

Genevieve's Joy

By C. Jade Wyton

Genevieve has returned to the estate she grew up in, with one of her cousin's great-descendants, who shows her the joys of her second chance in life and makes her feel at home again.

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It had been a long time since Genevieve had been this active.

It had been a long time since she'd been this *young*.

Eulogy's kind words had brought her to intermittent bursts of tears throughout the day. Tears which now streaked through the dirt on her cheeks as she dug her hands through the soft, fertile ground.

His talk about rebirth and second chances had *gotten* to her.

A second chance....

She panted, straightening up and feeling her ears brush the top of the hole she was digging as she knelt, exhausted from her overwhelming day, in the light of the setting sun. She was feeling rather proud of herself. It wasn't a bad a hole, for having been done by hand!

It almost reminded her of when she was little, helping to move loose rocks in the mine to earn wages for her mother to steal.... Terrible, terrible days, but she had always been in good, kind company in that shaft.

Still, though, her muscles ached— But not in the way they had in her old body. No, this ache was different. Instead of a hot, searing, tearing pain from dry joints that didn't want to entertain any give, she felt the ache of stretching muscles no longer at rest; muscles long forgotten learning how to be used again.

It was almost like she really *was* reborn, just like Eulogy said.

She couldn't help but laugh, loud and genuine. Echoed in the quiet field, her laugh was followed by Genny's happy chirp and a male chuckle.

'Need a hand up?' Eulogy asked, his raspy, comforting voice accompanied by his hand reaching down to Genevieve's eye-level.

She groaned with effort as she shifted to take his hand. And again as she let him pull her from the hole. Though, the entire time, she couldn't stop *laughing!*

Even when she saw Wonda watching her from Gomez's lap, little Moonbeam in her own, Genevieve couldn't stop herself from giggling.

She was filthy. And sweaty. And her hair was a mess.

She knew just from how the dirt tickled her skin that she must have been an absurd kind of dishevelled and unladylike, with ants in her shoeless socks and some sort of grub trying to crawl up her skirt, but damn the gods —damn *all* the gods!— she was *ALIVE!*

Sachem would never have allowed this. Not her unkempt hair. Not her hiked up skirt. Not her rolled up sleeves. He would have lost his mind, seeing a Jones woman on his estate in such a way.

But it *wasn't* his estate anymore.

It wasn't his. And Sachem wasn't going to hurt her— Never again! Never, ever

again! He would never lay a single hand on her!

She laughed again at the thought of it:

She was free! She was finally free from him! After so long trapped in that stupid fey realm, tortured by his hand, she was *free*!

She looked between Eulogy and Wonda with her eyes sparkling. And when Eulogy hunkered down on all fours, she attempted to do the same.

Clumsy with exhaustion, she slipped onto her elbows and paused to catch her breath. Though Genny wasn't deterred from tearing around the yard with the man as Genevieve's body made her rest.

More tears came as she rolled onto her back, staring at the sky and laughing so hard she could barely breathe.

*She was finally free!*

Free to live in the youth that had been stolen from her over and over and over. By her mother, her grandfather, her husband, the Scavenger—

It was over.

She was free.

She was allowed to just *exist*.

And she was young again, in a body as youthful as she had been the day she was killed.... Oh, by the gods, what a blessing! What a blessing, it was! To be given back what was stolen from her!

And after all she'd done, the mistakes that she'd made, to still be told she *deserved* this second chance? That what happened to her *wasn't* fair? She gave a loud sob through her laughter as she thought of Eulogy's words again.

She was allowed to be happy. She *deserved* to be happy.

She'd gotten her boots.

Her family had made her boots.... She was still a Jones.

Despite everything that had happened her family had loved her. They had really, truly loved her. Right to the end...!

It made her snifle with joy.

That was when Wonda sat calmly beside Genevieve, her daughter now in Gomez's arms as she used the hem of her dress to wipe the tears and dirt from Genevieve's cheeks. 'Are you alright, Mother?' she asked.

'I've never felt anything like this!' she exclaimed, unable to hide her glee. 'My heart is pounding— My *heart*, Wonda! My *heart* is *pounding* in my *chest*!'

Wonda beamed back at her mother, clearly overjoyed to see Genevieve so happy.

And Genevieve rolled over to bury her face into the grass and freshly-turned dirt, giggling like the child she'd never been allowed to be.

Then Genny began to bound around her, Eulogy close behind, and though her arms were shaking from overuse, Genevieve still pushed herself up and tried to join them.

'Whoa, whoa, you good?' Eulogy asked as Genevieve tripped and fell on her side.

Her answer was more laughter. Laughter that was broken for only a moment by a surprised grunt as Genny leapt onto her back.... But then she was back to laughing again as Genny nuzzled her cheek.

She couldn't stop herself, even though she tried. The most she could suppress

herself down to was a snicker.... But then Jung ambled over and stuck his face up her dress to eat the bugs that clung to her legs, and she let out a squeal and wiggled away, climbing into Wonda's arms and starting her laughing fit all over again.

'HEY! Hey, now!' Eulogy scolded, hefting up Jung and carrying him several feet away. 'What would Cirrus say if he heard you were putting your face up a dame's skirt?'

Jung was too busy noisily chewing on the large beetle he had pulled off Genevieve's calf to even begin to comprehend the question. Though, he probably wouldn't have understood it either way, being an opossum.

The opossum was deposited in Gomez's arms next to baby Moonbeam, and Eulogy dusted his hands before making his way back to check on Genevieve.

'How you doing?' he asked.

And Genevieve found she couldn't stop laughing enough to answer.

—END—

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