

A song about squirrels

Hoping her mother can see her excitement. Congratulate her. Take her out for ice cream. But her mother notices nothing, chatting with two other mothers on the bench willfully ignoring Glynnis, knowing there is nothing more but dirt and flakes of dried leaves on her daughter's hands.

At that moment Corbin invisibly walks up behind Glynnis. He sees the squirrel wiggling around her hand like a larva and smiles at it. Glynnis calls to her mother again; unaware her invisible friend is behind her admiring another imaginary creature.

“Mommy, look in my hand!” Glynnis screams.

“Glynnis, Mommy’s talking to Cheryl, OK? Please wait,” her mother says.

“But I have a—”

“Glynnis! Mommy said wait,” she chides.

Frustrated, Glynnis holds her breath and exhales resentfully. Her mother keeps nodding at Cheryl and waves Glynnis away in faux annoyance. Telling Cheryl how little sleep she’s gotten from worrying about Glynnis’ overactive imagination, like it’s a disease she has.

Glynnis exhales and then inhales deeply holding her breath again, this time for almost thirty seconds. Her face pulses into color, sort of a burgundy. Corbin worries she might faint. He walks beside her and touches her hand. Glynnis feels it and gasps, coughing spittle from her fox-like lips. She breathes-in hard through her nose and inhales Corbin instead. Her mother yells pipe down, but Glynnis can’t help but cough in icy pain. She covers her mouth, like the way her mother taught her, and coughs onto the baby squirrel.

Glynnis Jackson’s hair is in two pigtails that seem to curl forever behind her ears. A spring breeze dangles them eyeward, obstructing her view. It’s Corbin for sure, her imaginary friend. He always flips her hair. Unfazed she searches and digs with her small scoopful-of-hands. Glynnis isn’t keen on playing with other children, her rich mother’s friends’ children. Right now she isn’t even keen on playing with Corbin. She’s too preoccupied unearthing a burrow covered by branches and tufts of grass. She hears peeps from inside. Her smile reaches the apex of her turquoise eyes. She dives her hand into the burrow and removes a small pink glop. It’s a baby squirrel. Eyes shut and lidless with tiny blue follicles beginning to sprout around them. It squirms between her fingers unaware of what is happening.

Glynnis yells at her mother to come and look at what she found. She holds it high in her hand and waves it around.

“Corbin! You scared me!” Glynnis catches her breath. The squirrel opens its mouth as if chewing watermelon gum, releases a tiny bubble of air and dies in Glynnis’ young, steady hand. She drops it in a panic onto the grass and looks at her hand, smells it. It smells different—different from cookies and cinnamon and Play-Doh—like dirt and honeydew. A smell that makes her lungs warm. She kneels down and cautiously sniffs the dead squirrel, afraid to touch it.

“You killed it.” Glynnis says in a quavering voice.

“I did.” She hears Corbin say.

Glynnis’ sad little eyes well up with confounding tears and close. She sobs, not knowing what to do.

“Touch it,” Corbin whispers.

She looks at her friend. He is transparent, with an indigo mist outlining his thin radiant body. She furrows her brow to the cliffs of her head and extends her finger to the squirrel to pet its raw belly.

“Touch it again. Again.” Glynnis hears Corbin call from behind a tree. He knows Glynnis. He knows about her endearing precociousness. About the way she wistfully looks at clouds and how she skips on cracked sidewalks. He knows the second she touches the squirrel it will come alive.

When she does, the squirrel twitches and begins to squirm.

“I knew it! I knew it!” Corbin laughs and saunters over to her.

Its mouth opens again and lets out a high-pitched whimper and rolls over in Glynnis’ palm. She remorsefully and thankfully puts it back in its burrow and runs to her mother.

“Mommy, mommy I saved a squirrel’s life!” She calls, running to the bench.

“That’s great sweetheart.” Glynnis’ mother humors her lifelessly and turns back to Cheryl.

“Can we go for ice cream later?” Glynnis asks.

“We’ll see, dear. Maybe.”

Glynnis sits down beside the park bench and plays with the cool grass, the hair on the back of a gorilla. Next to her mother she sings a song about squirrels.