

# **TELL ME A STORY**

by Albi Gorn

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

TESSIE, 8 to 10 and precocious

DADDY, working class

VALSWORTH, as unlike a knight as possible

*(The bedroom. TESSIE is in bed. DADDY enters. There is a moment of silence)*

TESSIE: What.

DADDY: I have to read you a story.

TESSIE: What happened to Mommy?

DADDY: Nothing.

TESSIE: Did she get hit by a truck?

DADDY: Nothing happened to her.

TESSIE: It's the school, right, they made her come in again? This was so not my fault.

Tommy Vladeck had this —

DADDY: Nothing happened to Mommy.

TESSIE: Then why isn't she reading to me?

DADDY: She said I should.

TESSIE: Oh. *(Beat)* How come?

DADDY: I don't know how come. She thought it was a good idea.

TESSIE: Oh. *(Beat)* Do you think it's a good idea?

DADDY: What am I supposed to read?

TESSIE: This. *(Hands him a book)*

DADDY: *(Reading)* *A King Arthur Knight in the Yankees' Court: A Valsworth Adventure.* What is this?

TESSIE: It's a Valsworth story.

DADDY: Who's Valsworth?

TESSIE: Who's Valsworth? How could you not know that?

DADDY: Just tell me who he is.

TESSIE: He's a knight. He found the Grail, he defeated Morgan LaFay —

DADDY: A knight, like, what, Ivanhoe?

TESSIE: Not like Ivanhoe. I mean, yes, he was knight like Ivanhoe, but he has all these adventures.

DADDY: Never heard of him (*opens book*).

TESSIE: (*Mumbling*) Maybe if you came in here a little more —

DADDY: Don't mumble. You know, if you want to read about knights we got all those films on DVD, Ivanhoe, Prince Valiant, uh, Robin Hood's got knights in it and — uh, where do I sit?

TESSIE: Wherever you want.

DADDY: What happened to the couch?

TESSIE: What couch?

DADDY: The red one with the buttons, what happened to it?

TESSIE: I don't know. Did you look in the closet?

DADDY: Don't be a wise guy.

TESSIE: Mommy moved that out of here when I was like two. You probably helped.

DADDY: Yeah. Why did we do that?

TESSIE: I rarely entertain anymore.

DADDY: So where do I sit?

TESSIE: I don't care. (*Beat*) Mommy sits over here (*pointing to the bed*).

DADDY: Oh. All right, I could do that. (*DADDY sits and opens book*)

TESSIE: What did she promise you?

DADDY: What?

TESSIE: Mommy, what did she promise you for doing this?

DADDY: Nothing. It was more in the nature of — nothing, what's the difference. I'm here, I'll read and you'll listen. Where are we, the bookmark?

TESSIE: Yes. You wanna know what happened so far?

DADDY: No, I could figure it out.

TESSIE: Well, if you have any questions.

DADDY: Right, right. Okay, here we go. *Valsworth looked up at the huge structure before him. At the very top was writing. "Could this be English, such strange words," he thought. "Yankee Stadium."* What a minute. What's going on here? I thought you said he was a knight.

TESSIE: He is. He got sent into the future.

*(DADDY just looks totally lost)*

TESSIE: He's in love with Alisand, the daughter of Lord Overture of Glaxony. But he wants her to marry the King of Wyster so he got the evil sorceress Frigea to enchant him into the future.

DADDY: Oh.

TESSIE: But in another book he was told by Merlin that Merlin lives forever through all the wizards that follow, so I think he's going to try to find Merlin so he can go back.

DADDY: *(Looking at her)* You like this stuff? All right. *"Ah, 'gate'" said the knight. "Here is a word I do recognize. And if I pass through it, what then?" And he let his mind settle on the aura of the place. (Looking up)* Been awhile since we've been to the Stadium, huh? Remember we used to go to games.

TESSIE: No.

DADDY: You don't? With the hot dogs?

TESSIE: No. *(Beat)* Maybe the hot dogs.

DADDY: You don't like baseball anymore, huh?

TESSIE: Could you just get back to the book.

DADDY: Not really a girl thing, I guess.

TESSIE: The book?

DADDY: *(Beat)* *Valsworth decided to try to go in, but he could not budge the steel barrier. "Tis enchanted, no doubt," he said, and he tried to remember the runes which Merlin had cast on the Gate of Glass at Rohandon Tower. "Willow waily, willaloo," he intoned.*

**VALSWORTH: *(VALSWORTH enters unnoticed, eating junkfood. He is dressed in contemporary casual clothing, perhaps a tee shirt with food stains. He is a slob)***

Willow waily, willaloo.

DADDY: *(Not seeing VALSWORTH)* I hate those guys who sneak in.

TESSIE: *(Seeing VALSWORTH, she is startled)* Daddy!

DADDY: What? *(Looking up and seeing VALSWORTH)* How did you get in here?

VALSWORTH: It's a misprint in the book. Willow waily, willaway is the chant for opening a gate. Willow waily willaloo is a chant for making someone appear.

TESSIE: *(Frightened)* Who are you?

DADDY: Yeah, who are you?

VALSWORTH: Who am I? I am he that slew the dragon Argon, he that plucked the sacred plum from the frozen forest of Gjom, he --

TESSIE: Valsworth!

VALSWORTH: At your service, although technically I'm off until the next book is published.

DADDY: (*Looking at book*) Is this like one of those pop-up books?

TESSIE: (*About VALSWORTH*) No.

DADDY: Actually, it's good that you're here. Maybe you can explain something to me.

VALSWORTH: Be happy to.

TESSIE: No, no, no.

DADDY: (*Indicating book*) Why don't you buy a ticket like everyone else? What kind of an example is that?

TESSIE: It can't be.

VALSWORTH: Well, maybe 'cause I don't have any money.

DADDY: How could you travel without any money?

TESSIE: Stop it.

VALSWORTH: I'm a knight. We don't use money.

TESSIE: Stop it stop it stop it.

DADDY: Typical. (*Looking back in the book*) You're gonna end up in one of the boxes sitting next to George, I just know it.

VALSWORTH: Wrong. Don't start trying to guess the ending, 'cause you're way off, way off.

TESSIE: Stop talking like that.

DADDY: Yeah. And that outfit, they had Calvin Klein jeans in jolly old England?

VALSWORTH: See, that's the trouble with you couch potato TV addicts. This is a book, you're supposed to use your imagination.

TESSIE: Get back in the book.

DADDY: So what is the ending? What, you end up playing centerfield? (*Laughs*)

VALSWORTH: Shortstop.

TESSIE: NO! What are you doing? I don't want to hear the ending.

DADDY: You're serious?

VALSWORTH: Oh, yeah. World Series winning homerun —

TESSIE: Stop! (*Put her fingers in her ears and makes a long ahhhh noise to drown them out*)

VALSWORTH: — game-saving play in the field, the whole bit.

DADDY: Unbelievable. (*Looking at book*) This is what they write for kids?

VALSWORTH: Some writers; some kids.

DADDY: God, no wonder they spend all their time playing those computer games.

VALSWORTH: Look, I don't write it, I'm just in it, but there's some logic to it.

DADDY: Please.

VALSWORTH: See, some dude comes along and shows me a newspaper with a back page picture of some ballplayer and so I figure if I can get my picture on the back, Merlin will know where I am and help me get back home. (*There's a long beat*) Like I say, I don't write it.

DADDY: And he waits 'til the World Series to contact you?

VALSWORTH: He's a Yankee fan. You know, as long as they're winning — could you please get this kid to quiet down, I mean, it's like really annoying.

DADDY: Tessie. Tessie!

TESSIE: I don't want to hear the ending.

DADDY: You can say that again.

TESSIE: And you (*meaning VALSWORTH*) belong back in the book. (*Grabs book and starts trying to close it on VALSWORTH*)

VALSWORTH: You know, I find that a bit rude.

DADDY: Tessie.

TESSIE: BACK IN THE BOOK.

VALSWORTH: (*To DADDY*) That was effective. Didn't you ever teach this kid manners, or anything else?

DADDY: I don't know. (*To TESSIE, sincerely*) Did I?

TESSIE: Back in the book or I'll call Frigea.

VALSWORTH: Kids today, they just do whatever they want, say whatever they want.

TESSIE: I'll call your publisher.

VALSWORTH: Good luck getting a meeting.

TESSIE: Get back in the book.

VALSWORTH: See, that's why kids' books are always so preachy. We have to teach them what you obviously can't.

DADDY: Oh, please. What great lesson do we learn from a book about a deadbeat knight playing baseball?

TESSIE: (*Now hitting VALSWORTH with book*) Get back, get back, get back, get back.

VALSWORTH: How to hit a curve ball? I don't know, I didn't write it.

TESSIE: (*Now trying to push him back where he came from*) Get back, get back.

DADDY: Tessie, that's enough now, just stop it.

TESSIE: Sure, a lot you care. It's not your book.

DADDY: That's for sure.

VALSWORTH: You didn't pick this?

DADDY: No.

TESSIE: Are you kidding? If it was up to him, he'd be reading me the Hockey News.

VALSWORTH: Well, see, there's your problem right there.

TESSIE: You bet.

VALSWORTH: This isn't meant for girls. Knighthood, with the jousting and all, that's a boy's thing. And they stuck in the baseball to give it a sort of double attraction, you know. But it's not for girls.

DADDY: Huh (*DADDY looks puzzled*). What's she supposed to be reading?

VALSWORTH: Girl's stuff, you know, your best friend steals your boyfriend, your poodle gets hit by an ice cream truck, that kind of stuff.

DADDY: Oh.

TESSIE: What are you doing here, anyway?

VALSWORTH: I told you, the chant is misprinted

TESSIE: Spare me.

VALSWORTH: If you must know, whenever you read the book, I appear. Valsworth has never failed a quest.

TESSIE: Mommy reads me from your books all the time and you never appeared before.

VALSWORTH: Think carefully now. Not even in your mind?

TESSIE: Well, sure, in my mind. But this isn't my mind, you're here. What are you doing here?

VALSWORTH: Are you sure it's not your mind? This place looks too weird for reality, not to mention some of the characters.

TESSIE: This is not my mind. Daddy, is this my mind?

DADDY: How come you read this stuff instead of that other junk?

TESSIE: Answer me, is this my mind?

DADDY: I don't know. I don't think I know your mind.

TESSIE: (*Back to VALSWORTH*) It's not my mind and you should scam.



VALSWORTH: Fine, suits me. But how? I don't think hitting me with the book is gonna do it.

TESSIE: There's the door, beat it.

VALSWORTH: Don't work that way.

TESSIE: Daddy.

DADDY: What?

TESSIE: How do I get rid of him?

DADDY: Uhhh, contact Merlin? Maybe he's got a website.

TESSIE: Daddy.

VALSWORTH: Forget it. I'm here for awhile. Let's call out for pizza.

TESSIE: I can't stand it. Daddy, do you know what it's like for me to hear Valsworth talking about pizza? We gotta get rid of him.

VALSWORTH: Or Chinese is fine. Pizza, Chinese. Maybe in the next book I could do a kinda Marco Polo thing.

TESSIE: Daddy, please help.

DADDY: I don't know how. I just lost track of something back when you were younger and —

TESSIE: Daddy, what are you talking about?

VALSWORTH: (*Takes book from TESSIE*) You know, some of the writing here is actually pretty good. Let me find the part about Katz's Deli.

TESSIE: Daddy, get rid of him.

DADDY: I think we need to go back, honey. I think — go back, that's it. (*Grabs the book from VALSWORTH*)

VALSWORTH: Hey!.

DADDY: (*Reading*) *Stadium Yankee, thought he, words strange such, English be this*

*Could.*

VALSWORTH: That wasn't the section I had in mind. Well, here we go.

DADDY: *Writing was top very the at. Him before structure huge the at up looked Valsworth.*

TESSIE: Daddy, what are you — oh.

*(VALSWORTH has begun to disappear)*

VALSWORTH: Yep, that'll do it.

DADDY: *Place the of aura the on settle mind his let he and. Then what, it through pass I if and.*

TESSIE: He's disappearing, Daddy, keep reading.

DADDY: *Recognize do I word a is here. Knight the said, gate, ah.*

VALSWORTH: Oh, well, I think there's some KFC in the fridge.

*(VALSWORTH is gone)*

TESSIE: You did it, you did it, Daddy. *(Hugs him)*

DADDY: Yeah, I did. Good.

TESSIE: I can't believe that guy.

DADDY: Yeah. Not like you imagined him at all, was he?

TESSIE: No. *(Beat)* Nobody is.

DADDY: Well, that's enough excitement for one night.

*(TESSIE smiles at him and then laughs)*

DADDY: What?

TESSIE: One knight?

DADDY: *(He gets it and laughs)* I didn't mean — yeah, that's funny. *(They look at each other for a second)* Uhh, it's getting late. Why don't you get to sleep.

TESSIE: I need a story.

DADDY: Oh. Okay. (*DADDY starts to open the VALSWORTH book. TESSIE takes it away from him*)

TESSIE: Not that! Do you want him to come back?

DADDY: Good thinking. It was stupid anyway.

TESSIE: I'll say. He ended up winning the World Series, right?

DADDY: Yep.

TESSIE: Shortstop?

DADDY: Shortstop.

TESSIE: Unbelievable. They have absolutely no respect for us kids. Oh well, so much for this book. (*TESSIE tosses the book away*)

DADDY: How come you like that stuff, about knights?

TESSIE: How come you do?

DADDY: (*Smiles*) You got another book we could read, like maybe one about ponies?

TESSIE: Daddy!

DADDY: Just kidding. What else you got?

*(TESSIE hands him a book from under her pillow)*

DADDY: Ivanhoe? Hmmm. You know, I never read this, just saw the movie.

TESSIE: Me neither.

DADDY: My favorite, seen it a hundred times. Robert Taylor and, uh, uh, what's her name?

TESSIE: Elizabeth Taylor. I thought you said you saw it a hundred times.

DADDY: I always fast forward over the kissy parts. Hmm, this is a long book.

TESSIE: I'm here every night.

DADDY: Okay. It starts with a poem. Should I read the poem?

TESSIE: Is there any fighting in the poem?

DADDY: I don't think so.

TESSIE: Skip it.

DADDY: Right. *In that pleasant district of merry England which is watered by the river Don, there —*

TESSIE: Boston is in this weekend.

DADDY: Boston?

TESSIE: The Red Sox

DADDY: Oh.

TESSIE: There's a day game on Saturday.

DADDY: Oh. What are you saying, you wanna go?

TESSIE: Do you?

DADDY: Uhh — yeah, sure. I'll call Eric and get us a couple of tickets.

TESSIE: Good.

DADDY: Now, where was I? Right. *There extended in ancient times a large forest, covering the greater part of the beautiful hills and valleys...*

*(TESSIE has leaned her head on DADDY's shoulder)*

VALSWORTH: *(Over above, VALSWORTH appears eating a piece of chicken, unseen or heard by them but smiling at them)* Valsworth has never failed a quest.

End of play