

## Little Paintings

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There once was a young Tinsling by the name of Wellburry, who lived in a little lodge, a little bit outside of a little town named Woodsby.

One might wonder, “what is a Tinsling?” and well, this is a very good question indeed, as Tinslings are incredibly rare and scarcely seen by humans. Tinslings are human-like creatures, shorter than men, but taller than hobbits. They tend to keep to themselves in small villages, hidden between hills in the grassy plains, places no one can quite pinpoint on any one map. They have ten fingers and ten toes, like many humanoid creatures, with beady eyes and a range of different nose and ear sizes. What really sets the Tinslings apart from others, what stops people’s ridiculous claims of taller, smaller-footed hobbits, or shorter and more peaceful humans, is the metallic tint produced by their skin. A reflective, shiny tint similar to what one might see on a chocolate wrapper.

Now, Wellburry was one of these beautiful little creatures known as Tinslings. Wellburry was not a particularly intelligent Tinsling, nor a handsome one, or even a brave one. He would spend his days painting little pictures on canvases and each Sunday, once he’d accumulated enough, he would head into town with his little cart to sell his little paintings. It was a modest life, a good life...a little life. One day, while Wellburry was painting a lovely little meadow just outside of his little lodge, his neighbour, Sammy, came up from behind to greet him.

“Hello there Welly! What are we painting today? Let’s have a look.”

Sammy took the canvas out from in front of Wellburry, causing his brush to leave a light blue streak across the lower right hand side.

“Oh, well Sam, look what you’ve done! Now I’ll have to redo that section,”

“Hush up you. I’m just adding character to your paintings,” Sammy said jokingly. “Come on now! They’re choosing the next quest band in town!”

Wellburry got up and left his quiet paradise to follow the skipping Sammy into the bustling going-ons of Woodsby. The town was announcing the new champions to go on the latest quest, an exciting event filled with valiant celebrities.

There was Childlock the Courageous, who had slayed a dragon with wings of intertwined electrical currents and teeth like a thousand rusted long-swords dipped in acid. Whirlwind-Woodsleaf, who had taken on a thousand storm spirits at the same time to save a far-away village from certain doom. Or even Arod the Elve, a stealthy elf who was as quick and silent as a spring breeze. Arod had always been a marvellous guest to have in Woodsby. He was beloved by the Tinslings and was always incredibly kind in return, having grown fond of the Tine after years of returning to the small town in search of

adventure. Arod's hair gleamed silver, like that of a freshly cleaned blade, blown back off his brow from years of swift navigation against the wind into whatever danger his legendary escapades would bring him on. He was incredibly tall, reaching upwards of seven feet with a slender figure, perfect for hiding amongst the ancient branches of large trees in his homeland of the Legolees Forests to the East. His eyes were always half closed, as if he was always looking off into the distance, but when he sat around a campfire or in a corner booth and began to tell one of his tall tales, a twinkle would sneak its way from the corner of his smile into the pupils of his travelled eyes.

These were just some of the valiant heroes who still lived today, but their quests and adventures would be told for generations to come. The heroes were always sent out in pairs, one veteran of questing heroism and one volunteer in search of glory, adventure and fame. The celebrations lasted all night and the heroes would leave for their quests the next morning. Such festivities were simply just not for Wellburry - he preferred his quiet little lodge, his cosy little bed, and his delicate little paintings to all the hustle and bustle of Woodsby.

Once the procession was over and Woodsleaf and the other volunteer champion had been announced, Wellburry mosied on back to his little home, evading the celebration. He laid in the dark of his little residency staring at the little paintings hung up on the wall, all the detail engulfed by the shadow of night. He stared at the outlines, little rectangles hung all throughout the room, covering the wood behind them and shrinking in size as they went down the hallway towards the kitchen. Wellburry should've taken comfort in this, each painting was littler than the last. Little house, little paintings, little life. It was rather peculiar though. Rather than falling asleep to this sound thought, Wellburry lay in his bed staring at the roof of his home. Wellburry's pondering evolved into a sort of melancholy sadness - everything was so small around him. He was so small. He'd never felt uncomfortable in his skin - he'd always been a mellow fellow, preferring to keep to himself and hone in his painting skills, but now he felt as if his skin itself was too little. He squeezed his hands in and out of fists, feeling the skin wrap tightly against each knuckle. It was an incredibly odd feeling to Wellburry and one he'd never had before. To cheer himself up, he decided to get up and paint.

Wellburry grabbed a canvas and climbed up onto his wooden roof, balancing up against the chimney with his paint laying in his lap and his canvas resting on his knee. Off in the distant night sky was the little town of Woodsby, illuminated by some late night quest celebrators. He began to paint, black and blue for the background, grey buildings with pockets of light creeping from in between and the occasional lick of a flame reaching over a rooftop. Far above was the moon, the sickle in the sky gleamed with a large crater in the upper left corner, surrounded by tiny stars winking down at

Wellburry, letting him in on their little jokes. Wellburry set down his painting and sighed. He had always taken comfort in the little things around him, but there was a deep desire, a single ember within him that wanted to do something big, more than just creating and selling his little paintings. He made a commitment up on that roof: No matter what, he would work to do something big.

He decided he would try his hand at teaching. Everyone seemed to love his paintings after all, why not spread his art through knowledge as well. Some protégé of his teachings may even go on to create a masterful work of art and cite him as the teacher. Wellburry worked night and day creating posters and plastering them around town, telling potential students to meet him at the old willow tree by the creek, just outside of town the following Tuesday afternoon.

The day finally arrived and there was a turn out of about half the town. The sunshine stabbed through the willow tree branches like hundreds of gleaming daggers, illuminating the dried ground, the sounds of chitter chatter amongst the students matched that of the creek, babbling along nonchalantly.

“Alright sit down everyone,” called Wellburry from the front of the pack. “Firstly, we’re going to paint the simple country landscape set out in front of you.”

“Can we get a demonstration please?” called someone from the middle of the pack.

Wellburry nodded. He painted the soft green base of the hill off in the distance, stroking his brush upwards in vertical lines along the canvas to portray the robust grass. Past the peak of the hill was a wide expansion of blue sky, with two fluffy clouds floating peacefully in the distance - a hint of grey was streaked in to give the clouds their texture. At the base of the hill, Wellburry added some brown soil sprouting green stems at the base of the creek. He drew the bubbling water flowing from left to right along the canvas and finished the painting with a curtain of willow branches in front of his picture. Just a few leaves were perfectly detailed with the daggered sunlight effect glancing off the stems flowing in the wind.

The class sat back in silence watching the quiet Tine work. Once finished they applauded.

“How do we get that shadowing effect Wellburry?”

“Hey Welly, how do we get the brush to make the different texture effects?”

Wellburry sat and pondered how to teach them. Wellburry grabbed a new canvas and demonstrated how he painted such effects individually for his students.

He looked up and smiled at the crowd after demonstrating his technique, eager for them to try themselves. But the collected Tine were all still incredibly confused, struggling to mimic the effects Wellburry had displayed.

“Well that is wonderful Welly, but I still don’t think I’ll be able to do something like that without a proper lesson,” one of the students commented.

They were right, Wellburry thought. He believed teaching would be a lot simpler - you show the class how to do something and they follow along. Painting had always come so naturally to him, it had been a while since he had a lesson. So much for creating a protégé.

The Tine slowly cleared out of the area, complimenting Wellburry on his painting as they left, but he was deeply upset by his inability to teach.

Wellburry still had his issue. He didn’t know particularly what big task he was going to accomplish. He pondered what to do as he walked into town one day to buy new paints. In the town square, there was a travelling show of men performing, they hopped around and juggled obscene objects, squeezed their red noses and cartwheeled back and forth. The crowd laughed and cheered for the performers. Wellburry smiled and sat on a bench outside of a local cobbler shop and began to paint the happy scene. Polka dot uniforms and smiling people - he painted a silly face on one of the performers with a child's overjoyed expression tugging at its mother for a closer view of the show. The sun was shining down on the Tine and Wellburry was content. He suddenly came to a realisation - maybe he could become a performer! He wouldn’t change someone's life drastically but sometimes all someone needed was a smile to change the mood of an entire week, leading them along a brighter path. With this giving thought in his heart, and optimism in his mind, Wellburry went to multiple stores, spending his hard earned painting money on all the props he’d need to perform a happy show.

The day had finally come and Wellburry stepped up on the concrete ledge of the fountain, feeling the light tickle of water droplets coating his colourful jacket. Sweat dripped down his forehead as he stared at the crowd in front of him, all straight faced looking at the puzzling scene before them. Wellburry forced a smile and a silly face seeing if he could get an encouraging smile out of one of the children. A child stared back uncomfortably, hiding behind its mother's leg. The crowd stared and Wellburry stared right back. He felt so small up on that stage by himself, so little with the gaze of so many people locked onto him, judging. With a sigh, he stepped down from the ledge and walked through the crowd with his head low. The Tine patted his back and gave him encouraging words.

“It’s ok Wellburry, entertainment isn’t for everybody.”

“Keep up the paintings Wellburry, we all love them.”

Even with the reassuring remarks made by his fellow townsfolk, Wellburry was still upset. *I'll never accomplish anything big in my life* was the repeated phrase slithering through his brain as the cobbled streets began to mesh together from the tears forming in his eyes. A painting would calm him. Yes, a painting would calm his thoughts. He'd paint a lovely picture of his little lodge with the town off in the distance. Oh, maybe he would spot a colourful bird singing him a sweet tune and he could add that in, keeping the song a secret to himself. What colours should he buy to prepare for the potential of a bird? He'd love to see a red Cardinal but what if it was a Blue Jay or green little parakeet? He'd just buy all the colours. The painting would calm him, yes, he'd just make a little painting.

No.

Wellburry stopped and spun around on his leather clad heel. He was determined to do something big. He marched right up to the big house and knocked on the door four times. The Mayor of Woodsby opened the door, still working to button up his black jacket.

"Well hello Wellburry," said the Mayor. "Have you come with any more of your incredible little paintings? I sure would adore one in my foyer. Perhaps of the forests to the west of the town at day break. That would be wonderful!"

Wellburry gulped. "No, Mr. Mayor, I'm here to volunteer for a quest."

There was a stunned silence as the Mayor eyed Wellburry up and down with wide, beady eyes and an open mouth, recently vacant of a cigar, as per the smell.

"My boy, you're a painter, a calm man, not one of adventure and danger. Why would you even want to go on a quest?" said the Mayor after his initial shock.

"You see sir, I have to do something big, something meaningful in my life. I've been living a little life for so long and this is my last ditch effort. I am not intelligent enough to be a teacher nor am I courageous enough to perform a show. I must go on a death-defying quest and prove to everyone once and for all that I can do something big and change the world."

"But my dear Tine," said the Mayor, "you have a splendid gift which you use to spread joy to all of Woodsby! Is that not big enough, for someone who believes he lives such a little life?"

Wellburry thought about this for a moment. To gift people the calm joy of his little paintings had always been something that had made him happy. But even then, it was always a little happiness. A little happiness, given a little bit at a time, through his little paintings, from a little Tinsling, who lived a little life, defined by what it was to be little.

Wellburry shook his head.

“Mr. Mayor, I appreciate you and your words of encouragement, but this is something I need to do. I simply cannot go on knowing that everything I’ve accomplished, and worked for, and lived for, has all been so little. Please, I would like to volunteer for a quest.”

The Mayor could not refuse Wellburry’s request and on the next quest day, Wellburry was allied with Arod the Elve and given the daunting task of killing the manticore - a terrible beast with the head of a man, body of a lion, leathery wings and a venomous scorpion tail. The heinous creature was harassing travellers on a side road, leading to the realm of the United Kingdoms, disrupting a vital trade route providing the massive kingdom with food and supplies. Famine and sickness was becoming rampant.

Arod attempted to include Wellburry in the celebrations that night but the young Tine would not have it, preferring instead to relieve his anxious worries through his wooden brush.

The next morning, Wellburry was fitted with a steel sword and a bronze dagger, sheathed at the side of loosely fitted chainmail with smelly leather covering his chest and arms. Arod wore light Elvish armour, like a seeing glass, mirroring a distorted skinny image of Wellburry. The armour reflected Arod’s surrounding scenery, and if one looked away they would have to squint in order to find the tall Elve again. Twin curved daggers sat at each hip and an honourable grin sat calmly on his face, distracting from his scarred left ear. The two quest goers journeyed to the land of the manticore discussing past journeys and countryside canvas paintings to pass the time. Surprisingly, they got along like old friends. Wellburry knew Arod as a friendly Elve, but had never taken the time to get to know him. He hailed from the Legolees Forrest far east in the kingdom of elves. He had searched the realms for adventure, thrill and tales to tell, but still enjoyed the quiet neutrality of nature in his down time. As they moved closer to the lair, Wellburry sensed the tension growing. Arod stopped him a few miles out and got down on his knee to be eye level with Wellburry.

“Little Tinsling, this will be a dangerous battle,” said Arod, “Use your size to your advantage. The Manticore is big - run between its legs and under its belly, slash and stab as you go and paint its legs red. You will not be able to penetrate deep, but enough cuts drop even the mightiest beast. Be mindful of its tail - if it stings you, no medicine or magic will save you, brave one.”

Wellburry gulped and nodded. He could not speak out of his fear, but he would fight hard and long to take down this beast, help his new friend, and hopefully accomplish his goal of achieving something big.

The two questors sat on the downslope of a hill, peeking out from the top ever so slightly in the hopes of catching sight of the beast so as to ambush it. The sun played its never ending game of leap frog twice over before they

spotted it. A glossy black tail gleamed in the moonlight, rising from the branches ever so carefully, arching before crashing down to earth. The tail slowly rose and on the end was a young doe, still bleating in alarm. The poor creature was gently lowered back behind the brush where the noise went silent. All that could be heard was the tearing of flesh and occasional crack and crunch of bones.

Arod crouched and unsheathed his daggers. "This is our chance, come now Wellburry - keep low and we shall strike while it feasts."

Wellburry rose on shaking knees and ran as fast as he could behind Arod to the forest line, his armour dragged along the ground ever so slightly, making a light sweeping sound as it brushed the early morning mildew. They reached the forest line and each put their back to a tree, in between them they could hear the soft squish of the beast chewing flesh. Wellburry was sweating from fear and the exertion of the run, but it was barely visible as his skin gleamed dully in the moonlight. Arod's silver hair was pressed up against the trunk of the tree and his squinted eyes were locked on Wellburry, ensuring his message was being conveyed. Arod motioned Wellburry to go to his right on three.

One...Two...Three!

Wellburry and Arod crashed through the brush, weapons drawn. The beast was fearsome, a man's face looked at them with rotten sharp teeth and eyes like that of a cobra. Its hair was receding unevenly and his nose looked like that of a human who had lost a lifetime of bar fights. Its paws, like that of a lion, housed claws, each the size of carving knives. Its wings looked tattered, with holes throughout the tip of the left one and the tail was as dark as the night with the needle curved menacingly, dripping a mix of blood and poison. Wellburry focused on the monstrous paws, dipping under them and slashing, yelping on occasion when the midnight tail appeared out of nowhere, impaling itself into the dirt and injecting its perpetual poison.

Occasionally, he would catch a glimpse of Arod above, spinning and twirling, keeping the main focus of the beast in their deadly dance. Wellburry's fear turned to adrenaline, keeping him alert and quick, shaky knees turned to sharp reflexes and the Manticore's belly became his new canvas. As the battle raged, Wellburry's slashes became more numerous, soon the beast's belly and paws were red and inflamed. Its mighty roars grew shorter and its attacks became more sluggish. With one final cry, Wellburry watched the legs of the Manticore give in and quickly scurried out from underneath, watching as the beast collapsed in a heap, breathing laboriously. Arod hopped on top of the beast and flashed a grin at Wellburry as he panted.

“Good job kid! I’ve never seen a Tine fight so valiantly! You’ve rid the countryside of a beast and made your people proud. You’ll be praised as a hero upon our return.”

Wellburry glowed with pride - he’d done it. He had finally accomplished something big and exciting in his life. Now he could return to the quiet relaxation of painting and living out his normal life, knowing full well that he was capable of so much more.

Arod raised his daggers to deliver the killing blow but in the moonlight, Wellburry caught a refracting flicker of light. The tail of the beast raised up behind Arod slowly, arching its tip down towards his heart, tensing up for the killing blow. Without thinking, Wellburry leapt from the ground, higher than any Tinsling had leapt before, right in front of the midnight stinger.

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Woodsby mourned the death of Wellburry for a lengthy period of time. Arod told his heroic tale around campfires, causing the other Tine to swell with pride and bring tears to their eyes. After the mourning period, the town gathered and brainstormed how best to commemorate the heroic painter. Tine recommended statues and plaques, memorial days and grand buildings to be named after him, but none of those seemed fitting for the little painter’s life. Eventually, one of the townsfolk suggested gathering all of his paintings and creating a mural for him. The town relished in the idea, as his paintings had brought them all so much joy and decorated each of their rooms - it was the least they could do in return. The Tine went into their hallways and bedrooms, living rooms and foyers, carefully taking down the numerous little paintings that Wellburry had blessed the citizens with, bringing them to the proposed mural location, right at the heart of Woodsby. As the town worked together to hang up his paintings, they discovered something curious: there were multiple paintings that seemed to fit together in a series. Tines worked together for seven days and seven nights, rearranging the canvases and seeing which ones connected, for you see, the puzzle was grand in scale. Once they took a step back, what they saw was incredible. There sat a little lodge, just outside the little town of Woodsby. There was a little creek amongst a gathering of little trees and little hills that looked off towards a lovely collection of little clouds floating peacefully in their painted eternity. Wellburry’s final unintentional gift was a large mural, showing his view of Woodsby, through his little paintings.