

## The Magic Sheet

Writing is the greatest skill in the world. Jack believed his sheet was a great big piece of paper. He did not believe the sheet was made of paper, Jack knew better than that. He chose to believe the sheet could act as a piece of paper and record all his thoughts.

Another thing Jack believed was that the behaviors of his body always corresponded to the state of his thoughts. Thus, for example, when Jack was depressed, his body felt heavy and hard to move. If he was happy, the heaviness went away and his arms and legs felt light and energetic. Jack would dance and sing at those times, and tell people he loved them. But there was one thing better than telling them.

One day, Jack awoke to the idea that his thoughts, manifested in his bodily movements, might best be recorded in his magic sheet. The magic sheet lay across him unevenly. Jack's foot poked out at one end. At the other end, Jack's entire torso emerged. The rest of the sheet lay in bunches. It looked like a long pleated snake digesting three dissimilar payloads. Jack tugged it around his chin and rolled.

The day was young. Beyond the frosted window, the sun rose and spread light across the valley, which was thick with tall pine. Jack rubbed his fingers in his eyes and sat up, grasping the sheet. Sliding his legs to the edge of the bed,

he dragged the sheet free of the blanket completely. He stood and inhaled deeply.

"Everything matters today," he thought, "because today I am recording everything in my magic sheet." He then smacked his head, laughing, for now his first recorded thought was about recording all his thoughts. "That won't be too interesting or unusual to read at any time," he thought. Nor will that or that or that, he realized. Soon he laughed so hard that fell on the bed and curled into a ball, still carrying the sheet. There he laughed until his cheeks flushed and the upper lobes of his ears glowed an incredible pink. The sun climbed the sky. Its first rays broke over the windowsill, illuminating the lower frost.

"This sheet has seen everything," he said, as his parents objected to his wearing the sheet to school. He was calm. He patted his left thigh with his palm very gently. The waffles steamed. Across the table, Jack's sister Jill gulped at her water. Mrs. Helpful flipped the waffle iron off. Mr. Helpful repeated that wearing a sheet to school was in every case a bad idea and begged Jack to take his word for it.

"You will only regret it," he said, suggesting with his soft tone of voice that experience informed his advice. Then he drove the point home, saying, "Experience informs my advice, Jack."

"That's your prerogative," said Jack. "In your case, experience has played a sizeable role. To neglect the responsibility of squarely facing your experience and reflecting upon it with the intention to learn, or season oneself, is downright

treasonous. However, to advise others on its behalf is not to have reflected enough yet." He did not include the remark "if at all," although he felt some enticement.

"Jack will be fine in the sheet," said Mr. Helpful. He dropped his eyes and nodded his head several times. Jack sat down across from the window and addressed his breakfast, which swam in ribbons of butter and syrup. He picked up his fork and advanced it toward the plate. The waffles were soft. They spread before his fork like clouds to a graceful pilot. As he lifted the first bite, it seemed to thank Jack for its early selection, as if to be chewed were superior even to body integrity.

A thick band of syrup ran quickly down Jack's chin, where for an instant it beaded, but immediately fell. Jack reached for it with a playful light in his eyes. It escaped him. It got him. It ran down his chest and into the sheet. Jack stanchied it with the sheet. He smeared it into a thin line of stickiness. "That's sticky," he thought.

"But it will be very cold," warned Mrs. Helpful. "You've never gone to school in a sheet before," she reminded.

"In case you had forgotten," said Mr. Helpful.

"No," sighed Jack. "Jill, do you understand me?"

"I'm the only one who does," she answered.

"Let's get hitched," Jack suggested. This whole exchange with his sister was taking place in hyper-time. That was one power of the magic sheet: it could

change time for some people without changing it for all the people. Or it could change it for all the people, but in different ways, so that different things happened for different people or groups of people at different times. Anyway, hyper-time was no big deal to Jack, as he believed that hyper-time never went away, since somewhere at every given moment there was someone conjuring it with a magic sheet or its equivalent, and all those someones extended hyper-time around the clock and calendar without a single pause.

"It's my turn," he told Jill.

"How do you know?" she asked.

"You awaken to the idea."

"Is that what it feels like?"

"Yes, you awaken."

"But I don't think that I'm sleeping."

"It's not your turn," he explained, sliding from his seat, and so also from the hyper-time interaction. Mr. Helpful smacked his gums. "When was the last time life tasted so sweet?" he wondered. How had he forgotten the glory of each day?

"You can't mean to let him," said Mrs. Helpful, as Jack wandered from the table, the sheet dragging slowly behind him.

"I've never felt so together," he said. "We're good at what we do. We don't make mistakes, because mistakes are actually a lack of responsibility toward one's actions. In that way, whatever you do asks of you to think it

through, into, what you, can keep, with you. Oh, I'm sorry for singing, Honey, but I'm feeling fine."

"You're also still singing," said Mrs. Helpful, laughing. The exchange departed for hyper-time, and soon Mr. and Mrs. Helpful were in hysterics over a prolonged eye contact. Their magic sheet stretched between their eyes, catching the small stars that slowly fell like snowflakes. When they shook, the sheet trembled and glittered. Jill glittered. The house became spacious and warm.

Mr. Helpful stood on tiptoes for a second, testing the gentle currents of warm air with his face, which he stretched forward and up. He hovered in this position indefinitely until, extending his arms, he completely left the Earth. His body pitched upward, gaining altitude. His feet extended outward like a tail.

Mrs. Helpful gathered the spilled stars into a glass of water and quickly stirred it. She poured the mixture into a plastic container and headed for the freezer. But something overcame her. She decided to give the drink to Jill, whose thirst was very evident.

Jill had no need for more water. She knew how much water she contained at every moment of every day, because her skin was her Magic Sheet. That was unusual in someone her age. But Jill was not concerned with statistics. Her vigilance corresponded to only her skin.

Jill had an enormous attention span. Asked by a wise man to count every pigmentation along her skin through a special refracting lens with a notched

handle, Jill replied, "To answer you would be a privilege, but I am first counting follicles." So engrossed did she remain that she did not question the wise man's sudden appearance at her side or notice the small piece of glowing moon he placed beside her plate.

Nor did she notice the glass of water from her mother. It sat at the table's edge, demonstrating a tiny seesaw with its surface until all motion ceased and the stars settled out of solution, rising free of the water and into the air, where they clustered temporarily and then scattered into the unfathomable distance.

Mrs. Helpful flew to their last visible location. She seemed surprised to find Mr. Helpful in that exact spot. She flapped her wings lightly and ran her fingers through his feathers. Mr. Helpful put his arms around her and held her. They wore their Magic Sheet.

Jack wore his also. He stepped into the bus and smiled broadly at his surprised friends, his hands at his chest. The bus lumbered into gear, but soon advanced smoothly. Beyond the windows the pines passed like sudden broadcasts of Jack's blinks. His eye was suddenly sore, and he felt a tear build. He soaked it into the sheet and rubbed his eyes. The irritation passed and he sat down with a boy in a tan parka.

"That's a nice sheet," said the boy. Jack smiled.

"It's my turn," he said.

"You've certainly waited patiently," noted the boy. "It's not common for the inexperienced to show such patience."

"You flatter me," Jack teased. The bus reached the top of a hill. The speed lifted the front tires. They returned to the ground without bumping. Jack breathed softly.

"Have you heard of the Magic Sheet?" he asked the boy in the tan Parka. The boy in the tan Parka shrugged his shoulders. He twiddled his fingers inside thick wool gloves.

"I'm wearing the Magic Sheet," said Jack. "Oh, I know it won't be magic forever, but all the more reason to recognize that I am wearing it. One might slink through such a day, but one is probably performing for a college fraternity if so. On the other hand, my behavior is my own, and reflects my thoughts."

"You know who I am," said the boy in the tan parka.

"Yes," said Jack.

"It is your turn," agreed the boy. He spun around in his seat and etched a small diagram into the frosted window. This action required the removal of his mitten, which he handed to Jack.

Jack put on the mitten and explored the warmth it held. His fingers became pliable. He bent them into a fist.

"It's a strange sensation," he said.

"You're not the first to think so. Are you aware of that?"

"How couldn't I be? You made me aware."

"That's an excellent point."

"Yet I know what you mean," Jack said graciously. "Today, we have a guest for Math class."

"I remember," said the boy in the tan parka. "What he will tell us is represented by this small portion of the diagram." The boy in the tan parka pointed to the remote corner of the window. There, a brief mathematical equation suggested that certain letters were equal to each other if arranged in special sequences.

"That doesn't interest me," admitted Jack.

"Nor me," said the boy in the tan parka.

"Why don't we look somewhere else," suggested Jack. The boy in the tan parka graciously tipped his head. Jack accepted the invitation, pointing his own finger near the center of the diagram, which began to rotate on a central hub.

The boys sat transfixed. For a while their bodies did not correspond to their thoughts, and so this portion of Jack's day is lost. He resumed the inscription of the Magic Sheet in his first class, where the teacher asked him to help a girl arrange chairs for the guest's presentation.

"You will be the first to choose your seats," decided the teacher after questioning Jack about his choice of clothes. She cast a sad glance across the room at the window and shook herself into her identity as a teacher. She asked the quiet children to remind her what their homework had been. She did not listen, and sat down at her desk.

"You arrange chairs admirably," remarked Jack to the girl with whom he worked. "I have many chairs in my room that wish for such attention to their arrangement." He blushed, and wore the Magic Sheet. The girl smiled. A strand of hair fell from its perch behind her ear.

"It's your turn," said the girl, conceding the first choice of chairs to Jack.

"But we haven't finished arranging," he observed.

"Haven't we?" asked the girl.

"Haven't we?" agreed Jack. He scratched his head, then pointed to a chair near the center of the assembly.

"Good choice," commended the girl.

"Then you shall sit there," bid Jack.

"I shall sit there," said the girl. She smiled. The room lost its distinctness and she saw only Jack. He too was smiling. He expanded his arms beneath the Magic Sheet and produced the sun.