

# Tuesday and So Slow

*for Maureen*

*Red River Gorge, Daniel Boone National Forest, Kentucky  
The Hollow, East Belfast, Northern Ireland*

Days when the rains came, that's how the song goes. Rains could rain for days—we knew their gray trap. With practice, we came to know their arriving carillon of raindrops could release us like school bells. One late April day, senior year, he and I, we skipped. Our first time—we were such good grade-getters. He would be the first in his family to go to college. They were talking law school. College-bounding was expected of me, as well, the oldest, the smart girl, the slot I seemed to be born into.

The forest in Red River Gorge was wet with rain. This was a place that was nourished all the time. Sodden oak leaves tobacco'ed and fragrant, mahogany-skinned and smooth, lodged in the green grass. We clambered up banks of dark soil, reaching for knobs and branches interred in sun-splotched patches of crumbling earth. Miles away, back in our red brick schoolhouse, if we guessed the time right, the bell for English lit class could be ringing, our schoolmates opening light blue essay tablets, tapping the eraser ends of their pencils at blank newsprint until they could think how to begin. Or maybe it was nearing lunch bell, when they would spill out onto the lawn with their sandwiches, and the girls would choose flowers for our graduation floats, getting the colors and combinations right so the petals could form messages such as “looks like we made it” or “there's no stopping us now.” Back there, it was all Tuesday-like, more knowing to know, there still could be a test on Friday.

The only true tale we could tell: We didn't know what time it was. We didn't want to know. He and I, we had only the sun to let us know, limelighting pine needles and forest floor.

He carried this blue blanket in his rucksack. He shook it out, and the thought came to me that here, now, we could stop time.

I didn't know what time it was. I only knew that the end of school was near. The long train of educating me had laid down tracks on my life that stopped somewhere short of here. Behind me lay a path of straight As and all the boxes checked. He pressed a palm to my breast, and I let him push me down. He touched my hair, my face, my cheeks. Blue wool and forest earth met my bare skin, my shoulders, the small of my back, the curve of my buttocks. My jeans on the tree. His hip bone touching mine. My fingers reaching, webbing his skin, skin that told me how much he wanted my touch. A song between us. His lips to my ear. He's inside me. He lifts me to him, his strong hand cupping my skull. High above, a waterfall.

I didn't know what time it was. I only knew that the end of childhood was near. I wanted it to end.

Because so much could still be ahead of me, stone cities and ardent lovers, satin bistros and deckle-edged books, jazz-light streets and snow-covered hills. No one marries her first love. All those places were far away from this misty forest, which seemed to promise it would stay here. It had, after all, been here all the while that I was racking up the path to college and adulthood and had never come to look.

Except one day when my parents brought me to the Gorge, and my baby sister ran ahead of me on the trail. That's the first time I knew I could run, dash that far ahead of them. I could skip and jump and throw myself into the leaves. We could laugh and laugh and laugh. We could clip a giggle when we heard the trail of giggles echo back, signaling that we could listen now again. We could try it now, and it would happen again. We could giggle about nothing at all. And collapse into giggles and leaves, then do it again.

Something was always gone in me. Something that was already looking back before it began. I was that girl, only it seemed like I'd never known her. The one who was that innocent, wide-eyed and random. Wee, wild and safe, already so wise. Was I ever in that place where I could let my skin be on, every pore open?

Whatever happened to Tuesday, and so slow? I wondered if they took Tuesday somewhere, slipped a potato sack over her head and shoved her into the back of a white van, the kidnapped middle child of the week, a day no one would notice was missing. I wondered if Tuesday had always wanted to leave because the rest of us were going so fast—too fast—one slip in the mud from a breakneck tumble through brambles and barbs. No stopping us now.

What Tuesday wants is for everything to get a little quieter, dial back to another place, another time, a misty place where she gets to skip and jump and run and stand in the sunlight, laughing.

What Tuesday wants is to never have had to have leukemia. What Tuesday wants is for her husband to still touch her that way, and not because she had leukemia.

What Tuesday wants is not to have had her children so young. Also, not to have had them so late.

What Tuesday wants is for her hair not to fade. Or fall out. What Tuesday wants is her original face, the face that gleams in the forest, soft and lovely, touched by rain, and for that to be the way he sees her now. She wants to have the face that watches his young face, chin cutting crisp into the mist-shroud, cleaving past and present. He looks up the mountain for the path to the waterfall, seeming to know where it is already. He hums a loose tune.

What Tuesday wants is pizza—pizza with vine-ripened tomatoes and spicy sausage fired in a wood oven in a city of light, a city different, a city that feels like a town, not a city at all, a village within a city by salty ocean air.

What Tuesday wants is kippers and crusty bread and sharp aged cheddar from Kerry. She wants someone to pack the sandwiches and tuck them in his rucksack with the blue blanket. To reach for her hand and pull her down the banks of The Hollow.

What Tuesday wants is to live in his memory the way he will live in hers.

What Tuesday wants is to not have to tell him about what happened after. What Tuesday wants is not to have to fix him. Before the leukemia, she'd tried to fix him. She couldn't keep what was always trying to invade him from coming in. It was already in him, already there. He would have to fend it off now. After the leukemia, only white space was there, the white healer warriors they would have to pour back into her with chemo.

What Tuesday wants is no more white noise. It's too askew of an authentic life to have to find a zoned-out space within the accumulation of troubled sound. All Tuesday wants is a chime. It will make her remember, and settle into a comfortable seat. She will hold her hands in prayer pose.

What Tuesday likes is moss, how it grows on wet rocks and rough bark. What Tuesday likes is green caterpillars so bright they ought to become hazard stripes. What Tuesday likes is secret grottos, libraries stretching up through hollow tree trunks and apothecaries where a fawn-woman makes love potions.

Out beyond these woods are fields and slides and grounds, blue spaces marked in chalk, stands where people can see, watch people graduate into their lives. I tilt my face into the sun-well and I can hear their voices, pitched with anticipation, a new game today, their game. I stand

in the waterfall, laughing. He and I, together, we cannot stop laughing. I offer him a sweet, and he plucks it from the palm of my hand. Still we laugh, still the sun, shining through in beads of crimson, amber, sky and gold.

What I will remember is how good my parents were. My mother, wrapping sandwiches for me in wax paper, tucking in one sweet caramel shortbread, then thinking more of it, another to share. Maybe she always knew it was for him. What I will remember is how hard my father worked, and how hard this man, this boy, will work for me. What I will remember is his shout of my name, cutting through the blur and mist, calling to say, “The rains came.”

And that is what happened to Tuesday. When we turned home, she fell down the bank, slipped from the present and into the future. Sha-la-la—