

Starfishing

John Henry Carrozza

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By John Henry Carrozza

Starfishing is a lost art; not many people even know what it is nowadays. I wouldn't know myself, except for my Uncle Kris, he told me all about how when he was younger, how he'd catch 'em in the big field behind his house, and how he used to have a whole collection of 'em in a box in the attic, but now he don't know where they're at. I thought he was just telling stories at first, like everybody thought, I guess, 'cause most people know better about stars. People think they're big suns, like our sun, only so far away that you could never really reach 'em with nothing, not even a spaceship. That's what I thought, too, only Uncle Kris, he said he used to could catch two, maybe three a night when he was fast and could still see good. But I still didn't believe about it until last year, when I caught one myself. He said it was the first one he'd seen caught in fifty years, since he was a kid. He said it takes a kind of skill – that you gotta believe in it to catch one, otherwise, you just can't see 'em falling, even right in front of your face.

It was about a year and a half ago, I guess, when he first showed me how to spot one that was about to fall. We got up on the old barn out back of his house, climbed up through the place where the chickens roost, up on top where it was flat, and he showed me how some of the stars were twinklin'

real fast, and some of 'em, they wasn't twinklin' at all. He said to watch those ones that were twinklin', 'cause they were the ones ready to fall. The faster they were twinklin', he said, the sooner it would be for 'em to fall down. 'Course, you gotta find the ones right overhead if you're gonna try to catch one, 'cause most of 'em are really far away; they're like clouds that seem to be right over you, but really they're not, just so high up, it looks like they are. That night there was a couple stars that looked like they were gonna fall close by, so we waited for a while, watching 'em, but they never did. Uncle Kris told me some nights they wouldn't fall much, but other times they'd fall left and right. They usually came in bunches, on the nights when the wind was still and dry. That night the wind was blowin' pretty good up high — I could tell by the way the trees were blowing on top — so that's probably why none fell down that night.

The next few nights we went up on top of the barn again, watching, but none of 'em were falling then either. A storm came up the next day, and it was cloudy for a few days, so it was about a week before we got to look again. Penelope — that's our cat — she came up with us 'cause she likes to climb up in high places, and she was the first one to see the star falling, 'cause she mewed, and we looked where she was looking and there it was. It seemed like it was falling real slow, but Uncle Kris said that's just 'cause it was so high up that made it look like that. He said it was falling probably a

hundred miles an hour. I know he was right, too, 'cause he showed me a fishing net he used one time when he was a kid, tryin' to catch one. The bottom was all gone, like a fireball went through it. He said that's 'cause you gotta catch 'em with your hands, or else it'll burn up anything else or just break up into sand on the ground. He said they fall in the ocean all the time, and that's how come there's so much sand on the beaches, 'cause it washes up, and it's really stardust. That made me laugh, 'cause I thought all the time I was making sand castles, they were really star castles.

Uncle Kris had lots of neat stuff up in the attic. In the box where we found the net, there was some old star maps and field glasses and a disk with numbers all around it and a stick pointing out of it that he said showed how high a star was and where it was gonna fall. He said lots of people used to catch stars when he was a kid, but people stopped believin' in that stuff, and now nobody hardly catches 'em anymore. He said sometimes he thinks he don't believe anymore either. He said he used to go out in the forest at night and play games with the foxes and the nighthawks. He said that the owls and the cats would come out and they would all hide and play seek or sometimes they would act out pretend adventures in the woods. He said it was a fox that first showed him how to catch a star. He said it used its teeth to catch it, and then they played a game with it until one of 'em dropped it and it turned to sand. Stars, he said, would glow really bright at first, and

then they would fade out, 'cause they weren't in the sky anymore, and if you were careful with 'em, they'd get hard after a while like rocks. He said him and his friends would play games in the woods in the dark and the star was like a glowing ball bouncing to and fro, and him and his friends and the animals would all play together, 'cause they all believed. But now he says his friends that he talks to, none of them believe anymore. He says the world is too full of distractions like politics and money. He says people don't know how to believe in anything anymore, and I think he's right. My dad said you have to just believe in yourself, and everything will be alright. But I think you gotta believe in other stuff, too, like catching stars.

Anyhow, we took his star wheel — that's what he called it — and the field glasses and went out the next clear night to catch stars. There's a big field behind the old barn; that's where he says he used to catch 'em the most. We went out there and watched the twinkling stars up above us, waitin' for one to start falling. There was a really bright one right above us, and he looked at it real close through a hole in the middle of his star wheel, and turned the stick so he could see it like aiming a rifle, and then he looked at the numbers and said it would probably land at the other end of the field if we were lucky. He said the star wheel doesn't always work real good, but usually it gets pretty close. So, we went down to the other end of the field and waited. I looked at it for a long time with the field glasses, and I could

see it twinkling faster and faster. I was gettin' excited, and Uncle Kris told me to calm down. He said if I was too nervous I could never catch it. So, I did calm down, but I was still pretty excited, 'cause I just knew it was gonna fall and I was gonna catch it that night.

We watched it for a couple of hours, and then Uncle Kris jumped up real quick and told me to get ready. I got up on my feet and watched the star as it started to shake and then all of a sudden it started falling. It started out like it was falling slow — 'though I knew it really wasn't — and then it got faster and faster. It was probably about a minute before it got out of the black sky and I could see it shining bright and falling really fast in front of the mountains that were in back of the forest. All of a sudden it was into the treetops, and I could tell that it was gonna land right at the edge of the forest, about a hundred feet away. I took off running as fast as I could, and I didn't think I was gonna make it. I don't know how it seemed to take so long for it to fall that last part from the top of the trees, 'cause it seemed like I was running real slow. I kept thinking, how was I gonna catch it — I knew I was gonna have to dive for it. I turned seven last Spring, so I played baseball in the summer and I caught a few balls that way in practice, but never in a real game. Course, nobody ever hit one that hard either 'cause I was playing in right field, and the biggest kid on the team only could hit to me if he hit it low. I was thinking about all this stuff as I ran across the edge

of the field, chasing the star. I was breathing real hard so I timed my breath with my footsteps like my coach told me to do so I could stay focused. I could hear Uncle Kris behind me yelling, "Run! Run!" Then all of a sudden I was there and the star was right in front of me. It was so bright I wanted to close my eyes, except I couldn't or else I might not catch it. I dove forward, and my foot slipped in the loose dirt, and I fell really, but I reached out as far as I could and held out both of my hands and then I hit the ground real hard, and when I looked up I was holding a star in my hands.

Uncle Kris ran over to me and picked me up and kept saying I did it and hooray, and I couldn't take my eyes off it. It was brighter than I thought it would be — like a light bulb in my hands. It was so bright that I couldn't see the surface, just a glow. 'Course, I could feel it. It was soft like maybe an apple, but not that heavy. It seemed like it made my hand tickle a little bit, too, like it was moving, but I think it was just shaking 'cause it was tired from the long trip. Finally, Uncle Kris stopped talking and just stared at it with me. The two of us must've stood there just looking at it for ten minutes before we said anything again. I tossed it in the air a couple of times and caught it gently. Me and Uncle Kris looked at each other and smiled. I caught my first star. Uncle Kris winked at me, and I could tell that he believed again, 'cause there was this twinklin' in his eye, just like a star that was fixin' to fall.

I felt something on my feet and I looked down and there was Penelope, purring and looking up at the star in my hands. I held it down for her to look at, and she mewed and rubbed it with her face. I could imagine what it would be like to play games with it in the woods with the foxes and the cats and the owls, but we didn't see any that night. I still wonder if Kris made up that part about the animals, but it's alright if he did, 'cause anyway the stars were real, and that's the important part.

I caught another one a couple of nights later, and probably six or seven more over the next few months. I missed a few of 'em, though, and when I did, they burst into a puddle of sand on the ground. I saved the sand, too and put it in a jar that I keep under my bed. I put the stars in a shoebox, but now they just look like little white rocks. They get hard after they stop glowing, and if someone didn't know, they would just think they were just any old rocks. That's why I haven't showed 'em to nobody, 'cause they wouldn't believe in 'em. But I believe, and Uncle Kris believes, and I say if anybody else thinks they believe, too, then they can just go and catch their own stars.