

The Magic Typewriter

This is the story of two brothers called James and William Jacob. Their journey began when James, the most reasonable and mature one, decided that they would have to move to London in order to find a job. Their mother had died a few weeks before and nothing held them back to their hometown where they were seen as monsters because of their physical similarities. Indeed, the two young men were more than just brothers, they were twins. Their eyes, their smile, their voice, the way they walked or talked, every hair, every manner, they were perfect copies of each other. One could never tell one from the other, not even their own mother. And for the narrow-minded countrymen, it was something so troubling that they could not help but hate them as much as they feared them. The twins secretly hoped that a big city such as London, would accept them as they were.

After weeks of searching for a job, they finally met a man who was hiring chimney sweeps. Satisfied, they promptly accepted the offer.

Several months had gone by since their arrival in London. Everything was going well for the two of them but one day, James had a terrible headache. To such an extent that he had almost fainted. His stubborn character made him choose to ignore it, hoping it was nothing serious. But soon, the headache came back, even stronger. His body was aching. He couldn't really tell where. He felt as he guessed it would feel to be old. And this cough that wouldn't go... He couldn't avoid the doctor this time. It was pulmonary tuberculosis, the treatment was expensive... and rather inefficient. Way too expensive for his low salary. He left the cabinet full of sorrow and confused. The only thing he managed to ask before leaving was how much time he had left. He was told to wait a few days until the doctor had collected all the information required.

James decided to hide his condition to William. They had never lied to each other. But this was different. He didn't want to worry him. They had just found a job, were starting a new life in London.

One day, while William was heading to his apartment, a man appeared out of nowhere, behind him, out of breath and a bit sweaty. He said:

“I’m really sorry but I can’t answer your question about the disease. It could be weeks, months, maybe years. I am really sorry, I must go, goodbye and good luck.”

William was confused. He had clearly been mistaken for James. Was James... No it couldn’t be true. He had to talk to his brother. But finding the right moment wouldn’t be easy.

When James came back, William observed him, and hoped he would tell him the truth. As James remained silent, William just asked if he was alright. That’s the only thing he managed to say.

“Yes, I’m just feeling tired with all the work and the weather doesn’t help.” His features betrayed his exhaustion.

He was sick indeed.

William didn’t know what to say. So he just replied with an emotional smile and they got on with their day.

They knocked on the lustrous door of their new and last customer of the day. A gentleman in his mid fifties opened it, slightly, a large smile on his face.

“I was waiting for you. You are welcome in my humble house.” He said while opening the door widely, inviting them to follow him in.

The two young men stepped timidly in the luxurious mansion.

“Don’t be shy, come here, I will show you the troubles that I am having with my chimney,” the elegant man explained, noticing that the two boys were still on the threshold, their eyes filled with astonishment and wonder.

When the explanations were over, the owner announced he would leave and that they would be alone for the rest of their work. When James heard the front door slam, he immediately rushed to a table where was positioned a magnificent typewriter. Right in the center, standing there proudly.

William hurried to reprimand his brother for his incivility but James replied that writing on a typewriter like this one was his dream. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing. Such a beautiful object. It was brand new and shiny. Oh how he would love to have one like that.

Despite his brother’s disapproval, James eventually started to write a word, gently pressing the sparkling keys.

All of sudden, everything swirled around them and they were dazzled. They both felt dizzy and fainted.

When James woke up, he was surrounded by sunflowers. He looked at his brother who was still fainted. He shook him, trying to wake him up and eventually William opened his eyes and looked around, as surprised as his brother was to wake up in a field of sunflowers. He asked James what was happening but didn't get any answer.

James started to be scared. He pinched himself hoping that all of this was just a dream but nothing changed. The sun here wasn't shining with a yellow light but a purple one instead. James, panic-stricken, started to struggle to breathe. Assisted by his brother, he soon recovered his calm as they started to analyze the situation, despite the total nonsense and incomprehension of the scene. They had to walk away from the field and try to find someone who could help them.

As they were on their way to leave, hundreds of voices started humming around them. They turned back to see who was talking but to their great surprise they only saw the sunflowers. They seemed to be trying to say something but it was impossible for them to understand even a single word. They didn't have enough time to care about it so they turned around and left.

They walked for a moment on a little dusty path when a fancy bird came in sight. The two young men looked at each other, eyes filled with amazement and an ounce of fear. The animal sent them back the same look. He was wearing a black derby hat, a fancy jacket, and in his right hand was a wooden cane which ended in a handle made of marble representing a dodo. The funny looking animal cleared his throat and said :

“How surprising to see humans around here !”

How surprising to hear an animal talking, thought William, not saying it out loud fearing to appear impolite.

The bird asked if they were King's friends, but James timidly explained the disconcerting truth : they had no idea how they had ended up here. William was quicker to react and immediately asked if they could see the king. The bird proudly replied that he was the King's hand and that he would take them to him. James

thanked Count Dodo as it turned out to be called, and the three of them got on the road to King's castle.

After a little walk through the forest, they arrived in front of an enormous castle surrounded by a fancy garden. Two lizard guards as big as humans were waiting at the entrance, they opened the gigantic door, revealing to the two bewildered men a place of a rare beauty. The dodo opened a small wooden door on which we could read "King's office". They stepped inside only to find an ostrich wearing a sort of maid uniform cleaning with the feathers of her wing.

"Oh hello Miss Ostrich, is the King there ?" The Count enquired.

The ostrich replied that the King had left for an emergency. She then asked if she had to take a message for him. The Count politely declined the offer and thanked her.

The twins decided to wait for the King's return and warmly thanked Count Dodo.

"Well you shouldn't", the Count said maliciously, his sweet look turning into an evil one, "Guards, take them to the dungeon !"

Unable to fight back, the two poor men were caught by a troop of vicious lizards who locked them into a dirty and gloomy cell.

James embedded his face in his hands, almost crying, while William yelled for help, shaking the bars of the prison.

Suddenly they heard what sounded like subtle footsteps, someone was coming towards them. William and James looked at each other with a frightened expression on their faces. The shadow was coming closer and closer and finally they saw what the threat was : a toad. They calmed down, a little bit amused by the situation. The toad came closer and executed an ungraceful reverence.

"Hi, I'm Jeremy. I'm going to help you to escape" he said, shaking a bunch of keys in his tiny sticky hands.

The toad jumped to reach the padlock, entered the key. The old door opened in a loud creaking sound. The twins sincerely thanked the toad.

Jeremy asked them what were they doing here, because it was pretty unusual to see humans around. And again they answered that they had no idea how they had landed here.

“I see... well you have to find an explanation quickly to find your way back before the king returns. If he sees you, you will end up like me and be stuck here for eternity !” the toad warned.

“What ? Why ?” James asked, concerned. Their amused eyes darkened as they understood that all this was serious.

“I used to be a human too, but one day I had the misfortune to enter in this world and the King, who first seems like a decent person, turned me into a toad ! Your presence here is a threat for his kingdom,” explained Jeremy, quite straightforward.

The two brothers realized the heavy threat that was hovered upon them and how badly they had to escape this world.

“Focus on the place where you woke up, there is an explanation to your arrival, a crucial element,” the toad advised them.

The twins focused, they had woken up in a field of sunflowers. The sunflowers were chanting something but it was incomprehensible. Then they remembered what they were doing before fainting.

“The typewriter of course !” James and his brother exclaimed at the exact same time.

“A typewriter ? I saw the King holding one just before you both got in the dungeon ! The machine is probably in his room, but to reach it you will have to pass through the labyrinth of the seven doors,” explained the frog.

Suddenly the troop of lizard guards called for Jeremy. He quickly pointed to the direction of the King’s room and left.

The twins as quiet and discreet as possible walked in the long corridor that was leading to the maze. As they were walking, James looked at all of the portraits of the King that covered the corridor’s walls. Something seemed odd about those portraits, it was as if James knew this person, his face was familiar to him. But the

clock was ticking and he didn't have enough time. They arrived in front of a big white door. James looked at his brother, worried and not sure if they could trust Jeremy but it was too late, William opened it.

When they opened their eyes, they realized that they were on the beach. The atmosphere was soothing, and they felt relaxed and relieved. They noticed two deckchairs on the warm sand. They could use some rest, but there was no time to waste. Suddenly, the same door they first entered in appeared from nowhere. Not even thinking a second about it, James opened it. This time, the place they came in was empty, except for two wooden safes facing each other. They came closer and noticed two little etiquettes on each safe where their first names were written. The twins came in front of their respective safe and opened it. In William's safe were four golden bars and a ton of gold coins. Instead, in James' were only three wretched pennies.

"What do you have in your safe ? Mine is marvelous !" William exclaimed, joyfully.

"Nothing... I had nothing," James replied, forlorn.

James stood up to see what his brother called "marvelous". When he saw his gain he felt terribly jealous and directly begged William to give him half of his gain. His brother refused coldly, he felt the terrible need to keep it to himself. He was already thinking of how rich he was and of what he could do with his money. The twins never fought, they had always shared what little they had, but James stubbornly wanted to keep his booty with no intent to share it. Suddenly William realized how stupid their quarrel was because the money wasn't even real ; it belonged to an imaginary world, so in their reality it would no longer exist. When they finally stopped arguing, the same door mysteriously appeared.

They entered the third room which was empty, except for two tables filled with appetizing dishes and expensive wines. William ran to the table and hurried to serve himself a glass of wine. He didn't pay much attention to the etiquette of the bottle which was saying « DRINK ME », and poured the red liquid in a crystal glass. James stopped him, but it was already too late, drips of the wine had touched William's lips. The situation was way too suspicious not to be dangerous. How foolish could his brother be?!

As James said that, a door once again appeared. He went directly to it, still telling William off for foolishly drinking the wine. When he looked back to William, James realized that William was lying unconscious on the floor. He didn't even have time to scream that the previous door vanished. He found himself all alone in a cold and dark room.

William slowly opened his eyelids and discovered an all white ceiling, he tried to stand up but he immediately felt a horrible headache. Memories were rushing through his mind : the typewriter, the quarrel with James, the money, him drinking the wine, and finally, blank. His brother was right, he shouldn't have had this wine. The young man was now panicking. The idea of being separated from his brother, and the idea that James could be dying in the other room, that they could be spending their last moments away from each other terrified him. William wasn't blind, he had noticed the big dark circles under his eyes, the strange paleness of his skin and the sudden fits of coughing James suffered. Submerged by all his anxiety he started to cry, whispering desperately his brother's name.

William was still sobbing when he suddenly heard footsteps, he rapidly stood up, hoping it was James, all senses active. He saw a mysterious, tall figure standing in front of him. It was wearing a long black coat with a large hood covering his face. William thought he should be afraid of this person but he wasn't.

"You probably have many questions for me" the black figure told him.

Indeed, he had, so William asked him where he was.

"You are in the world invented by the man we call the King."

Secondly he requested how he and James could get out of this world. The answer was simple : the same way they came in.

But quickly his anxiety seized William again and he asked in a trembling voice who was the mysterious person he was talking to, where was his brother and most important, was James alright.

"Calm down, " said the other calmly, "I'm sure you have heard of me. I know many things about your future. I have to warn you. I'm going to take your brother away with me very soon."

William kept quiet for a moment, astounded, everything blurred in his head. This couldn't be. All his life he had been with James. All of his memories were with his twin. He couldn't let him take James away from him.

He asked one more crucial question to the Grim Ripper. Was there a way to save James?

"To save someone I must take someone else instead." Without hesitation William asked how he could take his place, but the answer was simple again: he had to find out himself.

William suddenly felt dizzy again and fainted. When he woke up, he was in the same room where the wine was, but everything had disappeared.

He noticed that the seven doors had been open and he could see his brother at the end of it. William ran towards his dear brother. James was on his knees, pale as snow and spreading drops of blood at every cough. But, in his moist shaking hands was the typewriter. William took the machine from his hands, slowly, and gently kissed his brother.

A tear dropped on the white paper. I am bringing you home.

James woke up. He was lying down on the luxurious carpet of their client's house. Back to normal! The magnificent typewriter was next to him. He stood up, with an ease he hadn't felt for a long time. He looked around and called for his brother, again and again, silence encircling him. It was a deadly silence. Cold silence. James felt panic rise in him again as his heart beat started to accelerate. He looked in other rooms, rushing everywhere around the house, but William wasn't here. He came back to the living room and let himself fall to the floor. He knew something had happened. The typewriter caught his attention, again. A paper was in it. It was wet as if someone had cried, but he could still read the lonely sentence:

*James is coming back home. I take his sickness and give him my body.
Live a happy life brother...*