lynn Smith

All he remembered clearly were tires screeching and a powerful impact. He gleaned from talk between doctors and EMTs that he was in a serious wreck while bringing his six-year old daughter back from her dance lessons. Although the other vehicle's driver was in ICU, tonight he and Mindy were walking away from the emergency room. Ambling along, hand-in-hand with his little girl, Jack was amazed at their luck but also troubled.

He was beginning to remember something that gave him pause. During the collision, he had a brief, strong feeling that some presence caught them. It was almost like an embrace. Though he was thankful, this presented a disturbing challenge to his world view because he didn't believe in miracles. To him, whatever created the universe did so and then left it to natural law.

Since he lived only two blocks from the hospital, he hadn't called for transportation. He looked at Mindy. "Let's not say anything to Mommy, okay? You know how she is on troubling news. She won't see how miraculous it is we're still here but will worry about the next risk. I'll explain it later when there's more time to talk about it."

"Okay, Daddy."

When they entered his house Jack announced aloud, "Back from dance lessons. A bit late, sorry." He was sure his wife, Doris, heard, and the continued rattling of pots and pans from the kitchen meant she wasn't rushing in with anger about the delay.

Later, Doris was already asleep when he was ready to retire. Dressed in pajamas he went to his daughter's room to say goodnight and found her sitting upright in the bed. She was playing with a clown doll she called Gretel. "What's going on? You're not sleepy?"

"I wanted to talk to Gretel before going to sleep."

"It's nice to have a good night chat with her. She'll be glad to see you in the morning ."

"Gretel is my best friend. Barbie's pretty and all, but Gretel has more perspirality."

"More...?" He chuckled. "More *personality*?"

"Uh-huh, sometimes she laughs and tells funny things."

Jack touched Mindy's cheek and brushed her long, sun-streaked, brown hair back from her face. His heart softened as vestiges of previous trauma melted away.

"What's Mommy doing? I didn't get a goodnight kiss."

"She's been busy preparing for guests tomorrow night and went to bed early. The Michaels are coming over. We can allow her a little mistake this time, right?"

"Guess so, but I heard the phone recorder when she was in the basement. The message said they can't come. They're feeling sick and may be courageous."

"You mean *contagious*? In that case, maybe it's best for them to stay home."

Mindy put Gretel aside and looked at her father. "I'm not sleepy. Can we go outside and look at the moon?"

"Go outside?" He paused. "I guess it's not too chilly, but let's put your housecoat on over your jammies." After he helped her with the additional clothing, they passed by the master bedroom where Jack peeked in at his sleeping wife.

"She's off to dreamland."

*

Father and daughter sat on the front porch doorsteps and gazed upward. The

moon was barely crescent, but stars showed brilliantly in the clear night air.

Mindy pointed. “Oh look, a shooting star. I wonder if I should make a wish.”

“If you want to, sweetie. The universe has many possibilities. Maybe one is an angel that wishes to please you.” Slightly perplexed at his word choice, he realized he could have said “fairy”, not “angel”.

“That would be nice. But, it’s so big up there. I don’t know if my wish will get lost.”

“Not if *you* remember it. Yes, it’s big up there but so is your mind. Did you ever dream of being in a spacious place?”

“Yes, I dreamed we were on a long road trip and drove onto a giant hill. When our car went over the top, it didn’t go back down to the road. It just kept going. I was scared at first, then I woke up.” She cocked her head to one side. “I wonder if we can hear voices from the stars. On a quiet night, I feel like they are talking to me.”

“Maybe they are—in their own way. Did you know stars can be much larger than our sun? They say star explosions are what created the elements we’re made of.” Jack knew his daughter was exceptionally bright, and he may have to back up whatever he said.

“Oh, then I am made of star-stuff.”

“You said it. And no less miraculous. Gurus say when you meditate, your mind goes back to the source. A timeless joining with what you always were.”

“What is the ‘source’?”

“Maybe it’s the beginning of All That Is. Some philosophers think the cosmos is a Great Mind. I really don’t know.”

“What’s a fellofficer?”

“*Philosopher*. Someone who tries to figure out questions of why we are here and what’s important. Like, are we all just ideas, thoughts and images in the Great

Mind?”

“Uncle Johnny said that’s throwjecting our ideas on the universe. It’s just calling the universe by a different name—like God.”

“*Projecting* our ideas? I see his point, but still there is a big difference. Many people think the universe is simply stuff and natural laws. But it is more. It also has consciousness and will. Where else could *we* get it from?”

“You mean the universe thinks and wants to do things?”

“In a way, that may be true. Since everything affects everything else, the cosmos is like one big, complex thing. I can imagine it has an ultimate plan. Much like we do for our life—but *way* bigger.”

With thrill rising in her voice, Mindy said, “I think its plan is to swoop us up into all those points of light and tell us things we don’t know.”

Looking at her cute, upturned nose and dimpled cheeks, he was reminded of his wife, but Mindy’s wide, bright eyes were unique to her. “You might be onto something,” he said. “Already the universe tells us things a little at the time. Each time someone discovers a way to grow better crops and feed the hungry, it tells us things. Every time a scientist looks in a microscope and finds out how our bodies work, it also tells us things. We simply need to translate nature’s messages to learn.”

“Do you think we’ll know everything some day?”

“Life will always have mysteries to puzzle over. We need mysteries. We’re made to learn and explore. What if there were nothing new left to discover?”

“Ooh, that would be like reading the same book over and over. I want to learn and translate for nature so I can discover new things.”

“Great, it seems to me your heart’s leading your mind. That could take you to wonderful places. Things you find inside your own mind could be like an adventure into the night sky.”

Mindy raised her brows. “Wow.” Then, pausing thoughtfully, she added, “Actually that doesn’t make sense...but it sure is interesting to think about.”

He laughed. “It is, and I feel you will do a lot of that in years to come. I can see you now, translating messages from the beautiful Aurora Borealis.”

*

Back inside, Jack felt dizzy for a moment but dismissed it. He put Mindy to bed, went back to the master bedroom, and climbed under the cover on his side of the king-sized mattress. His wife murmured softly and resumed sleeping.

After dozing off for a few minutes, he awoke, thinking he heard voices from Mindy’s room. *Maybe talking with her doll again.* But the other voices were like whispers. He got up and tip-toed to his daughter’s room. There was strange bluish-white light coming from under the door. Upon easing it open, the sounds stopped and the light was absent.

He turned on a table lamp and saw nothing amiss. Mindy appeared to be fast asleep, looking like a little princess. The doll Gretel was sitting on a shelf across the room. Jack felt dizzy again. *Whoa, must be effects of the wreck.*

Not remembering how he got back to bed, he awoke again with the doorbell ringing. It was still dark and he swung his feet toward the floor, once more feeling vertigo. He fell back and heard his wife get up to answer the door. Despite wanting to accompany her, he could not convince himself to try. *Something not right in my head.*

*

At work the next morning, Jack noticed his officemates appeared to ignore him. *What’s up with this?* Sitting at his desk, he realized it had been moved slightly. Paperwork he had not finished was nowhere in sight. A coffee mug he didn’t recognize was on his desk. *Someone’s been here.* A past event popped into his memory. Another company in trouble had reduced and then removed his work

to make him look idle. *Precursor to layoff.* He stared at the mug, puzzling, when he realized he didn't remember how he got to work. Vertigo and memory problems would only compound the possible pink slip issue. He wondered how many knew he was a target. *People avoid an employee getting the axe.*

*

The next few days went by in a fog, and Jack decided to talk to his wife about what was happening. He thought he did, but wasn't sure. More things were becoming uncertain.

Calling an automatic recorder at work, he reported sick leave. Distressed with a memory issue when he might need to find a new job, he retired to his home study and kept a low profile. He would stay there until he had a plan or improved.

The sound of his wife's busy preparations in the bedroom, however, aroused his curiosity. *What's Doris up to?* After an hour, he heard her heading for the garage where her car was parked. He ran to the front door and saw her pulling into the street. His car being absent, he would need to follow on foot. Downtown Dawsonville was only a few blocks away and he could go there and look for her car. *Maybe she's shopping or going to a doctor's office.* Why it seemed urgent to know was unfathomable.

After twenty minutes, he saw her car behind an iron fence around a wide, rolling property with rich lawn grass and a few trees. It was parked with several other cars.

"Daddy, do you need me to come with you?" his daughter said.

Wheeling around, he saw her. "Mindy, why aren't you in school?"

"I want to be with you, and Mommy wouldn't mind if I skip school."

"You asked her about that?"

She paused and smiled. "Sort of."

"Okay, let's go together."

Walking through a gate and past his wife's car, they saw a group of people standing under a canopy. Friends Jack knew focused their attention on two openings in the ground. Doris stood among them, head down with white handkerchief wiping her eyes. Her brother had his arm around her. Straps supporting two caskets, one full sized and one smaller, lowered their burdens into the ground.

Mindy looked at her father. "Daddy, they say we can go when we're ready."

When he looked at her, she seemed to glow. "Who says?" he asked, knowing the answer.

"The voices from the light."

More short stories & readers' theater scripts at

Storylandscapes.net