

When I appeared the sky glowed green and lightning made the windows look all cracked. Aunt Honey swore it was the worst storm in living memory. Ma said she worked out the time between each of her contractions by counting the roof tiles that flew past the window. And when she cussed with the pain, the wind carried her colourful words far away to another land.

Pa had paced up and down and up and down and up and down in the hallway. Ma screamed and the wind howled and the thunder thundered. And when the tips of the trees touched the ground, I wailed.

Pa rushed in to kiss Ma. He told me he grinned as wide as Eagle Creek when he held me. I wriggled around in his arms so much he called me Twister. It was a twister that had blown all the colour out of his hair.

I think I must have done something to scare him bad too. We ain't seen him in six months and three days and four hours.



Aunt Honey told me Pa disappearing plain broke Ma's heart. I guess if your heart was in pieces you'd feel poorly too.

Pa said Ma had the prettiest smile in Culleroy. Before he left she'd sing more than the birds. Now she was as quiet as her shadow. I always knew when Pa was in her thoughts though. She'd be here in the room with me, but she'd also be somewhere else too. Aunt Honey said it ain't possible for a person to be in two different places at the same time. But I think she was wrong 'bout that.

One time, when I was trying to sneak up on my

dog, Point, without waking him up, I heard Ma crying. I peeked through the crack in the door. Aunt Honey was telling Ma that there was nothing she could have done or said to drive Pa away 'cause he loved us more than anything else in the world. I guess Ma was blaming herself for his disappearance too.

I'm the spit of Pa. Except, my hair wasn't white. It was raspberry blonde. I had his blue, bluer-than-blue eyes though. But he don't have a gap between his front teeth to whistle through. I got that from Ma.

I learned to walk real fast. When I could run, Ma and Aunt Honey and Pa and Point chased me round and round and round the farm. I'd shriek with laughter. I made the chickens fly and the horses fly. I even made the pigs fly. If Pa catched me, he'd throw me into the air so I could touch heaven. Sometimes, I'd be so high up, I thought my head might clunk off the sun.

Ma decided not to send me to the school in Culleroy. She knew I'd the attention span of a buzzy-fly, so she took me outside to learn 'bout colours and shapes and plants and animals. And when she taught me spelling, we'd read out stories under the apple trees. Pa would sometimes stop by to see what we were giggling at. Sums

weren't quite so much fun though. Watching the black rooster on the barn roof twirling in the wind and Pa working in the fields and the clouds playing tag with each other across the sky happened to be way more interesting.

Clouds were great. I seen faces in them. And sometimes they'd turn into mermaids or dragons or skulls or swans. I loved how clouds were all sensitive. They'd change colour when they were sad and then they'd cry. I'd like me and Point to spend the day on one. And when we got tired from all that bouncing around, we'd sit and watch the land beneath us float by.

Ma don't teach me spelling or numbers no more. Not since Pa vanished. One morning soon afterwards, when she was in bed and Aunt Honey had left to sow the seeds, Point and me snuck out to see if we could find him. Point ran straight over to a bush and snuffled at it. But he found a fat old wood pigeon instead of Pa. Then I angered the ants with a stick. And catched butterflies with my hands. I also discovered skinks under rocks. They had three white lines on their backs and moved as quick as the wind. And some.

Point took me to where the rabbits lived. They'd dug lots of holes and left small, round dottles all over the grass. They sure did poop a lot.

The sun shone fierce, so we headed for the stream. Its brown water sang over green furry stones. Point showed me how to cool off by rolling in the mud. That made me laugh, but then I remembered 'bout Pa. We rushed back to see if he had come home. Ma and Aunt Honey were waiting for us in the kitchen. Ma's eyes were red and Aunt Honey frowned at me. She said never to go wandering off on my own again. Then she told Ma the whole of Culleroy would think I was being raised by mudskippers. She warned her that the time had come to let me go.

Thing is, she wasn't holding on to me in the first place.

Ma closed the doors in the house real loud and her sighs were so big they spun the black rooster on the barn round and round and round.



When the first white strawberries peeped out from underneath their scratchy leaves, Aunt Honey took me to the school in Culleroy. It smelled of wood and old paper and roses and chalk dust and sweetie breath and scuffed boots.

Aunt Honey winked at me before she left. Just as I thought it'd be a good idea to leave too, Miss Ida asked me to introduce myself to the class.

The girls were all prissy and the boys scowled. When I told them my name was Twister, they sniggered. My face changed its colour.

Miss Ida shushed them and asked me to speak 'bout myself. I wanted to say I was crazy 'bout going on adventures with Point and hunting for snickerbugs with Pa and watching butter slide off the hot pancakes I'd make with Ma. Boy, did I love that. But I seen them faces in front of me and mumbled I liked fishing instead. And shooglepopple candy. Everybody liked shooglepopple candy. Even prissy girls and scowling boys liked shooglepopple candy.

Miss Ida pointed to a girl who had a pink bow in her hair. "There's a seat next to Cherry Bonnwell."

"That ain't her chair. It's Lula's," muttered Cherry.

Miss Ida tutted. "You know fine well Lula's in a much better place. God rest her soul."

"Wish I was in a better place," said a boy who was slumped over his desk.

"Sit up properly, Clem Hussable. What have I told you about speaking out of turn? Extra homework for the rest of the week."

I stared at the empty seat.

"Go on, Twister. Sit yourself down," said Miss Ida.

Cherry gave me a look, as if I'd a catchy-disease, and moved her chair away.

"Where's Lula gone?" I whispered.

"You been locked away in a barn or something? She's gone to heaven, you loon. There was a fire in Holler Woods that killed her and her ma," hissed Cherry.

My mouth fallen open.

"Twister," said Miss Ida. "We don't talk in class unless we're invited to do so."

I gulped. I was sitting in a dead girl's seat. How had I not known 'bout a fire? Ma and Aunt Honey hadn't said nothing 'bout it. I guess I ain't been in the woods for a while. Not since Pa had left.

When Miss Ida started talking, I stopped wondering if the dead girl might haunt me for taking her chair. I even forgot to watch the clouds slide across the sky. Miss Ida told us stories 'bout the people who lived all over the world. There were men made of china and upside-down girls who followed the stars and boys who slept in houses made from ice.

Miss Ida had a globe on her desk. It reminded me of a pink and yellow and blue and green and purple gobstopper. I ain't licked it yet, but I betcha the sea tastes of blueberry. I hadn't realized the globe was so enormous. It sure was going to make finding Pa a whole lot harder

now. The sooner I brought him home, the faster Ma would get better. And then we'd all be happy again.

Miss Ida spoke to us 'bout new things every day. I'd be so amazed, she'd have to close my mouth with her hand.

I told anybody who'd listen what I'd learned. I whispered to Point there were cats in Africa so huge they'd chase *him*. He thumped his tail in the dust. The orange fire-breathing mountains astonished Aunt Honey so much, she burned the toast. I gathered together the spring peeper frogs and explained they used to be tadpoles. They weren't too happy 'bout that. It made them gulp. Ma sat up in bed when she heard me counting out the crows on the barn roof. But I didn't say nothing to the drunk man lying on the grass. Cherry Bonnwell told me he was the dead girl's pa, Turrety Knocks. He wouldn't care that you could find a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. All he'd want was his wife and daughter back. I crouched down and fished my sandwich out of my bag. I left it next to him. I knew what it was like to miss someone you loved. But the difference was, I still had hope I'd see Pa again.