

THAT'S THE WAY LOVE GOES

CAMEO

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The sun is beginning to set now. As it slowly slides off its celestial perch, it casts a soft golden hue over a single set of railroad tracks that run through a tiny farming community. There are tall weeds on both sides of the tracks and he has to look down as he walks so as not to accidentally step on a snake.

He's walking now just passing time until he hears that powerful soft sweet rumble approaching from the distance. He's been walking along side the steel highway for a little over two hours now, walking, stepping, pushing his way through and waiting for the moment when he will jump on board that big black steam-driven chariot that will take him away from this place.

He had always been intrigued with the larger-than-life legend of the hobo. When he was younger, during summer thunderstorms, his grandmother would tell him stories about the almost mythical nomads as he sat at her feet wide-eyed and mesmerized.

As he steps over an old rotten log hidden deep within the recesses of the weeds, he realizes how much he misses her stories. Now, here he is just four days after his twelfth birthday, mere moments from hopping a freight train bound for the great unknown. He supposes that he isn't really going to become a real hobo just a stowaway for a few days until he reaches his destination, Crystal City, USA. Who knows, he may even make it all the way to Candleshore Beach, California, someday.

Two more hours pass.

The sun has long since set, now, and the sky is a dark grayish black as a young boy continues to push his way through thick foliage beside a set of seemingly abandoned railroad tracks.

Swush, swush, swush. The weeds, shoulder high now, brush against his face and he begins to itch. "The train," he says to himself as he moves through the darkness, "I've got to keep my mind on the train."

As he moves through the night, his thoughts return to his grandmother. He knows, even now as he strains his ears listening for any sign of the train, it is because of her and her alone that he has enough courage to leave home, to leave virtually all that he knows and everyone he loves so that he can make a good life for himself.

His grandmother had always favored him above his siblings. He has five brothers and sisters of whom he is the fourth youngest. He has good parents who treat his brothers and sisters and him equally in all things.

His grandmother, on the other hand, had always considered him special and unique. He had never taken her seriously when she would say things like, "Don't be sad, Sweetie, it's gonna be OK. Try to remember that you are different than the rest. You are a very unique and wonderful boy and many unique and wonderful things are waiting for you in your future."

It wasn't that his parents mistreated him or anything like that, nevertheless, they had never understood why he would rather read books and write stories than following in the footsteps of his older brothers by learning how to run the family farm with his father.

His grandmother, ah yes, she understood him like no other.

Cameo of a small child's body forcing its way through thick brush beside a set of cold and lonely railroad tracks. Both the boy and the tracks are cloaked in the blackness of the humid midwestern night. On the child's face tears begin to roll as he ponders the past.

He remembers how his grandmother had smiled with warm approval each time he ran up to her carrying a new book he'd just received in the mail. While she herself could not read, she thoroughly enjoyed having others bring the written word to her by reading aloud. So, every evening for the past two years, after supper was finished and his daily chores completed, he would sit on her bed, American Indian style, and read to her as she lay beside him, listening intently.

Five hours now, five hours and still no sign of the train, no sign at all. He is starting to get worried now. He begins to question his decision to leave home in this way. What if the train doesn't come by, tonight, he wonders to himself as he peers, desperately, down the length of the tracks? What if it begins to rain out here or worse, hail? It often does at this time of year. It suddenly occurs to him how quickly the weather can change from good to bad. If the weather turns ugly he will find himself either being drenched in relentless sheets of falling water or being pummeled by fist-sized balls of falling ice. At this thought, he stops walking, touched by fear itself. He continues to stare down the length of the sleeping metal roadway and continues to see nothing, nothing whatsoever.

In the virtual silence of the night, he stands, motionless in the moment, too scared to go forward and too afraid to go back.

With uncertainty coursing along the emotional railroad tracks of his soul, he begins walking again, slower now so as to conserve energy. He begins searching now, searching for some kind, any kind of emotional anchor to grab onto so as not to sink even further into the ever strengthening quicksand of his doubt. He reaches into the front left pocket of his worn and tattered trousers and takes out his most valuable possession, his late grandfather's one and only pocket watch. His grandmother had secretly given it to him for his eleventh birthday.

Cameo of a young boy walking in the darkness of a warm midwestern night while holding a rather ancient looking timepiece that is almost too large for his preadolescent hand. He remembers his grandmother's words as she placed the last remaining possession of her late husband into her grandson's hand.

"Your granddaddy received this watch from his father, your great granddaddy, on his eleventh birthday, just like you. Your great granddaddy gave it to him the day before he left for the war. He told your grandfather that he purchased this watch on the eleventh day of the eleventh month of the eleventh year of the century. Your grandfather told me that he never saw his father again after that day, his eleventh birthday."

Cameo of a young boy placing a round object into his front left pant pocket as he walks in the night, an air of confidence slowly returning to his step.

One night, after reading a couple of pages from the Bible to her, she had said to him, "You know that I love you, don't you?" This question had made him feel uncomfortable. After all, he was eleven years old and, well, eleven-year-old guys just don't think about stuff like that.

After thinking about her question for a few seconds he'd replied, "Yes, I know you do, Gran." At that, she smiled, touched his little hand and said, "I believe in you and I know that you can go places with that mind of yours. It won't be easy for you. I'm afraid we haven't given you all the things a rich family could have given you. No matter, you have what it takes and you will make it out there."

At the time, he hadn't been sure of just what she was trying to tell him but now, oh yes, now he understood. He had asked, "Gran, I want to be a writer. Is that ridiculous?"

"No it's not, Baby," she had replied. "It's not at all. I know you'd be the best writer in the entire world. Remember, you can do anything you want if you want it badly enough. There will be many people in your life who will not believe in you. They will tell you to be happy with what you already have. But don't you

believe them. You keep going, keep crawling, keep walking, keep running, pushing, keep learning and then challenging, keep stepping, keep climbing, and keep reaching until you touch the very stars, themselves."

To that he had replied, "Gran, no one can touch the stars." Her response to his statement had since become the source for many of his daydreams and night dreams. Positioning herself so that her right cheek was pressed against his right cheek so that their right eyes were mere inches from each other, she'd whispered in an unusually commanding voice that somehow still managed to be laced with love, "Find a way Boy. Do you hear me? You find a way to touch those stars and find a way to put one of them into your back pocket." With that, she'd sat back in her old rocking chair and the moment passed into history forever gone and forever burned into his soul.

But that moment, that perfect moment had come and gone a little over two months ago and his grandmother is dead now.

Five and a half hours now. He's been walking for five and a half hours and still no sign of the train. No train. It's so, so black and quiet out here. He looks up into the midnight sky and sees that the moon and her cousins have decided to stay in, tonight. The reality of what he is doing or, rather, trying to do plunges into his heart.

The wind picks up a bit and the temperature seems to be falling. He's cold and very hungry, now. Tears of sadness fill his tired eyes as he makes his way through the night.

"Take this to the table, boy," his mother commands, handing him a big bowl of green beans. It's suppertime and everyone, except his grandmother, is seated at the big wooden kitchen table. He takes the steaming bowl of beans from her and carries it over to the table. As he approaches, his youngest sister asks him, "Isn't that true?" Using both of her small plump hands, she brings a glass, which at one time during its existence had been a jelly jar, of milk up to her mouth and drinks.

"Isn't what true?" he replies.

"That you only read those stupid books to Gran and now that she's dead you're gonna throw them all away? That's what Daddy says," she answers, lowering her transparent goblet and carefully setting it back down on the table, just as she's been taught to do.

At hearing this, panic grips him as the meaning of her ever so innocently uttered words slam shut any door of hope his grandmother has worked so hard to open.

From across the kitchen his mother confirms, "Of course he's gonna throw them away. There are more important things around here that need doing than reading silly books." Approaching the table, herself, she finishes, "We only bought them books for him so's he could entertain Gran. Now she's gone and those days are over for him. Now he's going to grow up the way the Lord intended him to, by working the land with his hands." The boy's father nods in agreement.

It had been then and there that he finally realized, even in the warmth and safety of his own family, he was a stranger in a strange land and that if he ever hoped to touch those stars for himself and for his grandmother, he would have to run away from home.

Now he's on the road, alone and on his own.

He pulls the bottom of his shirt up and wipes his eyes as he walks beside the railroad tracks. The weeds have given way to low brush now. This allows him to doze as he moves through the darkness.

Finally, reluctantly, after walking seven and a half hours he stops walking and crumples to the ground. Sleep, all he wants now is to sleep.

His head begins to fall forward, eyes closing when he hears something in the distance. The sound is so faint at first that his slumbering mind almost dismisses it as nothing more than the wind. Then he remembers and forces his eyes open and raises his head to listen.

"It's here! It's here!" he exclaims into the night. The sound of the steam engine cuts through the silence of the night, awakening it and what had mere moments before been a proverbial gloomy valley of defeat is now a glorious mountain of victory.

He jumps to his feet and as he does, his heart somersaults into his throat. "It's really here," he says to himself.

He's on his way, at last, at last he's on his way. As the boy listens to the roaring engine, a new kind of fear touches him. Unlike his original fear, however, this one is a good fear. It's an expected fear.

There! He can see the bright yellow glow of the headlight coming out of the darkness. He thinks it's the most beautiful thing he's ever seen. As the corona of the glorious blinding light grows larger and larger, the sound of the engine becomes louder and louder. He looks down at his legs and marvels at the sight of his trousers being bathed in that wonderful light.

Closer, closer, and closer still. Please come closer, just a little closer. The young man-child experiences an almost uncontrollable urge to start jumping up and down and shouting at the top of his lungs.

Less than half a mile away, now.

WUUUUUUUUHHH--- wuuuu--- wuuuuh!

The whistle blows and the air around him is electrified with power and wonder and awe. The train is here. He grabs his dirty, brown satchel and steps up to the tracks.

WUUUUUUWUUWUUUUWUUU-- WUUUUU-UU!

He jumps.

Cameo of a young boy leaping on to a roaring black mass of moving, vibrating steel wrapped in hot powerful swirling steam. The boy's eyes are wide with excitement. He is dressed in simple farm clothes but there is nothing simple about the expression on his face. His expression is one of deep and unyielding determination.

As his one hundred and twenty pound body lands on board the speeding ebony colossus, he remembers his grandmother and knows that this is all happening because of her. He will never doubt her words or himself again.

As he sits on the cold metal floor of the second to last car of the train, he closes his eyes and whispers out loud, "I'm going to touch those stars for you, Gran. I promise."

He doesn't know what tomorrow will bring but it doesn't matter. All things are possible, now. Eyes closed, he hears his grandmother's words:

"Son, all any of us really need is love.

"Love is its own beginning and its own ending.

"Love is its own prize and its own consolation.

"Love is unreasonable and melodramatic. In fact, love demands the dramatic.

"None of us can possess love, in fact, we are quite powerless against it. Love, however, can quite easily possess us and by so doing give us the power to move mountains if we so choose.

"Love is never the answer but always the question.

"We cannot destroy love. It, however, can effortlessly destroy us.

"Love is always a two-way path that can lead us to either the glorious nirvana of Heaven or to the fiery pit of Hell.

"Love makes all things possible, because, when it's all said and done, Baby, That's The Way Love Goes."

THE END