Joseph Brisben

 1715 Rochester Court

 Iowa City, IA 52245-3241

 Tel.: (319) 321-2599

 e-mail: okiejoe9@gmail.com

##  Freddie Finds Father Figures

Freddie was three years old when his father died. When he was four, he couldn’t remember what had happened to his father. All his friends seemed to have fathers so he asked his mother, “What happened to Daddy? Where is he? When is he coming home?”

His mother’s voice choked up as she answered his questions: “Don’t you remember going to his funeral – seeing his body in that big box? Don’t you remember going to the cemetery and seeing that box lowered into that big hole – and then you and I took handfuls of dirt and dropped them on top of the box – and people said nice things about your daddy?”

“No,” Freddie replied. “So he’s never coming back. . . . Do you want me to help you find a nice new man to come live with us?”

“No,” his mother said as she knelt to hug and kiss him, “I’m not ready for that yet.”

“But I want to. Please, please let me.”

“Freddie, your daddy was so special to me and so good to you that I am really, really picky about who I would want us to be with,” she said as she grabbed a tissue and dried her eyes.

“I see,” he said, “but can I just look for one anyway? Whoever I find would have to be all right with you.”

“Okay, sweetie, but be careful where you look. It can’t just be some guy off the street, and he’s got to be really, really, really special.”

“Okay.”

Freddie thought about what he liked about some of the men he knew. There was Mr. Thompson, Ricky’s father. When Freddie went to Ricky’s house, Mr. Thompson would often do something he called a “30-second melodrama.” He would roll and fold his napkin into the shape of a bow, put it under his nose, and growl, “I want the rent!”

Then he would put the bow on his head and say in a high, squeaky, girlish voice, “I have no rent!”

He would repeat these actions and then drum his fingers on the table, neigh like a horse, put the bow at his collar and say in a loud, clear voice, “I’ll pay the rent!”

Then he would put the bow back on his head and say in the girlish voice, “My hero!”

Finally, he would put the bow under his nose and mutter, “Curses! Foiled again!”

But Mr. Thompson was already married and had three children, so even though Freddie liked him, he knew he had to look elsewhere.

He liked Rev. Osborne. His mother had taken Freddie to see him in church a few time when there were no services. They had talked about his dad, so he knew how Freddie felt. Also, Rev. Osborne knew magic tricks. He could find quarters in Freddie’s ears and give them to him. But Rev. Osborne was also married and had children of his own, so Freddie knew he had to look elsewhere.

Whenever his mother took him to the mall, he would stop to listen to a man named Don play his electric guitar. He had a hat placed upside down near his wheelchair where people would put money. Sometimes, Freddie put one of the quarters Rev. Osborne had given him in Don’s hat, and the guitar player would let him sit on the floor and listen to the music. Once in a while, Don would ask Freddie what he wanted to hear, and Don would play and sing hilarious versions of “Three Blind Mice,” “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star,” and “Three Blind Mice.”

“Twinkle, twinkle little bat,” Don once sang, “How I wonder where you’re at. Up above the world you fly like a Lego in the sky.”

Freddie learned that Don was severely injured in a war. Freddie never knew which one. That was why he was in a wheelchair. His sister took care of him. He mostly made his living from giving music lessons. Freddie went to his mother and told her what he had learned.

“Well, Freddie,” she said, “you have done a lot of good work. What you have found what we call ‘father figures.’ Although none of the men you have thought of can marry me and be your dad, you can count on them to give you good advice and help you grow up to be a fine man.”

“I see what you mean,” Freddie replied. “They will do – until someone better comes along.”

His mother echoed with a catch in her throat, “Until someone better comes along.” Then they hugged each other.

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