

“To be Evergreen Through and Through”

Summer

Marnie is the bunny who lives right next door to me.

I like to think I am her protector sometimes, but it could just as well be the other way around. Honestly don't recall how we became close, but the first time we met I can remember the turning towards the sun, the pervasive greenness in my vision that followed, and a desire to keep going. And if I shut my eyes really tight, I can start to feel my body move on that day, strolling, crouching over, arms flung out, feet tucked in, head tilting and, of course, stillness. Funnily enough, I can also feel all the things that didn't happen just as strong, maybe even better. It was as if there were no words exchanged, which makes sense. It wouldn't be because of words that I stay with Marnie; I like to think of it as something I can't explain instead.

Marnie said that we could hang out anytime except Saturdays. At first I glanced passed that mention. I became very excited at the Tuesdays and Fridays I could go over, the Wednesday and even Sunday plans scribbled in a green marker on my calendar.

We filled that time with so many trips to the beach that I lost count: collecting seaweed for our sand villagers' clothes, carving wishes into the sky, and making stories for every odd-legged creature that came our way. Almond Shore was known for its mixture of white sands and a crystal sea on one end, miscellaneous freshwater ponds towered with willow trees on the other and a natural grass road separating the two. Made by the magic of nature, those in town didn't quite understand how this was possible. Not that it bothered them either, because it was beautiful.

Neither of us knew how to swim. So I would end up wading neck deep into the water with Marnie perched on my head. Even though we'd done this bit several times before, I still prefer not to mess with the ocean. But Marnie seemed to like it so much that I had to make my heart calm down as I swam through every sea with her only on my pointe feet. At a distance I was positive we were about to drown, she told me *she wished this moment would last a long long time.*

Back at home, I was lying on the carpet, gazing at the wall at my calendar. I could only see this one column of Saturday boxes that were too perfect, too clean it mocked me. I could taste the

sands hidden between my teeth from earlier. So after taking a hot shower, I pulled all the months off the wall, cut every line of Saturday out, taped the rest of the days back together, and laughed inside. There were only 6 days of the week. I was only responsible for 6 days instead of 7 now, and that made me feel a little better.

Then came my first free Saturday. And let me tell you, having every option placed at your feet feels somewhat the same as having none at all. I decided to ride my bike to the pond and it was undeniably summer, because the heat was ready to take somebody hostage. Though these were times that I really got to feel something. A temptation to stay as still as possible and crisp up into the sky. Like spinach in the frying pan, I played a little game of seeing how long I could last tingling before disappearing. Then I reached my limit. I hear the flakes of my forehead starting to sizzle and made a run for cover underneath the nearest tree.

There I found Mrs. Mouse with her husband dressed in black. This willow tree held many families inside, each level marked by an arrangement of carved lines on its trunk. A trail of tree ants made their way to the ground carrying a wooden box on their backs. A few of them must've noticed me staring because they left the procession to inform me that Mrs. Mouse's child Lucy had just passed away.

"he was just in the field, workin'. Then some green rock falls from the sky and knocks him in the head, now he's gone."

"it was a space meteor! i know it," another continues.

"it was just a normal stone. cherie confirmed that already."

They had some of the saddest expressions I'd ever seen on ants. I didn't know the Mouses' particularly well but their family always brought an amazing new dish to the Garden Festival every year.

Lucy. Lucy. Lucy. I rode on. That was the first time I heard his name. Lucy Mouse. It sounded like the name of a thousand memories taken away by the tides.

A half mile ahead, I came across a boy sat on the curb with his head tucked in his knees and pieces of colorful rocks around his feet. He couldn't have been over 7 years old, and the glowing blue from his head gave it away that he was not human. He was unaccompanied and I got nervous that he might've been dehydrated.

“water?” I asked holding out my canteen.

He lifted his head squinting, then showed me his muddy feet.

“i’m not like you,” he grinned, “i get mine through the ground.” And when the boy gave the biggest double stomp, his dark hair rolled free and his skin brightened just a little.

I was impressed so I sat down with him.

“so where’s your home then?”

“my house? my house is up there.” he pointed vaguely to a mountain top between two clouds.

“my mama said she found a new job down here. she told me not to follow her or she’d eat me for breakfast tomorrow. but I don’t get scared, then here i am.”

“you’re pretty brave aren’t you?”

“yeah, i am.”

A pair of breezes blew by.

“promise you won’t tell.”

“what?”

“promise you won’t tell anyone my secret.”

“oh, yeah sure.”

“yesterday, my earring fell into the pond here i think.” he said. “it was by accident I dropped it from my house. but i can’t find it anymore.”

“Well, what did it look like?”

“it was shiny, and green like a really pretty leaf green. wait gimme your wrist.”

The effect was insane. When he drew two lines on my skin with his fingers, I saw the peridot stone, its refractions and pressure cracks. I saw each of the 7 links in the chain hanging as delicate as thread, and the details in its etched numbers on the white gold pin.

“that was insane samo.” I say. “i’m sure we can find it.”

And we dived into the pond. Well I didn’t, I treaded.

Thankfully, it only came up to my knees. I peeled my eyes for anything that gleamed and glimmered on the floor bed. Too bad the sun made everything gleam and glimmer. It was so incredibly bright I thought I was going to faint. On the other hand, Samo moved like an electric eel. He wanted to show off. When he came out, he seemed exhausted, but also fuller if that was possible. I took a glance at his wiggling toes and just like he said, they were alive like roots.

“no luck,” we both agreed.

“maybe another mama found it and gave it to her baby. i hope it made them happy.”

“maybe you’re right.”

I didn’t have the heart to tell him what I came across earlier. So we just soaked our legs in silence.

We waited and waited for something. I don’t think either of us had a clue what it was, and as usual, it did not come. Though at some point, the boy became settled to the dark. His head nodded off at moments and jerked up at the beeping of a garbage truck or a flock of geese. Overhead, I watched a girl in a fighter aircraft follow them with a seagull by her side. When I was about to rub my eyes, I realized that my hands had been rolling several mud balls while we were sitting there. Marnie and I had sold mud pies once. We priced them for 5 almonds apiece and Nico the Turtle had stopped to tell us that we were in the wrong location if we wanted to get customers. But we were fine. We only made one sale and we were alright.

My hands recognized the touch of the earth. The moonlight hovered patiently as I molded each ball into an earring just like the one I saw. The first four were slightly off. But the fifth looked uncannily accurate. I knew what I wanted to do.

I tapped the boy awake. “samo,” I say, “let’s do a last dance, and then we can call it a day.” Moving to the song playing in our heads, he twirled his hair and even sang along a little. I slipped the earring in his pocket while he waltzed himself silly. And by the end of the music, my feet were matching the rhythm of his. “you’ve got a pretty voice,” I say slightly out of breath. Then he smiled a cheesy moon smile.

This town can feel dreary at times, but it was safe. I wasn’t afraid one bit to be slow riding at night.

“hold on!” I told him with his arms around my waist, I clamped my elbows tight around them going up the mountain. Pushing on the pedals one by one, it probably would’ve been easier to

walk up instead, but in my head, I pictured I was Takeshi Kaneshiro zooming on his motorbike, wind in his hair. And that image alone carried us to Samo's front door. The orange lights coming through his kitchen window complimented the blue from his head.

I nudged him off my sweaty back. "hey hey, you're home."

He gave me a gentle shove and I watched as he stumbled through the front door and closed it behind him.

On the way back, I stopped by the willow tree and knelt down to pray for Lucy's name to be laid in peace. And while I was at it, I prayed for a miracle that Samo got his earring back too. My legs gave out when I tried to stand back up and the gravel jutting out scraped against my knee. So I limped back home with half my weight on my bike.

I knocked on her door just to try. There was something so clever about my gash. It was adrenaline over pain as I bled on the paisley doormat. "marnie look, look marnie, i am hurt." But no one answered. Instead I got a voicemail from my phone that never rang.

"it's saturday. i'll call you soon," Marnie says through the microphone. Her voice was muffled, fainter than usual, and just a little more bubbly.

She actually didn't call me for a week after. But on her blog she posted this piece:

"oh fantastic beast, fantastic machine

youve taken me by storm again this time

im dripping and shy.

it is only hope that we will fit quite right, that things may be okay.

but i do believe in neon-wings and a great spotlight-wake.

like on a stage where nobody is speaking, everybody is peaking, and there is an extra second in the day just to make the right decision, i get the feeling that weve come a long way."

That set me off. Suddenly I craved the sound of a horn so full that id lose the ability to think.

Once, the snapping turtles Nora and Nico by the bay gave me some berries that they said would do something like that.

"how do I know when to take them?"

“oh you’ll know.” Nora said with sleepy eyes. She looked happier that day.

I got high in the afternoon, cried harder than I ever had, and went to bed all empty. The rest of the day calmly passed by without a fuss.

Who are you seeing on Saturdays? I asked. We were making pesto pasta but also walking on eggshells. Marnie sits on the chair at the end of the table.

“is your knee okay?” she asks back. I had been scratching at the scab not yet formed.

“it’s fine, who is it marnie?”

when she focuses, she straightens her back and then her ears arch forward in a way that remind me of this one beach shell I saw years before we met. Even with an ugly heart, there are pieces that I find her lovely. She sets the bowl down, which looks as if it’s barely been touched.

“ruby,” she says.

“ruby... like your fish?”

I turn to watch the innocent red body circle inside the tank.

“yes. she’s been teaching me how to swim.”

All the birthstones id ever witnessed start parading through my brain. All raging, I can give into anger now that I have a name, a shade. But it is only right to hold back because I’m waiting on more to fall from her snout.

“sometimes, i feel like you see someone in me that i cannot reciprocate for you. i care for you, you know that. but i think i’m changing as well.”

“i wasn’t even talking about reciprocation.” I retort.

“then what are you talking about?”

And that was when I scratched through the surface of my knee a little too deep.

“i’m sorry I couldn’t tell you. i was afraid.” she ends.

After a long time of pretending my head worked, i say

*Don’t worry, I’m going to forgive you. I’m going to be better.* Though only in my head.

The sound of Marnie’s light snoring concentrated the bedroom. It amazed me how she could embody peace so well even when I swore it didn’t exist anymore.

“are you awake,” I whisper to her dreams. The lack of a response assured me.

“i just thought I would be your only one. i thought you were going to be mine too.” It was now much easier to have this conversation. Slowly, I let the weight of her words settle in my stomach with the pine nuts. They must have been quite filling because I fell asleep soon after, waking up once in the middle of the night to remember that song I had stuck in my head last week was by The Cranberries, and then my brain fully retired until the next morning.

The next Saturday, I showed up at the same pond without notice. But so had Samo, wearing two leaf green stones on his ears. I tried to not let the excitement show on my face.

He had been pacing alone for some time and upon meeting eyes, he ran up to me waving a sheet of paper.

“so my mama found out I came down here because I went to bed with my clothes all dirty, but she didn’t eat me. She said that she was so worried I wouldn’t make it back up but I did and then and then-”

“woah haha, you wanna take a breath first?”

In for 4,

Hold for 5.

Out for 8. (He only made it to 3).

“-and then, i told her about you and she said that if we start running errands for her, she’d let us hang out together. look.”

I took the sheet from him. It was a recipe with instructions scribbled but clear. The title read:

*Lucy's Last Supper*

"where did you get this?"

"my mama gave it to me."

"what do you mean, where did she get it?"

"i dunno, people come in and out Mama's room all the time. They have this really long talk about finishing their journey in peace, and then we send them to the station and I never see them again."

"oh no."

"why no?"

"is your mom the grim reaper?"

"no she's not!" This was the first time I saw him irritated. "she goes by ruby now."

"what!"

"what!"

"nothing."

My jaw refused to close. Every hair stood up from my head. But Samo didn't see any of it. He had snatched the sheet back and walked off ahead of me.

We spent this day under the sun once again, not in water but in the fields. Two carrots, one small onion, four potatoes, a stalk of celery, five marigold petals, a fresh leaf from the willow tree, and ten almonds. I think by the end of it, Samo wasn't as upset with me anymore because he motioned me over to put a ladybug in my hand. Our harvest spread a tall shadow onto the golden ground, big enough for the both of us to sit down in the center of it.

"can i tell you my secret this time?" I ask.

"okay."

"i think i've become a burden."

"what's that?"

"a burden is kind of like when you get so heavy you start to pull someone down."

He tugged hard on my sleeve so that I was tilting to one side.

"like this?"

"yeah. like that, maybe even harder."



I didn't want to cry, which is just another way to say that I really wanted to cry.

"can't be that heavy if you carried me home. mama says no one makes it back from our house that easy."

He collected my tears in a blue bucket until it was a quarter full and then dumped it on the soil. Then we proceeded to mold a couple of bowls from the mud, poked and imperfect with the patterns of nature. We agreed to meet at my house next week to make Lucy's stew together.

I dreamt that night. There was the smell of dirt and sweat and longing on my hands when I woke up and I craved the earth badly. Maybe it was surreal, maybe I wasn't fully conscious to begin but the world was fogged green; that green became the only green I had ever known. The more I ran towards the horizon, the more I got to believing that there was never another color that existed. There was no need to think, there was no turning back ever. A stage of life starting and ending at the same time just manifests itself in the present.

Marnie actually gave me a call when I got home, which made my heart race in ambiguous directions. I asked her how her lessons were going and she told me that she would be performing at the Festival this year. I had completely forgotten that it was on Saturday. She told me that she was both nervous and excited for me to see her routine. I told her that she must be working very hard and I'd be sure to cheer for her in the front row. There was something quite silly about this entire conversation, but after we finished, I decided it wasn't too bad after all. Before the sun went down, I must've made and baked around 20 mud bowls. 24 in total if you counted the ones from last week. My back ached in the best way as if letting me know the honesty of effort.

"how does it taste?"

"mmm."

"was that an mmm delicious or an mmm questionable?"

Samo stuck out his big toe.

"hey!"

"it's good." he laughs "i was giving you a thumbs up."

He wanted to carry the pot, but that worried me, so I said I was trying to get stronger arms lately and that he could help carry the bowls instead. Except when we left my house we carried them the opposite way around and Samo was telling me how his arms were going to get stronger than mine. The tree stood tall in the same place that it always did. Tall enough to silence even the most talkative of children. Sometimes I think it would've uprooted itself and walked away if there weren't so many souls depending on it being there. Though, nobody was home today because everyone was at the Festival. I could hear the screams drifting towards us from the other side of the road, half blended into air.

We placed two servings on the ground; one for the tree, another for Lucy, and then turned our backs to the grave for a minute. These instructions were written at the bottom of the recipe. When we finished counting, both bowls were empty and the paper in my front pocket crumbled into sand. It was done, so we left the rest of his dish for the Mouses' to share when they got back, and headed for the beach around 4pm.

The show had just started. The ocean was quiet. Everybody held their breath, familiar with the anticipation. Then two fur legs rose from the surface. They made simple shapes and told complex tales; a red orb weaving and supporting her the whole time. She twisted and flipped, spouted and pranced. Samo said he swore she even flew at one point. They deserved the standing ovation.

Marnie stepped out in a swimsuit with gorgeous layers of scales and a tail. She was dripping and proud. Then came Ruby, who flourished from the goldfish and came out as a goddess. I don't know what I was expecting. She had a face that hid no part of itself. There were folds in the corners of her eyes that had seen a million more lives than I could imagine. Every word she listened to was written across her demeanor and it showed.

Watching them, some kind of rock inside of me was crystalizing. I saw the light blue shadows of frost on evergreen tree leaves. Saw the soft clouds above and soft snow below mimic each other in essence, and for the first time in my life, I felt the crispness of winter. I think I might've felt Samo's fingers on my wrist as well, letting me know that the revolution I was waiting for had already begun.