

No Milk Today

by Jayalalita

The first entry in the diary of an unextraordinary woman living on Spinner's End.

Sun

Chapter 1 of 2

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The sun came out for a while today, and I walked out to stand by the water for a spell and to pretend the river was a pretty one, and the bank a grassy one, and the sun a constant one, and the place somewhere unnamed and far away.

The river may be brown and mucky, and have a smell, and be unable to sustain life above the basest slime, but if I squint tightly and tilt my head just so, I can still play this make-believe, as I did as a little girl, and all that's left are the sparkles of sunlight on the water, and my dream can make the river blue and pure and teeming with fish and irrigating an atmosphere of adventure.

Though even as a girl, I had the sense to know adventure for someone like me was limited to reading books and squinting at a dirty river. So now that I'm grown, I visit the library weekly and try to catch a moment to trick the old river into sparkling on a sunny day. When I remember that it can sparkle, anyway. It's one of those things that become easier to forget, which must say something about how adventurous an adult I have come to be.

Youth

Chapter 2 of 2

Prospects are dim on Spinner's End...

I am beginning to grow concerned that I am older than I think I am. Twenty-six is not so old in the scheme of things, but I've reached it less eventfully than I would have liked. Too much of me still feels like a stunted teenager, plagued with repressed and retarded emotions, yearnings, and understanding. I still feel more or less like a silly little fool, and suspect that those who put on that they have "wised up" into sensible, mature adults are faking it.

I worry though, because I can really feel my tea. As in, it wakes me up, where I once I drank it just as a beverage. I didn't care for the stuff as a child oo bitter, unless I added a ridiculous amount of sugar ut I took up drinking it in my early teens as a piddly form of pretence (to accompany my books and inflating vocabulary and fancied literary superiority). I would have taken to smoking a pipe and growing a beard to stroke if I could have, but a cup (or mug, rather, as that was the dish available) of tea alongside my books on my little desk in my room made the act seem more complete, a nice prop. But now I need that tea, books or not, and slog through the afternoon with a few cups throughout the day. The only caffeine that used to affect me was that in coffee, which made me feel ill and dizzy. Now I'm old enough I need stimulation.

Poor choice of words. Or word, rather.

In this age of liberated womanhood, the term 'spinster' is not only obsolete, but politically incorrect, socially insensitive, and economically irrelevant. After all, a woman may marry at any age she chooses, or remain thus unfettered, or keep a mate without legal connection, or have many loves, or have none at all, and define her life with something other than sex, children, servitude, morality, and keeping house. But I am a classic spinster, nonetheless. It might still be remedied, of course, not that it's my primary goal (have I a primary goal?), but I don't see that the odds are in my favour.

Pertaining to life in general, I don't suppose the odds are in my favour. Quality (though my complaints are silly, childish, spoilt, when compared to the world at large) nor longevity wise. My mother died of cancer ten years ago, and my father is dying of it now. My elder brother and sister are gone, living normal, moderately successful lives, with normal, moderately successful jobs and families. And I am the last little pig left, the one with no other prospects but to nurse our father (the house *is* made of brick, though, if that counts for anything for the youngest pig). He will be gone soon (sounds insensitive, I know, but I've had a lot of sensitivity wrung out of me), leaving behind as his legacy a house on Spinner's End that will go down with the rest of the block anyway, a few chipped and tea-stained mugs, a mattress with nothing hidden under it, and ill-fortuned genetics on both ends for his descendants to contend with. Not even any family photos hose were all burned by Father after one of those great teeth-clenchers between he and my brother some years ago.

I didn't care for the bitter taste of tea as a child because all of us in our house already drank from a bitter enough cup. See? Another charmingly adolescent sentiment. Nothing that absurd would occur to a rational, seriously occupied adult mind.

Oh, and I currently work in a fish-and-chip shop. Who would want to wed and bed someone who smells perpetually of grease and potatoes?