

The Giant Bookworm

By Zara Adcock



Part One

Sal Tangit

Being the last giant has its perks. There are no other giants to tell me what to do or how to live. No other giants to bother, bully, govern or hurt me. I am free to do as I please. Or at least I would be if humans were more accepting.

Humans only recorded the legends of my brutal ancestors and not those of the kind-hearted – although to be fair there were very few of the latter. I wouldn't say I'm kind or brutal, I guess I fall between the cracks. Or maybe there are not cracks to fall between because like I said, I am the last giant.

I live in a valley guarded by craggy mountain peaks where I have a large timber home with a kitchen, library and bedroom. I'm not a fussy eater, so hunting is very easy. I like bears, birds, deer, sheep and cows. I'm actually an omnivore because I also eat raw vegetables and shrubberies too. But my absolute favourite thing to do is collect books.

There is no such thing as a giant book. Only humans have books, so small I can pop them in my ear. The writing is tiny too and I do not know how to read. Still, I collect books like a human child collects sea shells – I don't discard a single one.

I had decided that I would go for a walk to the village that recently sprung up over the mountains. I knew their defences were weak so they wouldn't be able to slow me down. I simply wanted to browse the library of theirs that I had seen one night when I went out to get a beef salad.

Now, it may seem rather silly but I always had this idea, that one day, I would find a book I could read. Reading seemed so incredible – to be able to understand symbols and find meaning in them – it would pass a lot of my time. Every time I go book hunting, this hope, to find a book I can read, flares inside of my giant belly.

When I reached the village, its residents woke up. Lanterns were lit and I was able to see that the library was connected to a two-storey building. The entire room jutted out from the building like it had been built as an afterthought. I decided I would do the least damage by tearing off the whole thing to take it with me. I did not stop to think about if they would care. I had long since decided that no one could want books more than me.

Later, when I was back at home and the villagers were recovering from my visit (probably saying things like, *“Really, could that really have been an actual giant?”* and *“There's proof, he took part of the building!”* Probably doing a head count too.) I lifted the roof off the library and raised the room to my face.

I froze. I am not surprised by much. Trust me. Being the last giant does that to you. But what I saw in the palm of my hand truly shocked me.

A tiny little girl about the size of my big toe was staring at me, blinking as if she had just woken up. She had a large book open on her lap, and frizzy hair that went *up* more than it went *down*. It was not the girl that shocked me though, it was her expression – she was smiling at me and I couldn't even remember the last time I washed my face. "I knew giants were real." She whispered and then a switch seemed to flick inside her. The child's smile fell, revealing sudden fear.



Part Two

Amelia

As far as I am concerned, Reckwood Village is the precipice that civilisation hangs from. When the pedlar dropped me off at Reckwood's orphanage I was lucky to find just two silver-linings. The first was that Reckwood was the kind of place where I could believe the unbelievable existed. A place where I could believe a fairy might grant me a wish or a giant may just eat Madame Cole, our horrid school teacher. In Reckwood, I was more abandoned than I had ever been in my whole life and whilst I was longing to be somewhere else, anywhere else, my imagination was my only escape.

The second silver-lining was only silver if you looked at it right: I got to sleep in the library. The orphanage only accepted me because Reckwood was where my father was from. They had no beds left and were going to make me squash up next to a girl named Orthella who had bad breath, which is probably the only reason she wasn't already sharing a bed with one of the other girls. Instead, I volunteered to sleep on the library floor. The carpet was dying and probably full of bacteria, but it was quiet – very rarely did anyone else come to browse the dusty shelves – and stories help set my imagination loose too.

I had spent many nights falling asleep with a book on my lap cocooned in dreams of whimsy. I was always consciously aware that my dreams weren't real. I knew if I saw a raspberry cake I couldn't allow myself to try a piece and feel the disappointment of tasting stuffy air. I knew if I dreamt of my parents that I wouldn't be able to wrap my arms around them and smell Mama's faint petitgrain perfume or feel Daddy's callused hands. So when, that night, I smelt a stench worse than Orthella's breath and Madame Cole's underarms combined I knew that something was happening outside of my dreams. I tore myself from my cocoon and opened my eyes, sitting up slowly. I looked at the books, my makeshift bed – nothing was out of the ordinary. Then I noticed one of the library walls was missing and in its place was a gigantic hairy arm. I raised my eyes to meet wide giant sized eyeballs. "I knew giants were real." I whispered. On hearing myself I snapped wide awake. *How in all the seven-hundred and twelve villages...?*

“Will the other villagers come for you?” The giant bellowed in a coarse voice.

“I doubt it. I doubt they’ll even know that I’m gone.” I clapped my hand over my mouth before I could say anymore. When I’m taken by surprise I blurt the absolute truth and don’t leave out one detail, including the bits best kept to oneself. Once, Madame Cole asked me during a geometry lesson what I was thinking about because it clearly wasn’t how to calculate the circumference of a circle. I told her, “About what kind of magic a leprechaun could do.” I got a whipping for that.

The giant sat down on a massive stool, three times as tall as the two storey orphanage. “I guess I’m past convincing you this is a dream now. So I’ll have to think of something else to do with you.”

Like eat me? I wondered. My heart thundered. I could almost feel my rib bones snapping under the pressure. “We better get introduced, I’m Sal Tangit.”

“A-Amelia,” My teeth were chattering, that happens when I’m scared. “My name is Amelia.”



Part Three

Sal Tangit

There are three options when the last giant accidentally kidnaps a little girl:

1. He convinces her that she’s dreaming and returns her to her home. No harm done.
(Obviously that wasn’t going to happen.)
2. He eats her, with a recommended dressing of fish sauce.
(I’m an omnivore, not a cannibal. I would never eat her.)
3. He entertains her until a new plan comes to mind.
(What else could I do?)

I studied the girl who called herself Amelia. She was shivering and gasping air through her mouth with long pauses in between each exhale and inhale, as if she kept forgetting to breathe. Watching her, I swallowed, and licked my lips. Amelia’s eyes froze on my tongue and I realised how my nervous habits might be misinterpreted. I pulled my tongue back into my mouth, slowly. Perhaps a compliment was a good place to start, “You’re quite pretty.” My voice was hoarse with disuse (I could barely remember the last time I had spoken with someone) and I was embarrassed. I could have said she was “really pretty” or “very pretty” or “so pretty”, but I called her “quite pretty” as if she were a doll. Amelia was silent, her chest fluttered.

“I didn’t mean to steal – or kidnap – you,” I blushed. If you can imagine a human shaped person, about half the size of a mountain, strawberry red, then you’ve imagined me when I blush. “It was an accident, I just wanted the books,” I cleared my throat. “I can take you back. I probably should, your parents must be worried –,”

“My parents are dead,” I was stunned – but also relieved to get a reaction to what I had been saying. “You kidnapped me from Reckwood’s orphanage so you should already know that there are no parents worried about me.” My thoughts flashed back to the hollow-feeling building. I had thought it was a courthouse.

Seeing as complimenting her *and* apologising hadn’t worked, I tried a new tactic, “Are you hungry?” By that point it was breakfast time, so I figured she would be starving.

“Are you?” Her voice was a sharp squeak that pierced my ears.

“Um, yes, a bit, that’s sort of why I asked.”

“Just eat me already!” she yelled.

I frowned and wondered if I ought to clarify... “I’m not going to eat you,”

“Why?”

What kind of question is that? “Do you want me to eat you?” Not that I was thinking of changing my mind if she did, but I was so confused.

Amelia jumped to her feet, “Of course not! Were you planning on fattening me up first?”

“Amelia, I don’t eat humans!”

“Why should I believe you?”

“Because it’s true!” Amelia looked up at me with searching eyes. I wondered what she would find.

“Your voice is too loud,” she said. “It’s hard to believe you when you’re yelling at me.”

“Oh,” I said. Amelia winced. “Oh.” I whispered. “You don’t have to talk loud either, I can hear you really well.”

Amelia blinked, glanced at my giant ears, and then nodded, “I guess we better use our library voices then.” There was a pause and we smiled in unison. It felt a little awkward, but on the outside, not on the inside, and naturally my confusion tripled.

To Be Continued...



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