***Spring and Beyond (2018)***

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**PAGES 1-3**

There once was a girl

There once was a girl

The girl is being born, the girl’s name is Spring

1.

Not quite holding back, but neither is she hurrying, she does her own thing. She is taking her time – a slow-moving body.

It’s so full in there, and so very dark. Red light, dim, it lends colour to us. She takes her time. It is what it is. A flame flickers in a gentle breeze.

A smooth, perfect head. Completely concealed within a channel. So new. And yet, old. So ripe and ready that it’s practically impossible. Orgasmic creation.

A carefully selected, true occurrence, like every occurrence. The orgasms, they surge out and into nothing, into everything, into thin air, they prickle within you: Orgasmic creation.

Spring. Spring spring Spring. I’m here. I’m Spring.

My name will be Spring.

I’m so close. So very close that I could be you.

You and I will merge into one, and our blood will run gold and blue.

*You will see a blue rose*, but that’s a long way off.

But before that, you’ll see me. Look.

It’s time to enter the world.

Swirling downwards, circular motions, convulsions. Head squeezed tight in a pincer grasp.

Mum’s birth canal squeezes the head and it is transformed into an oblong barrel. That’ll sort itself out in time. Perfection! Creation! You can all see it! All along you’ve all known it!

A strand of hair comes into view first, then another, then scratching, scratching at the crown. Here she comes!

Her hair is as black as coal, and no one can stop talking about it. Spring looks at them. They gaze and gaze upon her.

Are they labouring under a misapprehension?

They look her in the eye, she sees them as one grey mass, but she has love to give.

Old eyes, they say, she’s got old eyes. She’s ready for this world.

Spring emerges in the spring, and the hands of men are the first to touch her body, firm, rough, but with a delicate touch, and precise, like nails. In those hands she can rest easy, she can already smell everything, raw blood. Like algae. Mum’s stomach is soft, she’s pulled through. Milk runs down towards her mouth in tiny rivulets. She rests.

2.

The bells ring in the hospital chapel and the asphalt is damp, the sound of it being walked on: schwopp, schwoop, schwupp. The branches drip, almost blind, everything like a foggy world beyond.

Loud, gliding, full. I’ve forgotten what body feels like. The pain is remarkable.

The humans are filled with colours – surrounded by them. Fall asleep. Dreams unfold in absolute darkness, and a fountain of milk splashes away.

There is a wet taste in her mouth, like kisses later in life, so very wet.

The milk is like honey, and when it fills her mouth, each and every tiny gland, every cell, it draws out the milk. Instinctively the tongue drinks. Like a sponge in a bath of water.

Fingers so tiny, yet I remember everything.

The light from outside is blinding. Like laser beams, eyes stinging. I squint – and behind my eyelids, clarity. Packed inside blankets, the air clear as it is during a storm, but the smell of everything is all around me, and I look out of the window as often as I can.

Due in the spring, a late spring that year, colder than usual as the winds from the north swept across the country.

Spring came. Now it’s done.

I am a human.

**PAGES 17-29**

1.

The prince upstairs. Like a cat creeping around corners, she follows him – he never notices a thing. She’s a slip of a girl in comparison. She’s small, the scent of school all around her, but he carries the scent of everything else: Life and cigarette smoke.

She can smell him in the stairwell when she gets home from school – he’s just gone out or come back.

What she can smell there, in the denim, faintly oily when she closes her eyes and touches it, rocking back and forth in the chair whilst eating a sandwich after school, poised at the window, her eyeballs quivering behind her eyelids: the oil of his skin has mixed with the fabric of his jacket, and the fabric has absorbed every scent, a touch of cold too, the fabric feels cold, and a secret; his eyes twinkle with a secret.

His hair parts in the middle and falls to both sides, a line down the middle of his head, and she takes a comb to her own hair in front of the mirror, draws a line down her scalp, and the hair falls to both sides, it’s not pretty, she can see that, her scalp is white, her black hair wavy, while his golden, honeyed locks are created for a middle parting, a parting slap bang in the middle of his head, separating the two parts of him.

His eyes stare, brown and grey and green within them. Cat’s eyes.

His cheekbones seem to pop out of his face, and he’s never seen without with a handsome smile. Like one of those people in the magazines, the kind they put on the front cover, he could be one of those people that other people take pictures of. The air around his head shimmers, and he sees the glances that others give him, he walks around like a film star, strolling along, long strides, in a slow-motion film. A song in his ears. Dancing over, pirouetting like a film star in a nightclub, headphones on, Walkman in his pocket. A woman’s voice from afar, feelings that flash out into the world around him, he understands, returns them with a dance along the pavement.

She spies on him, the old-fashioned way. Hat and glasses. Just as it should be. Homemade walkie talkie. Nobody at the receiving end, but just saying *over*, *over and out*, it’s brilliant. *SOS*.

He catches sight of her out of the corner of his eye, flashes a crooked smile, leaves her be, it makes him tingle too.

Showered in glitter. Yellow body. Like plasticine.

He scowls, sees her shadow, like a cunning, contented cat on a night-time prowl. If only he could turn around quickly, catch sight of her, gaze at her, would he be angry then?

A momentary vacuum, but then he’d throw his cigarette to the ground, stamp on it – run after her and pick her up like a proper princess before placing her down on the sofa, drawing the curtains, pulling the blanket over them and kissing her long and hard, over and over again for hours at a time. Like people do on television and in films.

He whispers: we were standing on the beach. Do you remember the sun, like a great, golden giant on the horizon?

They run away there, to the beach. The beach becomes their home, a tiny cabin hidden in the long grass, the moonlight draws letters in the water at night, two horses stand in their stable, waiting.

Those kisses, a downy upper lip, not sharp, not spiky, but filled with promise – a prelude to manhood.

Breathing through noses and rain on the window, every drop like a tiny, tender message.

He whispers something to her. His breath leaves the faintest of damp patches on her cheek.

After a while they undress, then lie there naked and entwined.

Their abrasions touch, they rub them up against one another.

Aches and fever that cling to one another, a sound that gleams, metal, and a blue feeling like blood in your mouth, algae. But not *that thing you know*, not yet – the fantasy doesn’t extend that far.

Their abrasions melt together as one. Scabs fall away. The blood gathers as if to an enormous sorcerer. A creature with an enormous beating heart that swells inside its chest.

Everyone is looking for us, but no one can find us.

They whisper, she can’t hear what they’re saying, another language, but deep inside she understands it, deep within her, deep within her, he looks at her and says: *ach lak, nech me ha, so lei. lai keh me flaschp kla. ach mech lochk*.

The people are alone. But we’re here now. Nobody can catch us here. Not alone.

The kiss…

Cheeks like wax, so soft.

Cheeks like lips, kiss with every movement of their bodies, all the way to their fingertips, like tiny butterflies that lightly perch on a flower dusted with pollen, on the tip of my nose, like a kitten drinking its mother’s milk. And those lips, mouth half-open, lips grazing one another, breath like honey, hot like fever. All the way down to the deepest of nerves, fizzing at her tailbone. She kisses that way until she falls asleep.

4.

Winter keeps him from her, she doesn’t see him as often then, and spying isn’t the same – the darkness outside, and the light from within, they make her all too easy to spot at the window. It’s not easy sneaking around street corners, slinking around like a ninja, not when you’re wearing great heavy snow boots and a rustling coat. Every single step is so loud; broadcast by the snow. Plus, her winter gear reminds her that’s she’s only little. So many lumpy layers of clothing.

One evening she builds a snow cave in the back yard, and a snow lantern with a flare inside, sits inside the snow cave and waits, hears the gate as it clangs shut, his footsteps, he stops, tries lighting a cigarette, can’t do it, swears, and his swearing tickles her, her laughter ripples through the air. She holds it back with a gloved hand. He hears her. Comes closer. She’s wearing a hat with a pompom. Don’t look in. Don’t look at me. She closes her eyes.

‘Hey. Is that you in there?’

She turns around. Opens her eyes. Glances over her shoulder until she can only just see him. He’s not wearing a hat. His nose is red.

He’s wearing a leather jacket. A jumper with a high neck. His hair falls on both sides of his face. His lips are quite big. Red. He looks alert. Takes a drag of his cigarette with fingers frozen stiff and out flood one hundred thousand good spirits – a delightful smell fills the cave. Life! He laughs. Gasps. Nods. Is he going to come inside? Are they going to sit there together? They could tell each other stories, ghost stories, maybe? Stories about their dreams.

‘Well, have fun in your little cave.’

She wants to smile, but the skin of her face feels stiff. Her voice is hidden, her skin hardens, it forms a shell, pulls itself taut, locks her up inside, and down in her stomach there is a snail, curled up in there like a ball. She doesn’t look at him. Sits deep inside the cave with her back to him, her naked body underneath all of her clothes glowing, her skin prickling, sensitive.

Where is he going? she wants to ask, do you want to come in? she might have said. Now he’s gone, he’s sauntered off, danced off into the distance. The snow is sticky beneath his leather soles. She crawls out of the cave and seals it up, fistful after fistful of fresh snow, seals the smell inside, and the light burns orange, dim, the flame flickers.

She goes inside. Opens the door. The snow sticks to her gloves in clumps, the wool is wet. When she sees herself in the bathroom mirror, her cheeks are red, her hands cold against her body.

Mum combs her hair. Her fingers are so grown-up – firm. They’ve done so many things, they’ve sown, washed up, buttoned things, dried tears. She smiles at Spring in the mirror. Maybe they do look alike. Spring looks like her, she can see it.

‘You’re so beautiful, Spring. You’re a beautiful girl.’

5.

It’s Christmas time. Spring and her parents are over at the neighbours’ for some *julegrøt*, and *they’re* coming – the prince and his mother. They’re popping in, the neighbour says, popping in a little later on, go ahead and help yourselves. She can’t face it, she’ll wait until they arrive, and now they’re here, the doorbell goes. But *how*, how can she possibly eat in his company?

She’s worn her prettiest dress, purple and shiny – and a shawl, like the nuns wear, to show that she’s saving herself.

They come inside. Hot tea with sugar like a breeze on her face. They sit down, he sits there, just there, right across from her. Her voice is *a curled-up snail*, hidden deep inside her. Her skin hardens, it forms a shell, a casing of blue metal. It starts at the tailbone, spreading like a tidal wave, turning to ice with every sweeping swirl. Her body is deaf. Like something that won’t budge, something that isn’t hers at all.

He nods at her. A wide smile. He has his mother’s eyes. They twinkle. They look at one another. He looks her in the eye…

Then the clatter of cutlery against porcelain. They’re eating. She has to eat too, it would be strange not to, it wouldn’t go unnoticed, questions would be asked. She wants to clear her throat, to say something everyone might laugh at, but there is no sound.

She begins at the edge, making tiny inroads into the porridge, tiny spoonfuls that can be gulped straight down without any chewing, without any need to move her mouth. Not a sound should be heard, she tries her best to break it down in an appetising manner, luckily the consistency is firm, but not a sound must be heard from her mouth. The opposite is true for Mum, she talks incessantly, and all with her mouth full of food. Dad strokes her back. She smiles at him. Laughs and chats – sipping on cordial, speaking quickly, and a grain of rice sticks to the lipstick mark she’s left on the glass. Her voice is like a churning waterfall, not freezing over in the winter but just churning on and on.

She looks at him again, but he’s looking down, eating with concentration, his elbows on the table. Then his lips are sealed, he furrows his brow, brings a hand to his mouth and pulls something out.

‘I got the lucky almond. Look, I got the lucky almond!’

He laughs, hiccups, his voice curls up. His mum smiles, eyes sparkling, chuckling quietly, the same curl in her voice. Lilac.

She smells him, he laughs, she smells him, she shuffles, pushes herself further back into her chair, she wants to bury her face in his jumper. To rub up against him, hold his… No. Can’t go there, nauseating.

On her way out into the narrow hallway, just as they’re ready to leave, to put their shoes on, their bodies brush up against each other for a moment. The smell, like a part of her that she’s lost, like the scent of something all too familiar. A perfume all of its own. Steaming hot tea with sugar. Cigarette smoke.

6.

Sundays. A state of being. Tomorrow is Monday.

Everything takes on a different hue on Sundays – luminescent. Nauseating.

Sundays. You’re supposed to rest on Sundays, but I don’t think people ever really do.

Cold zip rubbing against her chin, wet arms, wet wool, heavy snow. The sting of juice from peeling oranges.

Is there a country out there where it’s dry and warm every day of the year? With just Fridays and Saturdays, maybe Thursdays too, because Thursday is the day before Friday, and that’s always so nice to look forward to.

7.

Dripping spring. Aching eyes. Most days when she comes home from school there’s nobody at home. The sun shines in through the window, and the dust whirls in the rays of light.

She lathers chocolate spread on a few slices of bread – her sugar cravings are insatiable. She sits by the window to spy.

The prince could appear at any time. She sits at the windowsill, under the curtains, with her hat and her glasses. Rocks back and forth. Eats, but it tingles and burns – no room for food. She puts the plate on the kitchen table and returns to the windowsill.

It’s him.

She always catches sight of him straight away, senses him coming long before he appears around the corner of the block. Now he’s here, she can hear his voice as if underwater, his footsteps – sauntering along, but has he brought someone home with him? She can hear another voice, a girl’s voice. A friend, maybe… now they’re close, she can see them.

They’re holding hands.

They’re chatting and laughing. He’s got a cigarette in one hand. He brings it to her lips and the girl takes a drag before exhaling, smoke billowing in his face. He brings the cigarette to his mouth, takes a drag, breathes smoke back at her.

The girl throws her head back. She walks backwards, stares into his eyes. They both look one another in the eye. She steps back slowly, he follows her, she presses herself up against the wall of the building. He follows her. Leans over her, one arm pushing against the wall. As close as can be. As close as can be to her face.

He’s wearing his leather jacket. He moves his head slowly, cranes his neck, leans in her direction. He kisses her.

The girl smiles and laughs. Giggles.

They both laugh.

He laughs. Gasps.

His hands are on her hips.

They smoke and kiss, laugh, **his hands on her hips**.

Spring gets up out of her chair, her body is a remote-controlled doll.

She leaves through the kitchen door, goes out onto the steps, the stone is cold, not yet warmed through. She doesn’t pull on her shoes. She can feel the gravel under what’s left of the snow, it makes a sound if she takes a wrong step, but she is a cat now, sneaking around the corner into the yard, body pressed up against the wall, listening.

Soft voices. She closes her eyes.

They’re kissing. The sounds. Smacking noises. Like a child drinking its mother’s milk. Tongues rolling round and round inside mouths. Plasticine.

‘What are you up to, eh? Spying?’

If I stand completely still. If I don’t move an inch, then nobody can see me. My glasses and hat make me invisible.

‘No. I haven’t got time for that.’

‘Then why are you standing there?’

The girl laughs. Spring shrugs. Looks at the prince.

He’s looking at Spring, he’s not looking at the girl.

He looks at me. He looks me in the eye.

The girl *crouches down*, says:

‘What’s your name, then?’

The trees all freeze up. Water turns to ice.

Spring turns around. Drags a hand along the wall in the yard, it scrapes her skin. The wall is cold. Goes inside, through the kitchen, out into the hall, opens the front door, goes into the stairwell.

Every step rings like an echo through her body.

She goes to the floor above her own, where his Mum might be at home.

She knocks, her heartbeat loud in her ears.

His mother opens up. He has her eyes. Stars in them, like something she wants to own, to have, to devour.

‘Just so you know, he’s smoking and snogging a girl outside.’

‘Oh, is he now? Well that’s no good. But it’s not very nice to tell tales, Spring. You shouldn’t tell tales.’

I’m a tiny insect.

‘It’s not very nice to tell tales.’

She’s smiling, she’s not angry, a kind smile, it hurts more than being told off.

It’s not very nice to tell tales. Spring knows that.

‘Sorry.’

A trapdoor opens up and something heavy and hard drops down into the depths.

Her body shakes in the evening. She clasps her hands together.

Mum and Dad, as if underwater:

Do you understand, my girl?

Do you understand what’s happened?

As if underwater.

He’s dead?

He’s dead.

He’s dead.

Yesterday he was alive. She could hear him in his room. Yesterday was Saturday.