

“The Essence of Evanescence”

by

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I paused at the corner, caught for a moment.

In the growing twilight, the street sign stood out starkly, a 3D figure in an abruptly 2D landscape. A thin ray of sunlight leaked through the storm clouds, making the raindrops over the letter "S" sparkle. The storm was passing, giving way to the summer night.

I don't know if my companion noticed the brief hesitation in my step as the scene, street sign, storm, and summer, arrested me. He may have simply chosen not comment.

Regardless, I don't think he experienced the same sudden sensation that we were in the midst of a story. The world does not offer up such visuals without some sense of purpose.

He tugged at my hand, our fingers interlaced, and I brought my eyes back to his face.

"Penny for your thoughts?" he offered, his voice as low as the distant purr of thunder.

We turned the corner onto the next street, leaving the sign behind.

"A dollar for your insights," I replied, nearly automatically. *A fortune for your desire*, I finished silently. *I'm just a painter and I'm drawing a blank*.

He rolled his eyes at me and drew me closer, his breath rasping over the shell of my ear even as we continued to walk.

"I can't provide insights into what you won't tell me, dear," he murmured.

I shivered, despite the summer heat.

"I know," I whispered drily, aware that his relative position to me would prevent him from catching the words. "I don't have a dollar on me, either, so it's all for the best."

I watched a lightning bug wink in and out of existence over the marker indicating the path to the neighborhood park.

A transitory bug over a transitory spot, in the midst of a transitory moment.

"Hey," I asked at full volume, stepping away from him slightly. "Do you want to go down to the park?"

He blinked at me. Where summer made me sprightly, it merely made him sleepy.

"Uh... sure," he acquiesced.

I grinned, and now I was the one tugging at his hand, our fingers interlaced.

The lightning bug flashed again as we passed, a vibrant strobe among the steam rising off the asphalt trail.

We were immediately encased in the scent of honeysuckle, warm and sweet, and I slowed again, allowing him to draw even with me. The summer would pass soon enough - I should savor it.

"I thought we weren't going to go this far," he commented, a little nervously, but with a thin thread of cautious delight spun through his tone. "The day will be over soon."

I turned and smiled at him, skirting an ant pile at the edge of the path.

"It's summer, sweetheart. It's a good while yet until the clock chimes midnight and your carriage turns to a pumpkin."

He stopped short, yanking me to a halt.

"What?" I demanded, dropping his hand to face him directly.

"Look," he breathed, extending his arm, indicating something beyond me. "It's like a fairy tale."

I shifted to see what he meant, and felt the sensation from the street sign all over again, this time certain that he felt it, too.

Lightning bugs illuminated the growing gloom surrounding the wooden bridge. The sound of the normally sullen creek chimed through the twilight, swollen by the summer storm. The scent of honeysuckle seemed to surge, the source nearly dripping off the bridge's handrails. On the horizon, a thread of blue lightning seized the ground, the resulting thunderclap swallowed by the distance.

"Yes," I said softly, taking his hand again without moving my gaze from the scene. "It's like a fairy tale."

Wordlessly, we advanced to the bridge, stopping in the center. The shadows from the looming trees danced over us, broken by only the flash of fireflies. The water rushed beneath us, but we stood still, suspended in a summer spell.

He released my hand and plucked up a honeysuckle. He held the pale bell-shaped flower between us.

When he spoke, his eyes reached beyond the bloom to me.

"Sweet and gorgeous."

I blushed, but kept enough of my composure to reply.

"But unable to last beyond the summer."

He shrugged, and dropped the flower off the bridge to get caught up in the current.

"Mayhap."

He stepped closer and his arms wrapped around me, his gaze locking with mine.

It was suddenly difficult to breathe, and I stared up at him, eyes wide with my vulnerability. His hands were flash-points of fire on my back, warmer even than the summer, and far more tangible than the ever-deepening twilight. If only summer really were a fairy tale, drawing to a close with a neat Happily-Ever-After bow, a non-ending end.

One hand rose to cup my neck, his palm soft on my skin. He leaned in.

My eyes fluttered closed.

He kissed me like I had always imagined being kissed, soft, sure, and sweet.

And then there was only summer air brushing against my lips.

It wasn't until he stepped away from me that I could bring myself to open my eyes.

Full night had fallen. The wind had picked up, pushing away the scent of honeysuckle along with the storm. The lightning bugs, too, had disappeared, leaving behind only the burbling rush of water beneath the bridge.

"We should go back," he said, holding out his hand for me.

I took it, interlacing our fingers.

Silently, we proceeded up the path, back onto the street, past the street sign.

His voice broke through the rising symphony of crickets and cicadas, summer sounds.

"Penny for your thoughts?"

We turned the corner as I shrugged, not meeting his eyes.

"I'm drawing a blank."