

John Reyer's Edition of the

STORYBOOK

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*An *etfiction* foundation Text*

Conjoining Stories from the Poet Soldier's STORYBOOK and moments they inspired.
Accompanied by adjoining poems from the POEMBOOK.

By John Reyer Afamasaga

SUMMARY

James is comfortable in the warmth of the June night; his mother's voice, as she reads from the STORYBOOK, is a fine replacement for the hot chocolate they cannot afford...

The wind's words and a flower Part 1

(From the POEMBOOK)

The wind
Had words also
as well as its oars at sea
On land he has
Words to woo
Words for making a smile
Words that wow
and words that ask why?
It blows them
so far they pollinate flowers
and populate minds
and take over actions
that make nations angry
A girl blossomed
as her mother now fades
on her bed Flower flows
all heart, her hair
across the cold body
the woman taken by now
The travellers rattling the beams
that hold together this dreadful wooden cottage
There's a willow outside her window
it weeps as Flower sleeps
the tree's sorrows just like her own
and when the wind is weak from all the blowing
It comes to this tree to sleep and snore sweet
It brings words
light and less than grief, and aghast
they're gifts and secrets
never lessons just
sweets...

CHAPTER 1

The wind's words and a flower

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PART 1

Flower walks through the paddock, determined to make her way to the other side of the field, through lilies, lilac, and lavender.

A butterfly flutters by and then it transcends her eye's range as it darts off somewhere only to reappear just when the child thinks its foreboding, foreshadowing presence is part of her daydream, in and out of which she drifts as a trailing mist leads her on and into the woods.

Under the forest's shelter, the sweat on her scalp and skin reacts with the tunneling flow of air from the path through the trees before her. The crunching twigs breaking on stones in the dirt cushion her step as her head moves from side to side to see her way in the much lesser light. As she walks, she thinks to herself that her mission is justified by the effort it will take her to reach the place where ritual and recital will be performed today before she returns home this evening.

In the distance, she thinks she can hear a train—a fallacy since the tracks for the celestial invention are but being laid. Her father, a blacksmith against her wish, has already signed up to sell his skill, and therefore, his soul to the railway company “linking man and man across this great country, allowing commerce and communication to flourish.” This “evangelical” mission, masking the demolition of all that lies in its way, echoes in the hall of the wild canopy she now wanders through slowly as that voice and then this voice fill the space, reverberating, echoing and looping, thereby causing Flower to stop and shake her head so she can hear herself.

She sighs as the butterfly catches her attention; as if willing her on, it stops above her head and then off it goes, catching the girl's breathe and putting her legs into motion.

The particular red maple that Flower saw in her dream was central to all else, so if she continues on this path, it should take her to the forest's center where she will find the all engulfing tree and its encompassing presence.

The reason for her dreams is more than likely her mother's long time illness. Her subconscious runs wild when Flower lays her head down at night. And as she walks, she feels that every step—while it takes her closer to the tree where the healing plant grows around the base of its trunk—squanders the precious time she has left with the woman who blessed her with life.

As in the dream, the young man who lost his tongue passes by, and as a mute would, the perfectly capable specimen shakes his head and points his finger to the back of his mouth which he opens wide. Flower reassures the dumb man, "Speak; someone will hear you..." She keeps her eyes on him as she hurries along mindful of how quickly the sun travels up above the forest.

A thunderclap permeates the sky, its deafening decibels would frighten a hunter clad in his kill's fur. Flower feels Nature's power and her eyes dart, but her resolve hardens as another thunderclap comes. Its volume is tremendous.

Flower begins to run as the dark clouds cover what sky she can see. She anticipates rain. Lightning is visible in the darkened world outside the cocoon of trees where she is desperate to find the vision from her dream.

The physical exertion in her arms and legs does not match her mental anguish as she endeavors to apply mind over matter in search of the tree. The raindrops that begin to bounce up off the ground hang around her ankles for a moment. Her anguish becomes angst against the hopelessness she encounters as she strives on. The tears are one with the elements as the rain begins to pelt her face, arms, and legs.

Her own breathing is all she can hear as she notices, without comprehension, the ferocity of the conditions in which she has been cast. Trees easily half the size of the centuries old red maple are uprooted and begin to fly through the air decimating all that was planted in their path. The sound of crashing timber and the cracking of trees outdoes the thunder while the lightning asserts its devastating power by igniting the treetops as if they were candles. In a blink, those candles are hurled through the air...

A boy, Afanasy, bends his knees as he crouches down to take a closer look at the girl who lies as if dead upon the forsaken path. Smoldering tree stumps are all that remain. The ash and charcoal-colored ground are still warm, and as far as the eye can see, it is flat, black and smoky.

He searches in his little green bag until he produces a small pouch made of green leaves. He uncoils the leather strap that wraps the package and holds it in his palm as he dips a finger into the paste-like substance.

The girl seems at peace, yet her fists are clenched. Afanasy applies the green ointment onto her eyelids and then wraps the pouch up again; after he puts it away in his bag, he sits back, hugging his knees as he watches over her...

PART 2

Years later...

A young woman stands alone inside a funeral parlor; she says goodbye to her last parent who lays resting inside his casket. Outside, she can hear the conductor's whistle blow and then the locomotive's engine followed by its loud horn. She walks across the cold floors of the foyer to speak a word to the solemn looking man who waits with his hands behind his back.

Soon she is outside and looking up at the world. She thinks she sees the boy from the dream. Of late, she has begun to imagine he is a successful trader. Before that, he was a writer; before that, he was the one who rubbed sweet soothing green ointment on her eyelids. A young man, stands at the back of the crowd that listens to a peddler on stage selling a lotion that will bring relief from the pains of rheumatism. "And in doing so, it shall spare you of your heart and mind's autism, frenzied by this evil's wretched hold on your rattled bones..."

Flower walks over to where the smartly dressed young man stands. First, she looks at the ground in front of them; their shadows seem much closer than where they stand.

From behind her, she hears a raspy growl in an older woman's voice, "Is that you, Flower Fountain?" The voice makes the sensibly dressed lady think, but only for a moment, before she commits herself to the fear the voice brings.

The loud person's presence is preceded by its shadow; it covers both his and her own. The ruffling of heavy fabric and then a pale but perfectly made face is just a breath from the side of Flower's face. "My, my, it is the crying Flower, blossomed into a lily of some sorts. Growing wild, weed like I dare guess, from the places it can be found."

The intent was still the same even though the croak in the crooked figure's voice was nastier than Flower recalled. She had moved in around the time her mother was taken ill. Then, after her mother's death, Flower's father became ill. It was not long after this that the wicked woman had made off with the little money left to Flower to care for her ailing father.

"What is it that you want from me?" Flower asks as she looks at the ground. She looks at the shadow cast by the person behind her. She looks to her right. The shoes that belong to the man—although she thought they might belong to the boy with the distinctive, unpronounceable name she has only heard in her dreams—are gone.

PART 3

Beneath the willow tree, Flower's mother sits with her needlework in hand. The frail looking woman watches her daughter at the edge of the brook that flows down from the hills.

Flower sees the ripples run through her reflection as she offers the stream another pebble, building up the island she started to compile when first she was able to throw a stone. Behind her she feels her mother's eyes, and then she looks up at the hills her mother speaks of often.

"The stream flows from the hills." Flower's head turns as she flings another pebble precisely into the mound's center in the middle of the water. "Three pebbles a day since you were knee high have amassed an island, Flower. One day, when the water is diverted, it will be a bump." Flower nods her head and tosses into the water her last stone for today.

As the girl makes her way over to the willow where her mother sits, the wind blows like a rolling shadow cast by a gigantic cloud on a fine day. Flower imagines the coldness sweep down the hillside, bitterly pushing all that is not steadfast onward. Her hair around her face is blown forward, and the clothes on her back offer little resistance to the harsh icy air. Her mother's bony face seems to find resolve in the blistering condition as her hair is blown back, until Flower kneels down in front of the woman, who deserves many more summers, and wraps her arms around her wiry frame.

When Flower pushes open the door to the log cabin, she sees her father smoking his pipe as he contemplates which card from his hand he'll play. The nurse he brought home to care for his wife sits across the table from him. The woman, who is older than both Flower's parents but seems years younger, dismisses Flower and her patient as she throws down her cards. "I declare victory over you, you sorry man!" Flower pulls her mother's arm further over her shoulder as she props her up while she closes the door with her other arm. "What's for dinner?" Flower is busy seeing her mother to her bed as the question is asked again. This time the voice, which deals deceit and makes Flower feel like giving up her sense of hearing, replies, "I hope it's damn well not shrubbery again." Flower uses her head to push open the bedroom door. Immediately she has a look of distress because the bed she had made perfectly is now a mess. She glances at the pair watching her and quickly heaves her mother's body over the threshold and closes the door.

Flower seats her mother in the rocking chair next to the bed before she strips the sheets from the bed. "You know, Flower, the wind has words." The girl pauses as she dresses the bed with fresh sheets; she smiles to let her mother know she agrees with her and then continues with her chore. "When there is nothing, there are Nature's gifts and the feelings they bring..." The girl bends down so her mother can cradle her neck to lift her onto the bed. A knock at the door suspends the woman in motion; the weight is too much for the girl so her mother lets go and flops back into the chair. Flower stands upright looking

down at her mother who covers her face with her hands in despair at having failed to get onto the bed. "We're going to town for supplies; don't expect to be seeing you anytime soon." At first, Flower is as flustered as her mother is disappointed until the message registers. She kneels down in front of the sad woman and places her hands on her weak knees that begin to shake. "It'll be just us, mother." She pauses and then completes her reassurance, "For a wee while, at least." The girl sighs as she lowers her head, offering her mother something to hold...

Flower's disposition is maligned by her concern for the state in which her mother lives amid the goings on in the home she built for her family. Flower begins to wonder whether the once vivid memories of a wonderful childhood, which included playing by the brook or swinging beneath the willow, were just faint and fond wonderings from one of her dreams. And as her mother closes her eyes to enter the sleep that will bring much relief from the pain she suffers, Flower again refrains from asking about those fading memories.

Once the woman finds serenity in the depths of sleep, Flower finds room on her mother's side and sidles up to her for comfort and warmth; the act is also a means of spending as much of what time is left close to her mother.

Soon she too is away in the oblivion and in and among worlds and other dimensions in which she sometimes finds settings to coincide and amalgamate with yearnings her feeble soul feeds off in the here and now. At other times, she's thrown into chaos, which her conscious mind dictates to her subconscious mind as the reality to which she must find answers.

The butterfly finds her seated on the ground. Legs crossed, she studies the ants that march to and fro carrying crumbs she littered in the dirt. The restless girl waves the butterfly away; she is more concerned with the ethics she recognizes in operation in the colony. But the brilliantly colored Lepidoptera pesters her to lift her head in light of beckoning splendor beyond life's toils. Eventually, she agrees to look up at the wild flowers that carpet the paddock in front of her; lilies, lilac, and lavender lay spread for an acre or so. A wild and carefree woman frolics with someone, and then she collects her clothes and runs off into the distance laughing as she is being chased; a boy with hazel green eyes looks up at the sun before he disappears. Flower looks for the vivacious woman, but she too is gone. She looks down at the ants; one in particular catches her attention; he is marked by his large head which he carries high as he clamors while he scurries over the tops of his comrades to the front of the line. "His name is Afanasy," the ant says. "He knows where the plant grows from which the ointment is made." Flower turns her head so her ear is positioned to hear him better. "Around the trunk of the red maple tree, the biggest of them all; Afanasy knows." As she stands up, her feet can feel the soft bedding the wild flowers offer...

Flower wakes before the sun rises. The birds that flock to flower the willow sing their life emanating song for her. She leaves the warmth of their bed, but not before she listens for her mother's heartbeat.

Outside on the porch, she stretches her arms to revive life into her body as she inhales deep the fresh and crisp air.

She looks to the left. The broken swing lies in the corner. She looks up and above the hills. The sun still hidden has already arranged an orange glow to warm her heart and body for another day.

As the sun reaches the top of the range, Flower puts the finishing touches to the table where she and her mother will eat their breakfast. Fresh flowers from the other side of the brook litter the table on the porch's right side., Fresh flat unleavened bread still warm sits in the middle of the table and fresh goat's milk from the farmer's paddock waits for the two of them in carved wooden mugs.

Today she is able to walk on her own; her hand on Flower's shoulder is all the support she needs. The satisfaction the woman gets from this achievement is evident when mother and daughter reach the front door leading to the porch and she pauses to take a well needed breath. She motions for the girl to step through the doorway first, her way of showing her appreciation for her daughter's undying love.

Once seated at the table, Flower breaks bread as she says grace.

The moment of silence, but for the humble verse Flower recites to give thanks for the meager food they have, is of immense feeling. With eyes closed, their worlds are what their minds paint. The morning is perfect and serene. The orange haze from the broken rays of sun seeps through the willow and reflects off the stream's surface to warm them as the morning breeze scintillates every open pore of exposed skin. Flower's fingers fumble to find bread to break as her mother's fingers find their way around the tabletop out of a need to hold her daughter's hands.

She holds the hand as Flower says "Amen" and then gives her other hand to her mother. The darkness beneath their eyelids becomes a growing hue of the rising sun's warmth they can feel upon their faces. In the distance, Flower sees a young woman dressed in white, the faint but enlightened figure looks over her shoulder, but it's a fleeting glance, and as the graceful woman's eyelids blink, her head turns and she smiles as she looks at the path ahead of her.

Her hand in her mother's hand feels a gentle pull as if she is being led away—to follow the beautiful figure that now begins to skip. The butterfly is on her shoulder, but she cannot see her mother who guides her. She senses a change in conditions but the impending chill from the hills is a warm calm flow of invigorating currents; her mother narrates its worth. "The wind's words wooed the weak one, when all she had was weariness of a waning mind, Flower..."

In her next step, the girl feels her spirits lift; she remembers the soothing ointment on her eyelids as she opened her eyes to see the boy smiling at her, just before he ran off into the

ATMOS. She cannot see him, but she is aware of his aura. Careful not to alarm anything or anyone of her presence in this newly found dimension, Flower keeps walking, not questioning the trueness of her existence in this sequence.

The mother gently places her daughter's hands down on the table. Then she struggles on her own to find her feet, using all of what strength remains in her weary wiry body.

A squirrel pokes its head out from behind a bush. Flower stops as the butterfly flutters above her brow. It circumvents her doubt and loops her sensibilities to make her believe her surroundings.

A green-eyed gray wolf yawns at her as he sees something in the distance, perhaps the boy Afanasy.

Flower turns her head to see the enormity of the tree. The eerie silence in which the butterfly's wings could be heard is carefully filled by human sounds.

The luminous figure holds onto the maple tree as if it were her life source. She hears another voice telling the woman, "Flower blossomed as her mother fades..."

Flower treads lightly as she makes her way toward the maple tree. As she nears it, she hears footsteps making their way from the tree. She sees the plant that grows around the tree's trunk. As she bends down to collect the plant, a force intervenes, displacing her balance; momentarily her senses are in disarray as she feels the sun's rays on her face again.

The girl opens her eyes to see her mother is gone. She turns her head to see the plant at the base of the tree. The swing rocks in the gentle breeze as the sun glistens on top of the water. The broken bread litters the tabletop as the willow's branches begin to weep the wind's words.