

The Salmon Trader is Tired of Pink

The letterbox is an abandoned cemetery of relations left behind when they came to this new country. Their mail dried after some time; so did the office mail and bills, once regularly shoved into it. None since Ramboodin was bit by, what his wife calls, the bug. The frame of the door leading from the gates creaks, needs oil, but there's only Szu and she has only two hands. The jars on the kitchen shelves gawk—desperate beggars—but there's no money to buy pulses or sugar, and Aimee knows that. Food is precious. Neither Ramboodin, wherever he toils, nor Szu and Aimee, complain.

Everything he can find, Ramboodin believes, is precious. Everything he can't is also precious. Ramboodin has a hard time acknowledging that everything can't possibly be precious, even if the bug in his head tells him so. Szu laments it's because of the bug—miserable bug of an idea. The bug put tiny wheels below his soles, whirring bees in his head. Ramboodin can't sit still ever since. He never went to trade at the docks where the fisherman brought boatloads of salmon ashore after he got that crazy idea, now doggedly leaves for unknown destinations without notice. Szu is let in on only one thing about him: he's out “exploring.”

Ramboodin simply won't consider things he already owns, things and people that are moving away from him at galactic speeds. For he doesn't know what else to do. Like now. Except watch water, salmon-hued, drip down the black rockface he's crouching beside, collecting in the bowl it has created on the gravel below. In time, they firm up, crystallize with sharp edges, turn into sparkling “water” diamonds. Discovery he'll announce to the world when he gets home. He dreams of the euphoria it will create.

The “water” diamonds begin to flow in a slow, sloth stream towards the far end of the cavern. Narrow beam of light from the cornice on the cave roof hits the glittery brook, lighting up interiors in an ethereal light.

Back from the cavern, sitting on a damp mossy rock, Ramboodin opens his log book and begins to scribble. In between digging out tuber for

lunch and trapping the odd blind bat, Ramboodin chronicles his unlikely survival and the strange mystique of the “water” diamonds.

He'll be home soon, Szu tells her daughter Aimee. Aimee takes a moment to reflect on her father, whom she hasn't met in many months, and only about eight times since she was born. She puts the lid on the jar filled with rare tangerine-and-beige pearls, one of her father's “precious” things, and leaves for school.

Later, Szu takes a couple of pearls, examines them in sunlight. Ramboodin had said the pearls, from a secret place where he used to go fishing for salmons, would fetch a fortune. Then she wouldn't need to work anymore...

One last time?

Szu had nodded. The day was his birthday, and both had had a little too much indulgence.

He'd gone on another of his trips. To find things no one believed existed.

Szu returns the pearls to the jar. Unbraids her hair. Goes shopping for baby tomatoes—pulpy, blood-red, and weird ocular-shaped scented candles to burn by the bedside. They must save money. She turns away from the confectionery and pedals her cycle back home.

At night, she waits for Ramboodin to return from the go-beyond world, in time for the holidays. Sits by the glow of the pearls in the jar, doesn't turn on lights. Everything, she knows, is precious.

In his broken campervan, twenty-hundred miles from civilization, Ramboodin hears wolves howl. The milky-white stream just beyond the tree-line gurgles. Freeze is still some weeks away. He's not been gathering nuts and roots for ten days, his toe is rotting, sprain on the other leg. He's due home. If only he could.

At night, Ramboodin dreams of a warm fire, and Christmas carols, and a nice breakfast, and his family.

He wakes up to feathery beings strolling around him, whispering amongst themselves. Will they cradle him in their arms, take him away, in one swift stroke?

Mornings melt into darkness. Ramboodin loses count, and consciousness.

The water diamonds sparkle. There's a silvery luminescence in the corner, lighting up things Ramboodin has hoarded. Today's precious cargo, tomorrow's junk.

Szu has been forgetful. She's losing it very fast. Aimee finds Szu's unused anti-depressant strips while she'd been foraging the cabinet. She'll settle for something she wasn't looking for, and open a tin of salted dried fish.

Szu will see herself with her husband, honeymooning in Cyprus, the balcony overlooking the bay, the kiss under the stars.

Tonight, she and Szu will put up the Christmas tree from last year, or was it the year before that, kept for so long Aimee can't tell, but she'll decorate it with strips of used foil paper, some lights and little Santa dolls.

They'll tell visiting neighbors Ramboodin is away in the north. On another of his expeditions.

Aimee will insist on going out with friends. Szu will hear the car full of happy teenagers swish away.

She'll pace the front yard afterward, observe steadily falling snowflakes, this year like the last. The dark wholesomeness will canopy her. She'll imagine Ramboodin waving to her when a meteorite streaks across the sky and suddenly dies.

In time, she'll forget Ramboodin is missing for years and believe it's not the snowflakes, but she, who's the precious one falling into a spectacular flaky abyss.