

Helicopter Seeds

I've known Lucy for as long as I've known myself. I met her when we were both seeds, and she didn't have a name yet, and I didn't have a name yet, but she said I could give her hers and she would give me mine, so she is Lucy and I am Jamie and I think we probably always have been. Gloved hands planted us both in the same plastic pot, in case one of us didn't grow, Lucy said. We had not much to root to besides each other, but that was enough. A semi-truck carried us to a Home Depot parking lot and we grew up blinded by bright orange signs. When Lucy sprouted, I sprouted too.

Home Depot taught us a lot. We met so many flowers, and they were kind, but they weren't like Lucy. Sometimes the brightness of their petals was just too much for me. Lucy's leaves were the perfect shade of green. I tried to show her our reflection in the puddles that would pool on the ground after a storm, but Lucy never saw what I meant when I told her she was beautiful. All she wanted was to be a petunia, a hydrangea, a poppy, even. I just liked to watch her grow.

Home Depot was nice. We met lots of people, lots of plants, sometimes dogs. They were okay, mostly, but some tried to pee on us and some succeeded which I didn't mind too much but it repulsed Lucy. I wished there was something I could do about it. Wished I could lift my roots like legs and step out of our plastic pot, protect her from the peeing dogs. But I couldn't do much besides hold her roots in mine. She said that was enough.

At night, when all the morning glories were sound asleep and the moonflowers bloomed, I'd sometimes think about what would happen if one of the people took Lucy away without me, or me without her. Surely, it'd be difficult. They'd have to untangle our roots, and I wouldn't let

go without a fight, a good fight, a fight with everything in me until I turned into one shriveled, dead leaf. We lived together in our plastic pot house. My roots were her roots and hers were mine.

I knew she felt me worrying because she'd put her leaf on my back and tell me to go to sleep. She said not to worry about those things, that she'd find her way back to me through the breeze. I tried to stop worrying because I didn't want Lucy to worry about me worrying about her. I squeezed her roots a little tighter on those nights.

Other than that, the Home Depot days were mostly routine. We'd wake with the morning glories and the workers giving us showers with their hoses, and then the people flooded through the doors of the garden center. Lucy and I watched more flowers come and go as we waited and waited to grow, grow big enough to stand on our own. Bigger than saplings. Stronger than the windstorms that shook our thin leaves. The orange-vest humans told us one day we'd be the oldest trees, older than Mrs. Collins who rolls through the garden center with her walker and buys purple pansies every spring. Soon enough, we'd outgrow our plastic pot like all the little tots outgrow their light-up shoes. Lucy and I liked it there, but we were excited to move.

And then one day, like a butterfly sneaking through the outer door, a man with daffodil hair flew into our lives with unexpected speed. He said he was looking for maple trees, and our orange-vest human pointed to Lucy and me, and before we knew it, we were freed. He didn't even try to split us apart. All that worrying, Lucy said, all for nothing at all. We said goodbye to the flowers and wished them all the luck, but they didn't need it. Petunias and pansies always found homes quickly, and the daffodils and sunflowers would be bought soon, too. None of the flowers ever lived in the garden center as long as us trees. Maybe they were brighter, but we were the strongest.

Lucy squeezed my roots as we rode in the cart out of the garden center and through the store, past silver cans of paint and boxes of shiny metal tools and so many planks of wood, which Lucy said will come from us when we're old and tired, but that it won't hurt. I put on my toughest bark, but Lucy gave me one look, and I knew she saw through. She knew everything, somehow, and I didn't even know what I didn't know until I saw that Lucy knew. Why is there always another thing I don't know?

I didn't know how money worked when Sam paid for us, but Lucy said it came from trees like us too, and how did she know that? She said sometimes we get cut down, and how did she know that? She said there are just some things that she knows. On that day, I swore that one day I would know things too. I think I've learned one, at least.

We drove home in something like the semi-truck, but it was smaller and not nearly as orange. Sam had a big smile and scuffed shoes, and his hands were calloused when he pulled a phone from his pocket and said, "I got the trees, Amber, two growing in one pot, like little tree soulmates." Lucy said he loved us already. She was excited, so I swallowed my nerves and tried to be excited with her as we rolled away from everything orange and everything home.

We drove and drove on paved roads, and it turned out that trees like us are everywhere. Big trees with green leaves waved to us through the open windows as they blurred by. I thought the world was mostly flowers, but Lucy said that's just the garden center. In the "real world," which I didn't know was different from the garden center, she said that trees are almost everywhere.

Sam pulled into what Lucy said was a driveway, which I didn't know how she knew, but Lucy knew everything so I didn't question it. Sam took us out of the tiny semi-truck and Amber, who was in the phone but was now here, opened the door to the house and walked outside. She

smiled when she saw us. It was then that I knew that that was what Lucy and I were here for. We were supposed to make people smile.

We'd discover later that we had more purposes, too. We were things for kids to climb, we were branches for tire swings, we were autumn leaves to point at and summer shade to rest in. Amber told us on that very first day that we were even the air she and Sam breathed. It didn't make sense to me, but she insisted it was true. I decided to believe it.

Sam had a quiet way of loving us, but Amber's was loud. She smiled like the sun glowing into the garden center and talked to us while Sam dug a hole in the ground with a soft smirk. They knew Lucy and I were supposed to stay together, which made it easy to love them. They were careful with our roots as they lifted us from our plastic pot. The pot was a nice home, but we were outgrowing it.

Amber placed us in the earth and Sam covered our roots with dirt. I was scared at first, but it didn't hurt. Nothing hurt until the bad day, but I didn't know about the bad day yet, so there wasn't much to fear. It was just another thing I didn't know I didn't know. I wonder if Lucy knew.

And so, we had been planted. We had a yard and a house and a new home and our very own humans. Amber talked to us all the time. She stared at us through the kitchen window, and when she wasn't smiling already, she did when she looked at us.

I started to understand what they said at the garden center about Lucy and I growing old. We got bigger and stronger, and Amber and Sam changed too. Amber's belly grew big big big, and Sam left more and more for work, and everyone was changing, but we were all still smiling. Lucy loved it here. She loved the breeze and she loved her growing leaves and somehow she just kept becoming even more perfect to me.

When Amber and Sam got into arguments through the kitchen window, flailing papers like autumn leaves and slamming doors like falling trees, Amber would come outside to talk to us. She said we're all still learning. I learned that there is always more to learn.

When Amber's belly popped, a tiny Sam came home. His name was Max, and he grew hair so yellow I mistook him for the sun sometimes. Lucy and I didn't know it then, but it turned out we were growing stronger for Max, too. Sam set up a swing for him on my strongest branch, and I smiled all day, and Amber smiled all day, and Max smiled his goofy little smile all day, and Lucy smiled all day, and even Sam smiled all day. It was a good day.

The swing on my branch felt like I was holding life. That's when Lucy started holding life, too. Two bluebirds crafted their nest in Lucy's arms, and Lucy held it with her strong gentleness.

Max grew up quickly, and the seasons made their rounds quickly too. Green summers blinked into orange autumns, like Home Depot, but prettier, and then came the blue and white winters, the pink springs. That's when our helicopter seeds floated down and Max caught them with his tiny hands. Soon, he could swing by himself, and soon, he could go outside by himself, and soon, he could ride a bike down the street by himself, but Amber still watched through the kitchen window or from our shade. She rested her back on Lucy and looked up at the birds those days.

"Was it easy?" she asked on a cloudy afternoon. I don't know if she was talking to me or Lucy or the birds or herself. I don't think anyone answered her.

Sam wasn't home that day, or the next one. Lucy and I watched him leave for work in what I now knew was a truck, but he was still gone when the stars came out. The morning glories back at the garden center had to have been asleep by then, the moonflowers waking. We watched

Amber yell to the phone in the kitchen. We watched her drop a glass. We watched her cut her fingers on the shards. We watched her clean up every mess. I wished I had legs instead of roots that day.

When our leaves started falling again and Amber made Max wear a hat every day, Sam had taken boxes from the house and put them in his truck while Max was at school. Amber was mad, and Lucy said he wasn't coming back, and I didn't know how she knew but she always did, and normally it doesn't hurt when my leaves fall, but that day it did. I was glad to not have legs that day. I didn't want to leave.

The birds left, too. Maybe they went with Sam. Another winter of empty branches, our first with an emptier house.

Max kept growing, and the seasons kept changing, and Amber grew more tired. Lucy and I kept growing too. Sam never came back, and I think then I was beginning to learn. Lucy said she'd always come back, even if she grew legs and left to see the world. I didn't want legs. I didn't care about the world. I didn't want to leave our yard. Why would she ever want to leave our yard?

Max got a truck of his own. Amber took down the swing. It'd been seventeen seasons since someone used it, anyway. I missed its weight. Amber still leaned against us sometimes and talked about things I didn't understand. That was enough.

She said Max was going to college. She said she needed a smaller house, that it was too empty here all alone, and I wanted to tell her that she wasn't alone. *Hello? You're talking to us right now! We're right here!* She said we couldn't go with her, we're too big now. I never knew growing could be a bad thing. Our roots here were too deep. I wanted legs again.

Lucy said it'd be okay. She said these things happen.

The moving trucks looked like the Home Depot truck, and I missed the Home Depot truck for the first time in my life, because why did we even come here if everyone was leaving and we had to stay? The moving trucks were less orange, but the leaves were falling again so the yard was orange enough. Lucy squeezed my roots. She didn't have anything to say that day. Amber drove away and no one came back.

We tried to readjust. We'd had a life of just Lucy and Jamie before, but we'd grown so much. The kitchen was empty through winter and when spring arrived, the grass stretched up to greet our lowest branches. A stranger arrived to cut it like Sam, and eventually Max, used to.

Men in orange hats tore the house down in three days. There was nothing we could do. No legs to lift out of the ground. I couldn't turn away.

We listened to the orange-hat men talk about the building that was going to grow from our backyard. It took us a while to figure it out. Even Lucy was confused. We never found out what the building was for. We didn't really want to know.

Construction vehicles like the ones we'd seen so long ago at Home Depot invaded our yard. They didn't look friendly anymore. I wished none of it had ever happened. I wished we were still at the garden center. I wished Sam never took us away from the tulips, I missed the tulips, and I wished Sam never left and made the house so empty so Amber was too sad to stay.

Lucy told me not to be scared. It happens, she said. Next time, I'd know more, she said. I didn't understand. I just wanted to understand. I didn't think I was ready.

The saws started whirring and cutting into our trunks, and our helicopter seeds flew from our branches. They looked like Lucy and me when we were first planted. I wondered what it would feel like to be a plank of wood back at Home Depot until I heard Lucy yell with glee above the grinding of chainsaws.

“Jump!” she laughed. “Jump on!”

Lucy dragged me out of my tree-bark body and onto the flying seed, and she jumped onto her own. We flew through the air and watched as our old bodies collapsed to the ground. It didn't hurt. We weren't in there anymore.

Suddenly, a lot made sense. Lucy laughed as we flew through the air, said she missed the feeling. Of course Lucy had done this before. That's how she always knew it all.

She said we could fly wherever we wanted, told me I could pick. We said our goodbyes to the grass and went on our way. Someone else would need us soon, I figured. Maybe we'd end up at a Lowe's. I'd always wondered what those were like.