



The good weather holds. It's almost like June, when we would get out our sundresses and our sandals and go for an ice cream cone. There are three new bodies on the wall. One is a priest, still wearing the black cassock. That's been put on him, for the trial, even though they gave up wearing those years ago, when the sect wars first began; cassocks made them too conspicuous. The two others have purple placards hung around their necks: Gender Treachery. Their bodies still wear the Guardian uniforms. Caught together, they must have been, but where? A barracks, a shower? It's hard to say. The snowman with the red smile is gone.

"We should go back," I say to Ofgen. I'm always the one to say this. Sometimes I think that if I didn't say it, she would stay here forever. But is she mourning or gloating? I still can't tell. Without a word she moves, as if she's voice-activated, as if she's on little pink wheels, as if she's on top of a music box. I resent the grace of hers. I resent her meek head, bowed as if onto a heavy wind. But there is no wind.

We leave the wall, walk back the way we came in the warm sun.

"It's a beautiful May day," Ofgen says. I feel rather than see her head turn towards me, waiting for a reply.

"Yes," I say. "Praise be," I add as an afterthought. Mayday used to be a distress signal, a long time ago, in one of those wars we studied in high school. I kept getting them mixed up, but you could tell them apart by the airplanes if you paid attention. It was Luke who told me about mayday, though. Mayday, mayday, for pilots whose planes had been hit, and ships — was it ships too? — at sea. Maybe it was SOS for ships. I wish I could look it up. And it was something from Beethoven, for the beginning of the victory, in one of those wars.

Do you know what it came from? said Luke. Mayday? No, I said. It's a strange word to use for that, isn't it?

Newspapers and coffee, on Sunday mornings, before she was born. There were still newspapers, then. We used to read them in bed.

It's French, he said. From m'aidez. Help me.

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