*July* Moments in January

(Dina Desveaux)

The day is sunny and mild. Snowflakes, fat and iridescent like soap bubbles, float by.

From the window seat at the breakfast table, Jenni’s languid gaze follows the flakes as though she were watching a snow globe. Her breathing is slower than normal and she’s wrapped her arms around herself as if she could hold it in.

“This morning,” I say, “I woke up and then fell back asleep.” I clear my throat to relax my vocal chords. In a deeper voice, “Anyway, I had this dream that I was watching a family walking across the septic field in the back yard. It was a nuclear family, n-u-c-l-e-a-r, like ‘new’ and ‘clear’, not nucular. I don’t get it. Why do so many people insist on inserting that ‘u’ between the ‘c’ and the ‘l’?”

Jenni glances up and looks away again. But, I’ve noticed the mist, the slight quiver. I strain to bring others into the room with us.

“This family—there’s a man, a woman, and one child—they’re all wearing heavy red capes, saturated red, saturated with blood perhaps, and somewhere between the man’s hip bone and the crack between his cheeks, his ‘backside’ holds a quiver of arrows.”

At first, I’d told Jenni that the man was carrying medieval flesh, which she accepted, but then I’d realized I was thinking of the French word for arrows, *flèches*, and had revised it for her. The reason I was thinking in French was that in the dream I was describing the family to my sister. And I always talk to my sister in French.

“The arrows seem medieval somehow, and I wonder if the man with the nuclear family is some sort of Robin Hood.”

It is a new year.

This is the first morning of the new year, and I’m telling this story to my friend, Jenni, because I know she is about to cry. This is also why I feel compelled to come up with another story, a better story.

I scramble through my memories of yesterday. While reading social media updates and posting my own jolly versions of my fake persona, I’d come across a ‘tweet’ that stayed with me. I consider telling Jenni about the man who claims he calls tall redheads ‘gingeraffes’, but that will sound too forced. So much of what I read online feels forced. These posts laugh, and laugh, and laugh, and every now and then, there’s honesty.

Outside, a rebel snowflake charges upwards, dodging the other snowflakes in a crazy Icarus leap for the sun.

It gives me an idea. An idea with time.

“Hey Jenni, listen to this.” I’m signing into my computer and bringing up the podcast I’d listened to during the holidays. “It’s a New Yorker podcast of David Sedaris reading Miranda July’s story *Roy Spivey*. I think you’ll like it.”

We listen to the podcast together and in its wake, in this, our new universe, on the first morning of a new year, my dream about the family walking across the septic field feels heavy with what’s absent in my kitchen.

*Where has she gone?*

“Who?” Jenni asks.

She surprises me with her question because I hadn’t realized I’d spoken the though out loud.

“Remember my inner Robin Hood outlaw-heroine? I used to fight injustice with more passion. Now I’m haunted by shattered limits. Part of Robin Hood’s lasting appeal was his idyllic life in the forest without the burden of civilization. This isn’t Sherwood forest.”

“And my life’s no nuclear family.”

I press ‘play’ to restart the podcast. In analyzing July’s story, Sedaris says that he’s reminded of another writer. Her stories would make him laugh, and laugh, and laugh, and then he’d be devastated. I’d forgotten that part.

I laugh and laugh, and laugh. And now Jenni is crying.

She outside.

Me inside.