

Megumi Mandish

WRIT 350

Professor Lampe

2 March, 2023

Impossible Things

The White Queen of Wonderland tells me I should believe six impossible things before breakfast, to practice believing for half an hour every day. As Alice, it's an easy task. I dream of wizards casting spells and elves living in the trees. I dream of shadows coming to life, dancing amongst little fireflies, and fae-folk watching humans pass by, hidden by flowers and blades of grass as they go about their own lives. I dream of the kraken slumbering in the depths below, unbothered by the ships sailing over it, and of dragons taking to the skies, free to set the clouds alight with fire.

As Alice, it was easy to believe these things. These days, I think about how nice it would be to have nothing to do. Or rather, not nothing, but no social pressure to perform at high levels every day. Next year marks my final year in school, and now more than ever, I feel the weight of reality and responsibility on my shoulders. Soon, I will pass from student to worker, and the rest of my life becomes set in stone before me. The closer I get, the more I grow weary. Time drags his feet, and yet drags them at a pace I can never seem to keep up with, so that I'm stumbling and chasing after him in a vain attempt to tell him to stop.

Instead of the future, my eyes turn towards the simple life, which it seems to me has become one of those impossible things the White Queen speaks about. To live the simple life, to live small and live well as, say, hobbits do in the Shire, or Mei and Satsuki in their new home next to Totoro's forest has become a dream that not only is impossible to accomplish, but even

considered wasteful in today's eyes. The world around us demands success in career, finances, and social life. You are only worth the money you make and the likes you get, and to veer from that trodden path leads to scorn and remarks of 'not living life to the fullest'. I'm told to obey and sit quietly and raise my hand when I'm meant to speak. It's suffocating. I want to scream at all these people in power, 'You have no right to tell me what makes me valuable. You have no right to tell us that money is more valuable than the life in this world.' The trees groan in pain as you fell them. The skies burn from the smoke you choke them with. The earth crumbles under your feet and the oceans rage as they're made to swallow your filth. And through it all, the only thing I am able to do is sit still and seethe in silent rage.

So I sit and imagine life away from life. I look at homes, cottages, farms, smials— they look so nice. Simple. Inviting. I wish I could just run away and live in the woods with my family and my cat and whatever friends I may make on the journey to a new home. I want to drown my imagination in rivers and streams, fly through clouds and wind in the blue sky, run and leap through green forests and fields and purple and blue and red flowers. I think to myself, the hobbit life doesn't sound so bad. I am, as Gandalf would say, only a rather small fellow in a great wide world. It's no bad thing to put your work down and rest, to pick up a good book and a cup of hot chocolate and sit in the sunlit window and read until you have no light left; to garden and grow life from the seed, watching their roots burrow deep as you dig with bare hands to plant them in fresh soil; to make breakfast and pride yourself on how well you cooked an omelette, and to enjoy the fruits of your labor as you listen to the birds sing in the trees.

When I dream of that simple life, I think back on one of my visits to Japan. We stayed in the home of a family friend, which hadn't been occupied in some years. The delight and wonder I felt upon first arriving, seeing little cobwebs in the corners of the entryway, light layerings of

dust on the floor, hearing boards creak and a bat chitter upstairs in the darkness while we blindly groped around for the light switch— it felt a Studio Ghibli movie come to life. I became Satsuki, in awe of the mystery and stories that this old house carried, tucked away amongst the other buildings by the river and the forest serene. We were by no means isolated, but that quiet walk up the hill to a tiny station and taking the train into the city made me feel as though that half hour ride was the bridge between two worlds.

Even in this, reality's long reach pervades this good green world. Money and time, as always, became the issue. We can never earn enough to do all we wanted to. My mother, being a green card holder, isn't allowed to stay in Japan for longer than a year, or else she loses her resident status in the States. It takes a toll on us all, and her the most, that she can't devote the same time with her family as my father's side can. She should be able to care for her mother in the hospital and be there for her, but plane tickets cost thousands and she can't afford to spend more than a couple weeks away out of the country. Next July, my birthday gift from the government is that I lose my dual citizenship. Every year, I lose more and more of my mother's native tongue, and I worry for the future when she and my father grow old. There is little I can do but try to retain it for her sake.

I suppose that's where the idea of simple life keeps me going. No matter how I look at it, I am only one person. Society tries its best to make me feel small. And I do feel small. That's no bad thing. I pick up what vestiges of the simple life that still remain and make the most of it. On sunny days, I sit outside and enjoy the sun, watching people pass by laughing and chatting. When the clouds roll over that blue sky, I sit by the window and listen to the rain patter against the glass, or the thunder rumble overhead as I count the seconds between the lightning and the percussion that follows. I close my eyes as the comforting scent of petrichor wafts through the

air, and watch the worms wriggle up through the surface of the earth. At night, I study the constellations and wonder if someday a sign from across the galaxies will arrive, bearing a message of a people lightyears away.

In these moments, I find myself thinking about home. Not home, like the one I spend my months away from during the school year, but a dream home. I think about living in a cottage or a hobbit house at the edge of the woods. Every time I approach it in my mind, the house changes. It's made of stone bricks and clay and plaster, or wood and stone. The roof is either wood, tile, or thatch. Sometimes it's by a lake, or a stream, or a river. There is a little barn in the back, behind the house. I can never seem to settle on cows, chickens, or goats to keep my two horses company, but I'm open to any option. I have names for all of them already.

Next to it lies a greenhouse. I grow carrots, tomatoes, lettuce, strawberries, blackberries, and herbs. Outside grow three trees, each bearing fruit: lemon, pear, and plum. The back area is surrounded by a stone wall, high but still low enough to see over. Occasionally, there's a well built into the wall, but sometimes it's out front near the dirt and gravel path leading off to a small town that's just a half hour walk away. Other houses are sprinkled about the edge of the woods or in the fields. I don't know who they belong to, but the hazy image of the neighbors I greet makes me feel safe and welcome.

The interior I still struggle to picture. One day it looks like a rustic cottage, and the next it imitates a traditional Japanese style. Another day it looks exactly like Bag End. On Fridays, I imagine everything to mimic the outdoors: green and earthy colors, rich brown wood and mossy-looking carpets and blankets. On weekends, everything is blue and black and gold, constellations and planets embroidered into curtains and drawn onto curved ceilings. Regardless

of what it may look like, every version still invokes that feeling of awe and inspiration and love of life I chase after.

Perhaps it's not a certain dream house I long for, but rather the feeling that comes with it. I miss loving life the way I used to. I miss when I was little, when I was Alice, and I dreamt that the impossible was grand, while thinking life was too simple and meant to be an adventure. While my brother and I fought with foam and pipe swords my father built for us, I pretended to be a Jedi fighting the Sith, or a warrior of Rohan riding into battle against the armies of Mordor. While climbing the plum tree in the side yard of my first childhood home, I thought myself to be a fairy or an elf, living off the fruit of the land and surveying the yard that was my hilly green kingdom. The world of my childhood was full of magic and mystery, ready to be explored to my heart's content.

I wish the world I live in now would let me stay small, live small, enjoy the small things that make up life. I grow tired of grades and deadlines, of business and contracts, of judgment and scrutiny and people looking down at me as I struggle and slip on their mountain towards 'success'. My success is the ability to live small. It's difficult in a world that demands nothing less than everything all the time. But with every bit of effort, I chip away at the mountain and build my home from its pieces, one pebble at a time. If I need rest, then I will rest and enjoy sitting still and admiring the view. There is life in the simple and the small, and it deserves the attention of your busied and tired mind. It is your safe space, your comfort. A way to grow the soul.