

The gravity tree

"Can you explain Newton to me? And Pie. And all that?"

Of course he could. He'd do anything for her, the apple of his eye.

"Love you."

"Me too."

Juanito lay down under the tree. The sun was belting. He held a hand over his eyes to ward it off and moved a little closer to the thickening trunk in search of shelter. He felt her breath whisk his chin, the whiff of her toothpaste breathe close to his ear. And she was so pink and beautiful, whitewashed, golden brown, everything he could wish for; the soft blonde hair on her arm prickled with consent.

Branches swelled and leaves unfolded until he was almost comfortable. He glimpsed the sun through the twigs, sense its heat tingle his cheeks, sheltered, shielded by the natural wave of overhead foliage.

He drank from the water bottle. He had a packed sandwich in the rucksack, but he wasn't hungry yet. He was too busy thinking of Helen. She promised she would come. No going back. They might even come together.

"See you there."

"Ok."

"Under the tree."

He was no Romeo, no Casanova, but she said yes. He struggled for a moment in the flush.

History might have been different if Adam had to peel an orange rather than simply bite into an apple falling through space. Gravity was easy to teach, but

Helen never seemed to grasp the concept: that he was meant for her, she should plop straight into his lap.

There were birds in the air. He could hear them preparing lunch. There were probably mice in the field also, but he didn't want to think about that. Maybe even snakes rattling and humming.

It wasn't a large tree, short, stumpy but ripe with shadow and promise. Full of foliage: he could barely see the clouds.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course"

"You know the tree?"

"Of course." Freckles wrinkled, nose twitched, about to sneeze. He'd give anything for a kiss and let that red hair fondle his forehead.

"See you there."

"What time?"

The orange fell and hit him in the eye. The left socket. And it hurt. And hurt twice because the orange had splattered his forehead and then the juice punctured his eye and stung like hell. He jerked himself upright and spat in fury. He rubbed his eyeball but that made it worse. A pulpy stare glazed through tears. The orange lay smashed by his hip. He pounded it into the earth with his fist. The lens bled, cried, stung. Tears flowed.

Three o'clock?

She was late.

He found a tissue in the rug sack and used it to dry away the tears. He lay back again, but more carefully. He shielded his face with both hands and stared up into the tree. An orange tree obviously. Another plopped down nearby, a splash of citric revenge. They were ripe and nearly rotten. He didn't want to move out of the shade so he just kept his hands over his forehead in case another one

dropped directly overhead. He could do the calculations but there was still a terroristic notion haunting their unpredictability: they could get you any time no matter how much you stared and pretended to be prepared.

“You’ll explain maths and all that, won’t you?”

There were sheep grazing in the distance; in the stillness of the afternoon heat he could hear them chomp, baa to each happily as they enjoyed their summer holidays. He envied their innocence. They had no Helen to wait for, no clocks ticking by within the wool that formed their brain.

Helen was hanging there on his mind when another orange just missed his head. Why did they fall? What was wrong with that fruit, that tree? He sat up and started to think: he’d have to explain everything to Helen.

Then he had an idea.

He climbed to the top of the tree. It took time, and he had to be careful, but it wasn’t all that difficult. Up there, no oranges could hit him on the head. Now, he pondered, if the whole world could be upside down like this, would everything not be easier? Things wouldn’t fall on your brain, Helen might listen to him, and ignore all the others. He had a vision of spaceships and rockets taking off, landing and creating new universes. He should write it all down but he had no notebook, so he just lay there in the top branches getting sun burned but avoiding the falling oranges.

“You will come, won’t you?”

“Of course. Three o’clock” And her cheeks bloomed into a promise. “I’ll bring my notebooks.”

Whatever. Juanito wasn’t planning on studying much.

Juanito lay up there on the top of the tree waiting for her. No snakes, no temptations blurring through the sunlight, no roots to take hold. He flowed in the breeze, tangled up in leaves, branches swinging in the sun. She would fall

for him some day. He knew that. Meanwhile he was all alone and the sun was going down. That was pure gravity.

"You will come, won't you?"

"Of course."

She searched all around but couldn't find him. Bastard. It was the right tree. She knew. She had the exam on Monday. Cheat!

He snored up there in the branches. She couldn't hear him. He'd said five o'clock. It wasn't fair. Helen stormed off. She'd never fall for this trick again.

Gravity seemed so relative. No temptation, no apple, no snake. Juanito turned over in his lair. With the movement another orange fell, hit Helen and stained her new t-shirt.

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