

Powerful
By Carlos A. Williams Jr.

Chapter 1: Leaving

A young boy, 12 years old, sits at the dinner table. He is anxiously stuffing his mouth full with each bite of his peanut butter sandwich, chasing the bites with gulps of apple juice. His eyes dart back and forth from the clock on the wall to the door. His breathing is heavy through his nose as he bounces his right knee repeatedly.

“Ottie, stop that tapping,” his mother says, “you’ll ruin my nerves before it makes you finish your lunch any faster. Slow down before you choke for goodness’ sake.”

“Glow-wy mawm.” he manages to say around the last bite in his mouth.

He starts to down the last bit of juice just as a wadded napkin soars from across the table into his cup. Ottie pauses, looking down into the cup, before resuming his drinking. He swallows whatever hasn’t been absorbed by the napkin and then proceeds to put away his dishes.

“You are so weird!” says Danny, Ottie’s older brother, 2 years his senior.

The notorious napkiner is still seated at the table. Their mother joins him, taking Ottie’s vacant seat. She reels back and props her foot up onto the table. The sole of her foot is covered in a pad that is coal-black at the bottom, with tinges of white at the edges.

“It’s a cleansing pad,” she announces.

“Ew! Mom! Why is it on your foot?”

“Quiet, Danny.” she says, fanning her hand toward him dismissingly. “It pulls out the impurities in your body through the soles of your feet. It’s purifying all of the icky stuff out of my body.”

“Mom, you’re worse than Ottie.” Danny says, shaking his head in disapproval.

“Where do ya think he gets it from?” she says with a hammy grin.

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Ottie smiles back at her as he darts out of the back door. As soon as his feet hit the grass, Deanna, Ottie's 11-year-old protégé, rises from a stump where she was patiently waiting.

“Sorry, mom wouldn't let me leave without finishing my lunch.”

Anyone who had seen Ottie's odd and lanky frame would understand why his mother didn't want him to miss a bite. The two head toward the loosely-spaced woods next to Ottie's house. They take extra care to ensure that their feet catch every single leaf as they pass between the trees, which are still dropping their yellow and orange leaves to the earth.

Ottie leads the way, as he usually does, stopping occasionally and pulling a magnifying glass from his pocket to inspect the curious creatures amid the leaves. He always takes care not to disturb them or their surroundings, as much as can be expected without completely ignoring them. Deanna follows suit, though she doesn't have her own magnifying glass so she waits for Ottie's approval on must-see specimens, and she always finds them worth the wait.

Ottie looks up, curiously, as the color scheme of the leaves above, all brown, orange, and yellow, is disrupted by a blue jay. Not only is it odd for one to be in this area for this time of year, but also this one seems a bit odd in its bright coloring, almost appearing to glow. Ottie stares up at it a bit longer, with a curious tilt of his head. Deanna looks up, tracing Ottie's gaze, and then back at Ottie.

“Are we going?”

Ottie looks at her and then back up to an empty branch. He scans around above him, but doesn't find the bird. He turns and continues with their trek through the leaves.

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The sound of their feet, swishing through the leaves, is like music to their ears. They occasionally change the cadences of their steps and playfully bound through them.

Deanna is having the time of her life, giggling and looking down at her feet as she kicks the leaves up into the air. She quickly realizes that the music has been reduced to just the sound of her own playing. She looks over at Ottie and notices him with an odd gaze again.

“Ottie?”

He takes off through the trees. Deanna gathers herself and follows him. She can tell by the way his head is moving that he is following something but she isn't close enough to him to see what. Ottie takes a sudden left, out of Deanna's sight. She makes the same turn, but Ottie is nowhere to be seen.

“Ottie... Ottie?” she says, starting to panic. She looks around and sees nothing but trees. She's not sure she can make it back home without him. “OTTIE!”

“Shhhhh-,” she hears from behind a tree near a small rock formation. She goes to investigate and finds Ottie leaning over, looking at something with his hands on his knees. She walks over next to him, mimicking his position. She stares with him, in an extended period of silence with her brow furrowed.

“What are we looking at?” she finally whispers into his ear. He turns to her with his own look of confusion and then looks back, slightly extending his hand.

“The bird.” he says, very matter-of-factly. Deanna leans over, putting her head in front of his in an attempt to gain his perspective.

“What bird, Ottie?” she asks, her eyes darting around trying to find what it is she's missing. Ottie pushes her head aside.

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“The bird standing on the rock, right in front of you. The blue jay, it’s right there.” he says in frustration, as there is no way Deanna doesn’t see this bird. He had just watched as she’d nearly touched her nose to its beak.

“There’s no bird here Ottie.”

They continue back and forth, as if philosophers postulating on the purpose of mankind in the universe, until Ottie’s attention darts away again. He stands and walks toward the face of the small rock formation.

“It flew in there,” he says, pointing at a flat rock face, “in that cave.”

“Ottie, you’re scaring me. I want to go home!”

“What? Why?”

“You keep saying you’re seeing things that aren’t there. It’s not funny.”

“Deanna, I’m sorry. I promise you though; that I saw a bird and it flew into this cave. We don’t have to go in. I’ll probably come back alone when I have my flashlight and explore it. Or I’ll have Danny come with me.”

“You’ll have me do what, munchkin!?” Danny springs from behind a tree, putting Ottie and Deanna in playful shoulder holds. While embracing the two of them on each side, he turns and reclines to rest his back against the flat rock face; only his back doesn’t meet any surface. He stumbles back, releasing Ottie and Deanna but the momentum sends them tumbling in right behind him. There is a loud rush of wind past their ears as they twist around each other, and then stillness and silence.

Ottie opens his eyes, squinting, as he is looking up at the sky. He looks to his left and sees Danny on his hands and knees, slowly righting himself. He looks to his right and sees Deanna, eyes clinched tight, with an even firmer grip on his right arm. His gaze

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moves past Deanna as he notices the bright color of the grass, the flowers in the distance, and lushly blossoming trees.

“What’s that?” Danny asks.

After hearing this, Ottie notices Deanna’s eyes are now open and fixed on his chest. He turns and looks down at his chest. The blue jay from earlier is standing there. It leans in close to him and opens its mouth.

“Hello.”