

The Escapade of the Pizza, the Soccer Ball, and the God in Disguise

My dad missing, a god in disguise, a trip to Egypt - it all started with a disgusting, greasy slice of pizza. Pepperoni, by the way. Fluffy crusts. Medium cheese. Now that I think about it, it actually might have been an edible piece of pizza if it hadn't been in a pile of dirt by a tree where all the neighborhood dogs pee. But my dog Emmy apparently thought it was edible, and ate it faster than I could even move to stop her. She had to go poo at three in the morning because of it, and to do that, she had to wake me up (and disturbing my amazing dream about surfing) so I could open the door to the backyard. There, I saw my soccer ball and had a tremendous need to kick it as hard as I possibly could. Which of course, led to me kicking it, as I have some difficulty with impulse control, and it flew right over the fence into the neighbor's backyard. But it was my precious soccer ball, so I just *had* to retrieve it from the other side of the fence (though it took about an hour to accomplish the task without crushing any of my neighbor's peonies).

I returned from my escapade with the soccer ball feeling quite proud. It really took some skill to climb the slippery fence and get my ball without disturbing the neighbors or destroying any of their prized peonies. So, I felt I needed to treat myself to some brownies for the occasion. There was no flour in the pantry, so I went down to the garage to see if I could find any there. I had to walk past my dad's bedroom to get to the garage, and that's when I noticed something strange: the bedroom door was open. My dad rarely got up before seven thirty, and right now it was 4:26 AM. I took a step inside.

The bed was unmade, and looked like it had been slept in. As usual, most of the room was messy: clothes were strewn all over the floor, pencils and notebooks with ripped pages lay on his desk, and the pictures on the wall were lopsided. The one thing that was neat and clean in the entire room was a slightly blurry picture of a mysterious woman with dark hair wearing a reddish-brownish dress. I was distracted by the photo momentarily, and then I focused on the real problem again: my dad was nowhere in sight. I checked everywhere for him - including the backyard and garage - with no luck. Panicking slightly, I looked for any messages he might have left on a piece of paper or on my phone, but there were zilch clues to where he had gone. I waited for five hours, and when he still didn't show up then my neighbors and I called the police.

That's how I ended up sitting at the dining table at 9:30 AM with my concerned neighbors and a bunch of policemen, thinking about that horrible piece of pizza and my great aunt. Quite unfortunately, since I didn't know anything about my mom or where she might be (she left when I was a baby), I had to stay with my great aunt until the police found my dad. I said unfortunately because the first word that came to mind when I thought of her is "nut" (I would say she was a cross between an almond and a walnut - I'm allergic to both those kinds of nuts, and that's why my great aunt and I are like oil and water).

After I packed a bag for a few days at Crazy Great-Aunt's house, I found her waiting for me in the living room. She was wearing a blue flowery dress with a matching coat and handbag. Her dyed brown hair was in perfect little curls, and her perfect little mouth, formed into a saccharine smile, was covered with red lipstick. I could already tell this woman was going to be a nightmare.

"Hello, dear," she said in a high voice with a British accent. "It's been so long since I last saw you. My, my, you've grown so much! And your dog is quite adorable. A corgi, I see."

"Hi," I muttered gruffly. She frowned, clearly upset at my rudeness.

"So, darling, as you've heard, you are going to be staying for a little while at my house while the search for your father continues. Do you have everything you need? Clothes, toiletries, and the like?"

"Yeah," I grunted.

"Alrighty then, let's go!"

Her car was meticulously clean, on the outside and the inside, just as I had expected. The air freshener was so strong I could only breathe through my mouth the whole car ride to her house. But worst of all was the speech she gave about house rules.

"I would like to ask a few things from you while you're staying at this house. First, take off your shoes and place them on the shoe rack before you enter the house. Second, do not let the cats outside, or give them any human food. Third, do not eat food upstairs..."

She continued this way for at least five minutes. I, however, stopped listening after about five seconds. We soon arrived at Crazy Aunt's house, a small, neat, cottage-type house with a perfectly trimmed lawn, pink petunias, and white-rimmed windows.

"Would you like me to carry your bag in for you?" she asked.

"I'm good," I said.

"You know, it's a bit more proper if you say, 'I'm fine, thanks'", she noted.

"Got it," I replied, extremely annoyed.

I lugged my heavy duffel bag inside, and Crazy Aunt shut the door carefully behind me. But what she did next shocked me so bad I jumped five feet off the floor in fright, the first in a series of events that I would remember vividly for the rest of my life.

Crazy Aunt ripped off her brown curly hair to reveal long, dark flowing hair. She took off her flowery dress, and there was a reddish-brownish dress underneath. Then, she did something that would scar me for life: she began to *peel off her face* (I realized it was a mask pretty quickly). Her real face looked very familiar, and, horrifyingly, like *my face*! Crazy Aunt was no Crazy Aunt anymore - she had transformed into a completely different person.

"AAAAAAHHHHHHH!" I screeched. I wasn't one to screech, but when your supposed great-aunt suddenly isn't your great aunt anymore, it's just a tad bit frightening.

"Sorry for the dramatic entrance," the new woman said, shrugging her transformation off as if it was just an everyday occurrence. She had lost the British accent. "It was necessary to keep my identity secret from everyone but you for safety reasons."

"So will you tell me who you really are now? How do I know you're not some creepy kidnapper trying to kill me?" I squeaked, more afraid than ever.

"No, I assure you I am not a creepy kidnapper trying to kill you. Trust me, if I were going to kill you, I would have killed you eons ago." *That's really comforting*, I thought.

"I'm going to tell you who I am, and the information I'm about to give you might anger, excite, scare, or shock you. However, I need you to believe what I say in order to accomplish what we need to accomplish."

"Does this involve my father?" I asked.

"Yes, it does, because I am his wife, and your mother." This sudden, unexpected statement was like a hurricane in the middle of a sunny day. I was showered with a thunderstorm of emotions all at once - shocked and excited that I had finally found my mother, terrified that she was so calm about it, and angry at my dad that he had never told me anything...wait, had he?

My mind was racing, and felt like an endless whirlpool of thoughts and questions. Then suddenly, I was able to form a coherent conclusion from the whole mess.

"Are you the Egyptian goddess of truth, justice, and the cosmic order - Maat?" I asked, horrified.

"Indeed I am; how did you know?"

"Well, Dad's revealed a lot more than he thinks he has. He always makes jokes about marrying goddesses and doormats - I just thought it was some sort of inside joke. And he has a picture of you in his room. And he wanted me to study you for my project about gods and goddesses in fourth grade." With each sentence, I spoke faster and faster.

"Oh, my daughter is quite observant! I see your father really has underestimated you. I'll have to talk to him about those jokes." She beamed for a moment, but then her face took on a more grave expression.

"Listen, we can catch up a little later, but we have some urgent business to take care of now. For now, all you need to know is that the Egyptian gods and goddesses are not myth or legend - we are living, breathing immortals. Your father has been kidnapped by Ra, the sun god - you see, after marrying a mortal (Thoth, the Moon God, was never my true love) I've become sort of an outcast among the Egyptian gods and goddesses. Ra's always been the angriest about my marriage - that's why I had to stay away from you and your father for twelve years - but now he's devised a much crueler punishment. So currently he has your father with plans to torture him somehow, and I need to keep *you* safe from him too. So I'm bringing you along. I know this news is hard on you, and the information about us gods and goddesses is not what you have been taught to believe, but once again I need you to trust me so we can save your father."

I was feeling pretty nauseated by then. I pinched myself so hard I yelped, did a couple of jumping jacks, and looked at the time and date on my watch - all I could think of to do to assure myself everything that had happened was real.

"I think I trust you," I said, or *whimpered* would probably be the better word for it.

"Well, if you don't, you're coming with me anyways, and you'll just have to find your way back on your own. We're off to Egypt."

And I thought going to get a soccer ball in my neighbor's yard was a big deal, I thought, and fainted.