

Luci

“What does this do,” Luci asked me, holding up a dandelion.

“What does it do?” I echoed, puzzled.

“Well, yeah. Don’t they have magic powers or something?”

I grinned, “Oh. Yes, as a matter of fact. You close your eyes,” she acquiesced, “and make a wish. Then blow, sending the wispy bits off into the air!” Her nose crinkled as she thought about what she wanted. She then opened her eyes.

“I’ll do it later, daddy. Let’s keep walking.”

“Alright,” I chuckled. “Lead the way.” She took my hand as we continued through a picturesque meadow. The grass was long, though not overgrown, and rife with flowers. The sun shone on us from directly overhead, its heat overbearing were it not for the gentle breeze that caressed our every move. All the while, songbirds graced us with their lyrics, emanating from the surrounding maples and pines, among others. I was living in a postcard.

“Do you think mommy could come here?”

“I don’t see why not.”

“Let’s bring her next time. If she isn’t too busy,” she thoughtfully considered.

Though she isn’t that old, it seems as though a lifetime has passed since we first met Luci. Aside from growing taller, not much has changed, however. Dimples still compliment her smile. Her eyes yet hold an innocence I feel will never fade, regardless of when she loses her childlike naivety. As for personality: loving, curious, and rather adventurous, with just enough spunk to see her through. When you’re young, the world around you seems a large and assuredly magical place. Having kids can alter your perspective, causing you to retain this sense, one that you’d certainly lose otherwise. For this, I’m truly blessed.

“Fishies! Daddy, let’s go pet the fishies!” She hastily made her way towards a pond that was just up ahead.

“How about we just watch them?”

“Nooo! I want to love them like our kitty, Kireina!”

“They need water, honey. To breathe.”

“Can’t they hold their nose when they come up to the air like I do when I swim?” While bemused at her logic, I paused to discern in my head whether fishes even had noses. She gasped, “Look how many!”

As with the flowers, there was an abundance of aquatic life. Carps, pikes, mahi-mahi, even the near-microscopic candiru of the south, they all tangoed before us. I peered over at Luci whose mouth was agape.

“Just like the aquarium, huh?” I asked. Silence. Too busy trawling over the ballet taking place before her. “Y’know, I had a goldfish once.”

“You did,” she inquired, dryly, her focus unwavering. “That’s boring. I want one of those!”

“Ah, Oscar.”

“That’s his name?!”

“That’s their species. They actually—

“No, that one! Look at its pretty colors! Way more than just *gold*,” she snorted.

“I’m not sure what that one’s called.”

“Think we ‘scovered it?”

“Maybe. What should we name it?”

“Hmm. Let’s name them Xi-fish. After mommy! She always looks so pretty!”

“You look just like her, you know.” I smiled, rubbing the top of her head.

“Hey! Don’t mess up my hair,” she protested, walking away from the pond.

“Sorry.”

“I bet I can climb one of those trees! Wanna watch me, daddy?” She sprinted towards the far end of the field. I sighed, admiring her tenacity. Am I really that old?

“Go on, sweetie. Let’s see what you got!” We spent what felt like hours in and around the trees, howling like monkeys, frightening the birds, playing tag and hide and seek. Soon, though, we were sitting on a thick branch on the crest of a boisterous cedar.

“Think I could fly?” She took a few steps forward before I wrapped my arm around her, yanking her backwards.

“I think,” I grunted, positioning her in front of me, “we should leave that to the professionals.” She giggled.

Then, for the first time that day, both of us sat in silence, looking out over our little slice of paradise. The sun was far to the West, the day ending as quickly as it began. Luci turned her head to look up at me.

“I’m ready, now.”

“Ready to go home? You must be tired.”

“No, silly. To make my wish.” She reached into the pocket in her jean shorts and pulled out the dandelion.

“Oh ok. Well. What do you want to wish for?” She closed her eyes once more before blowing the wisps into the watercolor sky. “Actually, you’re supposed to keep it a secret or it won’t come true.” I playfully mimicked shushing though she remained stoic.

“I wished you would wake up. Mommy needs you. Tell her to come. Tell her everything’s okay.”

“Honey...”

“I love you, Daddy,” she said before turning around and hugging me.

Soon the forestry and the fauna gave way to the four walls of my bedroom. My ceiling fan was slowly rotating. My heart sank as reality set in. I reached over to Xi only to find she was out of bed. I sat up, wiped my eyes, and headed for the hallway.

The water was running in the bathroom with her toothbrush sitting on the sink, the paste still fresh, yet resting atop the dry bristles. I turned it off, giving way to the sound of sobbing coming from Luci’s room. The door was cracked. Upon sliding inside, I noticed Xi in the middle of the floor, on her knees, clutching what used to be our daughter’s favorite stuffed bear. She looked up at me and extended an arm.

I rushed over and wrapped myself around her. “You found Mr. Fluffy, huh?”

“I can’t do it, babe.” Her voice broke before giving way to more tears. “She was just *here*. She was.”

“I know, I know. But I think she’s happy now. Don’t you?”

She sniffed, “She did always have the biggest smile on her face.”

“I have a feeling... wherever she is... it’s beautiful. She’d love for you to see it.” Xi nodded, placing her hand on my arm.