

Permeating through her vulnerably exposed nostrils, the musty scent of July-rain threatened to suffocate Lisa Carter as she pattered through the apathetic city streets. *Right, left, right, left*, she repeated to herself as she tried to keep from losing her body, her consciousness, and her plastic-covered violin to the unforgiving forces of nature. Just as she had composed herself enough to settle into a moderate pace, lightning cracked overhead. In less than the “one Mississippi” Lisa used to childishly calculate the distance of lightning, she could hear--no, *feel*--thunder’s pompous reply to her sister, lightning. “Oh!” Lisa gasped, as the peal of thunder reverberated through the alleyway that she had begun to stagger gracelessly across. *And the worst part hasn’t even come yet*, she gloomily thought to herself, as she clumsily veered left into recognizable territory. In no time at all, Lisa was standing under the porch light of a familiar house in a familiar neighborhood. Despite the unrestrained clamor of the outside world, she could not help but hesitate as she reached out to rap the green door of the house she had absconded two weeks before. Lisa withdrew her extended arm to pick at one of her cleanly-picked cuticles and to tuck her newly-drenched, blonde hair behind her ear. If any of the neighbors happened to look outside their window anytime from 11:12 to 11:25 that night, they would be able to dimly see the slender physique of a teenage girl standing frozen in time in the middle of a relentless storm, completely and utterly at battle with herself. Remaining on the porch for what seemed to stretch on forever, Lisa did not proceed until she was certain that she was making the right choice. Briskly, before hubris could push her in the direction of making another cowardly decision, Lisa resoundingly knocked on her mother’s door.

Within seconds, the door opened, and Lisa was thrust into a fork in the road that could take her on any path she wished to take. "I'm sorry," she blurted out, uttering the first thing on her mind.

"I thought you said you weren't coming back," the receiving lady said to her spitting image. It was with the same weary, hazel eyes that Lisa's mother, Tracey, probed Lisa's. "You know I've been searching for you since the moment you left? That you've had me worried sick?" Tracey's voice climbed higher and higher, entering the range of a mother's unadulterated worry for her young. "Or that I haven't eaten or slept in weeks because it was too hard for you to stick around and face your problems like you should be able to do by now? Do you know what it's like to have your only child leave?"

"Well of course not, I'm only seventeen," Lisa whimpered.

"That's right, you are. You can make as many rash decisions as you want and blame it on the fact that you're 'only seventeen'. Where have you even been all this time?" Tracey inquired, her rage growing.

"I was with Heather," Lisa admitted remorsefully. "She asked if anything was going on at home, and I told her no. I told her everything was fine and that you were okay with it," a second passed. "She had no idea, I swear," Lisa added quickly, looking up at the incredulous eyes of her mother. "It's just that...when you told me I had to make a choice between med school and music school, I couldn't handle it. I thought the world would tumble down if I made the wrong decision. I thought that I would be happier anywhere but here...but I was completely wrong. I realized it the day I left, but it wasn't until Heather's little sister told us a story last night that it occurred to me how nearsighted I was being," the words were rushing out now. "Maybe the girl in the story wasn't as rash

as I was, but she learned the same lesson that I learned these last two weeks. She didn't realize what she had until it was gone. She learned that home is where the heart is, and, regardless of all the stupid fights and miscommunication we might have, you'll always be home to me, Mom".

Finally, Tracey Carter replied, "I'm surprised you haven't caught a cold yet. You can tell me the story inside while you're drying off." Smiling wider than Lisa had smiled in weeks, she walked through the door left open by Tracey and entered the unchanged place she called home.

Home is where the heart is.

A young girl by the name of Lucy raced into the tranquility of the never-changing meadow with a rather massive book as her only escort. Taking out her now-messy ponytail and freeing her tucked-in shirt from the clutches of her skirt, she began to nestle under her favorite tree. "What story shall we read today?" she murmured to herself, while opening her copy of *1001 Tales for Every Young Adventurer*. The girl ran her slender finger over the spine of the book and thought of all the unseen memories attached to it. Lucy's mother had given her *1001 Tales* the last time they saw each other, right before her leukemia had gotten the better of her. Being the only other "reader" among her five other siblings, it was only sensible that the book should be passed down to Lucy, the child with whom her mother seemed to have the strongest connection. Sighing, Lucy opened the book to the next page her mother had dog-eared for her before she left.

Almost immediately, Lucy was battling sea monsters alongside the hero of her story, the dashing Jack Smith. The effervescent bubbling of the stream and the frantic rustling of a rabbit being pursued by a nearby fox in the meadow urged Lucy to fight harder and more valiantly with Jack. *And with a final grunt, Jack rocked the ship one last time as he hurled the sword into the flesh of the giant tentacle, saving the lives of his friends, as well as the gold on the ship.* Lucy shut the book with the greatest sense of victory a seven year old girl such as herself could possibly feel. *Hoot, hoot.* Momentarily astounded at the fact that night had fallen in a place where time did not seem to exist, Lucy shot up and galloped back to the house, book in hand and spirits high.

So was the case almost every day for years on end. Just as a boomerang consistently bounds back to the one who throws it, Lucy instinctively returned to the meadow every afternoon of her adolescent years. The stream was her resting place when the savage Indians were on her trail; the tops of branches were her vines as she swung to hurry back to the others in the vast jungle; behind orchards was where Lucy hid as she rested her eyes on the treasure she and her team of invisible adventurers had been searching for for so long!

And even after Lucy had finished fighting dragons and discovering lost civilizations in the dog-eared pages of her mother's gift to her, she did not stop coming back to the meadow. When her father had passed out drunk on the couch for the third time in a week after yet another one of his bipolarity-induced fits, it was only natural for Lucy to find refuge in the one place she could be alone. And when she arrived, feeling **emotions** she had not felt since her mother's passing, Lucy simply nestled under her usual tree and wrote the first story she could call her own. In the years that followed, notebooks

upon notebooks were filled, the accumulated size of which could rival the size of *1001 Tales for Every Young Adventurer*, the book that had started it all. Then one day, a day which had once seemed so distant, high school graduation came knocking on Lucy's door. "Come on, Luce, we can't be late!" her friends shouted from the car. Laughing, she tucked a spare notepad in her purse and hurried to the car.

Ten summers later, Lucy returned to her old house, but under exceedingly different circumstances than when she had left it a decade before. With her fiancé in hand, she glided through the streets of her previous town with a nagging feeling of emptiness. Lucy had become a published author months after she started college, but she felt as if her success was not deserved. Her sure-fire ability to weld words and emotions together with the utmost eloquence, which had come to her so easily before, lost itself as she grew older. Every day, she longed for the feeling of free-flowing ideas to escape from her fingers and into a notebook, but the harder she tried to replicate it, the more she painstakingly failed. For this reason, she resorted to sending publishers only what she had written ages ago. Any literary success she had now, she owed to what she had produced in her teenage years.

"Honey, where do you want to go next?" her fiancé inquired.

"I suppose we could visit my old school," Lucy replied absently. As they began walking through the homely streets, Lucy's thoughts bombarded her. *Why am I going to places I could have cared less about when I was a kid?*, she asked herself. *I brought him here to show him anything I considered important for the better two-thirds of my life...and none of these spots are it.*

“Change of plan, we’re going somewhere else”, Lucy said. Then, grabbing her fiancé’s arm, she began running in the opposite direction. Through four intersections and down a forgotten street they traveled, crisscrossing through a long-dead corn maze and finally over a bridge...until they reached a place where time did not seem to exist.

“Wow, this is beautiful,” her fiancé remarked.

“I...never really noticed before,” Lucy replied as she revolved on the spot, viewing the meadow with changed eyes. Memories she had chosen not to dwell on for years suddenly became relevant again.

The first time she visited the broad field was with the woman she loved most.

Lucy felt special here because it was the first allotment of time that she could remember being truly alone with her mother, away from the noisy hustle of their infinitely crowded house. It was where the two escaped when Lucy’s father would come home in the fits of rage that his intermittent bipolar disorder condemned him to.

“Making fun of me?!” he would roar at the dinner table, recalling the “jeering” faces his colleagues at work made when they talked to him. “Think you’re better than me?” *Clink, clink*, responded the nearby dishes as he would erratically wave his arms at his family. He took their collective, stunned silence to mean the worst. “I’m *normal* for Christ’s sake!” he would bellow, as he hurtled himself away from the table and into Lucy’s parent’s room. “Andrew!” her mother would call as she would half-heartedly attempt to calm him down. A final whoosh of the mockingly-calm, daisy colored table cloth signified his final departure. Moments later, the straining of ears was hardly necessary to hear the dull resonance of fist striking mattress, **emanating from the bedroom**. “Better that he takes it out on inanimate objects than on any of us,” Lucy’s older

sister whispered bitterly to her. The six members of the family disbanded from the table, trying to ignore the beginning of a maniacal symphony of sound. Naturally, the tempo of the *thump, thump*'s would change pace, modulating from the initial *allegro* of pestilence to a less foreboding *andantino*; with time, this beat would subside to a solemn *grave*, until, gradually, it would disappear altogether. As the frequency of such occurrences began to increase, the family realized that words of encouragement were worthless in the presence of Andrew Woolf's uncontrollable reactions. Instead, they learned that the most effective remedy to his condition was to not respond to it at all.

The older siblings had less difficulty dealing with this as they invested their time into other distractions. The teenage world of sex and drugs had yet to be probed, and they were willing to sacrifice their home lives for the sake of exploration. Lucy, who was only four years old at the time, was quite a different case. Sensing that Lucy was the child who needed the most attention at such a critical time, her mother would take her to a far-away place, away from the dangers of reality. This very field was where they stayed until Lucy's father would sort himself out (and he could always do so...the question was how long he could keep himself "sorted out"). Lucy's mother worried about Lucy more than the others because she feared that the youngest would be the most permanently impacted by the repercussions of the unstable emotional disaster that Andrew had proved to be. Consequently, Lucy's mother made it her mission to foster a passion in Lucy; eventually, it would grow to be so strong that it would serve as a protective buffer against all the strife that the universe could possibly hold. This passion came in the form of stories. Exchanging only an occasional few sentences, the two females let the clamor and confusion of their everyday lives lapse into their stories, even if it was only for a few hours.

As Lucy returned to the present, she found herself sitting comfortably on the ground. She was situated in the shade of an immense oak tree, sitting with the man she loved most in the very same way she used to sit with the woman who was her world. Looking up, Lucy couldn't help but chuckle as she noticed that the topmost branches were the perfect "vines" to swing from for any young adventurer. This tree had witnessed every stage of her life, from the ages of four to eighteen. With a shock, she realized that it was not the storybooks or the notepads or the adventures she had that had inspired and motivated her through her childhood; it was the meadow. This wondrous, deathless safe-haven that Lucy had taken for granted all these years was the most important constant in her ever-changing world. Laughing once again, Lucy became aware that *1001 Tales* was not the only gift her mother had left her.

Nestling under her usual tree, Lucy retrieved a spare journal from her purse, and she began to write.