PADA DESZCZ

by Octavia Coleman

In loving memory of Angela Basha Skapski, whom always hid from the rain.

Staring at her face, the girl wondered what it would be like to die. Not to die physically, as such, but to merely exist in a shell. Still breathing. She wondered what it would be like to live the same day more than once, to have only one begging, and no end. Or – an end that seemed so far away. To her, she didn’t think her great-grandmothers end was running that late, for the eternal antagonist kept appointments with a million years. Surely, their faceless host was more organised than that.

Her great-grandmother, Basha Skapski, was a foreign woman. She wasn’t like the girl. The girl spent her summers in canola fields that stretched over the countryside like a knitted blanket. She liked crosswords and hippie-skirts, ate marmalade on toast, and spent every other moment in someone else’s life, reading. Basha was blank. She never left the home over-the-way. She did not speak much, did not eat much and never, hardly, acknowledged the girl…much. She did, however, run sliced lemons through her hair every Thursday.

And, the to-day was Thursday. The girl, after all, would always came to watch her carry out the peculiar task. It was strange, but she made it look so mundane, warm and homely. That was the only reason she came. She would never even think to meet the woman whom never even came to her birth, or even more-so acknowledged her legitimacy. That was what she told herself.

Basha would just do what she did every time: ignore the girl. It meant that she could keep her peace, and of course, a little bit of her damned sanity.

A knitted cardigan wrapped around her body, and its sleeves were pulled over her thin hands. It had always been cold there, in that little nook by the window near which she sat. And dusty.

The dust seemed to settle on her skin. It even glittered in her thinning hair. Still, it didn’t stop her from bleaching it with citrus – despite her daughter’s constant protest. Her hair used to be a rich chocolate in colour. But *they* didn’t like that.

Grey patches, although not opaque, dotted over her body. The girl thought it looked similar to cheese when it had gone mouldy: all yellow and creamy from the inside, but at the edges, was a growing bacterium that would inevitably devour the Swedish Blue until it was all gone. But Basha knew she would welcome the elusive end.

There was something tragic about her. Something lonesome, albeit a little crazy. The girl couldn’t pinpoint what it was exactly. Maybe it was her leg, she thought. Or rather, absence of leg. It wouldn’t have been noticeable to the regular passer-by. Sitting down, from where she never moved, the few doctors and at-home nurses would merely think she was reading a book or admiring the beautiful sky. But no, her left side was merely a severed limb, deformed, and curling around the chair as if the time she had spent unmoving made the boneless thing take a liking to the bamboo.

But something was different this time. There was a coming storm outside. It brewed slowly, the whites of the sky dispersing, leaving only one little ball of heat. Otherwise, it was just grey. Black, even. It was like something was holding it back, and the pressure was clawing at the surface like an animal – a panther. A dark, silk-skinned wild thing held back by the tide. But there was always a coming storm. It just never actually broke. It had never released its thunder, and neither girl nor crow had heard the rain. But it would break this time.

Completely oblivious to its development, Basha continued to bleach her hair whilst the girl watched. Too involved in the stroke of the lemon and the breath of a relative, consciousness became relative. But the second the thunder roared, releasing its mighty claws on the township below, both girl and crow hurdled into each other’s arms.

Basha remembered embers, gunshots and six-point stars. She remembered the sound of Weilun in September, why she envied the blonde girls – and the bite of German dogs on her heel. She tasted pickled gherkins, sauerkraut and potato. She even remembered the caress of her own grandmother, her pointy nose and Yiddish tongue sharp, and quick to smell a lie. She had forgotten those things.

And for the first time, the girl realised that whilst her great-grandmothers skin was pigmented, it was soft and smooth. It enveloped her as they cried together, sharing tears, sharing each other. Below the storm, Basha whispered quietly:

*Pada deszcz*.



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