

Old Book, New Cover



SARAH ANJUM BARI

"I'm going to fall."
"You won't."
"Hold my hand."
"Okay but you're not going to—"
"TRING-CRUNCH-SMASH."
"Never mind."

In a park filled with laughing families, running children and the happiest kind of sunshine, there's a middle-aged woman lying underneath a bright green bicycle and a clump of fallen leaves. That's me. 30-year-old Adrienne, taking cycling lessons from the ever-patient Joe. Better late than never, I guess. I get up and brush dust off my pants, deciding to take a break.

Park time is therapy for me. It always has been, since the happier days of my 20s. Things had been a little different then — there'd been an older version of Joe, and I'd been much younger and more emotional. "Therapy" had consisted of rants and/or crying on my part until I eventually cracked up over whatever my best friend thought of to make me laugh. Or the other way around. Over four-hour conversations across transatlantic phone lines, we'd listened to each

other grieve and recover and planned a perfect picnic in the park someday where he'd teach me to ride a bike, or fly a kite.

That was 10 years ago. A lot of things have changed since then. We've lost some people and gained some better ones along the way, and our families have stayed connected through all the years. The parties, vacations and meals we spend together with each other's families are always fun, exciting and loud. But it is these quiet weekends with Joe in the park that I enjoy the most.

"What's new this week? Did you hand in the English paper?" I ask him once we've settled down on our blanket on the grass.

"Yeah, there's another one I need you to proofread tomorrow," he replies through a mouthful of the sandwich I've made him. Me. Making sandwiches. Who would've thought?

"Why are you upset though?"

"Who says I'm upset?" *How does he always know?*

"You told me you want to ride a bike, Ade," he replies, as if that explains everything.

"I've always wanted to learn to ride a bike. You know that."

"You also

asked me to bring the guitar. You only ever ask to do cheesy stuff when you're upset," he says in the same matter-of-fact tone. That does it. I set down my can of Coke and covered my face, not wanting to cry in public. Joe scoots over and takes me into his arms, hiding my face between his shoulders.

"Your face isn't showing. If you cry now, people will just think we're hugging. Okay?"

That makes me cry harder. I hug him back, running my hand through the back of Joe's head. Hair that no one else is allowed to touch but me, because he's weird about things like that. Kissing the side of his head I let him go, wiping my face free of the tears.

"What do I have to proofread tomorrow?" I ask him with a watery smile.

"So we were supposed to write a story, but it's horror. I'd show my Dad, but he asked me to definitely show this one to you. Apparently you love scary stories?" I roll my eyes, making a mental note to email the story right back to Joe's father. The jerk knew it'd give me nightmares.

We get back to the food and I listen

to Joe go on passionately about making the school football team. He hasn't asked me again why I'm upset or why I cried. He knows I wouldn't tell him anyway. He's been taught that by his father, and learned along the way himself. Some things you can't share with your godson, however close you may be.

So this is what we do. When things seem too hard, when being an overworked editor takes too much of a toll on me, when being scolded at home makes Joe want to slam his door too hard, we come to the park. We eat, we talk, we sing. And life goes back to normal by the end of the day.

Finishing the last bite of the sandwich, Joe pulls up the guitar and starts strumming the tune to a medley I'd spent years singing over the phone with his father, my best friend of 10 years. And we sing.

*"It's not about the money, money, money,
We don't need your money, money, money,
We just wanna make the woorld dance,
Forget about the priiice tag.
Pretty pretty pleeease, don't you ever ever
feel, That you're nothing,
You are perfect to me,
Wide lips, pale face, breathing in the
snowww flakes,
Burnnt lungs, sour taste."*

