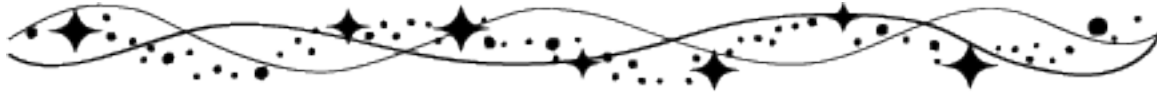


The Guest Shopkeeper



What do you do when your life doesn't fit you anymore?

That's where Jayne Strickland was at. It wasn't so much that her 'life sucked.' It was more that she herself had changed, and grown...but her life and situation hadn't. It was meant for a different person, one that she wasn't anymore.

Most of the changes in Jayne's life came about relatively quickly and in a straightforward manner. She couldn't tell you the day or the time, but somewhere about a year prior, Jayne realized that most of her beliefs had altered in ways that were non-negotiable. Somewhere around that same time period, she stopped in at her favorite local coffee shop, Cuppa Love, and wandered into Treasure Trove next door one day...only to discover that there were a number of items in the store that called out to her. Once she made the connection with Treasure Trove and the people who worked there, she bought and began working with the items that called out to her, trying to find her footing in her beliefs... which were taking a definite Hellenistic turn, as she began realizing she felt a bond to the Ancient Greek Pantheon of deities. It didn't take her long to put together an altar for them in her bedroom, and begin working with them.

Jayne woke up a little early one morning, ruminating on her circumstances.

She looked around her bedroom. Her altar elements sat on her dresser. She had a painting she'd drawn of a Greek temple, and photos she'd taken at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in the Greek section that were artfully framed in black and white. Jayne was happy with all of those; both in how her spirituality was informing her creativity, as well as how they were being used. It filled her

with a happy glow, just seeing them. Her alarm went off and she hit snooze, sighing, and rolled over in bed. It was her job, and the rest of her life that was problematic. When her alarm went off every morning, mentally, she asked herself 'why?' Why go to a job she didn't like, that she found boring, with co-workers she found increasingly more narrow-minded? Her job paid decently; kept her bills paid...but she spent most of her life showing up at a place that on the best of days left her feeling unfulfilled, and on the worst, like it was sucking the life and passion right out of her. As a result, everything about her life felt constricted; confining, even. Much like you would feel while wearing a winter parka that's too snug, leaving you with very little freedom of movement...and the zipper's stuck...and it's no longer winter.

"SO not good." Jayne thought.

For Jayne, things came to a head on a Friday night after work. That day had been especially miserable; she felt drained, like she was treading water. Once she got home, her mood persisted. She had a very large bottle of her favorite red wine in the pantry that was calling her name. Jayne ended up drinking the whole bottle by herself. At some point, she took her big sippy cup of wine with her to her bedroom as she changed clothes to yoga pants and a T-shirt. She stood there for a minute, mostly wasted, hanging on to the arm of her chair, and looked at her altar space, and sighed. "If you guys can hear me, I could really use a little help here." Jayne giggled as she lurched a bit, and held on tighter to the chair. "I mean my life, not my balance, though the wine's not doing me any favors there, either." She picked up her adult sippy cup, and raised it in the direction of her altar. "To the Greek gods." Jayne went back out to the living room and killed the rest of the large bottle of wine, and mostly passed out on her sofa, where she woke up the next morning, face down into one of her decorative pillows.

She sat up groggily, and then decided she needed to make some kind of change; bust some kind of move that got her out of the space she was in. She felt like if she was going to spend the bulk of her life working, she really needed to

be doing something that she liked. Jayne wasn't expecting miracles; a job is a job is a job. Even the best jobs in the world that you love, some days, still manage to feel like a job. They have their good times, and their bad times, and if a person's lucky, there's way more days you enjoy what you're doing than days you don't.

Jayne found herself later that morning visiting Treasure Trove. She wanted to go in more than anything just to feel the vibe, and get a good cup of coffee. She was also hoping she could find something magical that might help her situation. Unfortunately for her, Treasure Trove didn't sell cures for 'getting your life out of a rut,' but she decided to go anyway in hopes she'd find a book that would help her address her situation, somehow.

She got her cup of chocolate bliss coffee in Cuppa Love, and then went in to Treasure Trove through the pass-through and made a bee-line to the back where the books were. Unfortunately for Jayne, no one had written a book yet called "101 Spells to Pull Your Life Out of a Rut," or "20 Ways to transform Your Job Into One You Like Better." The closest she could come was a book on writing your own spells, and another on manifesting your desires. She saw the older lady who owned the place, Helena, walk into the back and said hello to her. On her way to the front by the pass-through door, she saw the hippie lady who had been out for a while; She was sitting on the floor, stacking candles on a shelf. Jayne couldn't remember her name.

Once she made it to the front, there was a handsome, distinguished looking man at the register. His hair had some gray in it; something in his looks made her think he was quite old, but there was a youthfulness around him that made her question her first impression. He was drinking a glass of wine out of a large pale green pressed glass goblet that had a pattern of grapes all around, with vines around the stem, and grape leaves at the base. The goblet was large enough that it looked like you could put most of a normal size bottle of wine in it. However, while the glass was large, it wasn't the glass that really drew her attention, or even the man's good looks; it was the fact that he was day-drinking

red wine at 10:30 in the morning, while he worked. He took a long sip, smiled at her, and sat the glass down.

“Did you find what you needed? Can I help you with something?”

Jayne put her books on the counter. “I think I found what I needed. These’ll have to do. I didn’t see a book back there on ‘Spells to Magically Give You a Better Job That Doesn’t Suck Your Soul Out Sideways.’

They both chuckled. “Um, no.” He replied. “Imagine, no one’s written that yet! I’m sure it would be a best-seller! What job do you have that’s sucking your soul out?”

“I work as a personal assistant to three partners at an investment firm. I get paid well, but the commute’s too long, the people are close-minded, and most days, I feel like I’m being pecked to death by birds.”

“Did you ever like it?”

“Sort of. I felt like I’d...I dunno. “Arrived.” I was making more than my friends, it looked like I was *so* successful. Somewhere in there, I got a raise and a promotion, my list of duties got longer, my hours spent there increased...and then I changed, but my job and life didn’t. I need to make a change. I feel like I’m spinning my wheels anymore.”

“If you’ll deign to take unsolicited advice from someone who’s been around longer than you, think about what you’re passionate about; pay attention to the things you love to do. What do you love? Are there any hobbies you do, or skills that you have that you could turn into a job with passion?”

Jayne nodded. “I draw; I paint and I’ve been into photography most of my life.”

“See. There you go. Nail down what means the most to you, and then work on a way to shimmy your way into it.” He made a little shimmy dance move behind the counter that made her giggle as he said the word ‘shimmy,’ and he took another long sip of wine from out of his glass. “Is creativity important? Is having more autonomy over your time more important? Is there anything you do that fills you with joy? Joy is imperative.”

“I’m afraid I’ll make a wrong choice.” Jayne looked at him, and shrugged her shoulders. Why she was having this discussion with a total stranger was beyond her, but he was kind, and looking into the depths of his eyes made her want to tell him everything about herself — but as their eyes locked, she had this weird sense that he probably already knew it all already. WTF.

He nodded at her. “Most people are, and it leaves them paralyzed, and they end up doing nothing. Here’s a newsflash: There are no really wrong choices. Don’t let fear dictate your choices, or by extension, your life. Follow your heart. Don’t limit yourself, and don’t let anyone tell you what you want or need is impossible. Spells are fine, but your heart knows the way, and will lead you in the direction you need to go. Remember: anything you can do that leaves you feeling fulfilled at the end of the day is good. Anything that lets you be fully yourself, and shine is good. Take stock of yourself, your skills, and the things you hope and daydream about; then go find the things that make you want to do it so much you can hardly wait. If you dislike your commute, take that into account, too. Our time here is important. Live it while you have it. We’re only allotted so many days and hours before our tickets get punched, and we exit hotel life. Jobs are important, but they shouldn’t be, how did you say, ‘Sucking your soul out sideways?’ They should add to your time here, not monopolize it, your days, or your life.”

“Wow. Thank you, sir.” His words were hitting like arrows right into her. Even as she felt seen and understood by him, she felt like his advice was on-

target, in every way it could be.

“Life is wonderful.” He told her, as he took another long sip of his wine, and rang up her books. “Living it fully is the most important thing we can do while we’re here, along with being the person the world around us needs us to be. Explore your options. Do something spectacular; if it’s not spectacular, at least do something that makes YOU feel spectacular. That kind of energy is what the world needs most. Imagine what the world would be like if you, and everyone around you were their complete total selves, and everyone felt simultaneously spectacular at the same time?”

“Thanks. I’ll remember that. It’ll help.” He extended the glass of wine in her direction, eyebrows up, in question. “No, thanks. I had a little too much last night as it is..”

He chuckled. “You’re most welcome.” Jayne couldn’t help but think that the advice from the kind man behind the counter was probably better than what was in either of the books he rang up. It was more direct, and less generalized.

She paid him the \$27.52 for both books, and he put them in a bag for her. “Do you want the receipt in your bag?”

“That’s fine.” Jane smiled at him, and he smiled warmly back at her. “Don’t forget what I told you. Hope things work out the way you’d like them to.” He paused a minute, and then said kindly, “I think they will.”

“Thank you!” And with that she left. At the door, she turned back to wave at him, but he’d already moved away from the counter.



Armed with her new books, she got home, and wrote down the conversation

she'd had with the man from Treasure Trove. Jayne was inspired enough that she bought a pretty notebook to write it all into. She didn't want to forget a single thing. She read the books she'd bought, remembered his advice — but more importantly, took it to heart and acted on it — and within the span of two months, Jayne was living a life that looked completely different. She had a new job working as a receptionist at a holistic health care center where she felt like she was helping people. Her co-workers not only didn't care that she was a witch, Jayne could openly embrace her path; in fact, a couple of her co-workers were also witches. Jayne was happier overall because she didn't have to hide who she was. Even though the new job paid a bit less than her other job, she had more money coming in, because she was tracking her ideas, like the man at Treasure Trove had suggested. She now had an online store where she was selling her creations. Maybe they weren't everyone's cup of tea, but those who enjoyed her work were willing to pay for them. Win-win.

The man told her to pay attention to her passions, and she did. They were beginning to pay. Maybe someday she might find a way to make her artwork and creations her main income, but she liked where she worked and the people she worked with enough that she'd actually want to work there anyway. Better still, because she could reach this job by train, she sold her car. Jayne didn't need it anymore, so no more car payments, no more parking fees, no more upkeep or insurance or any of the other expenses that came with a car. The best news for Jayne, overall was that her problem roommate that didn't like that she was a witch suddenly decided that she was going to move away. For the past two years they'd shared the apartment, Jayne kept the peace between her and her roommate Kim by 'staying in the broom closet.' A once in a lifetime opportunity came up for her that was just too good to pass up, and with hardly any warning, Kim was moving to Boston. One of her witchy co-workers was looking for an apartment, and suddenly Jayne found herself needing a roommate. Her new roomie would have no problems with open witchiness, and the only broom in the closet would be the one used to clean with, along with the cleaning supplies. No hearts or minds trapped there.

Jayne woke up one beautiful Saturday morning, and it was then - while she was lying in bed after waking up, and stretching like a cat as sunlight streamed across her that she realized how happy she was. In fact, she was about the happiest she'd ever been in her life, and for the longest continual time, and filled with hope for the future, instead of half formed fears with a side of dread. In the past, she'd had lots of average days, with bouts of happiness interspersed, and then it went right back to...just average, if not worse. Jayne realized that the frequency of her life had changed. It was higher, she was happier, and it was like someone turned up the 'happy' volume. She was filled with gratitude, to the point she felt tears welling up.

Jayne got up, and went to her altar. She lit a candle, she lit some incense, and though her altar honored the Greek pantheon, that morning, she sang a song of thanks to Zeus. Statues of other Greek deities sat around the periphery of her dresser-top altar. She thanked them all for the change in her life situation, and for her answered prayers and spells. "Thank you for putting that man from Treasure Trove in my path that day." Jayne continued. "...and I'm very grateful to him for his good advice." Jane decided there and then that she would be making a trip back to Treasure Trove that morning, to thank him. He didn't have to stand there, and give her advice. He could've just rang her up, with no comment. But he didn't. He took the time to be of help, so she wanted to take the time to thank him.

Jayne got a cup of Chocolate Bliss at Cuppa Love, and came in to Treasure Trove through the passthrough door, making her way this time to the front counter. Helena, the elderly lady who owned the place, was sitting behind the counter and a blond haired lady was in front of the counter, leaning on it with her elbows as they talked. Helena looked up as Jane approached.

"Can I help you?" The blond haired woman turned to face Jane.

“Yeah. I bought a couple of books here about two months ago from an older gentleman, who took the time to give me a lot of *really* good advice. Is he around today, that I can thank him?”

“Excuse me....what?” Helena looked puzzled. “Who are you looking for, again?”

“The older guy, who sold me my books. He was SO nice, and took a good 15-20 minutes to give me advice that I realized this morning changed everything for me. My life looks completely different now, thanks to him.”

Helena and Chrissie exchanged glances. Helena looked back to Jayne, “I don’t have any male employees currently, and haven’t for about a year and a half...”

Jayne was confused. “No, really. I’m not screwing with you. He stood right where you are now, rang up my books, rooted around under the counter for a bag and then put them in it, and even asked if I wanted my receipt in it...”

Chrissie reached out and touched Jayne’s arm lightly. “It’s okay. We believe you. Describe him, please, if you don’t mind.”

Jayne ran her hand through her hair, getting the stray bangs out of her eyes, a bit frustrated. “He was about six feet tall....dark reddish-brown hair, with a bit of gray in it, particularly at the front and by his ears. He had pretty gray eyes. Guessing his age, I’d say...maybe... 60 to 70. If he was 70, he was nicely preserved. He had a...presence? It felt almost regal. Between his presence, and how handsome he was, if he’d asked me out, I would’ve considered it, despite the fact he could’ve been my father, or...” Jayne laughed, “...my grandpa.” Then Jane spotted something that reminded her. She pointed to the goblet on the counter. “He was drinking wine out of that, at 10:30 in the morning. I was actually questioning the fact that he was here, working and day-drinking.

Seemed unusual.”

“We’re used to the unusual around here. Happens frequently.” Helena looked at Jane closely. “I really don’t have any male employees, but maybe we can figure out who you need to be thanking.” Jayne nodded.

“Bear with me, “ Helena continued. “What religion or spirituality do you follow?”

Jayne cocked her head to the side. “Um... I’m a witch, and I worship the ancient Greek pantheon.” Helena smiled, and nodded. “Okay. That makes sense.”

“What makes sense? None of this makes sense to me.” Jayne’s eyebrows furrowed, unable to see what the older woman thought made sense.

Helena pointed to the pressed green glass goblet on the counter Jayne pointed to moments earlier, that currently was holding the shop’s business cards. “That.” Jayne and Chrissie both looked at the rather large unremarkable goblet on the counter. “I bought that about three months ago from a woman whose husband passed on. He worshipped Dionysus, and she herself worshipped Isis, from the Egyptian pantheon. She sold some of his things to me because she felt like others might benefit from them, and she wanted to make sure they got a good home, in her husband’s honor. I guess she was right.”

Jayne looked up at the women. “So a ‘ghost’ sold me my books and gave me advice that day?”

Helena looked thoughtful, and reached for the goblet, and held it for a minute, contemplating. “Maybe. But I think you have to consider that since the goblet was used in the worship of Dionysus, and you worship the Greek pantheon yourself, that you might have been face to face with Dionysus Himself.

You said he was especially handsome, and had a regal presence. M-aaaaaaay-be” Helena chuckled. “We’ve had weirder.” She pointed to the front window. “There’s a statue of Pan in the front window there that gets bought and returned on the regular. *He* likes to dispense advice, too.” Helena addressed the statue while looking in its’ general direction. “Don’t you, Pan? You keep right on, and I’ll keep on aiding and abetting.”

Jayne looked thoughtfully between the two women. They didn’t appear to be freaked out by the thought that either a ghost OR Dionysus had taken a shift in their shop.

“Wow.” All Jane could say is “How crazy DOES it get here that a ghost or Dionysus is merely...a random Saturday?”

The two women broke out into hysterical giggles. Gwen, as she came toward the front, talking to Hope paused, and asked the assembled women, “What’s so funny? What did we miss?”

“Apparently, Dionysus works here now. He rang up all of Jayne’s purchases, and dispensed a bunch of well-timed life advice. Jayne just asked us how crazy it gets in here that either a ghost or Dionysus showing up is just a random Saturday...?”

Now it was Hope and Gwen’s turn to break into hysterical giggles.

Hope rolled her eyes, and waved her hand back and forth in Jayne’s direction. “Honey, you have NO idea.”

“What should I do now?” Jayne asked Helena.

“Thank Him for the advice.” Helena upended the business cards out of the goblet, and put it into a bag, which she held out to Jayne, who looked confused.

“Go on, take it. It should be yours. Use it in worship on your altar, but if you really want to thank Dionysus, have some wine in it with him at your altar and thank him; toast him even, for His timely advice that changed things for you. It only seems right.”

Jayne shook her head, in disbelief. “I’d almost forgotten. He...actually offered me a sip of his wine as he was ringing up my books. I said no, but I guess I get to have a drink with him after all.”

Jayne took the bag Helena was still holding out to her, thoughtfully. “Thank you. I think I should do that. Can I pay you for....” She didn’t even get the question out, as Helena shook her head no. “Nope. That’s on the house. It’s meant to be yours, now.”

Jayne faced the women. “Thank you, and Blessed Be.”

They all chimed back at her, “Blessed Be.” After Jane left, there was a moment of silence, and they all started laughing.

Helena shook her head. “There’s another one for the books. How do you claim a deity as an employee?”