



The Green Girl

By Karl O'Neill

In the middle of the night, when nobody was watching, The Green Girl set down her bucket and spade. She climbed down from the stone column she'd been standing on all day, tiptoed across the path, and bent down to slide between the bars of the nearby railings.



She felt the welcoming grass under her bare feet and stood upright again. It was a chilly cloudless night, but she didn't feel the cold. The stars were twinkling down at her as if they were waving. She smiled and waved back. This was her park now, she had it to herself.

Trees surrounded the edges of the park, blocking out the few streetlights, and the houses and other buildings beyond were unseen and silent.



The crescent moon smiled as The Green Girl took her first steps across the grass, her light pinafore dress moving softly in the gentle breeze. She hummed to herself. The hum became a little tune, and her feet began to move to the rhythm of the tune, and she danced. Her arms and her whole body went with the flow of the music that was inside her.

She hopped and skipped and did cartwheels and went round and round until she was almost dizzy, but happy, so happy. She laughed, and then sat down on the grass and stared up at the watching stars.

It was then she noticed, over to her left, peeking out from the side of a chestnut tree, another pair of eyes watching her. It was a squirrel.



“Hi there,” said The Green Girl.

The squirrel didn't reply.

“I thought squirrels usually slept during the night, just like humans.”

“Oh...yes...we do,”

the squirrel said, still looking rather shocked at being spoken to.

“Were you having bad dreams?” she asked.

“No, I just...”

“I hope I didn't wake you up! I'm sorry if I did.”

The squirrel moved round to the front of the tree trunk now.

“No, not at all, it's just...my eyesight isn't so good at night. I'm beginning to see you better now. And you didn't wake me up, I just wasn't sleeping.”

The squirrel stared at her as if still trying to make up his mind about whether she was dangerous or not.

“I wish I could sleep,” The Green Girl said, half to herself.

“You can’t sleep? Really?”

The Green Girl shook her head.

“Well, I’m only a statue. Statues don’t sleep.”

“Oh...”

The squirrel gave a little jump down on to the grass.

“I knew I’d seen you before,” he said, “You’re from just over there.” He pointed to the stone column. “I didn’t think you were real.”

“Well, I’m not sure if I am,” The Green Girl said, after giving it some thought.

“You look real now,” the squirrel said, “And you’re a really good dancer,” he added, hoping that would cheer her up.

“Thanks,” she smiled, “It’s just so great to be able to move about and play. This is the only time I can do it, when there’s no-one around.”

“Except me,” said the squirrel.

“Except you,” she smiled again. “Lovely night, isn’t it?”

The squirrel gave his nose a little rub before replying.

“Yes, it is, it is. But...are you not really cold, in that little dress?”

“I suppose I should be,” The Green Girl said,

“I mean, if I was real. I mean, really real.”

The squirrel seemed to think that made sense.

“And why the colour green?”

he asked, and then felt bad for asking such a personal question.

“Oh, I don’t know,”
said The Green Girl.

“Why are you grey?”

“You know, I don’t know,”
he replied after scratching his head,
“Funny, no-one has ever asked me that.”

“We are what we are,”
The Green Girl said, and the grey squirrel
nodded.

“I wonder if the stars are really white?”

The squirrel automatically looked up at the sky when she asked the question.

After a thought, he said,

“I was told once, by a very clever owl, that the white we see is just light, and that those stars are so, so far away that some of them aren’t there anymore, and we are just seeing their light from a long time ago. It’s only reaching us now.”

Even as he said this, the squirrel wasn’t sure he understood it.

“I can’t get my head around that,”
The Green Girl said.

“No, me neither,” the squirrel
admitted.

“But it doesn’t really matter, does
it? I mean, if there are things we
don’t really understand? And
whether all those stars are there
now, or not, it doesn’t make them
any less beautiful.”

“That’s true,” the squirrel agreed.

They were quiet then for a while, the two of them, as they sat there gazing up at the twinkling stars.

The Green Girl thought to herself how nice it was to have someone to speak to and to sit beside like this. She really didn't know anyone.

Or, if she did, she couldn't remember who they were.

She didn't even know her own name.

She was so glad the squirrel hadn't asked.

She wondered what she would do if he did suddenly ask her?

She would have to make one up. There were lots of names on the column she stood on, perhaps she should use one of those.

Was one of those her name?



“Oh, look!”

the squirrel pointed up at the sky.

“Geese! They’re geese, I’m nearly sure.”

The distant birds flew in an arrow shape
from left to right.

“How lovely!” The Green Girl said.

Then, in a sort of whisper,

“It must be wonderful to fly.”



The squirrel was thinking the same thing.

“You know there are such things as flying squirrels?” he said.

“Oh? Are you a flying squirrel?”

He shook his head and sighed.

“I’m afraid not. Flying squirrels live far far away from here, in some other countries. And, actually, they don’t really fly, not like birds do. They sort of glide through the air from tree to tree. I think so, anyway, I don’t really know, but I know they exist.”

“Come on!”

The Green Girl got to her feet,

“Let’s pretend we’re flying, or gliding, like your squirrel cousins!”

The Green Girl spread out her arms as if they were wings and began to gracefully run in a zigzag motion as her arms changed direction.

The squirrel did his best, but his arms and legs were so small, he could only give little regular hops after her.

“Not...quite...getting...the hang of this...” he muttered to himself.

“I do hope...none of the other...squirrels are watching...”

But despite feeling a little awkward, he was enjoying himself, and he thought his new friend moved really gracefully and looked much happier than when he had seen her standing on her stone column.

She always seemed to have a sad face then.

He wondered why that was.

She had a bucket and spade in her hands when she stood on the column.

That must mean she was going to the seaside. But there was no seaside near here, he thought, as far as he knew anyway.

Very odd.

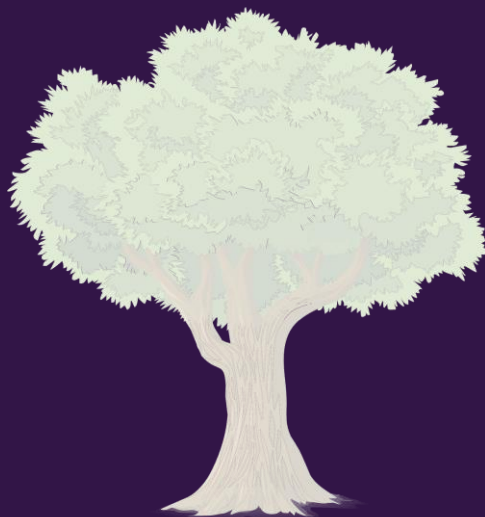
The Green Girl had suddenly stopped.

She was standing just in front of the big cannon.

The squirrel remembered scampering up that cannon many times when he was younger.

He'd even slipped off it once, from the very top.

He had landed on his feet without injury, but he remembered the shock of the fall.



He was about to relate this to The Green Girl but he noticed she wasn't looking at the Cannon but across the railings and path to the big statue opposite, with the soldier on top, holding the bugle to his mouth.

It was some sort of war statue, that's all he knew about it.

The Green Girl seemed to be deep in thought.

"There was music," she said, under her breath.

"Pardon?"

"A band."

She pointed to the statue.

“Soldiers, and a band,” she said.

“A military band. That’s somewhere in my memory. Something about walking behind a band, lots of us, along the streets. I don’t know why, or where we were going...It’s just a little picture in my head.”

She kept staring across at the soldier’s statue, hoping somehow it would help her to remember more.

“Maybe that statue will come to life too,” the squirrel thought, “It seems a night when anything might happen.”

He thought maybe The Green Girl was hoping that would happen, the way she was gazing across, but after a few minutes she bowed her head and turned away.

She seemed sad again.

“I can’t remember anything else, just that moment, music and the band,” she said.

“Must have been a happy occasion, then?” the squirrel said to cheer her up.

“Did you have your bucket and spade with you?”

Suddenly The Green Girl shot him a look.

“Bucket and spade? Bucket and spade! Yes, yes, I did...”



She started to run, running fast, back in the direction where they’d first met, back towards her column.

The squirrel skipped along after her, just about able to keep up. He was glad when she finally stopped at the railings behind her stone column.

The Green Girl grabbed hold of the railings to steady herself.

She could just about see the outline of her bucket on top of the column.

“The seaside,” she said, breathing heavily.

“It’s the seaside...we were going to the seaside...”

She was smiling, like she’d reached the top of some hill or mountain and was able to look over the other side.

Except, she couldn’t.

She couldn’t see anything.

“That’s all...that’s all I can....”

The squirrel could see the disappointment in her face.





“But that’s great you remembered,”
he said,

- “Well done! It was a happy day, a trip to the seaside, with the band playing and everything. A summer’s day, a warm day, wearing your summer dress. I bet it was fun! I’ve never been to the seaside myself.”

The Green Girl shook her head.

“I don’t know,” she said, “I don’t know if I’ve ever been either.”

“Oh, I’m sure it will all come back to you in time,” the squirrel said. “Just like me. Sometimes I forget where I might have hidden some food – you know, nuts or acorns or something – and I’ll be in all sorts of a tizzy trying to remember where I’ve stored them. But it always comes back to me, usually when I’ve calmed down a bit.

And, look, you hardly remembered anything when I first met you, but since then you’ve managed to recall a military band playing music as you were going along the streets on your way to the seaside with your bucket and spade.

I should think that’s enough remembering for one night!”



The Green Girl couldn't help but smile at her new friend's cheerfulness.

"Maybe it's because you're here that I've been able to remember. You are very easy to talk to, and I'm not used to talking to anyone."

If the squirrel could have blushed, he'd have blushed at that compliment.

"That's very nice of you to say so," he managed to reply. "I've enjoyed our little meeting, though really I should be getting back to my bed. For my beauty sleep," he added with a grin and a rub of his nose.





“Where do you sleep?” asked The Green Girl.

“Oh, just over there in that chestnut tree,” he pointed, “For tonight, anyway. Tomorrow night, who knows?”

“Well, I’ll always be up here,” The Green Girl nodded to the column,

“So you’ll always know where to find me.”

“I shall most certainly pay you a visit, my lady,” the squirrel gave a little bow which made them both giggle. “And with that I bid you a fond farewell,” said the squirrel.

“Bye!” she waved and watched as her friend hopped and skipped his way back to the chestnut tree and disappeared.

The Green Girl ducked through the railings and then climbed back up onto her stone column. She picked up her bucket and her spade. There was the tiniest bit of light beginning to appear in the sky now, morning was approaching.

She took up her usual position, her head slightly tilted to her right, and after a little intake of breath, she froze and became a statue again.



The Green Girl and the squirrel met on many occasions after that night and enjoyed playing and chatting together on the grass of the park. She never did remember where she had been going with her bucket and spade, and perhaps it was better that she didn't.

Some memories are best forgotten.

The end.

