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Separate Lives

by Joe Jackson

She was blissfully aware about everything as she frolicked in the garden, her dress was ruffled and danced freely. It didn't dance with her of course—she was instigating it—but my, what a shame for such a beautiful girl to be lacking. For in this rural French town, alone with her English grandparents, too far removed to be, she had no one. Only ample space. Acres of land; a gentle stream with a bridge where she played poo sticks; the fig trees and the sun.

She ran and danced under the infinite sky, cloudlessly blue to her, as she did most weekend mornings, when her grandparents, overlooking from the terrace, looked at phones and books separately. Under her dainty little shoes, tufts of thick grass scratched at her legs as she descended from the sky.

At 3:00 pm she heard her stomach rumble and went to the house, finding her grandmother sitting upright on the sofa, peering down at her phone.

“Grandma,” she said, not being noticed, “when—”

“Oh hello darling, I didn't see you there,” she smiled, turning towards her granddaughter, “isn't it a gorgeous day today, just like you.”

Ana blushed.

“Oh, would you look at the time! You must be very hungry—shall I show you the kitchen? Come now.”

Ana's head dropped very far down, and with her hands still behind her back, she followed her into the kitchen.

The next morning, Ana woke early and couldn't get back to sleep. It was nearly dawn and she knew everything would be lighter. She had the top floor of the house to herself; three rooms along a corridor: her room, the biggest, with an empty bed beside her; a spare bedroom and a bathroom. It was eerily quiet. She waited for a little more light to arrive to be brave.

Wearing just her nightgown she stepped along the corridor, down the spiral staircase and felt the chill of the paved floor when she reached the bottom. She turned around to see if anyone was there, then went over to the window, opening the curtain slightly, glimpsing one eye through.

In the kitchen, she decided to prepare breakfast, hoping to please her grandmother into taking her on a day out. Ana retrieved two plums, a peach and some figs, put them in a bowl then took out a knife, large for her, as well as a chopping board. Too quickly did she begin cutting the fruit after washing them, for the knife slipped and bore a deep slice of something not to be eaten; her red juice spilled out onto her grandmother's favourite: figs.

She did not go on a day out that Sunday, however the letter she had been so rapturously waiting for thankfully arrived. As it turned out, Jacob's letter had been delivered to the wrong address, and the recipient, Augustine, had come round and delivered it.

Despite her grandmother's protestations, Augustine handed the letter to Ana who at once ran up to her room, shutting the door behind her.

'This is not a letter but my arms about you for a moment.' (He had recently come across Katherine Mansfield).