

Water Dragon

The first time he saw her, she was waiting for the bus to come. It was raining, and as he was wont to do, he escaped the cold basement he lived in for the rain. He had seen her, dressed in a splotchy pink dress, bright against the wet haze, clicking her silver shoes together. She was whistling *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, and she didn't seem to mind the leaking overhang.

He approached her, trying to get a closer look at the young girl. He crossed the street, stepping in the puddles with his bare feet, relishing the water as his pants soaked it in. He didn't even mind the gritty points of the gravelly tar beneath him.

She turned her head, and she looked right at him. She stopped whistling, and he stopped walking. They stayed that way for a while, him in the street growing wetter, and her beneath the bust stop. The rain grew heavier; he could see her small breaths in the air. She tapped her fingers on the flaky orange bench, still in time with the song.

“Are you coming in?”

He watched the words come from her mouth, but took a moment longer to realize it was her voice asking the question.

Her high voice cut through the mist again, “Aren't you wet? Come here or a car will smoosh you!”

He looked down and saw the yellow pavers; he was standing in the middle of the road. And she *was* talking to him. He bridged the distance between them in three strides and stopped beneath the edge of the overhang. The water dripped onto his nose, and he let it run down his face, entirely comfortable with the sensation. She giggled, kicking her feet and covering her laughter with her hands.

He looked at her questioningly. She shook her head, her brown hair bouncing by her ears. She parted her hands and whispered her secret to him, “You don't make funny faces like other people do when it rains on them.”

“Because,” he began, “I like the rain.” His voice was soft, he couldn't raise his voice even if he wanted to with the rain like this; days like these deserved reverence in silence to enjoy them. His voice was rough though; he ran his tongue across his lips for rainwater, swallowing it down his throat to rid himself of the prickly feeling there.

“Really?” She leaned forward eagerly, her small hands balancing her on the bench. “I do too, but my momma always says to put on my coat and I hate it!” She scrunched up her face.

She could see *and* hear him. He wondered who she was.

She began clicking her heels together again, and closed her eyes. Her clicks sent sparks of water everywhere. The splotches on her dress, he saw, were from splashing on the wet ground. She set her hands beneath her chin; she looked like she was in prayer.

“What are you thinking about?”

“I want to go home,” she said, her eyes still closed. “I’m wearing silver slippers just like Dorothy, and I’m hoping the bus’ll come sooner.”

He vaguely recalled a movie playing on the old TV; he’d had to keep getting up to adjust the rabbit ears. He’d been annoyed because he was just about to figure out his Rubik’s cube.

“Doesn’t Dorothy have ruby slippers?”

Her eyes opened, and she looked at him agape. “No silly! She has silver slippers in the book!” She huffed, and then shut her eyes again.

He watched her face for a moment, and then took a look around. The inside of the bus stop was covered with graffitied posters, and he was sure there would have been the faint smell of refuse if it hadn’t been raining. It was still raining, and he closed his eyes to simply enjoy the smell of it, and the sound of its fall uninterrupted by rushing cars. No cars, no people, just the small girl by herself.

“What are you doing here alone; shouldn’t you be with your mother?” He may have been gone for a long time, but he knew some things did not change.

Her face changed, a peculiar solemnity settling across it. It vanished quickly. “I like the rain, too. There’s a lot of things it says if you listen.”

His eyes opened wider, the rain now weighing his hair with droplets. It wasn’t the rain that spoke.

“What did it tell you?”

“That you’d be here of course! Didn’t it tell you I’d be here?” She squinted her eyes, looking at him sideways. She waited for his answer.

“No.”

She looked up at him, eyes wide and open. He could see the rain falling in them, and the grumbling roar of white water opened in his ears, the sensation of swimming through running water, the stream from small snows becoming a torrid rush.

The word fell into his mouth and off his tongue. “Shasta,” he said.

She smiled and he saw her two front teeth were missing. “That’s it! That’s my name! I’m Shasta.” Her arms flung out, her fingers spread wide.

The bus came to a groaning stop behind him. Oily water splashed onto his pants, and he grimaced. The door opened with a creak and a hiss.

“I’ve gotta go now.” She got up and skipped towards the bus. He stepped out into the rain again to watch her disappear. She waved frantically as she called out to him, “Seeya!” and began taking the steps two by two.

He heard the driver tiredly asking, “Francesca, what’re you doing out here again?”

“I was talking to a spirit, gramps! He makes it rain!”

“Really? Fancy that.” The door shut in front of them, and the bus took off in a creak of tires and old parts.

He stood in the rain, drops falling from his nose and running down his jaw. Openness written across his face. He wondered who she was, where she came from, where her green eyes came from. The girl was a puzzle, and he wanted to know. He had all the time he needed, and the patience, to turn this Rubik’s cube until he found his answer.

He laughed joyously, and thunder echoed his voice.

Name: Stephanie D

Branch: Vacaville Public Library – Cultural Center