

Preface

DEAR READERS,

This book is the result of Synthesis.
To make it, I combined all kinds of things.
At its core is *Child's Play*
Or my memories of it,
Growing up at the Indiana Dunes,
A place I really believe to be Magic.
Poured in healthy portions, *Schleprockness*
Or at least my experience of it,
A certain special kind of Luck
I learned about from my parents.
Sprinkled throughout is *Fellowship*
For though what follows is utter Fiction,
There would be no story if not
For the good fokes who inspired it.
And I mustn't forget the *Big Event*
Which all Millennials will remember
As It Happens.
But for a dash of real *Madness*,
The rest just took a lot of *Time*
To write from inside
The thick stew of a creative mind,
Till I wound up with something
I felt was worth my while.
I hope you find it to be –

HAPPY READING,

@bykaileyann

I.



ROOTS AND FACTORS

Mily took a tumble on Saturday, July Fourteenth, 2001. As she fell, Mily lost all her marbles in the overgrown grass along the edge of her backyard. The ball jar she had been holding shattered on a pink granite rock when she tossed it to free her hands and catch herself from crashing to the ground –

As usual, Mily was quick enough. She was a clumsy kid, but her reflexes were good. But that was too bad because even though she had reacted fast, it just so happened she was tripping face-first into a bristly patch of Pitcher's thistle.

Mily caught her weight on her palms, and that instant her eyes went wide with pain. She tried to turn her head in time, but it smacked the ground on the left side, and her hands and cheek were stuck with what felt like a billion needles. She'd squeezed her eyes shut and kept her corneas safe from the thorns, but it didn't save her skin.

She could feel them, lots of them – Her hands and face were coated in splinters. Each one stung as bad as a bumblebee.

Mily was afraid to move a hair. If she shifted her weight one bit, a fresh blast of stickers embedded themselves in her hands – and now her wrists and her chin –

Poor Mily was halfway through crying out when she spotted something strange.

At first she thought it was just those white spots she sometimes got when it was too hot outside, but they didn't go away even after she blinked eight or nine times. Then she thought she must've gotten thorns in her right eye because she *couldn't* be seeing right.

But seeing didn't hurt. Mily blinked and blinked again; both her eyes were just fine. She'd gritted her teeth and thrown herself backwards, landing bottom-down in the tall grass.

The ground around Mily sparkled with the scattered glass shards of her shattered marble collection. Some of the orbs had split right in half, some were just dust. Others survived with cracks or chips but were still mostly intact, though sprawled about, making

the brush glitter...

In fact, Mily was seeing *quite clearly*. Something strange was happening in her periphery, something was shimmering...

Mily looked up from the tall grass and saw a cloud of buzzing white heat-spots form and *fly right at her!*

As they drew nearer, Mily saw that they were some sort of bugs; the creatures were shaped like teeny-tiny cottony dandelion seeds, the way they glided on the wind, they were everywhere!

The critters landed all in her hair, and the air was heavy with glittery dust. Mily tried to swat them off, but her hands *thwacked* in the tall grass and, with a fresh blast of pain, Mily remembered her palms, covered in pins and needles from the Pitcher's thistle.

The pain and confusion made Mily powerless to stop the glitter bugs as they crawled up her nose and *into her ears – They'd gone and nested in her head!*

Mily leapt to her feet and barreled across the yard to the driveway, screeching, "*Get em off me get em off me get em off!*" By the time her toes touched the cement a few seconds later, the Twins – her cousins, Eyani and Esabel – who had just witnessed Mily's faceplant in the thistle patch just past the tall grass, caught up to her.

"What's the deal Mil?" Esabel, who went by Esa, asked. She was often the clearheaded one when handling any kind of bump or bruise or cut or wound. This was true when dealing with her own injuries as much as the other two's – Though Esa did seem far less prone to tripping and falling than Mily was.

Before Mily could summon an answer to Esa, three more people arrived. Bird, Mily's mom, her big brother Will, and her dad, Dog.

"Are you hurt?" Bird asked Mily firmly.

Mily started bawling. Quite overwhelmed, she fell into a stiff and frantic mess in front of her mother.

Bird hovered over her, inspecting. "You're okay," she said. "Where does it hurt?"

It felt like everyone present was holding their breath when the light went on behind Bird's eyes. Mily looked up and noticed how her mom's gaze sharpened in focus as she combed Mily's face. Bird's eyes made their way down to her daughter's upturned hands, held away from Mily's body for fear of touching anything.

"Mily tripped and fell face-first into a bunch of those Pitcher plants!" Esabel exclaimed.

"You know those spikey plants that grew, the ones that hardly ever bloom, with the thorny stems!" Eyani explained.

Mily's heartbeat loud in her ears. But *Sound* was *changing*, turning *sharp* and *brassy* like *scanning* static between radio stations. The newness and utter strangeness of it struck Mily clearly as a stroke of bad luck.

Forgetting to breathe, dark spots started cropping up in the scope of Mily's vision. Black spots skipped and hopped across her whole field of view, and that instant Mily *knew*, thinking with fright, *Heat-spots are black, not white!*

"I better go find my tweezers," Bird determined after what felt like an eternity to Mily, whose Sense of time was now shifting in and out of fast and slow.

"They're in the vanity drawer upstairs," Bird went on. "I'll be right back."

Then Dog and Will crouched down catcher-umpire in front of where Mily was sitting

and set her with complimentary stares of concern. Her dad and brother cast nets with their forward chins and the braced casts of their shoulders, and Mily latched onto their sightlines and remembered to start breathing again.

“Looks like Outside gotcha good. Are you alright?” Dog asked.

“It hurts,” is all she found herself saying.

It must have only been seconds Mily’s Sense of time had gone wrong... When she turned her head it tossed the light strangely, making every motion look slow...

But it was all brilliantly *lit!* Mily’s summer skin, the cumulonimbus sky, the bluegrass lawn braided with silhouettes of fast-growing blades, all luminously defined, outlined silver and focus-magnified, feathery auras steaming from the edges of *everything*...

Mily found focus again when she saw Will’s mouth form the end of a thought, something her brother always did before he landed on a question:

“What else is wrong?” Will asked. He leaned forward on his toes till his nose was real-close to Mily’s cheek. She supposed Will was judging how bad her face must’ve looked and wanted to keep her talking.

“My marbles,” Mily whimpered. She swallowed and made herself talk a little louder. “I let the jar go and my whole collection shattered when they hit that big pink rock!”

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