

The Giants' Shoulders

There is this saying among us, the descendants of African slaves, sowing, endlessly sowing seed in New World soil. It is very simple, very digestible, very easy to remember. Should any one of us doubt the power of his true self, his entitlement to a great many inheritances, he should slap himself upon the wrist and boldly proclaim: "We stand on the shoulders of giants." If he is too absent-minded to remember this very simple, very digestible, very easy-to-remember saying, he will have to consult the elders, who, in their great wisdom, will tell him the stories of the Director of Micro Management, Incorporated, the Crystal Letter Opener, and Tiny Little, the most wee man of the wee folk—living, learning, thriving on the Giants' shoulders—that he might never again forget.

To the Giants, everything is grand. The sun, the moon, the mountains, the trees, the seas—everything. With their great hands they shook out and laid out the terrain like a large blanket. Their voluptuous fields are sweet with candied yams, pregnant with rolling hills as if Always will, at any moment, deliver more hills. Always is what the Giants call Mother Earth, because she always yields something, whether good crop, bad crop or no crop at all.

One day, Daughter Giant was there in the field picking plump red tomatoes for garnishing tomorrow's dinner. Through the kitchen window of the Giants' deep and wide shack was Mother Giant, sweating, stirring, sweating, stirring over a grand pot of beef stew bubbling on the stovetop. Father and Son Giant emerged from the thick, wooded forest surrounding their bulbous fields with swelling pride, for they had just caught two fine deer for tomorrow's supper. Mother Giant called her three laborers in to eat through the potent stew smells.

They each took their seat at the table and, after singing grace unto Mighty Big One, began violently smacking and grinding and gulping the juicy beef that had fallen clean off of the bones during the cooking; the bones, well they went into the pot, too. They crunched on the bones like they were cracking open hard-shelled walnuts with their bare teeth, for not an ounce of their blessing was to go unclaimed. The Giants were just so grateful that their cows even had bones. They did some talking at the table—"Pass the salt!" "Slide the margarine!" "Save some for me!"—but mostly they just ate out loud and grunted a breathy "Thank ya!" to Mighty Big One at intervals. For Mighty Big One blesses them with bone-having beef.

With Mighty in mind, they continued smacking, smacking, chewing, chewing, biting, crunching, and cracking. As Father lifted his heaping spoon to his dark, plump lips, a few cooked carrots and celery-bits dove fearfully into his grizzly beard. Immediately he went to retrieve the vegetables—remember: nothing was to go unclaimed. But just as he reached into that fearsome swamp, his arm froze. Right there in mid-motion! Next, Father's big white eyes widened in terror, the red veins of them bulged and pulsed like rampant rivers, and he roared out in such an awful cry of agony. The boom of his cry sent beef-breathed shockwaves through the triple-paned glass windows—shattering!—through the rolling

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hills—flattening!—and through the dense forest where the birds shuddered in fear and flew way far off.

“Aw naw! Not again,” said Mother Giant.

“I’ll get them windows fix’t again,” assured Son.

“Well,” said Daughter, “that leaves me to send for Dr. Gargan Twan.”

Now the Giants are used to pain. Due to their size, it is only natural for them to experience frequent ortho- and osteo-aches. But the pain always strikes heaviest and hardest in their shoulders, as if Mighty Big One unloads more-than-they-can-bear burdens on them.

“I’ll ride down to Dr. Twan’s first thing in the mornin’,” continued Daughter.

“The mornin’!” shouted Mother. She looked into her husband’s face wrenched in pain; his arm was still stuck at shoulder level and his hand still cramped in his beard. He was in such pain that he could barely speak, but only grumble and groan.

“Aw jus’ look at ’im! He ain’t gon’ last past night! We gon’ have to ride ’im down to Dr. Twan’s this evenin’. Son! Hitch up Major!” ordered Mother.

In no time, the horse and wagon was hitched, and the Giants were on their way to Dr. Twan’s home clinic up in the city. By the time they arrived, the sun was nearly lying down on its horizon bed, leaving a pink-purple-orange sliver at the bottom of the sky. Son drove Major up to the front door of the clinic, and even before Major had come to his final full trot, Daughter was banging down the doctor’s door. Before long, the good doctor, a rather gigantic man himself, flung open the door.

“Well, good Mighty Big, Giants! Don’t y’all know what time it is?” the doctor asked as he slid on his bifocals and squinted at his pocket watch. After the numbers came into focus, he concluded: “It’s almost nine o’clock at night and ya bangin’ like ya tryin’ to get into the Pearly Gates!”

“Forgive us, Doctor. I don’t know what they doin’ up on his left shoulder, but it’s mighty big and mighty bad this time. We ain’t never heard ’im cry so mighty loud,” Daughter told Dr. Twan. Dr. Twan peered around Daughter to the wagon where Father was lying in Mother’s lap still groaning.

“Aw, not again!” said Dr. Twan.

“Well? Can ya take ’im?” pleaded Daughter.

“Y’all knows more’n anybody else that my clinic close at five o’clock on the dot,” said Dr. Twan as he continued looking into the helpless expressions of the Giants. But the good doctor quickly buckled under the begging eyes and said: “Awright, awright . . . bring ’im on in. I’ll see what I can do.”

In the operating room, Dr. Twan began with his normal series of questions: Have ya been takin’ the medicine I prescribed? When’d it start? What were ya doin’? Any heavy liftin’? When’s las’ time ya felt any pain? On a scale of one to ten, how bad is it? Father grunted the answers as best he could, shook his head to yes/no questions; the questions that required detailed explanation another Giant filled in. But the latter question Father answered by another long, loud groan, for the pain of his current condition had far outweighed that reported during his previous doctor visits.

“We jus’ don’ know what to do, Dr. Twan. He been doin’ like ya tol’ ’im. In fact, we all been doin’ jus’ like ya tol’ us. Aw, can ya he’p ’im, Dr. Twan? Can ya please?” cried

Mother.

“Awright, awright, there, there. Jus’ calm down. I’m gon’ get to the bottom of this. Since he’s lookin’ purty awful and I ain’t quite sure what we workin’ wit’ yet, I’m gon’ have y’all set in the waitin’ room till I finish my ’xamination,” soothed Dr. Twan.

At that, the rest of the Giants did as bid, and the good doctor hastened to his digging. He glided across the operating room to the patient bed in his rolling stool and pulled down the large overhead lamp, hot and bright as the sun in a cloudless sky. Next, he arranged all of his medical gadgets—his scalpel, his tweezers, his stethoscope, his forceps and, most importantly, his magnifying lenses, among a range of other medical instruments. And Father just continued to groan as the pain continued to throb, thump, throb, thump.

“Now ya set still while I take a look-see at the percise cause of all this pain,” instructed Dr. Twan. He fumbled with his gadgets, then flipped through a series of magnifying lenses, and after inspecting Mr. Giant’s shoulder through each, said, “Naw, that jus’ won’t do.”

“Pears the problem is more deeply rooted than I thought!” He laughed nervously.

His bald head began to shine as it sweated. He rarely had to consult his resource manual of medical oddities, and he dared not consult it this time. Instead, he rose, momentarily left the room, and returned with the largest magnifying lens of all. He had never used this lens before—never had reason to! Affixing it to his rotund head strap, Dr. Twan peered again at Father’s shoulder. The doctor dug down with his tools, peering, peering, digging, digging deeper, picking and winding down long twisted hair shafts, carefully separating and gently blowing strands to clear a path. In peering through his lens, the anatomy of Mr. Giant’s shoulder yielded quite an oddity. Dr. Twan was certainly familiar with the small people living on the Giants’ shoulders, but none so microscopic as these. He must have dug way way down, or else Father’s hair had grown much longer, for there on top of his shoulder was the most highly advanced, fastest moving civilization Dr. Twan had seen. “Hm—hmmm—ah-hmmmm,” said Dr. Twan, fiercely scribbling indecipherable notes on a notepad now and then.

The hair shafts transformed into heavily windowed high structures. Scribble. The dark epidermis turned into paved streets, overrun with a cavalcade of churning wheels. Scribble, scratch, scribble. Life things moved so quickly, in fact, that Dr. Twan could see the passing of many days in one look-see. Peering, separating and blowing more, the unbearable and paralyzing throb and thump of Father Giant’s shoulder, Dr. Twan noted, was caused by a teeny tiny troublesome man—Tiny Little. Dr. Twan found him hunched over in a small cell at a county jail. Just outside of it, a large group of wee folk shouted all at once.

“Aha!” the doctor said, “ya got yaself a real issue here!”

“He’s innocent!”

“Free Tiny Little!”

“We want justice!”

“He ain’ never did nothin’ to nobody!”

“President Preston Privy don’ like wee folk!”

The mix of chants and indistinguishable tirades thus erupted from the large, confused heap of wee folk, furiously stamping, but not at all shaking, the streets. Inside the

cold, dark and worn cell was Tiny Little, the littlest inmate of all, who was thinking of how he should plea.

Now on account of his being the most wee wee person, Tiny Little was a troubled man from the very beginning. Even though everyone in his world was small, his exceptional height, or lack thereof, disqualified him from granted life opportunities, to include, but not limited to, educational advancement, social advancement, political advancement, economic advancement, and love-advancement. To be small was fortunate; to be wee was bearable; but to be the most wee, and to be forgetful of the Giants' shoulders, too, well, that was to not exist at all.

Quite naturally, Tiny Little's exclusion from the best, or at least the most common, parts of living made his self-esteem shrink lower than his physical stature. For even at his premature birth, the doctors predicted he wouldn't last past a day. No matter how much he suckled on his mother's tit, or how much she fed him steak and potatoes, or how much she took him to the doctor to be routinely stretched, he just wouldn't grow. Soon his few friends surpassed him in height, and thereafter, in everything else. No matter how high he raised his hand in class, the teacher never noticed him. Consequently, he didn't finish grade school. The girls never noticed him, so he never had a girlfriend, or a wife, or kids. What he did get were the lowest paying, oddest jobs.

After so many years—forty-three for Tiny Little—of mistreatment, the disadvantaged either disengage or plain get fed up and move to action. As for Tiny Little, he got officially fed up and was moved to find and secure a higher-paying job, despite his inability to finish high school and do a lot of other ambitious things. He was going to find a job that would pay him more than his previous ones, so he could attract a taller wee woman, and consequently, bear some wee kids. His life clock was running fast and short.

Scouring the Sunday newspaper, he spotted an open janitorial position at Micro Management, Incorporated, the largest international retailer of mechanical parts, and applied the very next day. The position required little experience, only much time, much attention to detail, and much management. His criminal and credit records were squeaky clean, for he barely had the physical and emotional qualifications to commit a crime against any other being than himself, nor the guts to jeopardize what little money and property he did own by impulsive buys. His résumé was brief, though thorough—listed were many very small, very mindless jobs—cobweb clearing in small houses, hair sweeping at a small salon, letter opening for a small business, and the like. In specifics, his job application was so thorough that upon receiving positive recommendations from one of the HR personnel, the MMI Director completely skipped succeeding employment rules and regulations—unheard of!—called Tiny Little directly and arranged an interview.

"Well, when can you come in?" he asked.

"Oh, anytime, Mr. Director! Anytime!" said Tiny Little.

"How about tomorrow at nine a.m. then?"

"Why tomorrow at nine a.m. is just perfect, Mr. Director! Where should I come?"

"If you go to our East Wing and circle around to the loading and unloading dock, you'll see a big gray and yellow sign that reads 'Janitors' Entrance.' You can read, of course?"

"Why, yes, of course!"