

streetwise to home

By Jerold London

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When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me....
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.

– Let it Be, the Beatles (1970)

streetwise to home

Late summer, 2020's. In the far corner of a yard outside a convent JAKE (wearing a straw hat) and RATTLER (with a limp – a young dog at his feet) are standing, admiring four micro houses that they (along with JOE YA-KNOW and MOLLY DEE) have just finished building.

JOE enters, carrying a pillow case in his hands, carefully holding it shut. He walks past JAKE and RATTLER to the front of the stage and releases a bat into the audience. Then he walks back to them.

RATTLER

[more of a statement than a question] Caught it, did ya, Joe?

JOE

Sure did, Rattler. Piece of cake.

JAKE

Then why let it go?

JOE

What should I do with it? Kill it?

JAKE

What else?

JOE

[surprised] Why? Why do something like that?

JAKE

To protect people.... Out there.

JOE

That's crazy, Jake.

JAKE

Why? Why is that crazy?

JOE

Bats help people, not hurt them.

RATTLER

Like how? Name one way bats help people?

JOE

The insects each one eats. Every night. You wouldn't believe. And that helps farmers not lose crops.

RATTLER

And that's supposed to impress me?

JOE

A lot cleaner than insecticides.

JAKE

They carry rabies, you know.
And suck people's blood.

JOE

They. Do. Not. Suck. People's. Blood.
It's mosquitos that suck people's blood.
And bats kill mosquitos, up to a thousand an hour. At night.

RATTLER

Bats suck people's blood in Transylvania.

JOE

You're kidding me.
Aren't you, Rattler?
That's a Frankenstein story.
Just a myth.

JAKE

A pretty damned good one, I'd say.

RATTLER

Hello Dracula, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its mark while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my veins still remains

JOE

The sounds of ignorance....
All urban legend.

JAKE

I still don't like them.
Bats creep me out.

JOE

They invented sonar, you know.

RATTLER

Like I invented sonar, sneezing.
The only sonar bats invented is sinus infection.

**A momentary pause as JOE pets
Rattler's dog, and then joins the other
two in admiring their handiwork.**

JOE

Pretty good job if I say so myself. Pretty damned good.

JAKE

Which one do you want, Joe?

JOE

I don't know.
I think I'll let Molly pick first.
She's not back yet?

JAKE

You know how women are. Shopping. With the allowance the nuns gave her.

JOE

[*beat*] You should see it in there, inside their convent.
It's like some medieval castle.

RATTLER

Yeah.
Count Dracula's, I suppose.

JOE

No. Not like that.
Like a circular staircase that goes all the way to the top.
Where Sister Ann's room is.
At the very top.

JAKE

In the belfry, with the bats.

JOE

It was the first bat she ever saw, she said.
And it scared the Hell out of her.
Curled up, upside down, like they do. When they sleep.
And she started screaming.
And that's when they came and got me.

JAKE

I always figured it would be a bat
To unlock a nun's deepest fears.

JOE

To set free their deepest fears.

RATTLER

No. To tangle themselves in a nun's hair.

JAKE

Oh, my God!

JOE

What's your problem, Jake?

You have a hat on.

[*beat*] Anyway, they gave me this pillow case

And told me I had to catch it

No one else could

And get it out of there

Which I did....

No problem.

It was sound asleep, even with all the screaming going on.

And I had my work gloves on.

RATTLER

I still say it's bad luck.

Finding a bat on a day like today.

JOE

[*beat*] Can I tell you something? About in there. On a day like today.

RATTLER

What?

JOE

Well ... when I picked up the bat

From the place it was hanging

I could swear I heard a voice, saying my name.

Joe Ya-Know.

Soft like that.

At first I thought it was Sister Ann, or one of the others.

But when I turned to look around, no one was there.

And then I felt the whole place shiver and shake.

The room. The stairs. The whole convent, I figured.

JAKE

Are you sure? There wasn't any shaking out here.

JOE

It was in my mind.
It must have been.
Like what I heard....

JAKE

Your name, you mean?

JOE

It was more than that.
And it came across my mind it was Jesus Himself.

RATTLER

What was Jesus?

JOE

In the convent.
At the top of the stairs.
Watching me.
Standing next to me even. Invisible.
And his voice was soft like a whisper
Yet at the same time it felt booming, like a lion's roar.
And it was his voice that shook the whole building.
Like: What could shake a building so hard except the voice of Jesus?
And not be felt outside.

RATTLER

You're talking queer.

JOE

"What you've *got* is what's next to be gone.
Like life's but a thread to the next beyond."
That's what he told me.

JAKE

What in God's name does that mean?

JOE

Don't ask me. I just heard it.
It's what he said. I swear.
And the whole place shook.

JAKE

You want me to tell you what I think?

RATTLER

Sure, Jake.
Tell us what *you* think.

JAKE

I think that bat out there loosed a screw in Joe here's brain.
And talked him into letting him go free.

RATTLER

Bats don't talk.

JAKE

No. Of course not. They just bite. And loosen screws.

RATTLER

And fly weird. Not like the other birds.
And maybe forecast bad omens.

JOE

Let me tell you two a story about that.
Know-it-alls.
A long time ago when people and animals *did* talk to each other
There lived a wealthy king
In a castle, in a faraway corner of his kingdom
Surrounded by a mammoth forest.
The biggest forest anywhere.
With his wife, the queen, and their two children.
He was a very happy man until one day
When his wife complained to him:
"Why can't you do something about this forest?
Too many trees. And too many birds.
I can't enjoy my tea and chocolates with all their singing.
Do something about it," she told him.
But what could he do? he wondered.
So he called a meeting of all the birds of the forest
In the courtyard of his castle, on Thursday.
And they all came
Except for one
A wise bat who lived under the eaves of the castle, close to the queen's bedroom
Who came a day late.
And the king was pissed.
The bat was a day late
And the king and the birds hadn't come up with a single idea.

JAKE

And you're going to tell us the bat did.

JOE

Well, the king asked him, angrily,
"All these birds could come when I ordered
And drop everything they were doing.
And you couldn't?"
"What do they have to do?" The bat asked.
"While I have the most difficult task in the land to do," he said.
And the King huffed, "What task is that, pray tell?"
And the tiny bat told him:
"Like my father before me: Keeping men and women in equal numbers."
"What?! How?" the king exclaimed. "Please explain how you do that."
"Like night and day," the bat said.
"When the nights are short, I take a little off the morning.
And when the nights are long, I take a little off the witching hour.
It's called midnight saving.
The same thing when there are more men than women
And some of the men say 'Yes, yes' to everything a woman asks them to do.
Those men I turn into women, and keep the sexes equal."
The king got what the bat was saying
And a little afraid that *he* might get turned into a woman
He sent the birds back into the woods, to sing whenever they wanted....

RATTLER

What happened to the bat?

JOE

Well since the bat couldn't sing
And seemed to be the bearer of bad omens
The king ordered the bat's sight taken away.
And bats have been blind ever since.
Which only goes to show you:
Bats do *not* make bad omens.
But when you tell a king the truth
Be prepared to fly away. Fast.

**MOLLY DEE enters, pushing a shopping
cart filled with things for her new home,
and cheerfully comes up to the other
three.**

MOLLY DEE

Here I am.
What am I?...

RATTLER

A lizard.

MOLLY DEE

[*laughing*] I'm a parable.
And when you're a parable unto yourself, there's no evil left in the world.

JAKE

Just a shitload of discrimination.

RATTLER

Against homeless. You bet.

JOE

Against everything unusual.
People, homeless, *and* animals.
Especially innocent bats.

MOLLY DEE

Look what I got.

RATTLER

What?

MOLLY DEE

[*excitedly*] Here. Look:
These are sponges. With sparkles.
With sparkles! Glittery sparkles! Glitter's my favorite color.
And just look at this:

Jumping up and down and clapping her hands.

All the plates and glasses I'll ever need here.
And coffee cups. This one says "Home" on it.
And pots and pans.
Sheets. Wrapped. And blankets. And pillows.
And a toaster!
Pretty awesome. Right?

RATTLER

[*unconvinced*] If you say so, Molly.

MOLLY DEE

A shower curtain and rod.
And candles.

Taking a few moments to open the candle and smell its fragrance. Then lifts up a framed reproduction of Gustav Klimt's "The Kiss."

And a kiss.
I have everything in my mind, just how things are going to look.

JOE

You're nesting already, little bird, aren't you?

MOLLY DEE

Absolutely.

JAKE

Which one are you going to take?

MOLLY DEE

[*beat, then to Rattler's dog*] Which one do you think, [*calling the dog by its actual name*]?

[*beat*] Yes. This one.

JAKE

Okay.

JOE

We still need to get beds and stuff, you know.

MOLLY DEE

Getting a bed is huge. I know.
But I can use my sleeping bag until.

Don't get me wrong. I love beds.
And I love couches, and the materials couches are made of.
I love their different textures.
Sitting on them. Rubbing my face into them.
But I can wait. Everything in its time.
When I'll be able to touch them all, all the time.

JOE

You're as happy as church bells at Christmastime, Dee.
I've never seen you this happy.

MOLLY DEE

I'm an avalanche of church bells at Christmastime, Joe, I'm so happy.

JOE

[*sings, loud*] Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

An avalanche.

MOLLY DEE

[*sings*] Ring the bells that still can ring

Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack ... a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in.*

** link at the end*

JAKE

Ya know, Molly Dee ... that voice of yours....

Never thought I'd see the day.

Life's that way, I guess.

You get to find out who.

Who.

Who's goin' to help you along the way.

Who's goin' to be your friends.

Bells ring the hour. They all listen.

Lights fade.

END

Ring the bells that still can ring, click [here](#)

Amanda (MOLLY DEE), click [here](#)