

UNEARTHING IRIS

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN - MORNING

We open on an ornate WISHING FOUNTAIN of white ceramic, glinting in the rising sun and GENTLY TRICKLING. It is haloed by flower beds of irises and daffodils. A worn copper plaque at its base reads "OPTIMISM IS STRENGTH."

BENJAMIN WOODROW (67) PADS down a gravel pathway, clad in dirt-stained overalls and a hefty gardener's tool belt. He's a real Hagrid type--all gruff, rugged muscle mass and gentle wisdom.

He's always believed in magic, but not the flashy kind--more the kind you find in everyday wonders. The solace of placing a wish in a fountain, for instance.

Reaching the base of the fountain, Benjamin rummages around in his pocket for a moment, emerging with a rusting penny. He holds it daintily against his chest, closing his eyes.

As he stands in the dawn, he's quiet. Reverent. Breathing.

Balancing the coin between his thumb and first finger, he sends his wish pirouetting into the water with a SMALL SPLASH. He watches it join a layer of other coins submerged in the fountain.

BENJAMIN

(murmured)

That one's for you, ma.

He takes one more moment, weathered hand against weathered stone, before turning his attention to the flower beds behind the fountain. He kneels in the soil and gets to work, pruning and weeding with a singular, attentive focus.

Opposite him, EMMA WILDER (19) approaches the fountain with a fraught air about her, holding an empty box and periodically glancing over her shoulder. Her collared shirt, complete with a gleaming name tag, reads "Botanical Garden Gift Shop."

A youth of familial financial struggle has hardened Emma, and she approaches the world with a sense of desperation. Out there it's eat or be eaten, and she's ravenous. She stops at the base of the fountain and sets her jaw.

Emma plunges her arms into the water, sweeping up handfuls of coins. Benjamin looks up at the sound of COINS CLINKING as Emma releases the stolen fare into her box. Watching for a beat, his eyebrows crease and his mouth twists into a frown.

Benjamin wearily rises from his knees, approaching Emma.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I don't think you're supposed to be taking those, ma'am.

Emma flinches, fumbling a handful of coins. A thick tension is perforated only by the sound of COINS PLOPPING BACK INTO THE WATER. She looks caught, face flushed.

A beat, before Emma somewhat collects herself.

EMMA

(voice wavering)

Yeah? Who made you king of the world?

BENJAMIN

Ah, no one. But a lot of people put a lot of heart into those wishes. I've seen 'em. They don't belong to you.

Emma stops short, taken aback.

EMMA

You're telling me you actually believe in this stuff?

BENJAMIN

I believe we do whatever we have to do to cope with this life. If that's a wish, that's a wish. Lotta people find comfort in it.

EMMA

What? That's so--I mean. It doesn't make any difference. It doesn't change anything.

BENJAMIN

I've done it. I think it does.

Emma's rendered frozen by her disbelief. A charged wire. A trapped animal.

EMMA

You--what? You just throw away your money here? And what, hope for a miracle?

Benjamin looks at her for a beat.

Returning to his pockets, Benjamin rummages around for a moment. He emerges with another rusted penny and holds it out to Emma.

BENJAMIN

Try it.

Emma stares at the coin. Her face is trying to be blank, but her eyes betray a burning, desperate desire.

EMMA

(softly)

Have your wishes ever come true?

Benjamin shrugs, smiling sadly.

BENJAMIN

Doesn't matter so much. It's about the hope of it.

Emma stares at the coin, hard. Her face is stony, thinking. In a moment of resolve, she snatches the penny and holds it in her open palm.

EMMA

It feels like cheating life.

Benjamin moves away, returning to his flower beds.

BENJAMIN

(growing more distant)

Not cheating. Just being optimistic.

Emma stands alone at the base of the fountain, penny in hand. She looks into the water, at the hundreds of wishes--a collection of currencies, a collection of sheens, a collection of stories. She looks at her box, partially full.

She closes her eyes, taking a heaving breath. She clutches the coin tightly before balancing it on her thumb, sending it arcing into the water. When she opens her eyes, they're shining. A tear falls. She sets her jaw.

Benjamin pauses his work at the sound of MANY COINS HITTING THE WATER AT ONCE, followed by FOOTSTEPS QUICKLY RECEDING along the gravel pathway. He smiles a little, bittersweet. Shakes his head. Returns to work.

Two rusted pennies rest side-by-side amongst the fountain's collection. They're glinting--the sun has risen.

FADE OUT.