

Everett

By: Mariah D.

Gerandy bent over and pulled up her socks, stretching them high to her knee. They were a dingy white, spotted with brown and mud. They were in a completely different state than the socks that had left the house that morning.

Gerandy stood up, tiny little pink shoes steady on the concrete. She squinted her eyes as she looked up, admiring the blue backdrop to the sun. It was a gorgeous day, ripe sunlight filtering through the treetops and into the schoolyard. It was the perfect day for visiting Norman.

All around her her friends were hugging their mothers, smiling and running to the swingset. Red rubber balls bounced into the street and panicked mothers held children back from running after them. Gerandy smiled at their innocence.

She, herself, made a beeline for the bike rack, where a pink 12-speed was locked up to the metal poles safe and sound. It was the only bike in the rack, and it looked rather splendid with its black, treaded tires locked between two rusted poles.

Gerandy reached towards the lock and spun the numbers. The playground was still quite crowded when she finally finished unwinding the cord from between the spokes of the wheels. She stuffed the lock in her backpack and out emerged her helmet, sleek and black in the midday sun. In an instant it was buckled onto her head and she was off, soaring through the gate and down the sidewalk and turning left onto the trail that was a shortcut to the highway.

Gerandy had a thin, wiry body. She wasn't too tall, but she had strong, pumping legs that could beat even the fifth graders at the 100 meter dash. Right now they pushed onto the pedals of her bike with a steady rhythm. Left, right, left, right, left, right. Not too quickly, her legs worked away.

She climbed a small hill and found herself on the familiar path to the highway. Her mother would never let her bike on the road, so she stayed behind the wooden fence and on the farmers fields. Her bike rarely left tracks, and there were no farm animals, so she wasn't a disturbance.

The horizon was flat ahead as she sped along the dirt, parallel to the highway. The fence ran high to her left, so she couldn't see the cars, but she could hear them roar as they flew by. The sound was deafening.

To her right were long expanses of field, some dirt, some unplowed, and some already sprouting crops. She passed three or four different farms before she saw, in the distance, her destination. There was a small outcrop of trees, small, solitary specks, but as Gerandy approached, they grew into mighty oaks and limp willows.

Soon Gerandy was at the foot of a maple. She let her bike crash to the ground as she leapt forward to greet the still bodies before her.

"Hello everyone!" she called. "I missed you!" Her fingers trembled with excitement as she fumbled to undo her helmet. Her blond hair was windblown, bangs tousled and whole strands torn from her ponytail.

She whipped her body around a few trees and turned to greet Norman. He was her favourite, a tall, lean cherry tree with curled branches and thick, scratchy bark that felt softer than sandpaper, yet rougher than a cat's tongue. He was perfect.

Gerandy brought her eyes to where Norman usually stood, and her body went rigid.

There was only a stump. There were his roots, strong and steady and wise and then there was the beginning of his trunk and then there was nothing, no branches and no birds nest and no leaves and no Norman. There was only a stump, a stump with tree-blood still red on its seat and gutted cherries on the ground, stems torn out and pits littering the grass.

Gerandy stood there for a long time, thoughts and memories and emotions all ripping through her mind at several thousand miles per hour.

“Norman?”

Gerandy tried to sigh, but all she could manage was a whimpered sob. She sat her pink shorts right there on the stump, staining the fabric with sap. Lifting her eyes, she looked out onto the field, rows upon rows of cornstalks pushing through the soil and thriving in the yellow sun. She looked around her, at the other five or six trees standing mighty and proud. She looked at all of the life around her and thought, *why Norman?*

Gerandy’s feet pressed into the ground, the toes of her pink shoes rubbing against the grass and nudging fallen cherries. There were too many to count, splayed across the grass in a haphazard fashion. Some of them were too mutilated for Gerandy to look at without tears welling in her eyes. Some of them only had the stems deattached. And some of them were nothing more than pits, mangled, bloodied pits lying on the ground, a gory reminder of the slaughter that had happen not too long ago.

Gerandy stared straight ahead. Her eyes were hollow, their usual vibrant colour now an empty-oak tree brown. She closed them slowly. *This isn’t happening*, she

thought. *Norman is still alive and I'm sitting on a different tree stump and it's a normal day and I'm about to go home and eat dinner and everything is the way it is supposed to be...*

But when she opened her eyes, there was still tree-blood on her shorts and she was still sitting on the stump that used to be Norman, and there were still cherries littering the grass before her. It wasn't a normal day at all. Gerandy sighed. She blinked several times, then, wiping her tears on the long, beige sleeve of her shirt, stood up.

It took a great deal of effort for her to move her legs at all. Those strong, fierce legs that could beat anybody in a race could barely take her ten steps. She walked around the stump slowly, unsteadily. Her legs trembled.

There. Right in front of her. Amidst the sea of dead, gutted cherries, there was one plump, perfectly intact red-purple cherry with the stem still attached, lying there on the ground between her feet. She stood still for a moment, then picked it up, hesitantly.

Gerandy rolled it around in her palm for countless minutes, staring at the way light reflected off its smooth surface and its flawless shape. She popped it into her mouth, feeling its roundness with her tongue. After another moment, she broke its skin with her teeth and ate it, savouring the sweet taste. This would be the last time she would ever eat one of Norman's cherries.

She spat the pit out into her palm. There it was, a perfectly-good pit, the son of a great tree. It lay in her hand, still, as if waiting for her to set it free.

Instead of letting it fall to the ground, Gerandy bent over and started clawing at the dirt. After a while she had dug a small hole with her tiny fingers, which were now covered with grime. The underside of her nails was a gathering of filth.

Gerandy stared at the ground as she tilted her palm and let the pit roll off of her fingertips. She watched it land in the hole and pushed the dirt back over it, covering the pit completely.

“Goodbye Norman,” Gerandy said quietly. But this wasn’t a goodbye. She looked at the upturned soil and saw, instead of the remnants of Norman, a beautiful, young seed that would one day grow into a strong and wise tree itself.

“Hello,” Gerandy whispered to the seed. “I will take care of you. You will grow to be tall and handsome and in the Spring you will grow lovely pink blossoms and in the summer you will give delicious purple cherries. I will name you Everett.”