a paper lantern over the light

by vype

Summary

Before Pamela Winchell, Danielle DuBois was mayor of Night Vale. She had two daughters.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

1937

When he asks, Stella tells the streetcar operator that she's from Mississippi; it's the first place she can think of without any deserts. He gives a smile and she smiles too, and over the years she begins to forget. She thinks she grew up in Mississippi, and on their first date she talks to Stanley about light snow and gentle summers, at first uneasily, but later on with artificially injected fondness.

It's okay, though. Night Vale is fine with her forgetting.

1947

Blanche is a literature teacher, not a geography teacher. She's not really too sure of where's where, or what the weather in Mississippi is like, so she just goes along with whatever Stella says. It's all right, Stella is her baby sister after all. Stella would have more experience with this kind of thing anyway- Blanche herself has only ever been to Night Vale, Desert Bluffs, and Laurel. Mississippi is as nice a place as any.

And when she first heard that Stanley was a Polack, she didn't quite know what to say.
being introduced to Stanley, she still didn't quite know what to say. The only thing that runs through her mind is, 'Well, at least it's better than the Apache Tracker.' She never really liked that odd Canadian man.

She can't say that aloud, of course. Blanche has some tact.

1920

Blanche is a quiet pretty girl who likes to sit by the old statue in the garden and watch her mother pull weeds while listening to the radio. The radio man is nice and talks about silly things happening in town. Blanche sometimes doesn't know what he speaks of, but it's all right. Stella's still too small to do anything aside from lie down and cry, but Blanche loves her baby sister all the same. All in all, life is good in their little part of Night Vale.

Sometimes their mother plants flowers. It's such a shame, though, because the carnations and irises and daisies never make it to full bloom. Sometimes the raccoons come by and eat them. Other times, it's the hooded figures that only come out at night (different from the regular hooded figures that hang out near the front of their house) that drop by and sweep away the seedlings without explanation, leaving behind only blobs of unidentifiable internal organs. And other times, they just stay in their pale tiny buds until the glowering summer heat comes and brings with it fire, and burns them away 'till they're nothing but ashes.

Blanche had cried for them once, but her mother shushed her and used a mint lace handkerchief to wipe away her tears. "It's all right, Blanche. Didn't you see their beautiful colors, so pale and delicate just like you?" Then her mother tapped her on the nose, and she giggled, and everything was perfect. "These flowers are blessed to even sprout like that in this weather," her mother said. "Don't be sad for them, when they could share their colors with you."

1918

Danielle DuBois finds and marries the father of her two daughters when Blanche is six years old, probably, and Stella is five, most likely. This was way before time travel was made illegal, something that happened only during Mayor Danielle DuBois's period in office, when she realizes exactly what and who those hooded figures actually are.

They meet out nearby the Sand Wastes, where she marches for two days into the vast expanse of nothingness and sandiness and comes back half-dead herself and dragging a man(?) into town. "His name's %&^--@*--...-$--"," she says to the City Council, a strange collection of sounds that are just barely outside the realm of human pronunciation. "I'm marrying him and if you try to stop me I'm going to show you what I did to the thing that gave me this," and she gestures to the ten inch long gash down her torso, jagged at the edges which ooze out yellow pus.

(sometime later, the city council will look back and decide that this is the moment that makes them choose Danielle DuBois as mayor)

Later, she will tell her children, "If you want a man, you've got to go and grab him. Take him by his hand and don't let him go unless you chase him out yourself."

Their father looks over at them from where he is listening to the radio, and he says, "Your mother went and caught me, you know, out in the wild. Your mother's a hunter, she is." He laughs, and their windows rattle. "For the first week I kept trying to run away. Fly away. She caught me every time and didn't let me go. But you know, now I think I like being caught. Radio is nice, house is nice. Daughters and wife are very nice. Life is nice here, being caught."

Blanche and Stella soak in every word-Blanche, so young and yet already full of epic romance
stories and long tragic poems buzzing around inside a wild, overbright mind; and Stella, full of humble thoughts about having a parasite grow within her for six (...no, that isn't quite right... seven? twenty?) months soaking up nutrition and fiddling with her hormone levels before exiting her and entering the world to the sound of screams and a lot of blood- sorry, humble thoughts about growing a family! Yay!

...

Blanche and Stella aren't very normal children, but in Night Vale, everything is all right.

1947

Stella doesn't remember much of their childhood. Bits and pieces, mostly, and not a lot about their parents.

"-something ape-like about him," Blanche fumes, huffing and puffing and venting all her hate for Stanley. Stella listens half-heartedly, and for some reason she remembers her father. "And you–you here–waiting for him-

Stella feels the urge to interrupt, say, "No, I'm not waiting; I've caught him," but she gets the feeling that Blanche wouldn't understand. She was never really a hunter, just a chaser- whenever she got what she was after, she never seemed to know what to do with it. Allowance money, hugs and kisses from neighborhood boys, happiness– it's all the same to her on they're in her hands, something oddly foreign in their concreteness, as if reality itself were a beautiful dream and mirages in the distance reality.

2012

"Cecil, I think time is slowing down in Night Vale."

"Oh?"

"Last week. Seven days, 24 hours each day. 60 minutes in each hour. That's 10,080 minutes in a week, right?"

"Uh huh. Go on."

"Well, I ran some figures, and during that same amount of time in Night Vale, 11,783 elapsed everywhere else in the world. That's more than a full day longer. I don't know what's happening."

A pause.

"Neat."

1947

"How many candles you putting in that cake?" Stanley asks, gesturing to the little pink candles that Stella pokes into the cake.

"I'll stop at twenty-five," she answers.

Stanley snorts a little before he can stop himself. "Twenty-five, really," he drawls under his breath. Stella gives him a mildly disapproving stare, but he swiftly changes subjects before she can hound him for being rude.

1944
The local attorneys are Ambler and Ambler, brothers who just happen to share a body. "Yes, yes," Ambler says, shuffling through a heap of papers. "Looks good, everything looks okay. The house is to be sold, yes?" He looks up over his yellow-framed glasses.

"Yes, sold," Blanche says.

"To the City Council to be turned into a dog park, for the sum of $320, a pair of green shoes, and a bag full of sequoia tree seeds, correct?"

"Yes," Blanche again confirms.

"Well, everything's in order, it all looks right. No problems here." Ambler and his brother hem and haw for a while more. "You're fine, Ms. DuBois. Everything's perfectly in order. Nothing wrong with the papers." Ambler hands it back to her.

"Thank you," she says.

1939

"Be careful, Night Vale," the voice on the radio says. "There's a sandstorm coming."

And that's all that Blanche remembers before finding herself somewhere else.

She steps on something that goes squish. She doesn't particularly want to look down, but she does anyway.

"Ma'am?" a wrinkly voice asks. "Are you all right?"

Even as she heaves onto the pavement- thankfully stone, though it smells of entrails steaming in the sun- Blanche is hit with the realization that the voice sounds awfully familiar. When she regains enough control of her stomach to afford to look up, Blanche can only think, 'That is my dress.'

Indeed, the old woman who stares at her with her head tilted in concern wears the exact same dress that Blanche is wearing currently- it was fancy dress night at Night Vale Elementary, and she had gotten a bit dolled up for the occasion: white satin gown and silver slippers and even a little tiara, rhinestone of course. She had searched for this outfit for weeks in anticipation of the event, so why is a random old lady wearing it?

"Y-yes," she says. "I'm fine. Just fine." She swallows and looks around- luckily, there is nothing left in her stomach to embarrass herself with. "Where am I?"

The elderly woman frowns slightly. "Why, you're in Biscayne Boulevard, obviously."

"Biscayne Boulevard?"

"In Desert Bluffs, dear."

"D-Desert... No, no that can't be right," Blanche mutters to herself. "I was just in Night Vale," she says. "Just a few moments ago."

"Oh! This must be what the radio was talking about," the woman says. She looks Blanche over up and down. "Not to worry, then, young lady. Everything will be all right."

"Bianca!" A voice breaks into the conversation, this is a man's voice, and it makes the old lady turn her head. An old man, looking like a kindly grandfather but dressed in a nice fancy suit; he
hobbles over and holds the old woman's hand. "Oh, thank Strex that you're safe! I heard there was fightin' going on over here." He glances curiously at Blanche. "And who is this?"

"Oh, Shep, this is that thing the radio was talking about," Bianca says. "What's your name, dear?"

"Blanche," she says automatically. "Blanche DuBois."

"Ms. DuBois, it's nice to meet you." The man extends a hand and she takes it, still in a state of mild existential pleas for answers. "I'm Shep Huntleigh, and this is Bianca DeMente. So you're from Night Vale?"

"Yes, yes I am."

"I've always wondered what it's like there," Shep says with a light drawl over his words. "Me, I'm from Texas myself. Dallas. Nice state there, real good place with some real good people." He grins, exposing his gums to the open air. "And real good oil."

"Shep's got a business," Bianca explains. "Working in oil, something or the other. I don't really know the details, but it's real good business."

They talk a bit for a while more, and Blanche slowly begins to calm down, until she realizes that she's actually quite enjoying herself. She starts to smile a bit at the old couple; obviously they love each other very much. She learns a bit about how they met in college where he was studying business and she was studying English, the cruise they'd taken on a yacht (despite there being no lake or river in Desert Bluffs either; some questions just shouldn't be asked), and other mundane things. Sometime during their conversation, though, Blanche feels something to the side pulling her gaze, and she sees something suspended in the air, hovering and glowing whiter than white. She doesn't notice when she started walking towards it.

"Oh," she says quietly. "It's beautiful... I... I think I should go... inside?"

When she next opens her eyes, an uncountable amount of time later, she's back in her room in Night Vale. The radio is sputtering on the nightstand beside her bed, and she can hear the voice talking: "-encountered their own doubles, their own selves-"

Blanche slowly processes those words, and the lifts a hand to feel her own cheek.

"I'm not that old, am I?" asks Blanche to an empty room.

1954

Danielle DuBois is buried next to her husband's chrysalis, and Aunt Margaret's and Cousin Jessica's coffins. They're all buried on the property, of course. No true DuBois would ever be caught away from their home.

(that's why stella's a kowalski, and why blanche is in an institution)

The dog park is still under construction, so it's black gates have not yet been opened to the public of Night Vale. Which is a good thing, because those hooded figures really dislike unannounced company. Like pterodactyls.

Anyway, speaking of those hooded figures...

One of them drifts gently to the large statue that sits in front of the house in the dog park. It stares at the statue for a few moments, and it feels sad. It doesn't know why. And then, for no apparent reason, it begins carving something into the smooth stone with its claws (...fingernails?), which
sink into the stone like a creeping fear through town.

2013

in honor of nothing that should never not be unknown

the gentle man in glow light is a candle in his maybes,
his face is a lonely bog.

do you ever stop to look at all the blood you gather?
metal halos spring from your attention.

she said, "watch, with all your eyes, 
lest chance again escape you."
said, "chalks wasted on blind children."
wrote today's special on the board.

what's blessed entry in this weather.

    i heard it tapping,
    but it doesn't leave a trail.

when you catch a beating heart in the wild
you hold it, squirming,
    and say, "that is that,"
but the damn thing keeps on moving til' you
    squeeze it
    in your hands.

End Notes

I don't think I quite captured the nonchalantly bizarre atmosphere of Night Vale properly, but this was a lot of fun to write.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!