



MEMORY BOOK

A short story

VANNA SMYTHE

MEMORY BOOK

Brynd squinted from the blinding light of the sun reflecting in the puddles left by last night's storm. The main thoroughfare of the town was packed with people; all and more seemed to have come to make their purchases on this first spring day.

It suited Brynd perfectly.

He'd already chosen his target. A rich-looking man--his heavy cloak adding at least 2 two stone to his already formidable girth--haggling with the crone who sold the porcelain dolls. Brynd couldn't imagine what girl would want a doll that could break so easily. But girls were all dumb.

The man's velvet coin pouch hung off his wide belt, attached by a thin string. One slash would free it, and likely the man wouldn't even notice the lightening of his load.

Brynd tucked his curly brown hair under his hood, then tied his kerchief over his mouth and nose, so only his eyes showed. When Brynd looked back at his target, an old blind beggar seemed to stare directly at him. A thin cloth veiled the beggar's eyes, yet still Brynd felt the man's gaze pierce him.

No matter. The man can't see.

Brynd edged closer to the rich man, squeezing between two younger men who stood a step behind him. The man's face was crimson, and he was flapping his arms around wildly, explaining something to the crone.

Brynd took out his small knife and pretended to stumble beside the man. He fell to the ground under the man's thick cloak, slicing through the cord that fastened the coin pouch to his belt, as he did so.

He failed to catch the falling coin purse.

It clanked loudly as it hit the cobblestones.

Brynd scrambled to pick it up, but not before the old man turned. "A thief! Get him!"

Brynd found his feet as only a lithe boy of eight years old can, and ran. A glance back showed him the two young men give giving chase. Their long legs would make it a short one. He'd be lucky to keep all his fingers if they caught him.

"Stop, thief! You can't escape us!" One one of them yelled, and Brynd imagined he felt the man's warm breath against his neck.

The blind beggar stood in his path. Brynd couldn't avoid jostling him. The blind man stumbled and collided with the first of Brynd's pursuers. The other one couldn't stop in time, and tumbled to the ground too.

Saved!

Deep in the forest and certain no one had pursued him, Brynd untied the pouch to check how well he had done. More gold than silver coins spilled from the pouch.

This would have been ample to buy the biggest blown glass vase that Mam so liked. If only Brynd had not botched the stealing so, he could be carrying the gift home to his mother now.

At least he could pick some flowers for her on the way home. Mam'd like that. Maybe she'd even stay in this night.

The sun was well over the midpoint in the sky before he reached the small wooden hut that was his home.

"Where have you been?" His mother's sharp voice greeted him from the shadows that hid her bed.

She is cross.

Brynd untangled the pouch from his pocket and set it clanking on the simple wooden table where they shared their meals. "A small trouble getting this..."

His mother approached slowly, still wrapped in the blanket, her black hair greasy with sweat.

She hefted the pouch and whistled appreciatively when she opened it to see all the gold.

Brynd held out the flowers to her. "I had meant to buy you a vase for these, the violet one of blown glass you liked so much, when last we were in town."

She didn't reach for the flowers, just looked at him with her mouth open.

Then she snorted. "Good. Why would you spend coin on a thing like that?"

She spilled the coins on the table to count them, ignoring the flowers.

"You said you liked it..."

"No, son, you were gift enough for me." She didn't mean a true gift, Brynd was sure. She meant he was a gift she didn't want. Often she said so, but not always.

Sometimes she smiled, tussled his hair, and hugged him. She did on that day, when she admired the vase. But that was ages ago.

Today her hands shook and there was no kindness in her muddy green eyes.

She dumped her blanket across the table and put the coins back into the pouch. At the door she slung her violet cloak across her shoulders. "Don't wait up."

Brynd started after her. "You mustn't go out with all that money."

"You will not tell me what to do, boy. Never will you tell me what to do!"

She turned and slapped him, then left and slammed the door behind her.

Brynd's cheek burned. He clutched the flowers still.

She'd been worried about him, he was gone so long. That's what made her cross.

He filled a mug from the bucket of water by the hearth, placed the flowers in and set them beside her bed. She liked the flowers, she was just too cross to tell him so right then.

The Disciple watched Brynd's mother sway along the thoroughfare. He approached her and grabbed her arm.

His particular talent as a Disciple lay in awakening compassion and love in the hearts of men and women, but the magic worked much better if the people he touched had an innate store of it. This woman did.

He pulled off the cloth covering his eyes and looked at her. She sighed and her eyes widened, as she met his turquoise-colored eyes and the full force of his magic hit her heart.

"Your son was born with the magic of the Disciples. Soon I will take him from you, make him forget all so that we may train him. Create for him a memory book. Do so with love, care, and warmth." The Disciple fortified his words with images set directly into her mind explaining the process.

"How?" She asked, tears welling in her eyes. "I have forgotten my love for him."

"Find a way, do not let drink steal it. Make the most of the time you have left with him. I will come for him at dawn tomorrow."

The Disciple released her, unwilling to overwhelm her with his magic.

A mean glint appeared in her eyes almost immediately. "Old man, get out of my way."

"After I take him, he will remember nothing. A memory book is all that will help him remember once his training is complete. If you do not make it for him, he will never again know you."

"As if I believe that you are a Disciple, or that Brynd is special enough to become one!"

Her laugh echoed shrilly across the street as she walked away.

Smelly old man, what was he even talking about?

Brianna entered the tavern where the ale was cheap and the company made up of folk she knew well. How they'd all laugh when she told them of a Disciple wanting to take Brynd away. Disciples could stop time, turn iron into gold, heal with the touch of their hands, and speak to wild beasts. They were always taken for training while still children. The smith's daughter was collected for training when she was only seven years old. Now a woman of twenty, she was a Disciple and sometimes visited her family.

Would Brynd visit me?

Nonsense. The man was likely just another lying old beggar.

Besides, Brianna didn't know how to make a memory book.

Yet there was knowledge in her mind of a leather-bound book filled with drawings, souvenirs and trinkets, scraps and locks of hair. In her mind, she and Brynd were filling it.

The main room of the tavern smelled of spilled ale, vomit and unwashed men. Despite the early hour, more than half of the tables were occupied. The baker waved her over to join him, but Brianna didn't want company.

She sat down at an empty table, and the serving boy brought her a large mug of ale without being asked to.

The papery sold leather-bound books. Brianna had enough coin to get a good one, with brass buckles and paper stitched in well, so it wouldn't unravel. She still had a box of souvenirs of happier times at home. From before she began to drink daily, and coin always ran short.

She stood and ran from the tavern.

If I hurry I can still catch the paper maker before he closes his shop.

Rain began to fall as she walked to her shabby home, clearing her head. Brianna clutched the book to her chest, covered well by her cloak.

Brynd sat at the table, carving a spoon from a block of wood, working a bear into the handle.

"You are so good at that," Brianna said as she tussled his hair. The warmth and love in his bright brown eyes seared her chest. *Will the Disciples make his eyes turn turquoise as they trained him? Surely it would be so, just as the old legends claimed. Where will his magical talent lie?*

"Come, put the carving away now. We must do something." Brianna set the book on the table and went to collect the box of souvenirs she kept in a cupboard by the far wall.

Dust and dirt had formed a thick paste over the box.

She brought it to the table and wiped off the filth.

"What is this, Mam?"

"A box full of memories, enough to fill a book... I hope."

A lock of his hair, taken while Brynd was still in swaddling clothes, a locket he'd carved for her not so long ago, bearing a single flower. Pages filled with her own clumsy writing, detailing Brynd's first step, his first word. It was "Mam," she remembered now. Hot tears streamed down her face.

"Put it away, Mam, if it makes you cry," Brynd urged, an edge of fear in his voice.

She cupped his cheeks in her hands. "Fear not. I will never be cross with you again."

Sobs threaten to overcome her, but she stifled them.

Creating a memory book should have no sadness to it, only joy and love. How she knew this, Brianna couldn't say, but knew know it she did.

"Bring water and flour. We must make glue." She rose to get the quill and ink. Some water would reawaken the dried powder and make enough ink to write with.

On the first page she wrote, "Brynd's Memory Book" in bold and shaky letters, hoping she got them all right. She hadn't set anything down in writing for a long time.

She stroked the lock of Brynd's baby hair, then told him to put a blob of glue down so she could set it into the book. He looked at her questioningly, but obeyed.

His tiny head cover went below it. Under it, she wrote of the day of his birth. It was late spring, the flowers all in bloom. She had picked one, and dried it to remind her. Tears choked her as she set it into the book now.

"What did you write, Mam?"

"Of your birth and all the happiness I felt when first I held you."

She wrote of his first steps then, his first words.

"Do you remember how I would call 'bread' 'dough' for so long?" Brynd asked, smiling.

"I do."

Brynd took one of his drawings from the box. It was of their old cat.

"I wonder what became of him," Brynd said.

"He left, as is the way with cats," Brianna assured him.

She glued in the drawing. "Here, you will remember him always now."

One of his carvings went in next.

"I cut my finger when I was making this," Brynd said, memory of pain marring his eyes.

"You cleaned the blood and wrapped it up in a flowery paste, and it didn't hurt so bad afterwards.

"You remember that, do you?"

The first letters he set down went into the book next. She had never thought taught him all of them. The Disciples would, she was sure.

Coins were hard to get. Brianna had no man, no trade. She'd been was just a girl when she got pregnant, shunned by her family for the shame. Left alone. Brynd was a ray of sunshine, but soon the thunderclouds had set in.

Brianna had been forced to steal, and she made Brynd steal for her now.

She had done so much wrong. How could this little book of what she did right outweigh that? How could she have forgotten her love for him when it threatened to take away her air now?

Soon, too soon, all the souvenirs of good times were fastened into the book.

She dipped the quill into the ink and wrote of her love for him. Brynd would remember all again, once. The man he would become might not look so forgivingly on her transgressions

against him, his unconditional love and trust.

She sought his forgiveness with those words, tears marring them in places.

Grey Gray light began appearing on the horizon as she made the final token for him--a collage made of the flowers he had picked for her.

"Don't destroy them!" Brynd cried.

"I'm not destroying, I am creating that which will last," Brianna assured him with a smile. Then she wrote how she would always cherish the last flowers he picked for her. She kept one whole, to dry and keep.

The Disciple stood in the doorway, the sun rising behind him. "It is time."

Brianna clutched Brynd to her chest. "No, not yet!"

The man shook his head. "You know it must be so. Your son must be trained as a Disciple."

She hugged Brynd tighter, and then covered his face and head with a thousand kisses. "I love you, my sunshine boy. I have forgotten, but will never forget again. Go now with this man. When you return, I hope you love me still."

She led him to the man.

Brynd squeezed her hand. "I don't want to go!"

She pried his hand open gently and set it into the old man's.

All recognition was gone from her son's eyes when he looked back at her.

"Did you make the memory book?" the Disciple asked. She ran to the table to fetch it.

"Do not expect him back soon," the old man said, then turned to the boy. "Are you ready to leave?"

"Yes, I wish to go home to the mountains," Brynd responded.

So quickly he forgets.

Tears ran unchecked down Brianna's cheeks as she watched them walk across the meadow and disappear in the trees.

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