Laugh with the Sinners

Autumn had settled in on the world. The vibrant reds, yellows, and oranges decked the massive Oaks, strong Ashes, supple Birches, Sugar Maples, and Weeping Willows. Against the backdrop of a typical blue sky they could be stunning. At the moment though, the colors were shrouded in the night, although already some early morning light was beginning to shine from over the rolling hills. The first frost of the season was early. It had swept down on the peaceful meadows gilding the long green grass with a shimmering silver mantle. The sleepy little town of Plainville would arise with the sun, as it always did, just in time to catch the last remnants of the frost before it vanished under the watchful eye in the sky. Already, a rooster was crowing. Alarm clocks all over town clicked over and buzzed patiently until their owners silenced them.

The sleepy little town began to awake much as it did every day. The first people moving about were street sweepers. The swoosh of their brooms and the clinking of the garbage that they collected carried in the crisp morning air. To the sounds that could be heard was added a variety of delicious smells. The local bakeries began to light up. Outdoors they maintained their peaceful facades, but behind the shuttered windows cooks ran left and right, adding to this, shaping that. Deliveries were received and the morning bread was put into the fire to bake. Cakes and sweet rolls added their tempting aromas to the wholesome grainy scents of dozens of loaves of bread baking. Back on the streets, traffic started to pick up. Boys on bicycles flew through the business area into the residential streets. These boys deposited on each doorstep the morning paper, hot off the presses. Before they had completed their runs, shops started to open. Sidewalk signs went out displaying that day’s special. In the windows, shopkeepers began to display their products.

That morning, as it did most mornings, the sun’s rays shone on a quaint cottage set on the edge of town. The light crept over the white picket fence, across the gravelled walk, through the rose garden and into the open window of John Brown. When the light hit his face, he sat up. Rubbing sleep out of his eyes as he slid out of bed, he made his way through his impeccably clean room to the waiting embrace of a warm shower. He stood under the streaming water for an extra minute letting the last remnants of sleep wash off him and down the drain. As he stepped out of the shower, he listened to the clanging of pots from the kitchen as his mother busied herself preparing breakfast. John slipped on khaki colored slacks and a white shirt. He was already on his way downstairs by the time he finished buttoning the shirt and slipped on a solid brown tie. As he did every morning, he greeted his mother with a kiss on the cheek, before it vanished under the watchful eye in the sky. The sleepy little town of Plainville would arise with the sun, as it always did, just in time to catch the last remnants of the frost before it vanished under the watchful eye in the sky. Already, a rooster was crowing. Alarm clocks all over town clicked over and buzzed patiently until their owners silenced them.

Several minutes later, he finished his breakfast, tossed aside the paper and swept out the door stopping only to grab his briefcase. As the door swung shut, Mrs. Brown, his mother, pulled the home decorating section out of the paper and sat down to her breakfast. The front page fell facing upwards displaying a bolded headline that read

“TRAVELING MAGICIAN ARRIVES IN TOWN”

The article went on to give a summary of the magician’s career and the times for shows that would be held all through the weekend. John had not noticed the headline. Mrs. Brown did not either.

By the time John arrived at his office however, word of the magician’s arrival was spreading. He greeted Rachel, a petite blonde girl who had recently been hired to operate the switchboard. She was reading the paper and when he entered, she dropped it guiltily. He nodded to her and went to his desk, where he proceeded to bury his head in a stack of important files that needed to be sorted before the weekend.

He couldn’t have avoided the talk if he had wanted to though. By
lunch, everyone in the office knew of the new arrival. Most of them rushed out on their breaks to gossip with servers and short order cooks. John did not. Reluctant to leave his work, he had brought his lunch from home. After retrieving it from the office fridge, he made his way over to an open table. Minutes later he was joined by Rachel.

“So, what do you know of this magician guy?”

John looked up. Startled at Rachel’s sudden appearance he muttered back a vague reply that he didn’t really know anything about the strange visitor. Rachel smiled at him, set down her lunch and started chatting with him. He replied in monosyllables, speaking only when spoken to, until the end of the hour.

Somewhat unsettled by his interactions with Rachel, John threw himself back into his work as soon as the lunch hour ended. When five o’clock arrived, he wrapped up his last project, threw some folders in a briefcase and went to leave the office.

On his way out, he heard someone calling him. “John! Wait up.”

It was Rachel. He turned toward her, paused to let her catch up and mumbled

“Have a nice weekend.”

She smiled at him and he felt himself starting to blush. He shook his head to clear it and made to start off again.

“Wait a sec,” she said reaching for his arm. “I was um wondering if you were doing, I mean, if you were busy tonight. I thought maybe we could –”

“Um, sorry. Plans, with my mom. Lots of work.” John mumbled.

“Oh. I didn’t know. Ok. I’ll see you on Monday then.”

“Yeah. Have a nice weekend,” he repeated.

Extremely flustered, John walked rapidly home, kissed his mother at the door and threw himself down onto the couch.

“John,” his mother said as she brought him some milk and cookies, “I got tickets to see that magician. It’s tonight. At eight. Wear something nice, Johnny. I’m sure there’ll be lots of nice girls there.”

“Ok mom. Eight o’clock? I’ll be ready.”

John walked upstairs and jumped in the shower. He let the water stream over his face for several minutes as the day’s events resurfaced in his mind. Rachel was nice, but he had no way of talking to her. She was out of his league. He resolved to forget about it, turned off the water, dried, and went downstairs. After a sumptuous dinner, he changed into his brown suit and drove with his mother to the performance.

Inside the crowded theater where the newcomer was to perform, the lights were low and the mood tense. No one really knew what to expect. Suddenly there was a bang. Smoke filled the stage curling up and around a central figure. A resonating voice spoke from the center of the smoke cloud.

“I am Marvolo the Magnificent. Prepare to be amazed.”

The smoke cleared and a figure robed in purple stepped into the spotlight. His silver hair was accented by the silver moons, suns, and stars that decorated his robe. In his left hand was a staff that glowed with a mysterious light. The crowd gasped. It would not be the last time. Throughout the performance Marvolo dazzled them with light shows, sleight of hand, and illusions. For his final trick, he tapped his staff three times on the stage floor, said farewell, and exploded into a flock of doves that fluttered out of an open skylight. The crowd went mad. Everyone was on their feet chanting Marvolo’s praises. When the cheering died down and people began to trickle out, John looked down at his program. An advertisement at the bottom invited
all who wished (or dared) to join Marvolo in a grand tent that was set up just outside of town.

Not wanting to worry his mother, John dropped her off, and then, on the pretense of going to a friend’s, made his way to the tent where the party was already in full swing. Inside the tent were all forms of entertainment. Tables were set up all around with cards, dice, and wheels. Most of the games were unfamiliar to John, but he joined right in, just as the rest were doing. They also served a strange beverage inside the tent that burned all the way down and then left John warm through and through. After only a couple of drinks, John began to feel fuzzy, confused and just a little bit unstable on his feet. He noticed that he wasn’t the only one, so he paid it no mind. Then his mind went blank. When he came to, he was home in his bed. He remembered the night before however, and as soon as he was able, he went out to see if the newcomers were still there. The tent was gone however, but where it had been was a swiftly constructed house. Inside were gaming tables and more alcohol. This time, John knew better than to drink limitless quantities of alcohol. He had two drinks, played some cards, and returned home. The next day, he returned to the bar. This time he spent his time talking freely with several men he had never met. They had a grand time, and when it was over, John returned home feeling truly happy for the first time in his life.

The next morning he got up late for the first time in his life. Running his fingers through his hair, he pulled on a slightly wrinkled shirt and reached for his tie. Somehow brown did not seem appropriate today. He dug through his drawers, and then his closet. Finally he located a bright red tie that his mother once had him wear at Christmas. He tied it with a flourish, skipped down the stairs, and grabbing a piece of toast and a kiss, he set off for work. The town was starting slower today. But it was still starting. People walked to work with a smile on their face and a tune on their lips. Most of the tunes whistled were ones learned over the weekend at the bar.

When John arrived at the office, he saw Rachel. Tipping his head to her he strode to his desk. When noon rolled around, he walked up to the receptionist’s desk, looked Rachel in the eye and spoke.

“Excuse me Rachel, I was wondering if you would have lunch with me today?”

By Michael Stowe