

Creative Writing Collection

Fiction: *Just Another Evening*

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Poetry: “Marigold Mind”

Just Another Evening

“I need a three-letter word for ‘thus far’,” Charlie said, putting down his crossword while searching for Jean’s eyes. She stood only a couple of feet away but was preoccupied with what was on the stove.

While a pot of water boiled on the back burner, a moment passed before Jean replied, “Try ‘yet’,” then adding, “You know, your sister called earlier today.” and over the sizzling pan of green and yellow peppers, she stared at him, very aware of what was happening. His body curved over the table so he could truly understand the paper below him. He let his curly hair, slightly disheveled, fall as his glasses barely held to his nose. He was far too focused now to have heard her.

Charlie had a bad habit of getting a little too involved in the things he used to pass his time. During his undergrad, a professor told him that to be an intellect, time must be attached to academia. Now at the ripe age of twenty-five, those words still haunt him. Three weeks ago, he was all over chess, spending hours learning every gambit he could. Jean liked that he was invested in learning new things, and he was never pretentious about it. She often would join into whatever new thing occupied his spare time. Jean once tried suggesting that maybe Charlie should pick up the hobbies of someone his age but of course, he dismissed that. His head was far too filled with the words of that Professor, and he had no room for new suggestions. He sat at their kitchen table, filling in the blank space of his new obsession: crossword puzzles. After a few seconds, Jean gave a short cough which caught his attention.

“Sorry, what did you say?” He replied with an honest apology.

“Cassy called here today. I told her you would call her back tomorrow. Can you do that?”

She said while dumping a bag of pasta into the boiling water that splashed onto the exposed burner, sizzling. Jean found cooking all so satisfying.

“Ego!” Charlie said, leaping from his chair with the crossword in hand.

“What?” Jean asked.

“Ego, it's line 28: word for self-esteem!” He brought the crossword over to where Jean was cooking so she could see the accomplishment. He smiled pointing it out. Crosswords made Charlie feel intelligent, as did chess but that was too boring even for him.

Jean looked over the page, then back at him and said, “Sweetheart, you didn't answer my question.”

“What question?” his brows scrunched for he really didn't hear a question.

“Will you call Cassy tomorrow? She's in town and wants to see us. “Charlie scooped his finger into the steaming dark red sauce Jean had created, unbothered by its temperature, and stuck it right into his mouth. The couple met five years prior in a cooking class put on at a restaurant in town. Jean was working as the Sue chief, while he had received the class as a gift from his mother. His mother thought it would be a fun thing for him to try but as Charlie watched Jean cut carrots and turn tomatoes into roses, he knew that he would never be as in love with an activity as she was with cooking. He told her every day that she had a gift, that she put her entire soul into each dish she made. It always amazed him how dedicated Jean was to cooking. It was all she did with her time. It was her career and her hobby - how lucky she was.

“Ask her when she's free, if your mom's coming, am I cooking or are we-”

“Okay I understand,” He said interrupting her, pulling his finger out of his mouth, “That’s amazing by the way,” giving her a small kiss on her temple before moving away.

“Thanks, I’m trying something new.” He again sat, reading through the list of clues he didn’t understand, which if he was honest, were most of them. Jean added a mix of spices, most of which he didn’t recognize, into the peppers. The stove’s little flames lit the red backsplash up just enough to create a glow in their kitchen. Charlie didn’t want to call his sister, and he didn’t want to see her. He loved Casey but whether he liked her was up to debate.

With eyes fixed on the puzzle, he mumbled, “Jean, could you just do it this time?”

“I’m not the messenger for-”

“Ah messenger, that’s row 32!” scribbling it down and raising his head, expecting to be met with the same excitement from his wife but instead, her eyes dug into him, with very little expression about them. The corner of her lips turned up and he knew she was not angry, just unwilling to let the topic change that easily.

“Sorry. You’re right, I will call her,” He said, pushing his crossword aside and turning to look at her, “even if I get stuck on the phone for hours.”

“Oh, come on, no you won’t.” Jean gave a light smile then went back to attending the pasta.

“Last time she called; I was stuck to the wall for an entire afternoon.” His finger moved to point to their landline across the room. Sighing, Jean approached Charlie, cupped his face with her hands, and hoped it would calm him. He didn’t say anything to that. So, she went on,

“That was months ago Charlie. You know that Cassy just wants to share her life with you.”

He chuckled, “No, she wants to brag about her life.” Cassy had a way of turning everything into a competition. She had since childhood and Charlie leaned into the fight when he was with her. They paraded their intelligence against each other, turned casual board games to contesting oppositions, and consistently compared the success of their day-to-day lives. But, when Charlie left law school, she went on to get her doctorate, which solidified to her who the winner was.

Dropping her hands, Jean moved back to the stove and added, “I know Darling but, she’s your sister. Maybe if you called her more, she wouldn’t feel the need to brag as much.”

“It’s not like you call your siblings,” Charlie mumbled, grabbing the crossword.

“Yes, I do!” She exclaimed.

“When?” he pushed back. She called her mother plenty but never her siblings.

“When I can...” A soft giggle took the place for her lack of malice.

“That’s ridiculous!”

“Please! I talked to Zach just the other day. He’s staying with Mom for a bit.”

“Oh lovely, and did you call Zach, or did you call your Mother and he just happened to pick up?”

“That’s beside the point.” She stated but Charlie knew her too well, for that was exactly what had happened.

“You hypocrite!” Charlie joked while a cloud of steam took over the kitchen as Jean drained the pasta. The dew on her skin caught Charlie’s attention. Her cheeks had a light raspberry tint to them that he was convinced never went away. For a cook, she had decently long hair that curled similar to his own. Considering its length, it remained pulled back for the

majority of her time. She left it in low buns, ponytails, and braids. Tonight though, only a section of it was up in a half-hearted bun while the rest was left to live freely. When she concentrated, Jean made this face that Charlie could only describe as a joyous concern. Her eyebrows would twitch, and her cheeks would rise with her nose, and he swore she must be biting her tongue too but, when he tried mimicking it for her, it never looked the same. He watched her a moment longer before returning to his puzzle.

“I can call her tomorrow, but I need something in return,” he said as she placed a bowl of pasta covered in her new sauce and peppers in front of him on the table.

“Good, thank you. Now, what do you need?” She said, lodging her fork into the meal before her and bringing the perfect bite to her lips. Charlie was hesitant to answer her.

“Vertical - long-necked bird.” Jean couldn’t control herself as she burst into laughter, between breaths she wheezed,

“Oh my god, you want help with the crossword?”

“Please!” He said with a smile that revealed his back molars.

“Try ‘goose’,” Jean said, still recovering.

“I already did.”

“Oh... what about ‘swan’?” He quickly wrote SWAN onto the page: perfection. His smile grew soft but held the same amount of joy.

“See this is why I love you!” Charlie said.

“That’s the only reason?” Jean teased, but Charlie wouldn’t bite, he knew better. So instead, he replied, “Yup, that’s it. You’re amazing at crosswords.”

“Well, at least that makes one of us.” She joked again, finding it far too funny not to laugh.

Looking From a Tree

Since I was a kid, I've had a habit of pushing myself into different activities that define who I am. My life has been a balancing act of contradicting personalities matched with the perfect way to pass the time. A younger me always longed to be more intelligent or cooler than everyone else. I thought that being good at things would help me achieve that longing. So, through the ages of eight to eighteen, I dedicated myself to activities with purpose. The majority of these activities fell in the arts. In middle school, I played violin religiously, participated in choir, and took part in the drama department. In high school, I focused on theatre and even went to an auditioned arts high school for acting. By senior year, I shifted to an interest in writing which is where I currently sit. Although before my time in the arts, something else defined who I was.

In 2012, I considered myself a soccer player. My dad got me into it just as he had with my two other siblings. Sam, my oldest Sister, hated soccer. During games, she would simply sit next to the goalie. Sam would justify this by saying, "I didn't want him to be lonely". As you can imagine, she quit before little league ended. By late elementary school, she turned to more academic activities, where she thrived for the rest of her educational career. On the other hand, Julia, my middle sister, was amazing at soccer. Her involvement in sports carried on for many years and she truly loved it. She was in competitive soccer, both indoor and outdoor, as well as competitive volleyball. I wanted to love soccer the way my dad did, and I wanted to be the absolute best. I thought making him proud would give me some edge against my sisters. Yet, it's necessary to know that I wasn't that good at soccer, and because of my lack of skill, I don't think

I enjoyed it that much. I found myself being grateful when games were snowed out or practices canceled. I would use any excuse to try and get out of soccer.

At the age of nine, I found myself home alone quite frequently. My sisters held busy schedules, and my Mom was responsible to get them where they needed to go. Anytime my sisters or I stayed home alone, we had to follow a list of rules my mom put in place. These rules faded as we got older but, at the time they made up what not to do when we were home alone including, not answering the phone, or the door, not using the oven or stove, we could only eat yogurt so that choking was less of a risk, and we were not to leave the house. Yet, nowhere on this list was no going outside to the backyard. That day I sat in my kitchen while getting ready to go to our weekly soccer practice. I put my shin guards, shorts, long socks, and cleats on. I paired this look with my messy hair that I never felt like doing, and my crooked, pink metal glasses, which I adored. Today my dad, who also was my coach, was running late from work. On any other day, Mom would wait till he got home before leaving to drive Jay to her volleyball practice. But today he was late, and Jay couldn't be too, so for a total of maybe fifteen minutes, I was left to my own devices. I was always impatient and felt quite bored just sitting inside on such a gentle October day. So, I went on an adventure to see the trees in my backyard.

The air outside covered my face in a cold fall breeze, the type that makes your eyes water and cheeks turn pink. The gloomy sky blocked out any bright sunlight, so the whole yard fell into a slight shadow. My dogs followed my every step since I was in their domain. They were ready to play fetch but instead, I walked straight to the curved tree that tempted me from inside. The tree itself was thick with dark gray and brown bark that fell off when you picked at it. Its roots pushed itself above the grass and up about thirty-five feet into the air. From the bottom, I

scanned it up and down. While seeing the new potential in this activity, I thought, I could climb that. So, I grabbed a low branch with one hand and swung to grab another while placing both of my feet onto the trunk. I continued to pull myself up one branch at a time, only taking small moments to catch my breath or take in my view. I did what I came to do, to see more than before, and I wanted more. I had to keep climbing. The dogs watching from below acted as my audience. Their barks filled my ears like applause fills an amphitheater. I needed to feel my height and know the distance I had climbed. The branch I balanced my right foot on distorted my view, so quickly I tried going higher while keeping my eyes on the ground. Despite the time it took me to climb, it only took a second to fall back to the grass. My left leg lost its footing, and the branch I relied on broke under my unbalanced weight. As the branch fell, so did I, and although I attempted to clasp to anything in hopes of avoiding my fate, I was unsuccessful and hit the ground hard.

When I awoke or was consciously aware of what had happened, the thought of "dad is going to kill me" flooded my mind. The throbbing in my ankle followed soon after as well as the panic. It didn't take long for me to tell that my glasses were not on my face, and even as a child, I had horrible vision. Every meager movement sent shocks up my leg and into my spine, but I had to find my eyes.

What was I going to say to dad? He already thought I made excuses to get out of playing soccer, and now he was going to think I was being stupid and reckless to do so. I scrambled around the grass, searching for my glasses. After a few frantic minutes of searching, I found them, thankfully intact about 6 feet from my landing spot. With my vision back, I sat there in the grass only to allow myself to cry. More than pain or fear, I felt embarrassment.

What was I doing? Any reasonable person would have known climbing trees in soccer cleats wasn't going to end well. I probably knew it too but, I simply didn't consider it. Maybe I just didn't care about the consequences because after all, I was a child.

I slowly hobbled my way back inside and returned to my chair. I attempted to fix the ankle pain with a bag of ice and feeble prayers. When my dad got home, I heard his excited greeting, "Hey kid! I'm home, I'll be ready in five minutes, and then it's soccer time!" He wasn't expecting me to be so quiet since normally I did try to match his excitement about practice. He saw my face, red from tears, and stopped. Before he could even ask, I spilled the entirety of what had happened. The faster I told him, the less humiliating it would be. I look back now and know that before anything else, he was concerned. He wanted to know I was okay, but I only saw disappointment.

He made me come to practice so that I wasn't alone again, and he said I owed it to my teammates. Above our local field, I sat just watching the team go on without me. Seeing them all together made me jealous. Coach's daughter or not, I knew I was just another player, and no one needed me to play. I could have been anyone else, and it wouldn't have changed anything. Two years later, I stopped playing soccer entirely, and ten years later, as I pursue other dreams, I know that if I could go back and change that, it wouldn't have altered anything about my life.

Part of me believes I climbed to escape. I climbed to be as cool as everyone else, to feel less like a little kid. I climbed to claim something for myself, no matter what it was. When you have sisters like mine, it becomes easy to cling to anything they haven't claimed yet. I knew Sam was the academic, and Jay was the athlete, so what was I going to be? I had no clue, but after the

fall, while the dogs licked the staining tears from my cheeks, I didn't mind being a kid. I didn't mind not knowing because sometimes it's better to lose balance in a tree than in life.

“Marigold Mind”

What is a day in any state?
Let it melt my body once ice-cold.
People love to over exaggerate.

about the time they filled with something great.
Let it dance in the kitchen before I get old.
What is a day in any state?

I want my time to feel like the montage of a film caked
in cliche. Easy romance, fall in Central Park, and feel the fever fold
People love to over exaggerate.

So, lead me to the marigold bait,
I'll trust my eyes even in a blindfold.
What is a day in any state?

Let the girl in - she wants to redecorate.
She'll cover your walls in yellow and gold.
People love to over exaggerate.

Time has gotten a little blurry since I left at eight,
How long has it been? I need to be told
What is a day in any state?

Yet I am coated in blue and white dates.
Repetition of the hour and retold,
People love to over exaggerate.

In my defense, I try my best to replicate,
Moment by mouth, candid and controlled.
What is a day in any state?

Stay out of my head, you thoughts of fate.
You tamper with the possibility of being bold.
People love to over exaggerate.

Body don't refreeze, watch what I create.
I count each breath till I'm half a century old.
What is a day in any state?
People love to over exaggerate.