

Legends of Elderly Slam Poetry
Ep. #2 (Jackrabbit Johnson)

written by

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FADE UP

EXT. AN OLD FARM - DAY

It's a long abandoned farmhouse surrounded by acres of fallow, unplowed land. Weeds sway in the breeze, of a forsaken front lawn.

FONT: "Elmira, Oregon"

JACKRABBIT (V.O.)

I was born in a dirt flat along the Long Tom River, only a stretch-away from this pumpkin farm, in the Lord's year of nineteen-hundred-and-forty-one.

A creaky barn door flaps ghostly in the wind, as feral chickens strut across the scene.

JACKRABBIT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Martha gave birth to our only son, way back, when I worked on this property.

JACKRABBIT JOHNSON (85), ancient-looking, disheveled, sits in a rocking chair on a rickety, wooden porch. He sports blue overalls and wears a straw hat. He's scribbling on a small spiral notepad.

-He looks up at the Documentary DIRECTOR (27).

JACKRABBIT

Are yawl filming?

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Yes we are. But please, don't let us interrupt you. Keep rolling on this, Sam.

JACKRABBIT

Well, maybe you can help me out. I need a better word that rhymes with pumpkin. And don't say bumpkin, ya can't always use the obvious choice.

He clicks a pen, closes his spiral notepad, takes off his reading glasses, and sets everything on a crooked table.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

I reckon I could show you around the farm, a little.

INT. A NICE HOME - DAY

JARED (43), successful-looking, sits with MARY (40). Mary holds a baby.

FONT: "Jared Johnson and Mary Smith / Grandchildren"

JARED

Grandpa is a bit eccentric but I'm a successful business owner in Veneta, so I try to support him.

MARY

He belongs in a nursing home. I called social services and they said they could easily find someplace for him. Where professionals would take care of him.

Jared glances at the Director, just off screen.

JARED

Uh, you said I could mention Chim-Chim Heating and Cooling in this, right?

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Of course.

MARY

That's the only reason you let him embarrass himself. He's not some amusing marketing tool, Jared. He's our grandpa!

JARED

I help him because it's what he wants to do. It makes him happy.

Mary spikes the camera.

MARY

He belongs in a care home.

EXT. A FALLOW PUMPKIN FIELD - DAY

It's a low angle of Jackrabbit's boots, his walking cane, trampling barren, brown top soil.

JACKRABBIT (V.O)

This farm produced enough pumpkins for the entire valley.

Jackrabbit points around an empty field with his cane.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)
Now this particular patch of field
was Elmira Farms corn-maze area.
During the Halloween season.
Hayrides, started on the North
field, just up there, after
Thanksgiving.

Jackrabbit points, with his finger, back toward the camera.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)
I reckon a friendly scarecrow would
jump down and entertain children
and parents alike, as they exited
the corn maze. Right about where
you're standing, young lady.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
In this very spot?

JACKRABBIT
Right there in that very spot. Look
down and you'll still see post
holes that held up the friendly
scarecrow's platform.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
Oh my gawd. I can see them!

JACKRABBIT
I'll take you to my favorite spot
on the whole farm. I might need
this cane, but I can still make it
up there.

It's higher angles of the entire property, including the
abandoned old farmhouse below.

JACKRABBIT (V.O.)
My only son died way too young. In
a car crash on a tiny road near
here. Some drunk kid hit him head-
on. Thank god Martha died a year
before he did. So, she didn't have
to see all that.

Jackrabbit keeps shuffling toward a large, old growth log,
nestling forest, on the upper edge of rustic, unkept
farmland.

JACKRABBIT

Old man Davidson sold this entire property, well. I reckon, about twenty-years ago, or so.

He sits on the old growth log, catches his breath.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

The owners are kind. They let me roam around, and I now occupy that old farmhouse down there. The plumbing I helped Davidson install in that house, still works like new. I'm okay to live in it, until they find investment to plant pumpkins, or squash, or maybe even corn, on this farm again. I reckon I might die in that old house. Then, I reckon I'll see Martha again.

Jackrabbit pulls a small, spiral notepad and pen out of his pocket. He adjusts his reading glasses, flips through a few pages, clicks his pen.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

Yep, Martha is gone. My son is gone. Oh, I still have two well-intentioned grandkids, and even a great-granddaughter now. I surely love 'em.

Jackrabbit stares at his notepad.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

But. My only real passion left in this life? Is. Slamming poetry.

INT. A NICE HOME - DAY

JARED

Grandpa ventured into the Oregon Country Fair here in Veneta, and saw some slam poetry hippie perform.

MARY

It ruined his life! And ours. I take him food, but all he wants to do is wander that damned abandoned farm where he used to work, and scribble in those little notebooks of his.

JARED
I bring him the notebooks. And
pens.

Mary smirks at Jared.

JARED (CONT'D)
Some of the slam poetry he writes
is really good, Mary.

Jared looks back at the camera.

JARED (CONT'D)
I've started helping him find gigs.
He's really good.

MARY
You exploit him!

Mary spikes the camera.

MARY (CONT'D)
Grandpa belongs in a nursing care
home.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Local business leaders sit around a long conference table.

FONT: "Veneta Rotary Club Meeting / Veneta, Oregon"

JIM (40's), stands, assumes control of the room.

JIM
We always begin our weekly meeting
with a short inspirational reading.
This week's offering is presented
by Chim-Chim Heating and Cooling.
You all know Jared Johnson. He's in
and out of every local business in
town, keeping us warm and dry.

Jared rises, approaches Jim at the head of the table. Jim
sits down.

JARED
Thanks Jim. How many of you
remember visiting Elmira Farms, as
a kid?

People look around, older people shyly lift their palms.

JARED (CONT'D)

Well, I know my dad's friends loved visiting that pumpkin farm and maybe many of your parents did too. I'd like to present one of the former workers at Elmira Farms, my grandfather Jack, he's known as Jackrabbit, Johnson.

Jared sits back down. Jackrabbit, still dressed in blue overalls and a straw hat, enters the conference room. He stands at the head of the table, adjusts his reading glasses, pulls out his small spiral notepad.

-He finds a page, clears his throat.

JACKRABBIT

Farts!

There is a collective gasp in the room. Jim and Jared jump up, rush toward Jackrabbit. Jackrabbit shuffles his notes.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

I'm sorry Jared! I wrote that one for the Elks Lodge next week.

Jim and Jared look at each other. Jackrabbit stops shuffling his notes.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

But we're here now, sit down.

JARED

Grandpa this is a business meeting.

JACKRABBIT

Sit the hell down. Both of you.

They hesitantly return to their seats. Jackrabbit checks his notes, looks back toward the stunned Rotary Club members.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

I reckon I'll say it again. Farts.

People look around the room, grimacing at one another. Jim sits on the edge of his chair, ready to pounce.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

Farts are smelly things. Yet we laugh off the aroma that our own farts bring.

Someone chuckles.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)
What is so funny, god-damn-it?

Jim stands. Jackrabbit stares him back down into his seat.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)
Why are our own particles of pooh,
so hilarious? To only us? When
something obviously smells so
wrongly nefarious. To others we
love and confide. And trust.

A few people laugh. Jim evil eye's Jared, who lowers and
shakes his head.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)
It sort of makes me sad. We can
laugh about some thing that stinks,
so bad. While others endure the
joke we had, on our noses, shared
bonds, and the environment around
us.

People now openly chuckle, roll their eyes at one another.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)
Our shared, common sentiments
should make us all glad. Not sad!

Jackrabbit abandons his cane against the long table,
approaches the street-view window, looks out of it.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)
Mistakes! We all make them. Yet we
abhor all problems that others
create. Oh we give. But we can't
take.

Jackrabbit turns back toward the room.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)
Why can't we find humor, when
others partake, in humanity? Why
can't we all share common sanity,
when others make mistakes, god-
damn-it?

The room is suddenly, riveted.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)
Why do we only excuse ourselves
when we flail? Our next-times
unlimited, mistakes-like-farts,
permitted.

(MORE)

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

As long as it's ours, but not,
someone else's fail. Denying our
commonality only puts pressure on
everyone's reality. When everything
around us, we see, only exists as
particles, of you and me. It's our
human predicament. And it really
makes me mad. We vet every single
mistake others have had. Laughing,
even quietly, creating unthinkable
stank for masses, while we chuckle
about pooh from our very own asses,
as acceptably human... If and when
followed by, the structural
typical, underlyingly
hypocritical... my bad.

Jackrabbit walks back to the head of the table.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

Judging others, above our own
standards of self, is inherently,
remarkable.

He looks at Jared.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

Given someone else's mistake,
unforgivable. Yet our own mistakes?
Quite livable.

Jackrabbit looks at Jim.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

But, my thinking shouldn't be so
poor.

He looks back up, at everyone.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

At least it was my fart. And not
yours.

He grabs his cane, exits the conference room. The room is
stunned, silent. Everyone rises, in thunderous applause.

INT. A NICE HOME - DAY

Mary adjusts a child in her arms, looks at Jared.

MARY

You used him Jared.

JARED

He spent a lot of time out in those
pumpkin fields Mary. He wanted
poetry slam gigs. I got them for
him.

Mary spikes the camera.

MARY

He belongs in a care home.

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

FONT: "Sellmore Vitamins Distributor Conference /
Springfield, Oregon"

A modest group of Sellmore Vitamins Distributors gather for
breakfast, in a small hotel conference room. Jared reaches a
sleek lectern, adjusts the microphone.

JARED

Thank you for having us. I'm Jared
Johnson of Chim-Chim Heating and
Cooling in Veneta. I reached Silver
Producer with Sellmore Vitamins in
twenty-twenty-one.

People stop eating, applaud. Attendees return to eating
breakfast.

JARED (CONT'D)

I'm only here to introduce my
granddad, as this morning's
breakfast speaker. Many of you
might remember Elmira Farms, as a
leading pumpkin and squash producer
in the Northwest.

Attendees now solely focus on breakfast, and chattering with
one another.

JARED (CONT'D)

Please welcome a former valued
worker at, uh, former Elmira Farms.
Jack "Jackrabbit" Johnson.

Jared looks around the room.

JARED (CONT'D)

Where is grandpa?

No one notices Jackrabbit, as he shuffles into the hall
through a side entrance.

He reaches the lectern, Jared returns to his table. Jackrabbit leans his cane against the lectern, pulls out his small notepad. He flips pages.

-Jackrabbit puts on his reading glasses, adjusts the microphone.

JACKRABBIT
Farts are smelly things.

A few people look up, chuckle, then continue eating breakfast.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)
Sorry folks that one's for the
Elk's Lodge.

The entire room is tuned out. Jackrabbit flips pages, stops.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)
I learned a lot about love by
watching a butterfly. She fluttered
in the breeze unaware of my eyes.
Her wings flapped clumsily, but she
didn't care. She blessed her flight
in dignified air. Until she lit
majestically, next to me. Like she
wanted to prove she could land with
ease.

Jackrabbit flips a page on his spiral notebook.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)
Her colors grew bolder against the
sun. While she rested her wings,
one by one. She stayed a while as
if only to say, my journey will
take me far away. And suddenly,
with ease and grace, she gathered
herself and flew into space. I'm
still amazed when I watch the sky.
Because I learned a lot about love
by watching a butterfly.

Jackrabbit pauses, adjust his reading glasses.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)
That one was about my wife. Her
name was Martha. She was my
butterfly. Thank you.

A few people clap. A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN shouts.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

More!

JACKRABBIT

I do have one about. Well, I'll find it.

Jackrabbit shuffles a few pages in his notebook.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

This poem is titled, Deep Down Friend.

A few attendees stop eating breakfast, listen to Jackrabbit.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

I offer refreshment deep below the surface. I am calmly still, fulfilling my purpose. You know I'm here waiting, so visit me. When you're empty, tired, and thirsty. Suddenly a splash, full and then, Lift soothing comfort up again. I am a well.

Jackrabbit looks up, most people in the audience eat breakfast, chatting with others at their table. Jackrabbit uncouples the microphone and walks around the lectern.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

I provide assurance whenever you're lost. Pointing to shelter from heat and frost. You know I'll offer direction when you look to me. Mapping a path of pure empathy. Just a glance, or a word, and then, Find your way back home again. I am a compass.

Everyone has stopped eating breakfast, now enthralled in the elderly man's slam poetry. Jackrabbit walks the room, table to table.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

I am a mirror, an echo, and a symphony. I laugh and cry, with you, in harmony. You know you can always count on me. To share your JOY or calm your seas. Years come and go, and then, Our hearts always beat as one again. I am your friend.

The room applauds. Jackrabbit falls to the ground. The camera jiggles, as the Director rushes to help Jared attend to Jackrabbit.

DIRECTOR
Sam! Stop filming this!

INT. A NICE HOME - DAY.

Mary is burping her baby, Jared looks sadly, just off camera.

MARY
You knew he was old.

JARED
It's what he asked me to do!

MARY
Oh, but you never failed to mention Chim-Chim Heating and Cooling, did you?

JARED
He told me to do it! I own a business!

MARY
You kept pushing him.

JARED
He pushed, me! It's what he wanted! I stopped trying to promote Chim-Chim, but not because he asked me too.

MARY
You enable him! And these, bizarre wild fantasies of his.

JARED
You don't understand. It's like, he becomes a different person or something when he's slamming poetry. He's like, forever young again. It's like his soul finds a voice, or something. I, I can't explain it. All I know is that I, I'm his biggest fan.

Mary spikes the camera.

MARY

My grandpa is pushing ninety. He belongs in a care home.

She pats her baby's back.

MARY (CONT'D)

Where trained professionals can take care of him!

JARED

He lives with us now Mary, we are taking care of him.

MARY

You better not take him out for slam poetry or whatever, gigs again, Jared!

Jared stands.

JARED

I can't do this anymore!

He throws off his lapel microphone, leaves the scene. Mary spikes the camera.

MARY

Grandpa belongs in a real care home.

JARED (O.S.)

He's doing what he loves Mary!

A door slams.

INT. BENNY'S TAVERN - NIGHT

It's various shots of college kids enjoying their local mid-sized, off-campus tavern. Most sit at small, round tables, drinking and conversing. The long, wooden bar area is also packed full of young patrons.

FONT: "Benny's Tavern, Corvallis, Oregon / Music & Slam Poetry Open Mic Night"

Jackrabbit can barely waddle onto the small, platform stage up front, even with Jared's help. Jackrabbit hands his cane to Jared. Jared quickly exits, stands close by, just off-platform.

-Jackrabbit puts on reading glasses, whips out a small notepad from his overalls pocket, shuffles pages.

Young people in the tavern chuckle, about the weird old man onstage.

-Jackrabbit finally removes the stage microphone from a stand, causing feedback.

JACKRABBIT

My name is Jackrabbit Johnson. I go by Jackrabbit because otherwise my name could be Jack Jack-son.

The entire tavern ignores him.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

Reckon yawl are to young for old nickname humor. I'm told I have five-minutes so I brought the longest slam poem I ever wrote.

A REGULAR looks at the BARTENDER.

REGULAR

Is that old guy a joke?

BARTENDER

It's open mic night. The owner met that old man at a conference down in Springfield or something. Just endure it.

The feedback grows, as Jackrabbit sort of moves around until it dies down.

JACKRABBIT

Sound guy must be a Republican.

The young audience purposely ignores the elderly man on stage. A YOUNG GUY heckles him.

YOUNG GUY

Go back to the old folks home!

A few patrons laugh, but most remain anathema to anything happening on the open mic platform.

JACKRABBIT

Well. I voted for a Republican once, so here goes nothin'.

Jackrabbit shuffles his notes, causing feedback again. He stuffs his notepad back in his overalls pocket.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

You may have heard of a Harvest
Moon. This poem is titled, Rockstar
Moon.

Young people in the tavern now visibly cringe, making their
conversations louder.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

The moon is a rock star at the end
of every day. When we cease day's
work, in perspiration, uniting like
an invisible nation, under one
ancient orb of fame and sensation
called the moon. For though small
minds may utter weak words, like
man on the moon or hunk of cheese?
Motherfuckers, please. Those tiny
phrases sound absurd. There is no
rock star like the moon.

A few people chuckle, return to their conversations and
drinks.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

All of our world's exalted
performers, poets, artistic kings,
handsome charmers, dancers and
heroes of stage and screen, even
bumpkin pumpkin farmers, we all
know it. There is no source of pure
inspiration, appearing nightly,
shining brightly, above our heads,
keeping us all out of bed, in
spectacular illumination, appearing
near not far, quickening hearts,
causing tidal waves of human arts,
once each day is done. The moon has
won! Yes, all earth's artists bow,
in awestruck wonder here and now.
There is no rock star like the
moon.

Young people begin turning their heads. A few turn their
chairs toward the stage.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

No other form of observable matter
causes hearts to swoon nor humans
chatter, in moonlit gatherings,
endlessly clattering, dithering
together like vampires...

It's various shots of young people, looking at each other, then turning to the stage.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

Mirrorless creatures as night's own
owls, in glowing moon beams we
prowl, out of sight, full of
dreams, of new empires. somehow
like werewolves, ghouls, everyone
reeking, of precious cool freedoms
we've found in our seeking, only
under moonlight. You know I'm
right.

The Regular looks at the BARTENDER.

REGULAR

Who is that old man?

BARTENDER

I don't know Caleb. I told you it's
open mic night.

JACKRABBIT

We've all found love, new life, and
gathered our might, to summon
strength through hardest fights,
all because we found our will, our
hope, our strength to struggle
still, from a glowing, lifeless yet
foreboding rock, that fills our
eyes. It's no surprise. The rock
star moon is in the sky.

The Regular downs his beer.

REGULAR

What the hell is he talking about?

BARTENDER

You want another P-B-R, or what?

JACKRABBIT

Announcing dusk and raising tides,
the moon above us glides,
pronouncing we must, in each new
flight, let hope abide! Even
through our darkest nights...

Cellphones near the stage are now recording.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

We all owe declaration,
proclamations, moon shine is our
destination, knowing fun and
frolic, we are pure moon-holics,
finding solace from hard days, and
so we sing in choir-like praise,
I'll shout again this boisterous
tune, there is no rock star like
the moon!

Young people begin to stand and approach the stage.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

My only true love? She left me
alone, to write this ode, far too
soon. And though she's yonder by
and by, I'm not cursed to wonder
why, because I know she's
somewhere, missing my hand to hold,
where ever, when ever, she beholds,
that bright, beautiful moon, above.

The regular turns his stool toward the stage, along with
others seated at the bar.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

It's obvious, you see, the moon is
a rock star, so high above you and
me. There is no sunrise without
night, yet the moon bounces,
announces, each new horizon's
dawning light.

ANOTHER REGULAR leaves her barstool.

ANOTHER REGULAR

Someone said he's a Shakespearean
actor visiting here from Ashland.

REGULAR

I knew I recognized that guy!

Everyone leaves their barstools.

JACKRABBIT

No horrid, wretched day shall last!
Rejoice in hope, dear astronaut of
space and time, for it is the
purpose of this rhyme.

It's now standing room only, as the entire young crowd
presses the stage. Nearly everyone is holding up their
cellphones, as if it were a concert.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

Flee all past, and sail new dawns.
 Yesterday has come and gone. Your
 new horizons wait beyond, all
 raging seas or backward truths,
 adventure is your gift of youth! So
 raise your drink of bubbling JAR,
 salute fresh hope and travel far.
 We all live short and die too soon.
 Celebrate, participate,
 investigate, each sacred night,
 underneath, a rock star moon.

The regular drinks his pint with one hand, while holding up
 his cellphone, recording the stage, in the other hand.

JACKRABBIT (CONT'D)

So again I muse? Do you still
 consider the moon as simply an orb,
 merely guiding ships while twirling
 seas? For the very moon above us
 decrees, only you may master your
 own unique and certain destiny.
 Motherfuckers, please. There is no
 rock star like the moon.

Jackrabbit literally drops the microphone, sort of standing
 zombie-like. Jared rushes to assist him.

-It's pandemonium in the tavern, as college kids shout, jump
 around, and celebrate their young lives together.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AN OLD FARM - DAY

A creaky barn door flaps ghostly in the wind, as feral
 chickens strut back across the scene.

-The old rocking chair on the porch, sits still and empty.
 Jackrabbit's small spiral notepad and his pen, rest on the
 decaying table next to the chair.

MARY (O.S.)

I'd come out here to check on him
 and he was always scribbling in
 that note book, like a madman or
 something.

JARED (O.S.)

Mary. You have no idea.

MARY (O.S.)
You're right Jared. He always
belonged right here.

EXT. A FALLOW PUMPKIN FIELD - DAY

Three sets of ankles trample barren, brown top soil.

JARED ((O.S.))
The owners sold this farm to a
cemetery company out of Texas.

Jared, Mary, and the Director stand over a newly placed
gravesite.

MARY
He'll rest here, forever.

Jared weeps. Mary places her hand on his shoulder.

JARED
I'm sorry Mary! I killed him.

MARY
It's not your fault Jared. Grandpa
wanted to share his poetry and you
helped him do that before he died.
You are actually a hero.

DIRECTOR
Maybe it was me. I heard about his
story and wanted to make this
documentary about him.

MARY
It's not your fault, either. I'm
glad you'll tell Grandpa's story.

DIRECTOR
He's buried in the same spot where
he told me a friendly scarecrow
would jump off a post and entertain
people.

MARY
Jared. She doesn't know.

DIRECTOR
Know what?

JARED
Grandpa was that scarecrow.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. A TOMBSTONE - DAY

THE TOMBSTONE INGRAVING READS: "Jack (Jackrabbit) Johnson.
1941 - 2026. Here lies a poet. Jack never found his perfect
rhyme for pumpkin. But he never stopped searching. His life
was really quite somethin."

FADE TO BLACK