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Candy Landfill

Z is sleeping.
In her bed, with pillows bigger than she was and feather down blankets, Z sleeps. She has been sleeping for a week and may never wake up.
Z does not seem concerned.
Beside her bed is a vase of flowers with tulips, daffodils and plum blossoms. Z would often complain about killing flower. The flowers are all plastic, with fake petals and fake smell.
They brightened her room considerably.
Z's room is not hard to keep bright. It has many windows, all letting in natural light from the sun. Z can not stand darkness.
Darkness scares her.
But inside her room there are many lights. Flickering on and off, they tease away the dark. The dark, confused, does not bother Z.
Inside her room, Z sleeps.
Inside her sleep, Z dreams.

In her dream, Z has wings. She could easily have wings in the waking world, but she can never decide what kind she would want. In her dreams her wings shift from feathered to fairy to scaly.
Z floats over the clouds. She wonders if they are yummy.
Z loves yummy things.
She loves candy, and cake, and ice cream.
Z reaches to grab some of the clouds. The clouds dart away from her thin fingers. Z's tummy starts growling.
She does not have a stomach, only a tummy. Stomachs like bitter foods, tummies only like sweet foods.
Z knows she is late.
She is always late.
Flap, Flap
An alarm goes off.
Ring, Ring
Z sleeps on.

A week ago Z got into a fight.
She refers to fights as quarrels.
The quarrel was with her best friend. They quarreled for two hours, with a short break for tea.
Z added twelve cubes of sugar to her tea that day.

Afterwards she returned to her room and locked the door. She removed her yellow sundress and red go-go boots. Her eyes meet an identical pair in her full length mirror, and she tried to remember what her hair looked like before she turned it coral red.

It was green.

No...It was kiwi green.

Z did not miss her kiwi green hair.

Z hated her hair. That was why she always changed it.

It was her worst feature, an ugly mark on her head that reminded her how ugly she was deep down.

That sounds far too depressing, so Z just says she changes it out of boredom.

Z had placed her new pajamas on her bed. They were pink with bunnies on them. She thinks they were a gift, but she can not remember who gave them to her.

Z put on her blue pajamas with stars and moons. They look like the sky, the clouds, the moon, the future. They look like freedom.

And they are very soft.

She laid down on her bed and slept.

And slept.

And slept.

Z's hair is now silver.

She likes the sparkle and often makes it the color of the stars and jewelry.

But never gray.

Z hates the color gray. It is the color of stone, of rock, of harsh pain.

Silver is much softer.

Once, her sister told her to stop talking nonsense. She said gray and silver were the same. She said that silver was harsher than gray.

Z did not talk to her sister for a week after that.

She has become bored with her wings. They shed off of her back and melt into a puddle on the ground. Feathers and glitter try to escape the puddle but can not. Instead they stick out in ugly angles, a Cuban sculpture in her dreams.

Z picks up a stick and pokes the liquid that once helped her soar.

Two weeks has become three.

In Z's dreams the leaves are turning brown and red. It will be winter soon. Then autumn, then spring.

She always forgets about summer.

But no one can blame her.

At least, no one that she knows.

Z finds a coat.

It is long, reaching to below her knees, camouflage with a furry collar and furry train. She does not know what color the fur should be.

Z loves color.

Snow is falling and Z thinks perhaps she should get on with it.

She turns in a complete circle and faces the city for the first time.

Someone in the city is crying.

Z enters the city.
She rather hates the city.
She is far too bright for the city and it makes her hair turn pale and cold. Color leaks from her coat...

Drip, drip

...All over the pavement.

The city is not where she was born, but she lived there for ten years. She was seven when her mother sent her to live in the orphanage. Her mother had never told her why, simply that she was to stay there until mommy came back for her.

Z hates the orphanage.

She remembers the hard, cold bed and blankets that scratched her skin. She remembers the food or lack of food when the matron was feeling upset. She remembers tears and heartache.

She remembers the plague.

Z wonders why her mother made her live through the plague. It was sad and painful and full of anger.

But Z made it.

When she emerged from the city her hair was gone. The matron had shaved it off, trying to protect all the orphans from lice. Her clothes were tattered and her eyes sunken. She had also stopped growing.

While Z's hair grew back and her eyes brightened, she never grew taller after leaving the city.

Z stares at the building that took her childhood and smiles. Her shoes try to absorb the color that gathers around her feet. The color is not wet, like water, which makes her toes feel strange.

But that is not important.

Her girl is in there and that is important. Z is going to get her back.

That is the most important.

Z does not go straight into the building.

Perhaps because of the vines. The vines twist around the gray frame of the school, and Z wonders if even bricks in the city are turning gray. The vines cover the door and do not let her in.

Z does not mind. She is not going in the building first anyway.

It would have been a waste of time, considering her girl was not in there at the moment.

Her girl was on the outskirts of the town. There every house looked the same, with identical gardens and identical families. There the trees are shaped like animal and the animals are shaped like trees.

“That,” Z says, speaking for the first time, “Is silly.”

Sitting in front of a small house that was completely burnt to the ground was her girl. There were the charred remains of rafters and support beams, along with the smell of death.

Z could remember that smell from the plague.

The smell fills her and she must rub her nose harshly to make it go away.

The plague did not burn down the house.

It did not have that kind of power.

Not yet.

It was just a normal fire. One started by a kid trying to be cool. He just wanted to be well liked among his friends. Causing destruction was how kids impressed each other in a city with no limits.

Instead he killed a family.

Z is not concerned with him. He is only important for moving along her dream. He has stopped existing to her, which is probably for the best.

The girl is crying. She holds a doll in her arms, despite being too jaded to be referred to as a child. Z wonders at what age childhood can be abandoned.

Z does not know what to say to her.

For the next hour she sits next to the girl, waiting for the matron to come and take her away. The girl knows the matron is coming and tries to bury herself deep into the pavement.

The girl does not want to go with the matron...

NO! STOP! MOMMY! DADDY!

But the girl really does not stand a chance.

Autumn is having a problem with the idea of becoming winter. Instead the red leaves grow back into new spring green with light blooms. Cold winds soften and forgot that it was angry. Birds reappear and start singing.

Spring has begun and winter has been ignored.

Winter is not at all offended. Its time will come.

Summer is the one that is always forgotten.

Somewhere in her left ear Z can hear crying. She tries to turn and catch the sound but it keeps slipping away. Waiting so the sound would not expect it she abruptly turned to the right, but the sound is too fast for her.

The sound turns into words. They are sweet words. They are soft words.

Z tries to remember who owns the words. She had heard them before, but in her dreams they were turning slow and sticky, like molasses.

From the corner of her eye Z finally finds the words. They are dripping slowly from a dead oak tree, so Z catches them in her small, childish hands. In her palms the words swirl and shimmer and glitter.

Z giggles.

The words glistens a thought, "Come back, please."

The voice for the words makes Z want to cry.

“Please,” The words shine in her hands so brightly that she almost drops them,
“Please wake up. I love you.”

Z wonders when she will get the courage to respond to the words.

But in her dreams she can not reply. Instead she kisses the words, giggling at the sensation of butterflies against her lips.

“I can’t wake up just yet,” She whispers to the words that sparkle away in the wind, “Just wait for me.”

Z’s hands are warm, as though the words came back to hold them.

She is very grateful for that.

The orphanage does not remember Z, which she thinks is just fine.

The orphanage does remember the girl, who now sleeps on the bed Z once occupied, under the sheets Z once huddled under. The girl looks sad always, and often cries until another orphan tells her to shut up.

Z spends most of her time holding the girl, but sometimes the girl just does not seem to notice. Z does not mind. She simply sits on the edge of her girl’s new bed, kicking away the rats that want to nibble on the girl’s toes. The girl sleeps and Z wonders if she will ever wake up.

One day, Z speaks.

“Please,” She says, and she wonders why her voice is so hoarse, “don’t cry.”

The girl looks down on the streets and says nothing.

“Please,” She says, looking at the same spot, “You could be much worse off.”

Z is referring to the mocha brown girl with chocolate colored hair and hate in her eyes. The mocha brown girl is sleeping in an alley and looks very cold.

Z kisses the girl on the forehead and goes to offer the mocha brown girl her coat.

In the street there is no noise.

This frightens Z very much.

She looks at the windows that line the buildings. They are fogged over, a shield between her and the people who pretend to exist behind the walls. She wonders if people really exist, or if she is imagining it.

She is on a mission. She crosses the street and wraps the mocha brown girl in her coat, which has finished leaking its color and still molts its fur into the wind. The girl stares at her and Z does not know how to answer the question in her eyes. So she makes her lips form a smile and asks for the girl’s name.

“I don’t have one.” The girl tells her.

Z does not think this is a good answer.

The girl does not care in the slightest.

Settled on the cold ground she looks over the pebbles, wondering what would happen if all the pebbles left the city. It would be a migration of pebbles, and the people would finally look out their windows, less afraid of the plague and more afraid of the pebbles. They would think that they were being ridiculous and stop crying.

Not that Z knew if they are crying. She can not see into their worlds. Their windows are far too foggy for that.

The mocha brown girl is crying, though she is too strong to show it on her face.
“Neve.”
The girl stares at her.
“I think I shall call you Neve. Neve Boliari.” Z wonders why her voice sounds so different in the city. It sounds too hurt and less happy.
Neve likes her name and clings to Z until the tears are gone.
Z wonders to herself why the plague kills everyone.
And the plague slinks past their alley, too obsessed with death to notice their happiness.

Z has returned to her girl.
And outside her dreams it has been five weeks. She is not concerned.
Instead she sits on the steps of the orphanage, blowing bubbles. The bubbles are all colors of the rainbow, and a few that the rainbow only dreams of. Her girl watches and is secretly jealous that she has not received a name.
“Neve is different. I can’t give you a name.” Z reminds the girl, who does not seem to be listening. “Only you can do that.”
Z blows another bubble, which floats into the sky and hovers above them.
Her girl goes back into the orphanage...
SLAM!
And the bubble pops.
Z sighs and tries again.

Neve has been accepted into a gang.
Z pouts at the notion of Neve fighting. Neve should not have to take lives in exchange for extending her own.
That was just unfair.
The gang fights with other gangs for the right to call a street their own. They fight for territory. They fight for a home.
Z is worried.
Z tells Neve that she thinks the gang will try and fight the plague. Neve holds her until the tears are gone and tells her that the plague can never kill her.
“Why is that?” Z asks as her hair melts into a weak red shade.
At first Neve does not answer. She is too busy looking out for danger. Neve will always look for danger.
It is her nature.
Z does not look for danger. She looks for warm windows to sleep on. She looks for yummy foods to nibble.
She looks for kinder things that the city can offer.
Finally she answers. Z is afraid of what she will say.
“Because you gave me my name.”
Z worries that it will not be enough.

The city is dying again. The plague is tired of hiding in alleys and has come out to play. It has grown, and now the people can see it through their foggy windows. It wears a man's face, and holds out its hands.

It is begging.

It is begging for life. Killing the people in the city, lengthening its own existences with the destruction of another's.

But that is the nature of the world. Even a dream world.

It fights with the gangs who band together. They scream the names of loved ones the plague has killed and the plague wonders if it is worth the aggravation. The names give them strength as they fight. The names give them meaning and purpose.

Neve screams the loudest.

"Zelda!"

That night Z watches on the roof of the orphanage, sinking deeper into her own dreams. The vines are growing upwards, crawling to catch her and bind her to the building. Z does not want to be bound to her memories.

Her mind tries to find something to combat the vines, fiery words to burn them away. She recites poems and sings songs. She speaks of fire pits and billowing smoke. She speaks of Hell, and its greatest enemy.

She speaks of hope.

Nothing stops the vines.

"Indifference is the least we have to dread from man or beast."

The vines loosen. They are afraid of indifference.

Indifference is only one step away from forgotten. And once something is forgotten, it might as well be dead.

Z fears she is dead outside of her dreams.

Z suddenly fears she has gone completely mad.

That night, the plague died.

So did the matron.

But that was coincidence.

Z's girl is being moved to an orphanage in another city, where Z can not follow. She can only stay and watch her old city.

In her dreams she can only remember. She can not create.

Some dreams are a loop, a circle that never ends. Nothing new to look at, only memories of the city and its people.

She buys some flowers and gives them to her girl before she boards the train. The train is red, with green words and white numbers. The flowers are daisies, bluebells and violets. She wonders if there is a message in the flowers, but does not have the time to look.

Her girl is wearing a new dress that the orphanage gave to all its children. It was not out of kindness.

The orphanage did not want to lose any of its children to the new city. It is afraid the new city will gobble them up with promises of happiness.

“Will you be alright?” Z asks the girl.

Her girl finally speaks.

“I’m not going to the new city,” She says, and Z realizes she sounds much older than twelve, “I will be going to a school where I will live for many years. Perhaps for ten years.” She looks at Z coyly, the last time her girl will ever be coy. Z thinks this is a shame.

“In ten years, you will be a woman.” Z tells her.

Her girl nods, “In ten years, you will still be a child.”

Z giggles and behind her a hand grabs her shoulders so she does not run away.

“I’ll be waiting, my girl.” Z says. And she means it. In ten years she will need a muse, and her girl will be the greatest muse in history. Her girl does not believe her, but that is okay, because Z does not often believe herself.

“I won’t remember you.” Her girl confesses, taking the flowers Z bought for her. A message is on the card, and she worries it is too soon to look.

Z sniffles back a tear, “Why not?”

“Because,” She says, looking at the card, “This is not real. It’s just a dream.”

The card has one word on it. The word the girl had been longing to find.

The card is her name.

Joan.

Z looks at her mommy. She wonders when her mommy snuck into her dreams and wants to cry, but can’t. The tears refuse to come. She has already cried too much, and winter is the worst season for crying. It freezes the lakes, rivers and tears.

“Z, it’s time to wake up.” Her mother says, offering a single white rose. The rose is already wilting, and Z wishes she could bury it in the ground. Bury the rose and pretend it had never been plucked away from the warm Mother Earth.

“Mummy, I’m scared.” Z confesses. Z has always been scared. The dark scares her just as much as the light.

...And bees. She hates bees.

But she is digressing. There are more important things in going on.

The thorns from the rose cut her finger. Each drop of blood on the ground grows into another flower. They push out of the concrete and struggle to reach light. They know that behind the clouds there is a sun. They know that the sun is their food and their warmth.

They know that the sun is their mother.

These flowers are pale green.

...No. They are kiwi-green.

The sunlight is painful on Z’s eyes.

Perhaps that is because she has been sleeping for six weeks.

She does not realize she has been sleeping for six weeks, but she knows it is time to wake up. There is nothing else to do in her dreams. She has run out of fun.

Outside her room there are shouts and bickering. Outside her room there is quarreling, loud enough to wake the dead.

But Z was not dead.
She was fighting a plague in her dream, and giving names away.
In the waking world there is a plague. That was not a dream.
Her years in the orphanage were not a dream. Neve is not a dream. Her girl is not
a dream.

The plague is not a dream. It is also not dead. It still crawls in the underbelly of
the only man-made city, feeding off of fear and sorrow. The plague makes sure it is
always remembered, making sure it will never die.

Someday Z will press herself into a memory. Just one memory. In that way she
will become immortal, flying through the dreams of history forever and ever.

Until then she is hungry...

Yummy, yummy, for my tummy

And it is morning.