

# **Earth like stars**

A story submitted to **Sixfold**

October 2014

## Earth like stars

Something cold and wet gets at the nape of Bian's neck and her eyes open to see a florid tongue lolling from a needle-nose snout and a pair of yellow-brown eyes rattling about their orbits like marbles inside a couple of coffee cups.

These eyes she can recognize. "Shotgun!"

She buries her face in his neck and reaches up for those ears of his. "You scared me, you skinny dog." Like leaves of an African violet so velvety soft are those lobes. "Never again leave me again."

He responds to her reproach with a cryptic smile and a fish-paste sneeze right in her face. She pushes him off with fond dismay and he goes trotting off in a huff, his narrow head angled down from his long neck as he assays a futile wall of fieldstones crumbling to earth. It is the blue end of day and his silhouette makes him seem more deer than dog.

She feels dizzy so she lay back down and looks up at the canopy above, which is woven of twisting branches bulbous with age from which drip a million meaty figs, black like teardrops. She feels like the first girl on earth, unless she is the last. And who's to know? She peers down along the length of her legs clothed by the same bunny pajamas she put on the night before. She sees that her two muddy bloody feet rest at the cool edge of a spring-fed pond, making her wonder how she got here? She is fuzzy on that, but rather than this making her upset, for the first time in a long time she feels happy to be alive, a trajectory she hopes is all part of growing up from here on out.

*Trickle. . .*

Chain fern and popcorn flower.

*Trickle trickle...*

Clover and watercress.

*Trickle trickle trickle...*

Bellflower and hyacinth.

*Trickle trickle trickle trickle...*

Lovely...

Lovely and yet...

Lovely and yet come to think of it she can remember neither noticing this pond nor admiring these flowers on the way into this once great garden now gone feral.

Lovely...

Lovely and yet...

Lovely and yet somehow something somewhere...

*Where did my flip-flops go!?*

A terrible thrill of panic for misspent deeds runs through her body nerve to nerve. Where was Odus, the man she left on the opposite bank of memory, stranded in the mud and waiting for the waters to rise?

In a single fluid movement she is on her feet and whirling around to retrieve him... only to hurl herself into the chest of that very man. She bounces off him and he her and each falls to earth like stars.

Recovering her breath and the remnants of her senses, she looks through the blades of grass at him. "How did you find me?"

He looks sideways at her then attempts a bent smile. "Just followed your dog."

"You found me by him finding you which led you to me. But I left you in the first place to go out and find Shotgun because.... Because I remember now because... when we crashed the car—when I crashed the car—he took off like a—like a—he is a greyhound—for that jackrabbit that was taunting us. And then we found this place and there was water here and so I was going to..."

Her ears fill with the roar of tides, warping her sight and leaving her in a red darkness stained by ragged white rings and tattered asterisks.

"And...?"

"And you, you were supposed to wait until I got back to the car where I left you, Odus."

"You were supposed to get back, Bian."

"Good point."

"Nobody's keeping score."

"I guess I fell asleep."

"Sleep is good."

"I like sleep."

A stranger in the morning and a savior by noon, now Odus is in Bian's care and they don't know where they are. She rests her eyes on his face, the half-black skin slack as sand, the flesh around the jaundiced eyes all torn up like a football field after a mud game, the cracked teeth weathered to the pith, the beard crawling across his capacious chest like some outlandish animal, or the pelt of one anyway.

Oh how he breathes, she thinks. "What was that back there, Odus? Did you have a heart attack?" Hot tears melt the corners of her eyes as she crawls over to him and sets her cheek against his broad back. "I thought you were going to die. And so now we need a doctor or somebody to stick a stent into your aorta or ventricle or whatever they do to fix hearts."

Here he thumps his chest to showcase his vitality. "What we *need*, child, is for you to stop prescribing bad medicine. We got to go and get you out of the trouble you got yourself into."

"Trouble? Me?... Me no trouble!..." She giggles and lifts her hand to her mouth and speaks in her best paddy-farmer accent. "Me eager daughter of wary immigrants... me see opportunity where others only see too-hard working!"

She presses her ear to his back ribs and closes her eyes to enjoy the ride as laughter passes through his body. When it subsides she rolls away and turns onto her belly and strokes the dark surface of the water with her finger.

She paints a bridge and a tree.

A road and a mountain.

The sea and sky.

Each disappearing sooner than it appears.

Lovely...

Lovely and yet...

Lovely and yet a lunatic surge fills her heart as she rises to her feet and starts to spin.

"Things are happening all around us all the time and so fast too." She spins and spins and spins and spins even as she feels moved to point out the obvious. "We can't even see it anymore because we're blazing our way around the sun and there's no way to slow us down."

"Why not?" He looks over at her balefully. "You're mighty. You're 15 years old. The world opens before you like a new day"

"Because it's something bigger than anything and it's bearing down on us eleventy-million miles a minute." She shifts her hips to the splintering beat of her heart. She tilts her head and opens her mouth and stretches her propeller arms in preparation for liftoff. "That's why I want to go back."

"Back where?"

"Back to before I started pretending I knew what I was doing. Back to when I was little and used to sleep at the foot of my sister's bed." She hears a sound but can't tell what it is. "Back to before." Whether the sound is some furtive fluttering from within or something coming from above she cannot say.

"I just want it to..." She gets too dizzy and her feet cease their ceaselessness. Her arms to fall to her sides even as her brains continue swirling inside her skull "...to stop."

He looks up at her standing there against the purpling sky. "Well that's a start. "