

Marshall Lee learned to crawl early, for years people often joked that if no one kept an eye on him he would simply float away. His mother would quickly strike the idea down, “He knows that it is best if he stays alongside his mother.” and Marshall giggled a bit, seeing as he hadn’t learnt what else to do.

But his mother was wrong about Marshall Lee more often than she was right and this was one of those occasions. Seven year old Marshall wanted to go to the park on a Wednesday and rather than miss two and a half meetings just to chase a child around seemed frivolous. Time is money and that money kept a roof over their heads, the pool clean, the shelves dusted, and the Nanny working. Which is exactly how we got here: Marshall Lee at the park with his nanny holding his hand a little too tight and drowning on and on about something or other that didn’t seem to really matter to either of them.

“Why couldn’t my mom come?” Marshall Lee inquired.

“Because,” his nanny replies, “She has many important meetings to attend to today.”

“Yeah, but WHY–” Marshall started up again.

“Hold on.” the nanny interrupted.

Marshall had really stopped paying attention about fifteen seconds after that, the nanny and whoever she was on the phones with were clearly yelling in circles around each other about locations, parks, and spying. Nothing that could really hold his attention—not in the way this did.

A bright, strong noise was coming from further into the park. A jazzy little tune of sorts, most likely at the center, and he had no time to waste. If Marshall Lee wanted to see the artist performing the song, he really had to hurry.

Without looking back Marshall ran up the path, probably making it there in record time, he mused to himself, and he only tripped twice! Rounding the corner, the music became clearer and there it was; a lone ice cream station’s radio and a woman behind the counter humming along. The woman was tall and sharp all while having a gentle regalness to her. That regalness however couldn’t hide the way her toes tapped and her head swayed with the jazzy song playing on her radio.

“I like your song.” Marshall announced to the woman behind the counter.

She jumped back a bit before looking down at Marshall, chin resting on the cart in order to fully see her.

“Thank you,” she replied, “A good tune often helps those get through the day. What’s your name, kid?”

“I’m Marshall, Marshall Lee!” He reaches his hand over for her to shake.

“I am the Ice Queen, Simone Petrikov– you know what, you can just call me Simone. Nice to meet you Marshall, Marshall Lee.” She answers as he shakes his hand. “You’re a bit young to be hanging out by yourself, you got a parent or someone watching you?”

Marshall’s face contorts as his nail strummed along the side of the cart. “I wanted to hang out with my mom today but she just did what she always does and made me hang out with the nanny so she can do silly work gunk but I don’t want to hang out with my Nanny!” He slumped down to the side of the walkway next to the cart, chin in his hands, and sat there for a second, allowing

the music to fill the park again but this time he wasn't able to hear it; his thoughts overpowering its calming melody. Maybe he just wasn't worth the effort.

"Well," The Ice Queen broke the silence as she sat down next to him, "I think you're a pretty cool kid." She gently tapped him on the shoulder. As he looked over he saw that she was holding a red popsicle. "I think you need this more than I do right now." a small gentle smile stretched across her face as he took the popsicle from her. Cherry, his favorite.

From there they talked about just anything; Marshall talked about any cool songs he heard on the radio or otherwise, Simone talked about strange and odd antiques that she's been keeping her eye on, he told her the joke on the popsicle. ("What do you call a sleeping cow?" "Their name, I would hope!" "No! A bulldozer!" "Ah! Yes, that would fit better wouldn't it?" "you're so silly, Simone." "Yeah, I suppose so.") Soon, much to his disappointment, his nanny found him, scolding him for running off and told him that he was expected back home. It wasn't until after Marshall said his goodbyes he realized that he never said thank you for the popsicle. Yet with his nannies grip tighter and the center of the park already out of view, it was too late. At least it gave him another reason to come back.

And so he did, Marshall Lee always went back to that park whenever he could and talked to Simone but it isn't until he is 16 that he is able to properly thank her.

A cool summer night graces the day. The day he is going to be performing live for the first time. If you were to ask Marshall Lee if he was nervous he would have laughed in your face. That didn't stop his panicked thoughts; what if they don't like it, what if they hate me, what if everything falls apart just like everyone always said it would, what if mom was right?

"You should have seen what I had to do to get backstage!" Simone. Sweet Simone. Still as regal as the day he first saw her. More recently, however, she's welcomed age to her face and hands with much grace. The gray-white streaks in her hair coming down from her ponytail as if they were icicles. Without even thinking Marshall whipped around and embraced her.

"Wowzers! Guess you needed this more than I initially thought!" She jests. Marshall pulled back to ask what she meant only to be met with a popsicle, cherry, his favorite. He takes it and holds it like it's the most precious thing in the world. It most certainly feels like it is right now.

"I know you gotta be on stage soon but I figured after the show I could just get you another."

"Thanks, you know I really needed—Wait" Marshall's brain feels like it's overheating. "Are you staying for the show?" he asked. It felt silly to ask, this certainly wasn't the music she usually heard her humming or playing during work, why would she?

"Are you kidding me?" she softly yelled, interrupting his spiraling. "I've heard you talking about this concert every time you've come to the park for like, the past week and a half, of course I'm staying! This is a big deal!" Her face falls. "But not like, too big! Don't even stress you'll be fine, I mean of course you'll be fine! Why wouldn't you be fine!" His hearty laugh intervenes her rambles, Marshall just can't help it. "This might be the sweetest thing anyone has

ever done for me—literally and figuratively.” He smiles to himself. His popsicle is half melted and creating quite the puddle on the floor, neither of them couldn’t care less. “I can never thank you enough for being there for me.”

“Ah, sure you can! Just play hard and enjoy this and I think that makes us about even.” another one of her warm smiles fills the space.

“MARSHALL LEE TO THE STAGE. MARSHALL LEE TO THE STAGE.” the stage monitor crackles before fizzling out.

“Oh Glob, that right, I better get going.” Marshall races around to get all his stuff in order before stumbling out of the door. Simone quickly followed behind. When they reached their fork in the path, the stage and the crowd, Marshall quickly shouted out for Simone.

“What do you think a kite's favorite type of instrument is?” he calls out. She quickly thinks.

“I think they might like a bit of brass, a nice saxophone might get them up and ready!”
“HA! The strings!”

“Ahh yes, I see now.” Simone retorts back as she nods, understanding. “Break a leg, Kid. I mean—”

“I know what you mean, I won't actually break any limbs... Thanks, for the popsicle.”

“...Thanks for being such a great kid.” And just like that it was like they were back at the park, not a care in the world. As Marshall Lee came on to the stage—the light blinding him giving blurs of browns, blacks, reds, and pink, the sounds of chatter, amps, and tuning filling his ears, as shitty alcohol and stale pretzels fill his nose— he knew that everything would be alright, even if they hated him he would always have someone in his corner.

There weren’t many times in Marshall Lee’s life where he felt like there was an outside force, pulling and pushing the very universe to its whims. Yet something deep in his gut zone knew the familiarity that he felt that one fateful day couldn’t have been accidental —not even close— they were embedded together, intertwined and woven like a good quilt. She will always have his back just as he will always have hers.

Even as they found less and less time to talk, each knew that they could be separated for a thousand years and still pick up right where they left off and that is worth more than anything is the universe. In any universe. In every universe.