

The Boy and the Peach

By Trevor Hackley

There was the sound of scraping, then with a grunt, a pair of legs made a skipping hop. Up high, high on a mountain cliff, a boy doggedly looked around for his next step up its side. His hands clung tightly to pointed bulges in the two neighboring ledges. He reached up and found another hold in the just under the ledge, and pulled himself up so he was positioned now like someone almost to the top of a fence, and going diagonal to best the fringe or crown. He pulled himself up grunting as he went, and rolled over onto the ledge and breathed heavy for a moment. He stood himself up straight then looking down at himself he brushed off his front. He turned and looked around, squinty. He put his hands akimbo or at his sides and looked up at the far corner of the kip of rock above him.

There is was! The lone, scraggly or bare peach dwarf tree or branch. Hanging from it was the single, legendary white peach which had a streak of red feathered on its face.

He reached up and grabbed it and started twisting it off then in a flash, as he was as about to have it off, plucked a large bird swooped down with its wings flapping madly and clawed at the peach. 'The boy had had it in his hand for a breath before the bird wrested it out. The boy stood there in utter shock. He had lived one of his dreams for a fleet of a moment, but like a breath it was gone just as quickly. He watched as the bird flapped not far from him, crowed over its shoulder at him then kept flying.

Now the boy burned with anger. All in a whim, he suddenly looked down and started descending down the face of the cliff! His foot slid down like a toboggan with almost every step. His heart flew up into his throat, a myriad of butterflies with almost as many steps and it was like the beat of a heart or the rhythm of a heartbeat. He continued down along and he knew he was approaching a part of the rock where it would be impossible to end this. He readied himself to stop and turn so he could descend properly. His foot kept sliding though, not down like it was slipping. He did not dare to keep going. Now his heart raced with dread. What would happen when he reached the bottom?

In a flash of terror flooding him, he reached out blindly for anything he could possibly grab. He wailed out while for a fleeting moment it seemed he would plummet down the river, very far down below, then something brushed against his hand-it was hard- he grabbed instantly and he was tugged out of his fall. He found himself jerked up and swung or swooped to the side. He and the something bounced him up and won. And he hung there, the water rushed along beneath him. He took a look around at where he was at. A branch from out of nowhere had been within reaching distance. He looked it over and frowned at it. He

did not remember it being there. He looked over the wall surrounding it then shrugged. "Who know? He wondered to himself. He looked back to the far right. Something a little different color than the wall caught his attention. IT was green, and long, and wound down the wall. He reached out and suddenly felt the branch he clung to bend down and to the right, curve to the right. He kept reaching he wiggled his fingers and wanted it so much! He tilted his head back and closed his eyes in a grimace, then the branch stopped. He looked back over his shoulder. He pulled on it. It didn't move. He stopped pulling against it, and started winging gently back. The branch moved so easily. HE got an idea, thumped his chin and suddenly swung back the other way, harder. He was pulled, stopped, and just swung back but this time again the branch bent farther. Now he got it! He swung back and forth two more times. Then let go and flew. He reached out, and snatched the vine up, and then something weird happened. He found himself swinging vertically this time. When he dropped with a little sling like motion, he bobbed up again. He knew what to do this time. HE swung his legs up, then swung himself hard the other way then launched himself with space and found himself going up into nothing. The smile faded replaced by a worried frown as he turned and slowly and started falling. He did not have a clue what he would be able to grab onto or land on and just fell hopelessly when all of a sudden a bird swooped under him then went to rise over him and he felt himself dropping then with a mild tug, he felt the emotion of the bird as it fought to stay up in the air. It dropped him and he fell towards tree and watched helplessly as they rushed up at him. A monkey jumped into sight and suddenly grabbed him.

He hung there, dangling in the monkey's grip, by his shoe. With a cry, the monkey turned and pounced off the branch, and started jumping through the tree. All of a sudden another monkey appeared. The boy spotted him, and wanted out of the grip of his current captor, and punched him. With a yelp it flung him away.

The boy flew right at the other. It caught sight of him and just barely grabbed in time. Then it ran along and leapt through other trees. The boy saw they were getting near the edge of the cliff again and his heart quickened for a moment. He saw something and quickly turned and pinched the monkey. And it threw him too! He sailed, and held his feet out under himself as he started falling down.

The boy landed on the something he had seen gliding- an animal, a wombat. He landed with a thump and it barked. For an instant they fell. It flapped its kits harder like a sparrow and then they started whooping toward the opposite cave to the one he had started at. He could see a cave hole nearing them, and leapt.

There had been what looked like pretty magical bugs floating around in front of it. Suddenly they

started popping and reappearing as pretty fairies with young face and they held onto his clothes gently. They looked at his eyes and he could tell they waited to know where he wanted to go. He looked over and bowed his head towards the cave. They smiled, turned and glided over to it. He reached out towards it. Gently they swung him back and forth three times then let him go and he flew, neatly sailing into it. He landed with a grunt, and stumbled, but regained his feet, and looked around. The walls were dark, and water dripping hollowly from the roof. He hesitantly started walking around, looking at the walls, and sweeping the cave floor with his eyes. He wondered what treasure or unusual trinket might be in here. He knew from having come near it on the wombat's back there was something special about it, almost mysterious. He couldn't quite tell what it was yet, though. Curiosity kept him looking around, and it was when he walked further back, when he came upon it. The roof suddenly rose up steeply, like a dwarf section of the chapel in a church. He saw to the left was a dark low tunnel with a short series of steps leading into who knows where. There was the alcove just to the right of that, the walls were shaper here, yet that became all the more inviting. A slight hint of danger, but adventure was what he saw in the low rock overhang here where the rest of the cave was set further back, and was a steeply curving down ceiling to wall, resuming the likeness of a chapel. Carefully he walked under it, and found, up a series of pond round steps, yet another opening, with bright light illuminating it when it came into view. Huh. It suddenly hit him the light had not been glowing down into the cave, but was just a white opening through which he could see the greenery of whatever lay beyond. He wanted to guess it was chirpy, green grass with a few knolls and fun magical creatures to play with, since so far the ones he had come across were just making it more annoying of a venture to get this special fruit. Granted, they were probably after it themselves. He still somehow had the notion, despite the drawbacks thus far, he could still somehow recover it. He climbed his way up the hole into a tunnel.

Back up onto flat land, he walked along, still gloomy he had lost the peach, he kicked at the grass and a rock here and there, and just continued walking around, headed back to his house, hoping his mother at least had a good lunch ready for him to perchance take the bite out of having lost that most precious fruit. By and by he came to the edge of a cliff, which he either had forgotten was there or he had by chance taken another path, which led him on another route to his house, and stopped at the edge, and found himself looking down into a narrow, winding, long marsh land between two cliffs. He frowned, wondering how on earth he would get over, then frowned when he realized, this had not been here before. The last time he had crossed the wet turf back on the way home, large rocks had sat on the ground, and a fog hung in the air every once in a while. In fact mountains had risen up on the far right side, and his home was

overlooking the ocean not a mile away, perched on a curving out lip of rock that probably would never break off, and birds always seemed to hang around it in the afternoon. The sea washed up against the rock, down below and even had begun to cut a cave into one spot. There was a narrow river winding irregularly all along the valley.

He looked out wistfully and let out a dejected sigh, when he spotted a small, black brown bird floating around. His heart leapt, then balked with hesitancy. Could that be the very same bird he had been robbed of his snack earlier this morning from? It flew up, and his eyes glanced around it. He could not be sure, but he had a hunch of hope that the something he saw in the bird nest not far from it, light in color, was possibly...the peach!

He resolved to go after it, and started stepping back from the ledge, then turned and walked a piece. He turned around, and looked steadily at the edge of the cliff. He bolted, and ran. He got to the edge. He felt the dirt rocks and grass under part of the front of his shoe. He pushed off with all his might, and flew. He swung his arms out lest he tumble in the air and fall, to terribly hurt himself at least, on the marsh ground far below. The trees started coming at him. Faster, faster. Then he was flying into them, the closest twig he spotted he snatched his hand out and grabbed it. His fall was abruptly slowed and with a lightning fast jerk in direction, he managed to let go before he started swinging back and risking falling to the ground, so he sailed, and wondered as he started to fall, what was he going to grab next.

His eyes caught sight of something long gnarly and hanging winding, down from another tree. He twisted for what it was worth, he was still flying through nothing. He just managed to grab it. A vine. He dropped, and swung wonderfully, and he could feel its strength and he swung along and then pulled himself away from it. He hurtled through the air again.

He started to fall, but saw something on the ground, that looked a little like a snake. It was more like a gel, green, slimy, mixed with a few dark colors. The boy didn't know why, but he got the idea it might be worth the risk falling to them. He hit the first one. It felt like very firm silly putty, and it stretched under his fast weight. He pushed off from it and leapt to the next. A vine was overhanging that.

The bird was still in sight. He swung off, and caught the branch of another tree. He climbed up, and started looking quickly around in the next two trees. They were both rather bare, which was the case every often amongst the rest of the healthy trees. He at first just saw twigs and sticks, and leaves. He climbed up higher, getting out on a thin branch.

The next tree over was a good several feet away, jumping. His heart picked up, the bird was coming in fast, he jumped. He felt its feathers brush over him as he sailed, and with a painful thud he hit against

the limb. Nevertheless he threw his arms around it and clung to it, shutting his eyes tight, then flashed them open. He looked around and quickly pulled himself around it and scurried down so he could hop to the next branch. Again the bird swooped down over him, as it rushed, he threw his hands over his head and yelped. The branch was still coming at him. His feet touched it and just as he was about to hit it he twisted himself and looped his arms around it, so he slung on it, and tightened his knees again. He got up and kept climbing. There was nothing in this tree either.

There! He saw it, between two twigs in the last, he could just make out the top of the peach. This time the bird called out, and savagely. He looked around and saw a vine hanging off a couple branches below the target. He squinted.

He would have to go for it. He slid back down the tree, and ran up half the length of the branch with the bird coming up behind him, and he slipped off the edge and pushed off the underside. His hand hit the vine, he swung and nearly hit the cliff behind it, and ran along it. He ended up swinging around the tree, and up to the nest. His hand dipped in and got the peach. He swung a second time but now the vine was shorter, and he pushed the other way.

The bird was diving right at him. He somehow miraculously grabbed onto lower and lower twigs and picked up speed. He sped through the few trees this way back to the main marsh area. He swooped out dangerously on the end of one particular twig, and it snapped, so he fell. The ground rushed at him. he hit one of the green winding gel looking pools now, and thought he was done. His foot hit, and... he found it was like a slimy rocket boost! It shot you forward, and with balancing himself, he could jump forward and be parallel to the ground and get even more speed when he swung from the next vine.

The bird was still viciously flying hot on his tail, and dove every chance it had to try and regain the peach. He kept going, swooping along like this; grabbing a vine, flying along, gliding over these gel pools, and throwing himself from the ends of twig branches, when this time, the bird swooped, he had become absent minded of his peach holding hand. He was holding his arm up loosely for balance, and the bird snatched the peach right straight out of his hand! Right back one more time. He was enraged.

Swinging on the vines and sliding and leaping around the brook, he kept chasing it, but finally he neared the valley to the sea. The bird went too far up, then disappeared around the left, out of sight. He decided he would just have to give it up. He sighed, and swung himself up one last time, landing neatly on the edge of the cliff, and started walking the last little bit home.

When he arrived at, he opened the...creaky, door, and stepped inside. That was odd. It did sound way neat, like in a witch's house, but that's not how it sounded last time. "Huh", he said aloud to himself and

shrugged. He wiped his shoes off on the mat, closed the door and made his way to the kitchen, where he hoped there would be something fair out, since she had had to step out for a bit, but should be back within the hour, but had prepared something for him since he had planned on definitely making it home before her. He came into kitchen and his head jerked in surprise. She was here! “Mom?” he called.

She turned saw him. She was busy cutting carrots and throwing them into a pot. “Oh hi honey! Weren’t expecting me were you? I thought I was going need to be in town at noon, but Mrs. Jacobson said she didn’t want to do it till a little while later. Isn’t that great? I get more time with you now!”

There was something certainly strange about the way she said it all, as though indeed trying to sell him on the idea. He wasn’t about to instantly doubt it, but it did seem a little strange.

“So how was your trip?” she asked.

“Oh, I didn’t find it. It was gone before I got there.”

“Oh, don’t worry, there might be more later on.”

“More?” he scowled and turned his ahead in question.

“Well, you know, other things. Oh I don’t know. You’re always finding something interesting to go after. I’m sure you’ll find something else to go after.”

“But I had the thing in my HAND!” He slid his elbows forward. “This wretched bird plucked the darned thing right out of it! Twice!”

“And how did it do that?” She was stunned.

“Well,” he reluctantly continued, his voice softened. “I...tried to steal it BACK” he shrugged, a grin trying to sneak out on his face.

“Well, it wasn’t at all nice for it to take it, but” she shook her cloth holding hand at him, “you shouldn’t be...” she put a hand on her side again, “now how did you get near enough for it, to... how did you GET it back?”

“I went up and found its nest.” He shrugged innocently with raised brows.

“What else was I going to do? Just let it keep it?”

“Well I’d rather have you being safe, and going off to find something else to hunt instead of risking getting pecked!”

“Well, I know, but I still wanted the peach!”

“It wasn’t that special one you’ve been reading about is it?”

He looked at her, glanced away, then a quick thought hit him and he quickly answered, “of course not! But it still looked so good!”

"I get it." She turned back to the pot starting to boil, she was working over. "Well, anyway, Nickie and I were going to go see Mr. Zoola's three headed dragon today, said the ghost of Wingshire hadn't come through to play with him like Mr. Zoola thought he would.

"Huh! Him again!" He rolled his eyes and took a drink from the glass of milk she had set out for him. The table cloth was one of those neat, white and red checkered ones. The whole place looked magical and almost Halloweenish, corn and vegetables hanging around, a meat drying out, even a couple of pies atop the refrigerator.

"Something wrong with leaving that beast alone for one day? It's a dragon! Can't it fly and go find some playmates?"

"Mr. Zoola doesn't want it risking getting lost."

"It's a dragon. Come one! But whatever. It's his pet!" He sighed, then shook his head, and took another drink.

She came over and was putting out a ceramic dish when under her white sleeve he spotted a gold tip of some sort, of color. Hm. He opened his mouth to say something, then quickly looked down and just turned his glass in his hand.

She went back to the stove, and at first he thought he was just seeing shadow on her leg, it looked a deep blue, almost scaly, then it glistened, and slowly went back to a normal skin complexion as she turned, almost in an effort to hide the change.

He "hm"ed low to himself, and squinted one eye.

He asked her, "Hey mom, what would you think if I were to bring you a bee's nest, fresh, full of honey?"

"What?" She spun and clutched a fist to her chest, and took a few steps back and gasped, "you know how much I don't like anything that might have bee's in it!"

"Then what about a snake? There's one right here under the table!" he innocently asked and thumped his fork on the table, then got up and grinned as she scurried to the window, and she hurriedly manages to get it pulled open and scrambled up onto the roof. She starts to look around hurriedly for a blue bird or a mail bag, the first of which would give her good luck, the other she could grab onto and temporarily leave the house.

A neighbor could deal with the wretched creature then she could fix her misbehaving son when she had her wits about her.

She looked back at him, and she got a funny look in her eye, where her eye actually changed shape.

She looked around, half ran two steps, she was about to leap, he snatched up for her wrist. he reached out to her and she started to move towards the window, then she floated out the window and the boy jumped at her and snatched for her wrist.

For some reason that rather stunned her and she popped into a golden poof, into green smoke a bird and the peach he snatched it and slammed the window shut, and the bird squeaked and swooped at the window, but smacked into it, "Not so fast, Gretta."

Gretta was an obnoxious apprentice witch girl that was always trying to cause her friends trouble because she knew she was the only one of her kind here.

"That was a good trick, but I caught you! Ha!" he jerked his head forward. "Now then, still leaning towards her, he took a taunting bite of the peach, and started slowly chewing. When he swallowed, he said "you have a bad habit of not knowing when to hide your shimmer., went over to the table and sat down contentedly and continued eating his peach, and smiled. "My mom did not make it back yet. I saw her strolling in an orchard with a kerchief covering her hair, and the door never sounds creaky when I come in. Nice try though," and he took another bite of his delicious peach.

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