

## The Boy Who Watched The Moon From His Swing

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“So, what do you think about this picture,” Elliott asked Henry, his older brother, shoving a piece of paper with drawings on it in his face.

Henry pushed it aside, taking a large bite of his salami and turkey sub sandwich. “Nice moon, bro.”

Elliott stumbled, almost falling off the rusty swing. “That’s it?”

Henry was seventeen and Elliott, his half-brother, was ten-years-old. Their mom remarried the town butcher, Doug Stevens, and that’s how Elliott came along—red-haired and freckled faced, and they became a family. The two siblings shared one thing in common, good height and very white skin, thanks to their mother, Margaret.

Both boys were spending their June summer day at Heritage Park, two blocks from their home on Winchester and Cobly Lane in Ottawa, Illinois.

It was Wednesday around lunchtime. They were enjoying complimentary subs from *Earl Bigly’s Sandwich Depot* down the street. “Mr. Earl” as everyone called him, received a couple pounds of ground sirloin from Doug a few weeks earlier, and the older gentleman was returning the favor to his sons by giving them free two foot-long subs with all the fixins.

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Their mom worked at the local cleaners, ironically next door from the butcher shop. Today, both parents were working late, so the foot-long subs would have to tie them over till supper, later in the evening.

Henry chewed with his mouth open, balancing the sandwich wrap on his knees. "Okay, what do you want me to say? You drew a picture of dead trees, silhouetted by a cratered moon, and you have a kid on a swing."

Elliott stopped swinging, picking a pickle out of his sub, and throwing it over his shoulder. "Those aren't dead trees."

Henry nodded. "Yes they are," and he flung the sheet to the rubber-mulch covered play area.

"Hey," Elliott barked, jumping off the swing and grabbing the sheet before the summer breeze took it away.

Henry laughed. "What are you going to use that drawing for anyway?"

"My new book," Elliott answered confidently.

Henry skidded off his swing and then jump-shot his drink cup and crumbled sandwich paper in the trash can next to a bench. "Score!" He then wiped his hands on his new red colored workout shorts. "You wrote a book? Come on?"

"Yeah, I did. It's about a goblin, sorcery and its twenty-five mil-million words."

Henry snorted. "Ha...Ha...No such thing as a million words."

Elliott followed his brother with his trash but missed. After cleaning it up, he sat on the bench next to Henry who was re-tying his gym shoes. A basketball had been stowed away underneath while the boys ate and swung. They had plans to shoot some hoops on the empty court across from them before going to Mr. Bernie's house and mowing his lawn.

"Well," Elliott insisted, looking for approval. "Do you like it?"

Henry jabbed him in the arm. "Since when did you become a writer?"

Elliott pulled up his white socks over his shins. "...Yesterday."

Henry hovered over Elliott. "You wrote a 'twenty-five million' word story, yesterday?"

"...Yes, why don't you believe me?"

"...Because yesterday, you were swimming at the YMCA till 8."

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"I know, I did it after."

"Okay, whatever," Henry picked up the basketball and began dribbling.

"Isn't my picture nice?" Elliott asked again.

Henry threw him the ball. "Not original. Looks like a cover from a Harry Potter book.

Elliott caught it. "My story is better than Harry Potter."

Henry jogged backwards toward the court. "Sure, pal. A ten-year-old story writing pales against J.K. Rowling's work. I'd like to read it. Cover doesn't matter."

Elliott slammed the ball down and it popped up in the air, Henry snatched it with one hand. "Fine. You'll see. You can read it."

Henry smiled. "What genre is it?"

"...Mystery."

They reached the court and Henry began shooting. "You said there was goblins, and sorcery...That's fantasy, you idiot."

Elliott tried blocking Henry from shooting. "Yeah, well, Goblins can have mystery."

Henry took two steps back, spun around and then shot the basketball in the air. It went through the hoop. "Sure, kiddo. Goblins can have mystery too."

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It was late afternoon when the brothers returned home from lawn mowing. Henry slid into the shower and Elliott sat on his bed gingerly tearing the many handwritten pages of his story from his notebook, titled: *The Boy Who Watched the Moon from his Swing*.

There were twenty hand-written pages. He counted all the words, periods, commas, and spaces. Counting all that was hard work and Elliott was exhausted. But, he was proud of his tale. He didn't know anyone at his age who wrote a story before.

Carefully stapling the top-left corner of the pages, Elliott left the stack on his desk in his room for his big brother to take a read when he was done showering.

An hour later, Henry still hadn't touched the papers. Between a couple friend phone calls and playing on the Xbox, the older sibling had fallen asleep on the recliner in the basement.

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Elliott was very upset. He wanted Henry to read the story and tell him what he thought. Elliott was so sure this tale was a masterpiece and daydreamed of a huge publishing contract and a movie in which he'd star as the boy on the swing. His imagination was over the top, but emotional frustration was also getting the best of him, and so he had to do something to curb the rage pulsing inside him.

Stomping down the stairs to the basement, he found Henry snoring. The TV was still on. Shaking his brother, he called, "...Wake up, Henry! You're supposed to read my book."

Henry startled out of deep sleep was angered at his little brother and stretched his arm to punch him. "You little stinker, what are you doing?"

Dodging out of the way, Elliott shrank to the floor. "I'm sorry—"

Henry bolted out of the chair and grabbed his younger sibling. "Why'd you wake me? Leave me alone!"

Elliott ducked, "You're supposed to read. Why aren't you reading?"

Henry stood up. "Ah, geez. I was tired that's all. Get your stupid story, and I'll read it now."

Elliott's face lit up and he skipped up the stairs to his bedroom and retrieved the precious story. Jumping down two steps at a time, he was back by his brother, who was sitting down again, channel-surfing.

"Here."

Henry took the stack and flipped through the pages, his face suddenly darkened. "It's hand-written? You have one of the worst handwritings I've ever seen." He flipped some more. "How many pages is this? They're not even numbered."

Elliott began to shake inside. He wanted someone to read this story so bad; his father wasn't a reader, and his mom would be too tired to do it because she worked late. His brother was his only saving grace.

"Please try..." He pleaded.

Henry clicked the off button on the remote and the TV shut off. "Fine. Now, get out of here."

Elliott was hesitant, but then he moved away from his brother and sat at the foot of the basement stairs.

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*...It was a cold and dark stormy night...*

Henry stopped and turned. "This isn't original."

The younger boy was already grief-stricken by the critique, "But—"

Henry waved him off, "Just forget it. Let me finish and then I'll tell you my thoughts."

Elliott placed his hands under his chin and stared at the cracked concrete of the basement floor.

*...The wind was howling and the shutters rattled on the two-floor house that Alice lived in...*

"You spelled 'howling' and 'rattled' wrong."

"...Keep reading."

*In the shadows of the night, all kinds of creatures came to play on the beach. And Alice, the nine-year-old orphan girl whose momma left because she don't want her no more, waited for the creatures to come and play with her. It was close to midnite and the moon with all the big, round craters showed up too. Alice swunged on the swing, and waited. One by one, the critters came.*

*They brought apple pi, pizza, and fried chicken to eat together. They needed their strength so they could kill the goblins stealing their food, or so they thought. Alice was going to help. She was a pretty girl with red hair and dark eyes. She lived alone in the barn house across the beach. She said to them that they were her friends.*

*Alice told funny stories. We were planning how to catch the goblins that night. We were supposed to trick them into going in the house and then loking them up. First, we had to eat. We were hungry...*

Every so often Henry chuckled and Elliott looked up at his brother cringing of embarrassment. *Maybe I shouldn't have showed him.*

Henry stopped and sighed. *This is a stupid story. So many mistakes.* He looked over at his brother who appeared frightened. *Hmm...At least he's trying. Gotta give him that.*

It was no secret that Elliott had experienced challenges at school. He had a lisp and couldn't read or do math very well, but with the continued extra help he was receiving from therapists, the boy was making progress.

Henry flipped to the next page. Elliott's handwriting was crooked, he didn't write on the line, and some words were hard to decipher. But, he continued.

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*There were twelve animals. Dogs, cats, beavers, raccoons, birds, squirrels, deers, geese, ducks, rats, and spiders and ants. We had filled our bellies and were ready for Alice to tell us how to catch the goblins.*

*Alice had a sheet of paper. On it was a plan, she told us. We were to lay out cheese in a line all the way up to the house. You see, goblins loved cheese. Cheddar cheese as matter of fact. Then, when the goblins came, we trap them.*

*So, we got to work and put the cheddar in squares in a path to the house. Then we waited. We waited a long time. So long, we fell asleep. Then, when the moon went to sleep and the sun came up, all the cheese was gone.*

*Who ate it? We don't know. It was a mystery.*

*The next night we meet again and did the same. Alice watched from the swing, but then she fell asleep like all of us.*

*For 3 nights we did this and no sign of the goblins. Alice called this a mystery. It was. We did not know.*

Henry stopped and got up. "I have to pee."

Elliott stood up, "Are you done already?"

The older boy brushed passed him going up the stairs. "...Nope."

A couple of minutes later, Henry came down and slouched back down on the couch and continued reading.

Elliott's stomach growled and he went up to the kitchen to eat a banana. Out the sliding door, he watched birds flying overhead their backyard. He daydreamed of having his story published. *What will that cost? Would his mom and dad allow it? I could bring it to school in August when school starts up again. I'll be famous...* His daydreaming was interrupted by his brother calling him. *He's done!*

Elliott raced down the stairs and hopped next to Henry on the couch. "Well?"

Henry chose his words carefully so not to discourage his younger sibling. "Okay, your title has a boy in it, but yet the main person is a girl who's planning to catch the goblins."

Elliott rubbed his chin. "Oh, okay. I can change that to make it a boy, and I'll call him *Allen*."

Henry flipped through the pages, "You have a lot of misspelled words, but I can help you clean them up."

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Elliott's eyes lit up, "Really!"

Henry nudged him in his arm. "For a cost. Let's see...clean up my room?"

"Done!" Elliott shouted.

"The mystery is that Harold the horse was the one eating the cheese and there were no goblins, correct?"

"Yes."

"Okay, so we solved the mystery. But, did anyone know what the goblins looked like?"

Elliott snapped his finger, "Yes, the girl, or now the boy."

Henry nodded. "You need to describe that and add that in. Maybe describe what the house looked like. Even expand more on the boy too. Okay?"

Elliott shrugged. "Wow, that's a lot more work."

Henry sensing his brother's disheartened look, nudged him again. "You can do it. Mom and Dad will be proud of you."

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Three weeks later on a balmy, July Wednesday, the boys were back at the park eating another sub sandwich each courtesy of Mr. Earl.

Both boys were swinging and eating. From his back pocket, Elliott pulled out a crumpled sheet of drawn paper and put it up to Henry's face.

"Like my picture?"

It was stick figure girl holding a heart.

Between chews, Henry responded, "Don't tell me you wrote another mystery?"

Elliott plucked the pickle out of his sandwich and threw it over his shoulder. "Nope. This time I wrote a romance. It's two-million words."

Henry rolled his eyes and threw the sheet to the ground. "...No, no, please..."

THE END