

Strawberries and a field of orchids

Strawberries and a field of orchids, she cavorts through nature's year round duty. Coming to one's senses at a time like this seems foolish; as foolish as throwing away a five dollar bill found in the gutter. As a conveyor belt of clouds delivers rain and chill to places far from this field, she sees an explosion of butterflies collide with a flurry of dandelion seeds.

Placing the basket of ripe red fruit on a soft patch of earth, she approaches the silver brook that passes through the field almost stealthily. Completely silent, it arches off into the forest from which she emerged, off to meet the clouds and rain at the lip of the ocean.

A few of the dandelion seeds light on the thin membrane of water that sits on top of the brook, and are carried off to their doom. As the innocent puffs of white helplessly slide down to the forest she is struck by a wave of regret. They'll never be flowers now.

Her mind tires to console her, reminding her that dandelions are in fact weeds, but this field is not a place for textbook facts or empirical reasoning. The seedlings are almost gone from her vision: the sunlight that had once helped nurture the baby plants was now throwing rays of distraction upon the brook, disguising the swiftly departing seeds.

Forgetting the strawberries, she darts down the embankment. The brook has gotten wider as it nears the forest's edge... the need for stealth was reserved for the field. The calm surface is now jarred by curious stones, and one of the seeds has washed upon a miniature island.

Bunching up her pants, she steps into the brook. Somehow the cool water is more chilling than comforting. She reaches the stone and bends to scoop up the seedling with her pinky finger. The bath has made the seed willing to stick, and it does just that. She brings it back to her basket and releases it into a patch of grass.

There she sat, eating strawberries, not planning on going home until the sun slanted through the boughs in the distance.

He was on the run, and was wary of open fields. The rifle was a weight that was both security and confidence. Well, it has been confidence until about half an hour ago. He had awoke on the bank of the blasted brook, his pouch of food and ammunition soaked near though, the result of a kick or twitch in his sleep. Only two shells were good, the rest were garbage.

His heart had shattered. So had his will to live.

His anger and frustration was redlining, however.

Following the wretched waterway to the field, he almost took a moment to reflect on how he used to love these sort of days. A shell went into the rifle. Out here, anyone within earshot would think it was a hunter. He'd be free of this, and that was that.

The muzzle under his chin, he readied to release the hammer with his toe. Then movement in the field. A girl, with a basket. She went up to the brook. The girl reminded him of someone. Someone who had stood on the witness stand. Stood

there and lied and wrote his life off as easily and instinctively as one would pick a five dollar bill out of the gutter.

He did have two shells...

Why should he be alone in his suffering? He could pass this injustice to someone else, he could actually EARN the time he had spent rotting in a cell. Earn it, yes. Then it wouldn't have been for nothing. The muzzle came off his chin. The stock was braced against his shoulder, and the sights bore down on her neck.

Then she darted off down the bank. Had she seen him? Impossible. He lowered the rifle and waited. A gust of wind passed through just as she returned, her feet bare and soaked. She bent down for a second then stood. He prepared again to earn his time.

The wind blew again and his eye was suddenly a well of pain. A dandelion seed had piloted itself right into his cornea. Muttering and wiping his eye, he looked (with one eye) out at the field. The girl had not noticed: she was eating something from the basket. He waited for his eye to clear. Some water from the brook speeded the process. He was ready again.

But something was different about the scene. The girl remained, but the grass behind her was changing. It swayed and shuffled out of pattern with the breeze. He had been a hunter for sport before his life had been torn to shreds... and he recognized the skulking of some animal in the bush. The creature revealed itself: a coyote, thin, haggard, desperate. Meters from the girl.

If he used a bullet for the girl, then the coyote'd probably come for him. He hadn't the time to reload and end himself before the coyote made it painful. But if he used it for the coyote... damn it.

It was seconds from leaping. He shot it just before its muscles sprung.

* * * * *

She was more than startled. Had she not been between strawberries she may have choked. Hearing a CRACK! a loud shriek and a thud in the same moment caused her to jump almost comically, and she nearly ended up in the brook. A coyote lay twitching behind her, its head a ruined mess. Her brain compiled this, and she looked briefly around then stared off to where the bullet must have come from. No friendly hunter emerged from the bush. It was still. She took a cautious step forward, still shaking slightly from the scare.

The field was on pause. The brook was silent, everything had stopped. She made out someone's voice from the bushes:

"I'm so sorry..."

~ CRACK! ~

(April 20th, 2006).