

The Echoless Well

The well in the village square had been dry for as long as anyone remembered. Children played there, dropping stones to wait for the echo that never came. The villagers said it was useless and drank from other wells.

One evening, after the others had gone home, a boy lingered. His name was Aric. The strangely silent well called to him.

So he climbed into the bucket and lowered himself, hands tight on the rope, the wood and pulley gently groaning as he descended.

At first there was only dark. Then a shimmer. The deeper he went, the cooler the air became, until he realized he was no longer descending — but rising.

Below him was not earth at all, but a sky without bottom, a sea of stars shining up through the mouth of the well.

For a few minutes he watched rain fall upward, spashing in puddles over his head. And birds flew upside down with calm, unhurried wings, as the moon shone far beneath his feet.

Then he pulled himself and the bucket back “up” to his village.

When he climbed out, everything looked ordinary again. The square, the roofs, the cobbled street.

Except that nothing looked ordinary at all. Ever again.

The illusion was broken — the illusion of thinking he knew what how the ‘real’ really works.

He no longer hurried past the sagging roofs or the grit between the cobblestones, nor dismissed the other children’s laughter as only laughter.

Even his own breath felt like a mystery he didn’t understand at all.

For Aric had seen with his own eyes that the world was far greater, and far stranger, than he — or anyone else — could possibly imagine.

— *William Zeitler*
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