

The Mirror Chronicles

THE BELL BETWEEN WORLDS



The Bouncing Turnip

A deleted scene

When Sylas first arrives in the Other, he meets a young girl called Simia who leads him to a refuge, The Mutable Inn. There Sylas encounters Ash – a young, maverick, but exceptionally talented magician...

“Come and see this,” said Simia. “This is our kind of magic.”

A small crowd had gathered around the table and they had to climb on a bench to see what was happening.

When Sylas peered down he could see the flushed, animated faces of the men, all of them excited and engrossed as they watched a young, lean man seated at one end of the table. He had a huge head of curly blond hair, as ill-kempt as a wild hedge, with golden tufts erupting in all directions and great twirls and whirlpools in its centre. His clothes were of the same fashion: an over-worn tunic with several buttons undone; one shirt sleeve gathered about his elbow and the other loose about his wrist; and a collar that stood to attention on one side. But while his hair and clothes were comically haphazard, his pale, angular face was quick and intelligent. He had the manner of a young man who very much knew his mind.

“That’s Ash,” whispered Simia. “The youngest person here but easily the cleverest.”

“So, to repeat the challenge,” said Ash in a bold, youthful voice, “you must keep the turnip bouncing until you have completed just one of the following tasks...” He leaned forward and pointed in turn to a number of items laid out on the table. “...You must blow a smoke circle with this pipe; or drink this tankard of plume; or break this egg. All things you do at least once a day, and in the case of the plume, well, rather more than once a day...”

He paused for a peel of laughter.

“What could be simpler?” he said, breaking into an innocent grin. He rocked back a little on his chair. “Any questions?”



Sylas's eyes turned to the man at the other end of the table. He was a pleasant looking, middle-aged man with a face that glowed red in the darkened room. He had extraordinarily large cheeks that sagged a little under their own weight, but which gave him a soft, amiable appearance. He was himself snorting with laughter, causing the mighty flanks of his face to leap and wobble, but as the crowd fell silent he pulled them into a more sober expression.

"Just one," he said, leaning forwards and pointing at a wooden spoon that lay next to the other things on the table. "What am I supposed to do with that?"

"That, my dear Chuffit, is your prize for losing – as lose you certainly shall!" cried Ash with a confident smile.

There was another hoot of laughter from the crowd and cries of "Wooden spoon! Perfect!" and "Hah! Excellent!"

Chuffit raised a large, grey eyebrow and grinned. "We shall see," he said with a steady but amiable gaze.

Ash reached over, picked up the turnip, raised it a little way off the table and looked expectantly at Chuffit. The older man nodded, and in the same instant the turnip fell from Ash's hand. To Sylas's utter astonishment when it struck the table it did not land with a thud, but bounced to an impossible height above their heads, as though it were made of rubber. Then it fell, and bounced again, and again, and again.

Sylas's eyes flew to Chuffit, who was staring at the turnip with furrowed brows, following its path through the air. His right hand now began to move towards the pipe. He seized it firmly and without once looking away from the turnip, brought it to his lips and took a deep draw on the tobacco, which burned brightly in the bowl. Then, allowing himself a quiet smile of triumph, he pursed his lips and blew a perfect ring of white smoke. But as quickly as it formed in the air the circle began to droop and buckle. A second later it fell towards the table. It was as though it were made of a powder and not smoke at all. Sure enough, as the haphazard ring met the table, it settled neatly on its surface, the particles of smoke piling one upon another. Chuffit chanced a fleeting glance towards it and with a look of perplexity, he blew another; but once again, the ring crumpled in the air and fell to the table.

"My dear Chuffit!" cried Ash from the other end of the table, "You have formed the most marvellous rings, but however charming they may be, they are clearly not made of smoke!"

There was a mumble of general agreement among the crowd as many leaned in to get a closer look at the growing pile of white powder on the table. Others chuckled knowingly and grinned at Ash, who sat back and eyed the scene with feigned disinterest. Sylas noticed that Ash's eyes were moving quickly between Chuffit, the turnip and the other objects on the table, and he was biting his lip in deep concentration.

His opponent frowned but seemed to take the gibe in good part and quickly gave up on the pipe, placing it back on the table. He reached for the tankard and took careful hold of the handle, keeping one eye on the bouncing turnip. Raising the white foam to his lips, he tilted his head backwards. But as he did so his eyes bulged and his face flushed an even more impressive red, then he coughed and spluttered, sending the foam flying off the top of the drink. But this too behaved strangely. Instead of floating through the air it fell quickly to the table, landing neatly on top of the white powder.

Chuffit's great cheeks shuddered and quivered as he continued to cough, and the turnip made a heavy thump as it hit the table. For a moment it looked as though the game was over but its next bounce was as impressive as the others, and soon both man and turnip were restored. He took another swig at the tankard but once again he coughed and spluttered as it met his lips, and the foam fell like tiny granules on to the table below.

"Well, I must say I have never seen you so reluctant to take a swig of plume, old friend!" announced Ash at the other end of the table, raising a single eyebrow. This drew guffaws from the crowd and a dark look from the challenger.

"That's no plume," he cried. "There's sugar on top!"

"Oh but I assure you that it is!" exclaimed the young man with an innocent look. He turned his eyes to the crowd and they all nodded vigorously.



The turnip bounced on. Beads of sweat had now formed on Chuffit's forehead but with a show of great determination, he set the tankard aside and reached for the egg. This, thought Sylas, would be easy. Chuffit slowly raised his hand until it was almost level with his eyes, then opened it. Everyone waited for the inevitable crunch as the egg hit the table top, but it never came. It landed immediately next to the small pile of powder and granules and flew back up into the air, spinning along the table. Then it fell again, bounced and flew off to the side, where it landed at the very edge of the table, bounced again and headed back to the centre.

Sylas shook his head in disbelief as the egg bounced here and there all over the table top, striking it in perfect time with the turnip. A cheer erupted from the crowd and there were shouts of "Hurrah!" and "Marvellous!" Sylas found himself laughing along.

Chuffit hung his head and pushed back his chair, then raised his red face to show a resigned smile. He dabbed at his forehead with a handkerchief and gave a nod of respect to his tormentor.

Ash did not seem to notice. His eye was still fixed on the turnip and the egg, both of which continued to bounce, the turnip on a single spot in front of him, and the egg all over the table top. The crowd hushed to see what would happen next. All that could be heard were the turnip and the egg.

Thump... thump... thump...

Ash leaned in a little and suddenly the erratic path of the egg seemed to change. With each bounce it drew closer and closer to the turnip at his end of the table. Then, after one final bounce, it struck the turnip in the air, knocking it free from its steady bounce and sending it bouncing back down the table towards Chuffit.

Chuffit clapped his hands and chuckled with amusement. Meanwhile the egg took the turnip's place, bouncing with perfect accuracy on the same spot. As the turnip reached Chuffit, it bounded particularly high in the air until it was almost at the level of Sylas's eyes, then fell plumb on top of the white powder and granules.

There was a loud crack. To a gasp from those gathered around, it broke neatly in half, leaving a huge egg – the white and the yolk – sitting neatly on top of the powder.

"Bravo!" shouted some, "Genius!" shouted others, and every one of them clapped their hands and stamped their feet in approval.

Abruptly Ash rose to his feet, caught the real egg and cast it into the crowd to another roar of approval. Someone quickly pocketed it as a souvenir.

Ash threw both hands into the air. "Pray, quiet!" he shouted above the racket, bringing the room to an immediate silence. "We have had our fun, and now it falls to me to present the loser's prize."

He leaned forwards, picked up the wooden spoon and held it out to Chuffit, who stood to receive it.

"I hope that we have not laughed too much at your expense, old friend," he continued, "but if we have, take this spoon, and beat with it that egg –" he pointed to the mixture on the table – "that sugar and that flour. Add to it this milk –" he took up the discarded tankard and to yet another gasp, poured from it not plume but a white fluid – "and bake yourself a cake. May that sweeten your defeat!"

With that he flourished his hands in the air to a deafening cheer from the assembled crowd.

"What a spectacle!" shouted the man next to Sylas.

"Glorious!" shouted the man opposite.

"Genius!" cried others.

Chuffit walked around the table and patted Ash's shoulder warmly.

"Well done, Ash, well done," he said, "a worthy challenge!"

Ash smiled and bowed deeply, presenting his profusion of golden locks to the room. When he stood up he turned to the crowd.

"Time for one more, I think!" he shouted to another loud cheer. "Who will bring me a bowl of sand, a pinch of mustard and a spade?"

