

The Clearing

Kate Nahu

I lean against the tree, its cold trunk pushes against my back, honey-sap sun soaking my face. My hand idly fiddles with a flower in the grass near me, though I eventually cease, the siren song of bees humming and birds warbling slowly lulling me to sleep.

I dream of her, but when don't I?

We're little again, wandering the local park. She is adorned with a pink tiara, me a cape. Together we conquer the swings and slides, leaving the forbidden outer shell of the park. However, her temperament was never one to admit defeat and she points into the nearby bush. She charges and I race after, happy to play knight. Soon we're running together, breaths merging, hands finding each other and in that moment we are no longer six year olds escaped from parents, but fairies and princesses and knights and wizards and... we see it.

A clearing. Making up for it's size with a shy beauty. Grass swaying drunkenly, buttercups and daisies twirling together in the breeze. What catches our attention though, is the tree, standing proud at the edge of the clearing. It has a sturdy trunk embellished with moss and vines, weaved together in such a way that they seem placed there by a higher being. Its vast branches stretch over the clearing protectively, a father's hands over their child. We gaze around, hazy eyed in excitement at our own magical land, seemingly crafted just for us. Our hands catch again, and we know.

Then we are older. Gone are the carefree days of childhood. Adolescence has embraced us with a slap, stretching our limbs into beanstalks and spraying our faces with dandelion seeds. Our clearing is also growing, the grass tall, flowers wild. The tree's changed to, moss no longer a light scattering more than a thick rug. But it's arms remain steady and protective. So we dance together in the grass, and the grass dances with us, tickling our bare calves. Soon the intoxicating scent of spring has drugged us and we collapse against the tree. Our laughter is captured by the breeze, which gifts us with a cool draft in return. Time passes in the way that it only can on a languid summer afternoon, and our hands are pressed together, then our sides, then mouths. We break apart, warm in each other's contentment and we know.

Now I'm woken up by her.

Grass heavy with melancholy droops on our bare feet,

the birds have left with the sun. She holds my face in her hands and I mirror her, always happy to follow her lead. Our eyes meet and her gaze tells me. For us, our love is sunlight dripping through foliage, or the surgery syrup of honey, beautiful and natural. But now we know her parents can't feel the warmth, or taste the sweetness. To them, it's the tang of a wasp sting, or rocks digging into feet, nature at its worst. We pull each other close and press against the tree, desperately wanting to find comfort in it's familiar strength. But the grass is muddy and the flowers are hiding from the winter and the tree, our tree's branches have sagged, fingertips grasping listlessly.

We stay bundled closely, having each other and our own magical land is enough.

We stay bundled. Too stubborn, or too heartsick to admit that, to a six year old, even mundane things such as clearings can be magical, but once your childhood has passed...

We stay bundled together. Only this time, we know nothing.