

It was Mardi Gras Day in New Orleans, with people frolicking in front of Old McGregor's house and marching bands blaring their trumpets. McGregor, on the other hand, just wanted to sleep.

"Hey! Get off my lawn!" He screamed out of one of his stained glass windows. The people that were sitting in lawn chairs in McGregor's front yard just shouted in surprise.

"Old McGregor! Everyone thinks you're dead," they exclaimed, rubbing their heads in confusion. All but a child, who just stared at McGregor sadly.

"Well, I'm not." McGregor stuck his tongue out at the little kid and popped back out the window. "And right now, truthfully, I just want to sleep without people stomping all over my grass!"

"We're sorry, Mister," the people responded. The little kid started to cry, and his parents comforted him.

"But it's Mardi Gras day!" the kid said. "Why aren't you out on a float throwing doubloons?"

"I don't celebrate Mardi Gras anymore," McGregor grumbled. He shut the window forcefully and flopped back down on his bed. McGregor hadn't seen the light in a couple of months, and it disturbed him that people were continuing Mardi Gras and having fun without him.

You see, McGregor used to be in love with all of the parades and the fun that everyone has partying with their friends. He used to host the best parties and eat the best king cake. He was even once the King of Rex! People loved him when he rode on that carefully painted float at the beginning of the parade. He had memories of them cheering at him, begging him to shower doubloons upon them. McGregor recalled smiling at them and waving, and maybe sneaking just a couple of doubloons out of his bags for the people down below.

He used to be fun, playing with the children on the sidewalks when floats finally rolled past his house for the last time. He would host house parties, with so many king cakes that he could feed an army. *But that was all in the past*, McGregor thought. With all of his financial problems these days, McGregor couldn't do much of anything fun. His Mardi Gras spirit was thrown off of a float like the rusty and broken beads that no one wanted.

McGregor got up to make himself a cup of tea and went back to paperwork.

The next day, McGregor sat in his chair on his front porch and watched all the parades coming by. His house was so far back from the street that no float-riders could throw beads at his face. *Good*, McGregor thought, smirking, just as a bead smacked McGregor in the face. People started laughing, jeering Old Mc Gregor. McGregor's face started to turn red out of embarrassment and anger as he went back inside and vowed to never go out on his porch again.

A few weeks later, an eviction notice came to McGregor's door. If he didn't start paying his rent again, he wouldn't have anywhere to live. McGregor tore the stupid piece of paper into shreds without a second thought.

When McGregor sat down in his chair that evening, he started to cry. Mardi Gras was ruining everything, his lawn, his spirit, and he couldn't even go to work because his driveway was blocked by trash cans. Even when he pulled them away, there were too many trash bags and beads in the way, and the city clean up crews hadn't come yet.

McGregor couldn't even sleep, because there were so many people still celebrating Mardi Gras on his front lawn late into the evening.

McGregor couldn't even make his specialty king cake in peace!

It was like McGregor didn't have a choice but to go find a new place to live where he would be safe from all this nonsense.

Only a few weeks later when the day finally came to pay his monthly bills, McGregor had no money, and nothing of value to sell. His apartment was a dump, and he'd already sold all his baking supplies, his paints, and his king costume. Only a bit of money came in from that. And so he packed up his supplies, stuffing an extra king cake he'd made long ago and some red beans in a cooler.

McGregor walked for days and finally found a bench that looked comfy enough near Lee Circle and the interstate overpass. He settled down for a long nap, finally getting some sleep.

In the morning, McGregor felt tired and weak, although he got a good amount of sleep and even had a leftover piece of king cake. It was a little bit stale, but it was still delicious. Duh, he had made it from his secret recipe! Of course, it was delicious.

As the afternoon went on, people walking by started to gawk at McGregor. He wasn't looking, in terms of appearance, so good. McGregor just glared back at them and chomped away on his king cake.

After a while, someone finally came up to McGregor. She looked to be about 13, with longish brown hair and a sweet smile. She sat down next to McGregor and said nothing, just sliced a piece of his king cake and took a bite.

"Oh boy, this is good, even stale," she said, McGregor's face showing surprise.

"Is that all that you wanted to say?" McGregor asked her, and she nodded.

"Yeah. Oh yeah, and I'm Mardi," she said playfully and set the piece of king cake down on her lap.

"Mardi?" McGregor says suspiciously. "That's an odd name. Did your parents name you after Mardi Gras?"

"You could say that," she nodded, and McGregor could've sworn that the clouds opened to the heavens with her smile. "Anyways, I was just going to suggest that I know you have some

savings in your bank account, and maybe you should open a king cake bakery or something. It's such a shame that we only get them in February."

"I don't disagree with you about that, but you must be insane about using my savings," McGregor exclaimed. "I only save that money for emergencies."

Mardi rolled her eyes. "Are you sure this isn't an emergency?" she asked him. She grinned, and McGregor could've sworn that her eyes flickered purple, green, and gold.

McGregor thought for a second. He knew the girl was right, but he didn't want to admit it.

"Give it some thought," Mardi told him, and then she disappeared before he could even ask her why she approached him in the first place.

McGregor thought about what that girl said for the rest of the day. He decided that she was right and that her idea might offer him a way to pick his life back up. He went to the bank, got his remaining life savings, and walked Uptown for an hour trying to find an apartment with a storefront where he could sell his king cakes.

Finally, he ended up on Magazine Street. There was a cream-colored building that was perfect for him, and he rented it without a second thought.

For the next few years, McGregor's king cake company grew and became so famous that his king cakes were shipped to everyone around the world year-round. The joy that people had when they walked into his store was just infectious: McGregor somehow caught it too. He became a nice and friendly person, the way he was before.

He said "hi" to people when he was shopping for groceries at Rouses, grinned on his walks down the streetcar tracks at St. Charles, and even grinned at babies visiting Lakeside for a wardrobe change. The people were overjoyed at McGregor's sudden change in attitude, and happily struck up conversations whenever they could. When kids walked past the store, they would look up at the king cakes in the glass windows and think about how they wanted to be like McGregor when they grew up.

Sadly, he never got to thank Mardi for giving him such a great idea, although he did think about her every day. But he decided to name his now large and still growing business after her as a tribute: Mardi's King Cakes.

McGregor always hoped that maybe one day Mardi would visit him again, but he was satisfied just knowing that this spirit of Mardi Gras was probably helping others in need find the joy and happiness she had helped bring back to his life.