

# Dreams of a Beautiful Future

*by* Woodshop Handman

I wake up to the smoky smell of bacon and eggs frying. After changing into some day clothes and donning my boots, I head down the stairs to see two beautiful girls in the kitchen by the stove.

They are both adorned in simple, but elegant linen dresses, one red and the other green. Each of them has a white cotton blouse under their dress, with elbow-length sleeves that transition into the fair skin on their slender arms. Both are wearing aprons as well. The smaller of the girls has a wrought iron spatula grasped in her hand and is tending to the sizzling contents of some cast iron frying pans set atop the wood-fire cook stove. The other works to braid the hair of her sister while making sure that her young apprentice works swiftly and safely, giving advice every so often.

My presence does not go unnoticed. "Good morning, dad!" they each say with smiles on their faces. The younger of the two explains to me that her older sister is giving her cooking lessons, and that they had to get an early start because of their plans for today.

Our town is holding the annual Summer Solstice festival today. There's bunting strung between buildings, flowers decorating every windowsill, and a few of the kids are going to be putting on a live concert, though I'm sure the adults will be happy to bring instruments of their own, too. There will be food and drink and dancing and all sorts of games. I am to go meet up with my some of the other men from town to put the final touches on the stage in the town square and anything else that still needs carpentry or handiwork done for the festival.

I am presented with a plate of food, which I graciously accept, making sure to ceremoniously bow with a dramatic flourish of my right arm as I thank the young chef. The bacon is a bit too burnt and the eggs very slightly undercooked, but for my

youngest daughter's first time cooking mostly on her own, I can't bring myself to fault it.

The sound of footsteps can be heard from the stairs and I turn to see my youngest child coming down for breakfast, still in his pajamas. He's only eight years of age, but he's become such a bright and gentle young man.

He hops up from the checkered tile floor onto a kitchen chair and scoots himself in. He doesn't get quite as much food as me, since he's quite a bit smaller in stature, but he is eager and thankful to his big sisters all the same.

I offer to help my girls clean up but they refuse any assistance I could give. "Don't forget you have to help out in town today, dad," the elder sister reminds me. They tell me to check on the ladies in the garden and the boys in the workshop before I go. I tussle the hair of my youngest son and daughter as I take my leave. Only my daughter complains.

Stepping outside, I see that my wife and the eldest of my three daughters are tending the flower garden together. My wife is watering the plants with a copper watering can and my daughter is carefully taking string from the pocket in her green apron and tying stems to sticks to keep the flowers growing upright.

Rows upon rows of vividly pigmented flowers cascade together in a torrent of petals that tremble in the warm breeze. The rainbow in the mist of the watering pail is the only thing that can compare to the sheer spectrum of color they show. Bumble bees buzz around trying to dodge the streams of water as they gather up all the pollen to take back to the wooden hive sitting on its podium adjacent to the garden.

Finally noticing me standing there taking it all in, my wife comes over and gives me a kiss, asking what I'm up to. I tell her that I'm just in awe of the beauty surrounding me, both in my girls and their garden. My wife calls me a dork.

"After you check up on the boys, you need to get going, dear," my wife says to me. After assuring her that there's plenty of time to finish preparing the town, I start walking towards the work-

shop. "I'm not sure what they're working on, but they're being awful secretive about it," she chimes.

"It's a surprise, or so I've been told," I say, turning my head and talking over my shoulder while I continue down the path.

I open up the Dutch door that leads into the side of my workshop and see one of my boys sitting on a workbench watching the other carefully carving out small dishes on a piece of wood. I can hear the cut of the curved knife as it digs into the round piece of maple. The aroma of the shop rushes into my nose, particularly the smell of freshly cut walnut, which always lingers in the room and can't sufficiently be described in simple language to those that haven't had the chance to experience it themselves, because there's no other smell quite like it. The racks of fine lumber stacked high arrest the eye just the same as the stone fireplace in the rear of the building, gone cold from a few days with want of use.

The older boy waves and gestures for me to come over, and I lean against the workbench and observe the work being done by his younger brother. "He's been working on this for a few days, pops," he tells me.

"Aaaand done!" says the younger sibling, handing me his project. "It's a fife!" he says, "I found diagrams of them in some of the books in the library. Now I can play it at the festival!"

I turn the instrument over in my hands and run my fingers over the grain. It's a very plain design, to be sure, and still somewhat rough, but it's not bad work at all for someone that's just started their apprenticeship. It's been quite a long time since I last played any instruments, and I'm sure some fine tuning will be needed anyway, so I'll let him be the first to play it.

"Nick, you don't even know how to play it yet, though," his older brother chimes in.

"I can just get someone in town to show me how to. I'm sure there's someone that knows."

"Oh, you mean like that pennywhistle girl at the bakery that's been plucking at your heartstrings? You could just ask her to dance at the festival or something, you know."

Hearing this, Nick's face turns bright red and he gets very defensive and flustered. "It's not like that! I just like the music she plays and I wanted to give it a try too!" he stammers out.

After quite a lot more teasing and banter between the two brothers, I remind them to be safe when they're working in the shop alone. I tell the younger brother, "Good luck with the baker's girl," as I make my escape, closing the door behind me before he has time to respond.

Standing just outside the workshop, I take a deep breath in, stretch, and gaze at the sky. Today, it's a brilliant deep blue backdrop adorned by a few perfectly-shaped clouds. The temperature is ideal, too: A bit warmer than I'd like, but not enough to make you start sweating unless you're doing some good, hard physical labor like I'm about to. We couldn't have asked for a better day to hold a festival.

I turn to look at in the direction of the sun. It's roughly mid-morning, which means that I need to get a move-on downtown to help out finishing up the preparations. I begin my trek down the old road to the town square.

Maybe this will sound a bit prideful because I helped build most of it, but I'm always taken aback by our little town, especially during festivals. We were blessed to have good clay deposits nearby and quality lime in the area, so most of the buildings in and around town have dark, charred brick foundations and half-timbered skeletons, exposing the wood frame in contrast against the off-white plastered walls and red-orange tile rooftops. Archways lead off the two main roads through town into narrow, winding passageways between, under, and occasionally above buildings; there is no set grid to be found here. Ornate signs, often made by yours truly, hang outside the entrances to shops throughout the little village advertising the workplaces of tailors, builders, a bakery, and more. Brow-top doors on the facade of each building welcome anyone willing to enter.

When the town was first being built, we decided to design the town in such a way as to not impede on nature. Because of that, most of the town's floor is carpeted in low-growing grasses with

trampled dirt paths, with occasional bricked walkways and a few channels for water drainage. Ivy and scales the sides of buildings and brilliant purple Wisteria vines seems to swallow others up. Trees grow all throughout town, providing shade and shelter from rain, while copper lightning rods atop towers protect the trees in turn. The denser growth in some parts of town gives them a sort of darkness that feels more comforting and cozy than eerie thanks to the pure light that beams through the canopy on bright days. Flowering bushes and other plants of different shapes and sizes trying to show off the last few traces of Spring beauty they can adorn the streets and many of the window sills throughout the village have planter boxes full of flowers with myriads of colors, though I still say they pale in comparison to my wife's garden, of course.

Honeybee hives, both natural and man-made are speckles in various places around town and rudimentary spigots are attached to the trunks of the sugar maples for sap collection, both providing the town with its sugar supply. Fruit trees and berry bushes around town offer more than enough treats for those willing to grab them.

If you look up, squirrels can be seen scampering and performing acrobatic feats across buildings and trees. Mother ducks lead their little ducklings around the waterways through town. All sorts of butterflies flap their wings and float about. At night, the butterflies are replaced by fireflies that swarm around town, making it feel like something out of a fantasy novel. Birds of different songs and colors dash around and tweet out their calls. Rabbits and even the rare deer help manage the growth of the taller grasses in town.

I hop over the beginnings of the town's wall border construction, being built less to keep things out, but to ensure that we stay *in* and don't try to grow too far out. The foundations for the wall are still a short ways out from the closest buildings, so there's still room for some new construction. Outside that wall are all of the farms that grow and raise food and supplies for the town, from flax and wool to vegetables and grain to beef and

milk. This region is encapsulated by its own border to prevent over-expansion, though it's a series of crude fences and trenches serving as markers rather than a proper wall. That area is also where my family's house is, since the lumber mill needed to be built next to the river that runs past the village.

Heading towards the nearest group of buildings, I step through the entrance into a small courtyard in between them, unusually devoid of everyone but myself. Everyone must either be still asleep or busy preparing for the festival. I walk under the balconies on the opposite end of the clearing and head into a small tunnel and up a section of stairs leading to a covered bridge arching over the main street and water channel for the town.

Upland from the village, there's a grove full of natural springs. I'm not sure on all the technical details, but I was told something about wells or aquifers in and around the mountain had something to do with it. Whatever the case, we've made use of the water, constructing a large main channel through the middle of the town's main roads that branches off into smaller supply channels into businesses and homes when it enters town and meets up with them again at its exit, where it flows down to the river. Periodically, you can hear the creaking of wooden water-wheel as they turn to power pumps or simple machines.

From my spot on the bridge, I look upstream and see all the preparations that have already been laid out and others that are currently in progress. There are sun-themed banners and decorations hanging all across the main road, from both buildings and trees. Small market stalls are placed up and down the avenue and I can even make out the stage I'm to help finish building at the town square.

Continuing across the bridge, I head down some stairs and hang a right down a short alley and on to the main street. Walking up towards the town square, I exchange greetings and small talk with many of the townspeople working to set up stands and stalls and games, being careful not to procrastinate too much as I make my way towards my task.

Finally, I reach the main square. It's more of a hexagon than

a square, but language is all arbitrary anyway, so we just call it a square. At the center of the square, the very center of town, there's a small artificial island with a massive, old oak tree growing at the middle of it all. The waterway through town splits around it, covered at either side by small bridges joining the island to either half of town, almost making the whole thing resemble a compass rose, normally. Right now, though, temporary raised platforms have been built and set into the stone rebates on either side of the channel, allowing festival-goers to walk over the waterway without being bottlenecked at the bridges.

On the side of the waterway where I stand, there are piles of deal lumber with joints pre-cut and ready for assembly stacked while a crew nearby is hard at work putting together the stage. There's a tall, young man with scruffy blonde hair, age 17, leading the crew and guiding the project. I'll also be under his watch while I work today. I walk over and call out to him.

"Hey, George! I was hoping you'd be done with this already so I wouldn't have to work today!" I laugh.

"Ha! No, you're not getting out of work that easily, old man," he smirks in response.

Yeah, that's exactly how I'd expect to be accosted by my eldest son. This is George, one of the leaders of the next generation of this town.

George studied for several years under the town's old head architect, Leo, and has taken over any sort of overseer position having to do with construction projects since Leo's passing last year. He's done excellent work so far and has dedicated himself to carrying on the legacy of his teacher. I'm quite proud.

"What do you need me to do?" I ask, before being shown the perhaps overly-detailed schematics and told what I needed to work on. I join the crew and get to work.