

The Last Wish of Jonny Goat-Legs

by C. A. Fulwell

Jonny Goat-Legs, the most dynamic, popular movie star in the history of cinema, was in London to promote his new film. He was also a faun. He had always been a faun.

Leaving his hotel, he had to duck to fit his seven-foot frame through the door, pausing to bask in the appreciation of the crowd.

“We love you, Jonny!”

“He’s such an awesome faun!”

“He’s always been a faun!”

Jonny, revelling in the attention, grinned, waved, and brandished his silver fountain pen.

“Oh my god, he’s doing autographs!”

A small, wide-eyed boy appeared with a notebook; Jonny went into his usual routine.

“Here ya go, buddy- hey, I better not see that for sale online later,” said Jonny, with a wink, “Okay, who’s next?”

Nobody was next. Unsteady on his hooves, Jonny staggered back a step, breathing hard. He bent over and rested his hands on his hairy, muscular legs, wheezing. The crowd blurred, an incoherent buzz, and the world went black as he fell.

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Word spread quickly around St Arthur's: a real-life movie star- *the* Jonny Goat-Legs, here, in their hospital!

Indeed he was, Jonny reclined in bed, in a private room of about fifteen feet square. It was light, airy and smelled clean- all white walls and shiny surfaces. Next to him stood machines he didn't really understand, with multicoloured wires snaking over his head and body.

His fans were already lining the corridor outside his room: doctors, nurses, visitors- even patients, queuing for a glimpse.

“What the hell is going on here? This is *supposed* to be a goddamn hospital!”

Carole, Jonny's agent, swept down the corridor, a demon in \$700 heels, barking at the startled group to get out of her sight. There was mumbling, then obedient shuffling, before Carole pulled a doctor by the elbow into Jonny's room.

“Hey, sweetie,” called Carole, her New York drawl a welcome reminder of normality. Carole turned to the doctor, “Tell him what you just told me. Come on, spit it out.” Carole's diminutive stature and advancing years belied the hurricane within. Jonny was glad she was on his side.

The doctor sat down and introduced herself. Jonny immediately forgot her name. “So, Mr Goat-Legs,” she hesitated, then met his eyes, “is it okay if I call you Jonny?”

Jonny shrugged. One of his pointed ears twitched impatiently.

“Ok, thank you- Jonny. This is quite difficult for me to say. We ran some tests. Of course, you’re a faun, and you have *always* been a faun-”

And a badass faun at that, my friends.

“- your anatomy is different to a human’s, but we were still able to examine your nervous and cardiovascular systems. I’m afraid that both are in rapid decline, and we don’t know why.”

Jonny blinked, then looked over at Carole.

“They think you’re dying, sweetie.” Jonny blinked again, then his eyes widened.

“*What!?* What do you mean, I’m *dying*? This is insane- I can’t be dying, I have a movie to promote!” He tried to stand, but immediately regretted it; his legs gave way and he crashed back to the bed, his pulse thumping in his ears.

“Please stay in bed,” said the doctor, “We have more tests to run, and a long list of medications which we can try. We haven’t given up yet.” She gave a weak smile and left the room.

“Carole, what the f-”

“Sssh, take it easy, buddy- first up, you sleep. That’s an order. We’ll talk tomorrow afternoon, ok?” With that, Carole squeezed his hand and left. His world was swimming, and he was completely exhausted. Sleep came mercifully quickly.

In his dream, Jonny was shorter, and weak. There was a grey, airless office: mediocrity. He couldn’t make out what people said to him; their faces said enough- he was not popular, not respected, and, worst of all, women stayed away from him. It was like

watching a point-of-view video from his favourite website (but there, things with women ended up a *lot* better than they did in the dream).

This image faded, and he found himself at the side of a busy road. He was running... a car horn blasted: he was pulling a woman out of harm's way at the last moment. They fell hard; the woman's glasses fell, cracking the lenses, the skin on his hand stung as he scraped the concrete. He was bleeding. The woman helped him up- Carole? *What?* Why would he dream about her?

Awake, his lips and tongue were bone dry—he reached for water, then froze. There was a wound on his hand, right where he had hurt himself in his dream. He dropped the water and scrambled for his phone.

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At just before 6:00 am, Carole was by Jonny's bedside again, her face a definition of the word 'unimpressed'.

“Okay, Jonny, I'm missing pilates for this.”

Jonny told her about the dream: the more he talked, the more that what he'd seen—being such a loser, rescuing Carole, hurting his hand- felt like a real memory.

“Come on, Carole, first all that from the doc last night, and now this. What's wrong with me? How did I hurt my hand?”

Carole held eye contact, but said nothing. Jonny pounded his fist on the bed.

“Jesus, come on, Carole! We need to fix this shit so I can get back to what I came here for- to promote-” Jonny couldn’t finish the sentence.

“To promote what, Jonny?” said Carole. “What’s the movie called?”

The movie’s title was misty and slipped away whenever he thought he had it.

“What about the last movie, Jonny? What was that called? What was it about? Who else was in it?” Carole was eerily calm, enjoying this conversation.

The blood was thumping in his ears again; sweat formed at his temples and his hooves twitched. He didn’t have the answers, and it scared him.

Carole continued, “Jonny, can you tell me anything about *any* of your movies? What about your house in L.A., what’s that like?”

Jonny’s chest was tight, his legs itched and the room was too small.

Carole leaned in, whispering, “Jonny... What’s my last name?”

He couldn’t keep it in any more, and yelled, “I don’t know! Ok?” He was breathing hard, his chin flecked with saliva. The world wasn’t making sense.

“Why don’t I know, Carole? What’s happening to me? Is it because of what the doc said?”

Carole sat back, somehow seeming taller than before. She smiled softly, sighed, and pulled her chair closer to the bed. When she spoke again, her New York accent had vanished, replaced by something not unlike English aristocracy. Her words were carefully selected, and unhurried, “I’m afraid I didn’t think this would happen so quickly.”

Jonny stared at her, mouth agape. His lips started to twitch as he tried in vain to form words.

Carole pressed on, as if explaining something complicated to a small child, “The reality is: you are not a film star. You are not... all of this,” she said, gesturing dismissively to his hooves, legs and muscular torso. “You are not *a faun*. ‘Jonny Goat-Legs’- I mean, come on, did you *honestly* think that was your real name?” She chuckled. “Men- such simple creatures.” Jonny dreaded her next words.

“Your name is Michael Finch, you are from an unremarkable little town just outside London, and what you described seeing in a dream actually happened- two days ago, in fact.”

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“You’re probably wondering how, and why, this happened to you- perfectly reasonable questions, Mr Finch, and we’ll get to all that, but first: what do you remember about when we first met?” Carole seemed alarmingly casual, as if she were pondering what to order for lunch.

“Wait a minute, Carole, hold on. This is-” Jonny found his voice had changed as well: no longer a deep, Californian rumble, but a nasal sound, coupled with an English accent- and not the refined kind, like Carole’s. *This can’t be happening.*

“I’m afraid it is happening, Mr Finch,” said Carole, patiently. “I should probably be transparent: I can read some of your thoughts. It comes and goes, but I caught that one.”

She flashed him a smile and wiggled her eyebrows.

“Who are you?” said Jonny. He had never felt weaker.

Carole clapped her hands, “Good! We’re getting somewhere. Honestly, it’s easier if you just call me Carole. My real name can’t be pronounced by humans; your tongues aren’t long enough, and you don’t have enough space in your mouths.”

“All you need to know is that I am, indeed, an agent- however, I’m something known as an agent of Baphomet.”

Jonny, no, *Michael*, stared blankly at her as she continued, “Never heard of Baphomet? Famous picture? Goat head? Pentagram? Is any of this ringing a bell?”

“People think we’re evil, but we strive for *balance* in all that we do- ‘as above, so below’, justice and mercy, male and female, good and evil, the list is endless, really.”

“We roam the world, seeking out imbalances and tipping the scales the other way: when you see someone down on their luck who has a sudden boost, or a rags-to-riches story, that’s probably us. We can’t get to everyone who needs it, obviously, but we do what we can.”

“Why me?” said Michael.

“Fair enough, it’s probably time for that,” said Carole. She was about to continue when the doctor from yesterday arrived, with three children in tow.

“Good morning!” cooed the doctor, ushering the children further into the room. “I hope you don’t mind, Mr Goat-Legs, *Jonny*,” she blushed, “but we’ve got these three little superstars from upstairs on the children’s ward, and they just *love* you. It would be wonderful if they could have your autograph- and maybe even have a picture with you. Would that be okay?”

Michael looked at the children: two girls and a boy, around eight, ten years old. One of the girls had an eye patch and some of her hair was missing, revealing jagged, pink scars. The other had a metal frame built around her head, bolted into her neck. The boy was in a wheelchair and looked like it was an effort to sit up straight. The children seemed to be in a lot of pain, but they were grinning like it was Christmas morning, and looking right at him in his hospital bed. He wanted them out of his room as quickly as possible.

Michael did his best to affect Jonny’s voice, “Sure, why not?”- he signed their notebooks, managed to smile for pictures, and breathed a loud sigh when they’d gone. Carole noticed this, and he felt the need to say something.

“Poor kids,” he offered. Carole rolled her eyes.

“Come on, Michael. I think we both know that you find illness like that rather unsightly- *disgusting*, even; you found it hard to look at them and you wanted them gone. I wish I could say that I was surprised by this.”

Michael said nothing.

“Anyway, let’s get back to why you were selected.”

“As you saw in your dream, you’re not exactly a wonderful example of humanity. You’re self-centred, you don’t do anything for anyone unless it benefits you, you lie to yourself about your poor decisions, and your attitude toward women is... concerning, to say the least- let me show you.”

She put her hand on the side of his head, and the brain fog lifted. Snatches of his previous life—his *actual* life—flashed before him.

The times he had sent girls at school, and university, those desperate, often graphic messages, not taking ‘no’ for an answer. He’d made up feeble excuses, such as his ‘friend’ doing it as a joke. Nobody ever believed him, not least because he didn’t have friends.

The fumbling, unsuccessful attempts to lose his virginity with his only ever girlfriend, and the lies he told, to her *and* about her, in the three months they were together.

The late-night social media sessions, trawling for bikini pictures of girls he had met, again and again: Louise, the new girl at work; Rebecca, the receptionist at the dentist’s office; Olivia, his manager’s daughter, brought into the office one day on work experience. She was fifteen. Being Michael was cold, lonely and empty.

All of these things had happened- he couldn’t persuade himself otherwise.

Carole withdrew her hand and the images dissolved. “That, Mr Finch, was just a sample. Would you like to see more?”

Eyes fixed on the wall, he said nothing.

“I thought not. You weren’t doing much positive *at all* in your life, so it was time to see if you could manage balance. I placed myself somewhere you’d be able to save me from a horrible accident, and you obliged- thank you for that. And don’t worry about the glasses: they’re not real. My vision is rather good, as it happens.” Carole’s eyes flashed, blazing purple for a split second.

“But, I saved you- why am I here? Why do I look like *this*?” said Michael.

“Patience, Mr Finch, we’re coming to that. I wanted to test what you would do with an opportunity like no other. I can fulfil three requests- or wishes, if you like- to mortals in need of balance. Before you say it- I know what you’re thinking. The genies think we took the idea from them, we say they got it from us- who knows? Who cares?” Carole shrugged.

A memory formed, hazy and unpleasant: he hadn’t believed Carole, so he’d been flippant with his first request and just asked for £800, the amount he owed on his credit card. Carole had stared at him, then asked him to check his wallet which was immediately thicker in his pocket.

In his hospital bed, Michael blinked, “Was that when we-”

“Was that when we went to the pub? Yes. I had hoped that you might do some good with such an opportunity- perhaps a charity donation, maybe giving something back to the community, or, at least,” she said, with a knowing look, “buying *other people* some drinks without expecting anything in return. But, alas...”

“I couldn’t let this ridiculous imbalance stand, so when you made your next request, I made a little tweak. You’re probably wondering what this has to do with the whole faun

situation. You didn't *wish* for goat legs, if that's what you're thinking. The pub was noisy, you were rather drunk-

"Please," whined Michael, "just tell me what's going on- am I going to die?"

"Oh, quite probably, Mr Finch, and soon. Goat and human anatomy are not compatible at all, and the oldest goat on record was approximately 22 years old. What are you, 27? I don't fancy your chances- though I did think we'd get a few more days to see how you'd manage."

"Anyway, in my report, I will say that I heard your second, predictable, lecherous request as 'to be the world's biggest *faun* star' and acted accordingly."

It took a few seconds for Michael to register what Carole meant by this. When he did, he roared with laughter; he laughed so hard at the absurdity of it all that his ribs ached and his throat was in ribbons.

Even given three wishes, he was a useless idiot- there was so much he could have done, and *that* was how he had responded. Truly, he was as pathetic as so many people had told him, maybe more.

The laughter subsided. Michael said, "So, what happens now? I still have one wish, don't I?"

"Correct- but, before you ask, I can't cure what's wrong with you. It doesn't work like that. You can wish for pretty much anything you like- you can even reverse this change completely and go back to being Michael Finch. And, no, I can't remove anything you've said or done- I can't do half measures on this one."

Michael shot bolt upright, “I’d live?”

“Yes. It’s your choice: spend your last few days here, popular and respected, or go back, and take your chances with your life, such as it was.”

“I imagine you’ll still be thinking of number one, telling yourself lies to justify your distasteful decisions—but what do I know? If that’s what you want, let me know. It’s your request.”

Carole prised herself from the chair, “I’ll give you a couple of hours to think about it, then I’ll-”

Michael interrupted, “I don’t need more time, I know what I want. Please.”

He laid out, as carefully as he could, what he wished for. Carole nodded, and left the room in total silence.

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The next morning, there was pandemonium at St Arthur’s. Doctors and nurses were bursting into tears and hugging each other; others were running down the corridors, shouting, and social media was dominated by the news.

On the children’s ward, three children with life-limiting conditions, two girls and a boy, had made immediate, miraculous and full recoveries. Terms such as ‘medical marvels’ and ‘unprecedented’ were appearing online. The hospital had never known anything like it.

The doctor who had brought the children to see Jonny came to tell him the good news, but was unable to do so: Jonny's heart had failed some hours earlier. His monitoring equipment was inexplicably missing, so nobody had come to help. The doctor and her team did her best over the next thirty minutes, but it was too late.

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Across the road from the hospital, Carole stood in silence. She was pleased Michael had taken the bait and added a little moral equilibrium to his life; this would make things slightly easier for him in what came next. Carole felt herself pulled towards the next unbalanced soul, and left Michael Finch to his fate.