



Rainbow Perfection

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Behind her fluttering eyelids, a rainbow sparkled with the glittering beginnings of her fantasies. The journey was finally starting as she left her awkward body, writhing with nauseous retching. The gulf between the physical mess they'd find when they eventually broke her front door down, and the fabulous freedom of her mind was growing by the second. Each painful inhalation was followed by a grateful exhalation of relief. Before long she'd arrive at peace. All that was left to do was wait and watch the predictable behaviours she'd imagined play out. The desperate wails and shocked expressions were obvious. It was the weeks and months that lay ahead that would show the true justification for what people label this "selfish" act. The bitter taste of bile she'd become so used to after nights on the lash was as sweet as the most expensive chocolate now her body weakened and the reality of her decision – that she'd taken all by herself – because it was what she wanted more than anything else – took effect. Despite the excruciating jolts of her ambitious body, her determination calmed any earthbound thoughts as she lost herself in the multicoloured mist in front of her eyes.

Fluorescent grass and turquoise sky reached towards her. She stretched her bony fingers through the soft blades of grass and into the moist earth, feeling herself becoming stronger. She stood with ease, with no aching load pushing her polluted body ever downwards.

Light from an invisible sun warmed her cheeks and the air breathed gently through her hair.

Her eyes widened as she gazed at this place she knew so well from fantasies and daydreams, and then she saw him.

Moving gracefully towards her came a strange and fabulous being. His limbs gently rustled as he moved, for his whole self was composed of ivy. Beautiful and tall, with the gentle dignity of nature's gifts. Although his shape was human, and she knew him as a man, his features were indiscernible. No staring eyes or threatening hands, but delicate leaves emerging from unbreakable roots. It was his voice alone that gave him the earthly label of “He”. A humbling voice filled with truth and strength.

“You are early. But let me assure you that what you seek is here.”

The nauseating lights in the hospital made Lisa's mum dizzy. She watched her little girl lying unconscious on the trolley with blood seeping from her mouth. The paramedics forced an unforgiving tube down into Lisa's stomach. Every muscle wanted to tear the doctors away from her daughter. She knew it must be hurting her. She knew because Lisa could still feel. Of course she could. One day soon she would tell inappropriate jokes about the similarity between a stomach pump, and deep-throating, then be mortified she'd said it in front of her mum. And her mum would pretend she didn't know what deep-throating was. And they'd laugh. Embarrassed. And a little ashamed.

The ivy man's roots dug down into the soil creating gentle ridges that spread out in intricate patterns like veins beneath the skin-like surface of grass, growing back towards the horizon before disappearing. Exhilarated, Lisa smiled for the first time since she'd decided to leave her world behind for good. She was where she wanted to be and it really was all going to be ok now.

She was suddenly aware of how she was dressed as the wide pleats of her skirt brushed her legs when she walked. It was her favourite bright blue dress she'd owned as a child, and her hair was cut short in an elfin bob. It was how she wished she'd look as a grown up. Her breasts were larger and had she been a celebrity she'd probably be described as plump. No more the look of a sickly depressive with lank hair and spots freckling her skin, forever encased in black armour. But pretty. Beautiful even. They'd never recognise her if they saw her now.

Had he driven her to this? She'd never listened to him when he tried to explain. As much as he loved her, he couldn't be all the things she needed (deserved). All she'd ever say was how that wasn't true, as if that was enough to stop it being so. That he was the man she wanted above any other. The only one who had ever made her feel truly whole and had made all the poetry, art and writing about love make sense. So bloody much to live up to, and so impossible for him (for anyone), but she wouldn't accept it. He'd torn himself away – he'd had to – didn't have a choice really... It was the only way to save her from the pain he knew he'd cause her (was causing her)... And he couldn't bear to do that. But now...! He'd been convinced, completely convinced that it was him that had made her so sad all this time. That he'd made her insecure, made her cry as if her heart was splitting in two. He hadn't listened or believed or even understood when she told him over and over that all along it was the fear of never seeing him again that caused the pain. Had he known (listened, believed, understood) he wondered if he could have made her feel safe and not scared anymore. Would it have made a difference? Would he have been able to? Would he have tried harder if he'd known all of this?

Lying there looking at him sleep, stroking his hair and listening to his breath moving in and out of that lickable strokable suckable body, even if she was whisked away to her fairytale land right now, she'd be screaming to be allowed to return here. If time could simply stop forever and this was all there ever was... In a story it just ends where you want it to, at the happiest and most complete moment, with no more questions to be answered and no more problems to solve.

She wished he'd never wake up, and that she'd never fall asleep... Not in a never waking up like dying sort of way – but for him to just be asleep and peaceful with no worries creating pain in his eyes, or those delicate creases on his forehead, that would one day be carved deeply and permanently, unless it all did just stop. Quietly. Now. Whilst it's all perfect.

Everywhere she looked there were delicate flowers she'd never seen before glistening in the sunlight even though there was no dew on the ground.

She'd always hated to step on flowers, as if they'd die under human weight and never recover their beauty again, but there were so many of them it was impossible

not to. As her foot trod guiltily onto a patch of pink and yellow blooms, the petals cracked into pieces and tore into her skin... Specks of beautifully coloured glass decorated her bleeding soles, and she fell to the ground with shock, crushing more flowers that pierced her elbows and arms as she collapsed.

She hung her head and wept, scratching her face with yet more specks of delicate glass as she tried to wipe the tears away. So wrapped up was she in the shock that she could be here in her own perfect world yet still be fucking things up, that she didn't notice the figure that began to draw near, until a warm hand stroked her head.

There's something so unexpectedly parental when someone touches your head. A wide-awake reminiscence of the state just before sleep lulls you into a warming dream. As Lisa's breath slowed and her sobbing gasps calmed, she turned to look at the bearer of this welcomed kindness.

Moist dark eyes looked kindly down on her from within a slashed face perched on top of the charred and blackened body of a woman. The sores and cuts around her lips oozed yellowing pus as she opened her mouth to speak. Something soothing no doubt, given the tenderness in those swirling brown eyes, but Lisa would never discover what those words might be.

This repulsive thing that had touched her so sweetly with her bare, torched flesh terrified Lisa more than any number of sharp flowers, and she struck at the woman again and again.

The woman's skin felt something like warmed rubber and not dissimilar to the crackling on a roasted pig as Lisa punched and slapped over and over, closing her eyes as she did so. The woman begged Lisa to stop, until finally, under the repeated blows, she was no longer able to stand or cry out anymore, but lay subdued, foetal and still.

And so Lisa ran, sobbing, her feet shredding over the glass flowers.

An enormous tree whose branches grew higher than any clouds could reach loomed up ahead, and around its roots were deep blades of soft grass. Exhausted, and with

all her tears spent, Lisa collapsed onto the cushioned earth, and lay for some time looking up at the enveloping sky, asking “Why?”

Why was it only now that she was beginning to understand how little she really knew about her lost little girl? In the cold funeral parlour, surrounded by patronisingly beige décor, Lisa’s mum had absolutely no idea what sort of wood, satin, handles or engraving Lisa would prefer. She probably wouldn’t care. Or would she? And did her not knowing condemn her inadequacy as a parent?

Worse than thinking about the bleakness of a coffin, was the warm familiarity of wondering what to clothe Lisa in. Something she’d so delighted in when Lisa was a child, had now become a final judgement both on Lisa and on her.

She couldn’t bear for her to be locked forevermore under dark soil and dirt at all, but to also condemn her to a dull uniform of miserable oversized jumpers and faded shapeless trousers to disintegrate into was an unthinkable thought.

She wished instead for the treasured memories of Lisa to return to her, untainted and golden once more. Of a blonde pigtailed child wearing bright blue skipping amongst the sun-soaked flowers and laughing.

A tiny bird whose feathers were each dipped in gold flew from the tallest branch of the tree and landed softly next to Lisa’s ear. He was so small that at first Lisa thought the glittering spark was merely a trick of the light, until he began to sing.

“Don’t be scared Lisa. This place is yours and you can be happy here. Come with me.”

Despite her exhaustion, the desolation she’d felt moments before lifted, and she stood to follow the bird. It was difficult to see where he was, as his golden feathers reflected the blazing turquoise light all around them, but she carefully made out his flitting form against the sky, and followed as he led her towards the huge tree in whose roots she’d found solace.

The bird flew up to a branch out of Lisa’s reach, “Up here,” he called.

“How?”

“Try not to wonder.”

The tiny, golden, and bossy bird confused Lisa, and she felt distrustful of him. After all, they’d only just met.

Nevertheless, she tried to clear her mind of worry, and focused on reaching the unreachable branch. She pressed a sore sole to the tree’s trunk, and was lifted off the ground. Knots of wood within the tree’s enormous trunk moved her feet upwards at regular paces, so she was climbing upwards as easily as if she was scaling stairs. Within seconds, she had reached the bird.

“We must climb further. I have something you must see.”

Despite being so far from the ground, and so precariously balanced, Lisa felt excited and strong as she climbed higher, her body overflowing with wonder as she looked at the beautiful world stretching in every direction all around. No clouds of rain, no grey buildings, no ugly cables and no people busily engrossed in their own minds. Just magical rainbow perfection.

“We’re here. Watch.”

As she looked where the golden bird directed her, between the shimmering leaves, to the silhouette of the tree drawn on the ground below, she saw her old world appearing. The grass became translucent, a misty window onto her old life, soaked in an oppressive grey fog. Within the fog, shadowy figures took on the forms of all the people she’d left, run away from, hurt, shunned and loved. They were together in an ugly dull room, and seemed upset and angry. The little bird muttered something Lisa couldn’t quite hear, and as he did so, a flower burst into bloom on a table of stale sandwiches. The bird smugly whistled on seeing this.

“Impressive isn’t it! A little distance gives you a bit more power you’ll find.”

Lisa's blue eyes burned and shone as she stared with such force that her eyeballs felt as though they were struggling to be released from their sockets. She could see him there – just there – alone and sad. And even though she was here, with beauty, sunshine and colour soaking the air around her, she too felt the same – so very alone, and desperately sad.

Her only thought was how much she needed to be close to him. To smell his skin. To hear his breath.

As she watched his life unfolding beneath her, she saw him walk slowly out of the miserable room to the street. Past roads and anonymous buildings. Over a dual carriageway with cars buzzing beneath. And into an underpass lined with old cinema posters.

And all she could feel was the desperate need to be near him again. Her brain began to suffocate with that single obsessive thought.

And then it happened.

So that's it. She's never coming back. Goodbyes are said, and aside from polite acknowledgements to her relatives and friends in the street, she would never interrupt his life again. Never look into his eyes. Never cling to him with her humid embrace.

He felt sickeningly relieved walking home. A relief that seeped into his grief and lay curdling as guilt in his throat and behind his dry eyes. Any text messages, notes under his front door, voicemails that cracked into his routined life, would never be from her again. And of course that was sad. Of course it was terrible. But of course it would now mean that his life could move on. Go somewhere. Without feeling suffocated with her overwhelming passion that drained his every ambition. Her emotion drowned him. In a way, he'd been waiting for something like this to happen. It had given him worth in some way – she did it because of him, or for him (he didn't know which).

As he neared the underpass, a strange sound of ripping paper came from within the walls of the tunnel. Cinema posters clung persistently to the grimy walls. A roll call

of the most gruesome horror films of the past few months. Films she hated, but he smiled faintly as he realised that this was exactly the kind of thing he would now be able to go and watch without thinking twice about. And then the guilt made him swallow the smirk down once again.

He heard the ripping again, and something moving in the darkness made him shiver... but he walked on.

The gruesome, stinking figures flexed their distorted limbs, freeing themselves from the fetid posters that bound them. Their blank eyes blinked as they focussed on the lumbering figure that passed by. Starved from violence and thirsty for death, they splattered onto the grimy pavement below one by one, unfeeling and uncaring.

His lethargy made him slow, and his guilt stunted his pace. An easy target.

Putrid claws snapped his shoulder, shattered his legs and began to crush his skull.

She watched, transfixed. Disbelieving, frightened but happy. Soon he would be here.

He looked into the dull eyes of the filmmakers fantasies as the monsters broke each brittle bone he'd taken for granted. Writhing and screaming for freedom as they carried out the wishes of the woman who loved him. Blood spurted messily from him as taloned fingers tore into his pulsating muscles, reaching down into gooey flesh. The last earthly vision he had was of his own mutilated body in tatters, soaked in his blood and their filth.

She sighed, shed melancholy tears, and waited. Nervously recalling their first date a coy giggle burst involuntarily from her lips.

Rushing wind swept past his scabbed ears, heavy behind him and propelling him into an abyss of terrifying darkness. As his broken limbs flailed helplessly, his swollen eyes squinted through the violent air.

He smacked onto the ground, sharp shards prickling his tender skin.

Two pink feet approached his head, and an umbrella of electric blue brushed his back.

Lisa knelt down beside him and pressed her cheek against his warm back. She could feel the blood in his veins ebbing through his body, with only their two films of skin separating their flesh. Her lips tingled upon his ears as she breathed, “I’ve missed you so.”

Rejecting the oppressive weight bearing down upon him, he turned over onto his back, revealing the gory manifestation of her desires. Watching her bright eyes consume each scratch, bruise and bloody hole in his mangled body he saw those unspoken truths of love reach her quivering lips. Regret, guilt and self-pity.

She hung her head and turned her flawless body away from him. Solid tears of silver fell heavily to the ground.

Beyond the horizon, orange now as the day’s end drew ever closer, gentle veins beneath the ground spread towards the desolate figures of Lisa and her boyfriend. Upon reaching them, the veins thickened, and pushed upwards between the blades of grass, and as the ground folded back, the figure of the ivy man grew tall and strong before them. The panicked golden bird fluttered up from the ground, and hovered just behind his head, so that his shining wings sparkled through the leaves that made up the ivy man’s magnificent face.

“Now, Lisa. What have you found here?” His sonorous voice warmed the air and stalled her tears.

“I just wanted to be looked after, and loved.”

“And now?”

“I only wish I hadn’t hurt them all.”

As Lisa's last word fell from her lips, the ivy man sank his strong limbs back down into the earth, enveloping her limp boyfriend within grassy veins as he spread beneath the grass, carrying the pitiful, bloodied body with him, so that the ground around Lisa was soon smooth and unblemished, apart from the puddle of silver beside her.

Looking through the pool of tears to the world below, Lisa watched her boyfriend walk safely home, before the silver shimmered and showed her mother, sad and tired, sitting comfortably in her living room. A picture of Lisa at 6 years old wearing her favourite blue dress hung on the wall behind her, watching.