

TEARS

A little boy walked down a winding path, his cocoa brown feet turning grey on the dusty ground. He stopped at the sound of a rasping voice. At his feet, lay an old woman, wizened and entangled in dry roots. She begged for food, but all he had was his stuffed yellow bunny. He looked in its mouth and found a tiny seed. The old woman seemed to shrink in size before his eyes. He quickly placed the seed in her withered mouth. She disappeared.

The little boy dropped to his knees clutching his bunny. Tears streamed down his young face and fell on the dry ground. He cried until he was empty. He lay his head on the ground, curled up and went to sleep in his sadness. A tickle beneath his cheek awoke him. He sat up, wiping grime from his eyes.

In the dust was a sprout, shining in its greenness. It grew, twisting and sending out tendrils. Its roots spread, the surface greening as they went. The sprout stretched toward the sky, growing branches, twigs, and leaves. It became a giant tree among giant trees. The ground became lush with fronds, ferns, moss, and grasses. Crawling, hopping, and flying things filled the land. Water began to flow near the roots of the tree, trickling away to join other waters until it formed lakes and oceans.

The little boy looked in amazement and joy. He felt his yellow bunny soften before it leaped from his arms. He heard his grandmother's voice singing among other voices. She called to him. He stood up and ran to her. The old woman thanked him for saving her and kissed his forehead. They walked up the path together.

FORGIVENESS

Sadie picked at the old scab on her baby toe. She hated wearing the black patent leather church shoes because the seam rubbed her baby toe something awful. But Big Mama insisted that all the girls look their best on Sunday. Every resident in the Orphan Girls Boarding School had the same blue dress and pair of shiny shoes.

Sadie continued to pick her toe, wincing at the flicker of pain with each pull. She was upset today because Big Momma chastised her in front of the whole church yesterday, just for talking to a boy. She didn't even bother to get the details. She just assumed they were up to no good.

She watched a line of ants cross the broken concrete step below her until the shadow fell and took the light. She looked up and squinted at Big Momma's darkened face.

"I'm sorry, baby, for hurting your feelings yesterday. It just don't feel right having you mad at me. I baked some sweet potato pone and saved you a big corner, seeing as you like it so much." Her round eyes searched Sadie's.

In a flood of fierce love, Sadie hopped up and grabbed her thick neck. She pressed her nose against the rose scented flesh. Of course, she would forgive Big Mama. This was home, right here in her big fleshy arms.

IMAGINARIES

“Are you real?” the little girl asked, pushing her dark curly hair out of her eye. She leaned in closer, her wide nose nearly touching the boy’s. She examined his face so she could remember him, from his brown eyes peering at her sleepily, to his tight black hair peeping from under his red cap. She stepped back and looked him up and down, noting his denim overalls with a bit of turf still clinging to his knee.

“Are you a real boy or an imaginary one?” She paused for breath, then continued, “My mommy doesn’t like me to talk with imaginary friends any more, says I’m too old now.” She sticks a finger in her mouth to wriggle a loose tooth. “She didn’t say I couldn’t play though.” She took his hand and dragged him to the merry-go-round. As they spun at a dizzying speed, she crawled to the center and tugged his red shirt until he was sitting beside her. He smiled and watched her while she talked.

“My mommy does not believe in imaginary friends. She says they are make believe, not real. I told her mine were real but she got angry, so I stopped talking to them around her. I just talk stopped having tea parties.” She bunched her loose curls up on top her head and let out a heavy sigh. “Now I play outdoors mostly, more stuff to do out here. But I never met you before.” She placed a grubby little hand on his cheek and left a smudge there when she pulled back. “You are real! The sand is sticking to your face just like it sticks to my hand.”

Delighted, she hopped down off the merry-go-round and ran to the sand box to finish her sand castle. Her new friend plopped down beside her and started to help. They worked silently for a few seconds. A warm breeze caressed their cocoa brown skin. Then a voice tickled their ears.

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“Uh oh. My mommy is calling me. Time to go.” She stood up and reached to hug her friend. He hugged her back. “See you later!” she yelled as she ran off toward the sturdy silhouette of her mother. She didn’t look back. He had already disappeared