

Vota Ut Opus

“Over three thousand applicants have arrived this year for interviews,” the headmaster glared at Eileen. “Why do you think you deserve to come here?”

Eileen wished she had an answer for the headmaster. Sitting across from him, Eileen felt someone had shortened her chair to give the balding man the best angle for glaring. He had a white beard, but there was nothing jolly about his rotund expression. His eyes were steel grey and his frown spoke of a disapproval that Eileen couldn't deny was for her.

“I don't...well, the problem is, I don't remember applying?” Eileen said, fidgeting with the hem of her skirt. “I barely remember looking at this campus. At least...I don't think I applied?”

“Of course you did,” the headmaster said, opening a folder. “October 3rd at 4:35 in the afternoon. You distinctly said ‘I wish I could get accepted into a school’ and then again on October 9th when you're best friend...Rhea got accepted into Harvard.”

“That was...wait so you're application process is based on an idle wish?”

“There is nothing idle about a wish,” the headmaster said, rumbling like thunder. “I'll forgive your transgression, but understand this: Wishes are power. Without them, our school wouldn't exist.”

“Is wishing an elective?”

“It's our entire course of study,” the headmaster leaned over to his phone and punched a few numbers in. “Perhaps we should have you take a tour so you understand the situation you're in. Ah, Trudy? Yes, can you send Cassandra in, please? Very good. Thank you.”

Before he'd even hung up the phone, a girl a little older than Eileen walked in. She wore jeans but had an extravagant floral top that seemed to intertwine with her long, green braid. She smiled a little and looked between Eileen and the headmaster.

“Cassandra,” the headmaster said, “would you explain to Miss Roberts what we do here? I think she doesn't quite understand.”

“Of course,” Cassandra said. She stood by the door and waved Eileen towards her. Of the two, Eileen preferred Cassandra's invitation, so she followed behind her like a lost puppy. She was grateful when the doors opened to the outside, allowing her to leave the confines of the

headmaster's manor house. There was a soft breeze coming in from the ocean, warming Eileen's heart.

"Let me guess," Cassandra grinned, "you don't remember applying?"

"He said I wished to apply?"

"That's the thing about this place," Cassandra said. "We get lots of applicants, but very few know about it. You made it through to the interview phase though, so that counts for something."

"Is this really a place that teaches you about wishing?"

"No, no, no," Cassandra laughed. "We learn how to grant wishes."

"Like a Bipidee Bopidee Boo fairy godmother?"

"Or father...or person, depending on who it is. We've moved out of the dark ages, so now we can be more inclusive."

"You can't blame me for not understanding."

"I didn't get it either. Here are the basics, since that seems to be where we're starting: there are a lot more wishes than people who are willing to fulfill them. Shoot stars, eyelashes, wishbones...everyone wants to make wishes, but only a select few have the proper stuff to make them come true."

"If that were true, more people would have a million dollars."

"Those wishes don't work. At least...not like that. All the showboating of glass slippers is a bit too old hat, so we...nudge things to make wishes come true."

"Nudge?"

"Luck, fate, whatever it is...that's all wishing comes down to. Opportunities and people willing to take them. The wish for a million dollars? Those only come true if you take the right steps, which many people don't see. Wishes take work, right?"

"Not really," Eileen said. "So...I applied here by wishing for it?"

"Yes, but you also really wanted it to come true. Wishing to get into a school isn't uncommon, but the unique cases get brought through us first."

"I meant Yale or something!"

"Well, be more specific next time. I got a friend in djinn studies? Whoo, let me tell you: those contracts make lawyers look like they're writing in crayon."

“Djinn studies? So genies are real?”

“Kind of. There are good wish granters and bad wish granters. Some of us like to help people become their best selves. Others like to sow discord and see the world fall apart. We all use the same skills, just...differently. Djinn studies are kind of like...defenders of the wish world.”

“So...what are you studying?”

“Well...Bipidee Bopidee Boo.”

“You’re trying to become someone’s fairy godmother?”

“Well, there’s a lot of cases coming up these days. Honestly, I just wanna make some kid happy, even if it’s only for a day. That’s the wish that got me here, honestly. I just wished I could help make the world happier.”

“Right, so apart from the curriculum, I’m still unsatisfied.”

“I figured. Listen, no judgment, but it’s often easier to show rather than talk about this stuff.”

Cassandra ended their walk and folded her arms. Following her line of sight, Eileen saw a line of students all focusing on the skies overhead. It was broad daylight, clear and sunny, but the students were all watching the sky intently with notebooks. “First-year studies,” Cassandra said, “Shooting Star Watch.”

“It’s the middle of the day.”

“Here, yeah,” Cassandra said. “Just stand here for a minute.”

“Why?”

“I’m going to show you. Now, stand here and look...right about there.”

Eileen grimaced and shook her head. She released a frustrated breath and looked up at the spot Cassandra was pointing at. The brilliant blue of the sky was almost blinding, but Eileen insisted on focusing. She’d allegedly applied to this school, so she may as well give it a shot.

“Now, focus on the idea of hope,” Cassandra said, “not just for you, but for everyone. Everyone wants—hopes for something to happen. Hope is one of the few, truly universal experiences...more so than breathing. Dreams, desires, and wishes all come down to hope. Find it and hold it like your life depends on it. Now keep that feeling...and look for it in the sky.”

Eileen dropped her guard and focused on her hopes: getting into a school, helping the world, and making things better than she found them. She could feel the longing in her gut, an

emptiness in her spirit that made her want to go forward. She clutched the feeling as best she could and looked to the blue heavens.

At first, she thought the brightness was playing tricks on her eyes as streaks speckled her vision. She saw a few more lines, all darting in the same direction across the blue above. Blinking, Eileen saw the shapes a little clearer, pinpricks of light leaving trails across the sky. Something in her named each streak with a single word: Peace, Sleep, Justice—

“A pony?” Eileen asked. She blinked her eyes and the feeling faded.

“Yeah,” Cassandra nodded. “That’s a popular one. It’s nighttime in Europe, so I’m willing to bet that one came from England...lots of horse girls out there.”

“Wait, so each one of those lines is—”

“A shooting star,” Cassandra grinned. “You need to learn how to see wishes as a first year, but I can see them as clear as you see the clouds. It’s a painting to me. I’m trying to focus on only a few wishes at a time these days, but you gotta know where to start.”

“Does it pay?”

“Granting wishes?” Cassandra laughed. “Absolutely not. If it was about money, only rich kids would get their wishes. Could you imagine a fairy godmother for hire?”

“Then why do it?”

“You found hope...you tell me.”

“To make the world better?” Eileen asked. “To feel like I’ve done something right and made an impact?”

“It’s not always about changing the world—”

“It’s about changing someone’s world.” Eileen nodded. She looked back to Cassandra grinning with satisfaction.

“I think you’re ready for that interview,” Cassandra said, turning back towards the manor house that was the headmaster’s office.

“You think?” Eileen asked. “I still don’t know if I’ve got it...”

“You will. The stars picked you, Eileen. Wish or Fate: You were meant to come here.”