

Songs of the Seasons,
Song Three



the
World Spins
Madly On

A SAMPLE
of the short story by
Janine K. Spendlove

Songs of the Seasons, Song Three: The World Spins Madly On

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Sample V1.0

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If the massive crack of thunder hadn't been enough to mask a knock on the front door of the old hunting cabin, the onslaught of freezing rain following it certainly was. The only reason Josh even knew he had a visitor was a coincidence in that he was already on his way out the door.

"Holy crap, dude! Knock or something next time. You practically gave me a heart attack!" Josh clutched at his chest with one freckled hand and was so startled he nearly failed to take in his visitor's odd appearance. A dark-skinned man with electric blue, waist-length dreadlocks, wearing only a tiny scrap of cloth around his hips was not something anyone would miss, surprised or not.

"I did knock, many times."

His words were strangely accented. Josh would have said he sounded British, except that wasn't quite right.

When Josh didn't invite him in or make any attempt to ask who he was, the man shifted his weight awkwardly while the

silence dragged on. Finally, the half-naked man pressed his lips into a flat line and gave Josh a hard look before handing him a long, thin seashell with a wax plug on one end.

"My sister asks that you please read this letter, and she hopes you find it in your heart to forgive her for not coming back or contacting you sooner. She wishes you to know she is well and that you should not worry about her."

His message delivered, the man spun on his heel and walked down the gravel lane back to the main road, heedless of the frigid rain engulfing him.

Short puffs of frosty air escaped Josh's mouth, and he stared at the shell casing that spanned the length of his hands. A flash of lightning reflected off the satiny pink finish.

Could it be? He looked up at the stranger's fading silhouette. *Brother?* No, aside from the fact that they looked nothing alike, she'd had no siblings other than the twins, and they'd died over a year ago. *Still, they'd been adopted, so maybe this guy was too?*

With fumbling hands, Josh pried the wax off the end of the shell and unfurled a tightly rolled scroll of paper which fell out of its confines.

The breath in his chest tightened, and he leaned heavily against the log doorjamb. He'd know that messy scrawl anywhere. It was from her. It was from Story.

Josh,

Surprise! I'm not dead. At least not at the moment, though not for lack of trying on a certain sadistic faerie prince's part. But I digress — yes, I survived the fall, & injury free at that. I'm sorry

for waiting so long to tell you, but believe me when I say this was literally the first chance I had to do so.

I know even if I tell you not to that you'll still worry about me, so I won't bother. That said, please know that as of this writing I'm alive & well, & more importantly, happier than I've been in a very long time. I promise I'll tell you all about it when I get back — it's a pretty crazy story for sure.

Also, you'd better believe that as soon as I get back I'll race you to the pond!

Love ya,
Story



The cave's sinkhole was far worse than Story had led Josh to believe. It looked easily ten feet deep with sheer cliff-like walls Story claimed provided ample hand and foot holds for climbing. Maybe if you're a monkey, Josh thought sourly. He had never been fond of confined spaces and wondered how Story had, yet again, convinced him to do something he detested.

Lately, she'd been able to get him to do a lot of things he didn't like. Most of which involved defending her to their friends. Though, at this

point, all the defending in the world couldn't salvage the friendships she'd shattered with her erratic behavior and angry outbursts. She was downright mean to everyone these days; only he was left, doggedly sticking by her side. Try as she might, he wasn't about to leave her, not when she needed him most.

He owed her that much. He always would.

His hand slipped on a loose rock and he immediately cleared his mind, focusing on breathing in through his nose and out through his mouth. He was definitely not thinking about how the tunnel they were currently crawling through could collapse around them at any moment.

Josh's semi-panicked thoughts were interrupted when he ran face first into Story's backside. His face burned with heat, and he knew it had to be as brilliantly red as his short-cropped hair.

"Uh, sorry. Didn't realize..."

Story didn't say anything but merely glanced over her shoulder, careful not to blind him with her headlamp. Her sea-green eyes met his, and she gave him a half-smile before hopping down out of the tunnel. He watched her short black and purple curls swish by in the light of his headlamp, and steeling himself, he followed her down.

He let his gaze sweep the length of the massive cavern and felt, for the first time, he might understand why Story loved this place so much. The cave room was half the size of a football field. There were all sorts of dangerous holes and cracks that a person could fall to his death into, but ignoring that, there were cool looking rock cones dripping water down from the ceiling. They all had matching cones coming up from the ground to meet them. In fact, some of them had met.

"Whoa." The insufficient word escaped Josh's lips unbidden; he could think of no other way to express the awesome sight before him. However, he was starting to feel the uncomfortable tickle at the nape of his neck that signaled it was time to go. Before an earthquake hits and we die in a cave in!

But Story had other plans.

Turning to the right side of the cave, she began navigating around

the cones toward the far wall. Josh rolled his eyes, hefted his daypack, and followed after her, trying to maneuver his much larger frame through the same path she so effortlessly wove.

Tripping over an unseen rise in the cavern floor, he bit down on a curse word he'd never have said in front of his mother. We can leave any time now, Story, Josh thought at the back of her head. As if hearing him, she suddenly stopped in her tracks and gestured in front of them at an unremarkable rock face with a few stones jutting out from the base.

"So what? It's a wall—am I missing something?" Josh cast a confused look at his oldest friend and wondered just what she was trying to accomplish with all this. It won't bring them back, no matter how much she wishes it would. Maybe he needed to have another talk with her tonight—after they were back outside, of course, and not about to get crushed by an avalanche of rocks at any moment.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" Story walked toward one of the bigger rock outcroppings and shrugged off her pack. "But looks can be deceiving." She flashed him a mischievous grin over her shoulder and then promptly disappeared

Josh felt his chest tighten with anxiety. "Story? STORY?" He scooped up her pack and searched frantically along the rock face for her, but there was nothing.

She was gone.

He felt the blood drain from his face as he tried to comprehend what had just happened. How could she just disappear—

"Hey, quit freaking out. I'm right here." A light flashed through a hidden fold in the rock wall a trick of light and shadow had obscured from him.

He felt the pressure around his chest release as, in its place, a flash of anger boiled up. "Not cool, Story. Not cool. How about a little warning next time?"

She smirked at him from the other side of the crack, the LED light of his headlamp washing out her lightly tanned face. "Well, that wouldn't be nearly as fun, would it?"

"I'm serious." Josh eyed the thin crack with a secret flood of relief; only someone as thin as Story could have managed it. "Also, there is absolutely no way I will ever fit through this."

"That's fine. I just want to look around a bit in here anyway."

"I don't think that's such a good idea—you going off on your own."

Story rolled her eyes and gave him a sour look. "Just pass me my pack. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Holding his breath, Josh silently counted to ten. Maybe she just needs some time alone. He let the breath out slowly, feeling his anger slide away with it, leaving only his hurt feelings. He could deal with hurt feelings. Later.

Shoving her pack through the crevice, he grumbled, "Fine, have it your way." What could it hurt? She just wants to feel in control of something in her life, right?

Just as the pack slid through to the other side, he heard a thick crack followed by a low thump and an abbreviated shriek.

"Josh!"

The clamp was back around his chest, and in a wild panic, Josh threw himself against the rock face.

"JOSH! Help me!"

"Story, hang on! I'm coming!" He'd managed to wedge his head and neck as far into the crevice as possible, which was about a foot. It was far enough to see the most horrifying sight of his life: Story, dangling over the side of a precipice, arms outstretched before her. She was clawing at the slick stone to no avail as the weight of her body began to pull her steadily down.

He jerked himself out of the crack and tore off his backpack, fumbling for the zipper.

"Josh?" Her voice was strangely calm now, almost surreal in its quality. Josh's panic escalated.

"Story, just hang on a little longer—I'm going to throw you the rope!" Ripping the zipper open he yanked out the rope, uncoiled one end and —

"Josh, I'm sorry." Her voice was quiet, calm, and collected: not at all like she was about to plummet to her death. What is she doing?

"Story, no! Don't you dare let go! Story! Story!" He got the rope through and jammed his head back through the crack just in time to watch her fingertips lose their hold.

Jaw open in shock, he held his breath and counted to himself, "One Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi...." He made it all the way to twenty Mississippi and never heard her hit the bottom.

A flash of hope coursed through him. Maybe she found some hand and footholds to hang onto! Or maybe there's a ledge there and she's just screwing with me again...

"Story?"

Nothing.

"Story!"

The water continued to drip in the background, echoing in the length of the cavern behind him.

"Stooooooooory!"

But she never answered.

Hours later, when he'd finally been able to lead the police and a rescue team back into the cave, the spelunkers hadn't found any sign of her at the bottom of the shaft. It hadn't even been that deep—a mere ten feet. A fall she could have easily survived, despite the rubble-strewn floor. Even if she hadn't lived, there still should have been a body.

But she was gone, and all the officer had to go on was the word of a seventeen-year-old boy that went contrary to the evidence at hand.

"Look, Josh, I know she's your best friend, but that don't mean you need to cover for her. Lying to me will just get you in more trouble and it's definitely not worth it in this case." Officer Waddell hooked her thumbs in her belt. "It's not like we don't all know she's had a rough year. Lord knows, anyone who lost their whole family like that... well, it ain't goin' to do either of you a lick of good if you cover for her if she's gone and run off."

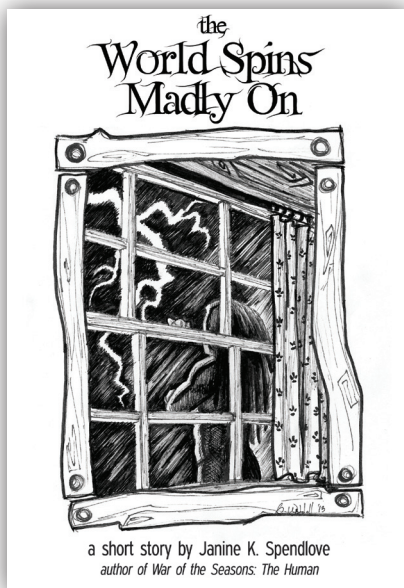
Josh could only huddle under the blanket they'd wrapped around

*him and shake his head in a silent avowal of the officer's words.
He knew what he'd seen. Story was gone.*



END OF SAMPLE

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About the Author

Janine K. Spendlove is a KC-130 pilot in the United States Marine Corps. Her bestselling first novel, *War of the Seasons, Book One: The Human*, was published in June 2011, and she's also had several short stories published in various anthologies.

A graduate from Brigham Young University in 1999 with a BA in History Teaching, she is an avid runner, enjoys knitting, playing Beatles tunes on her guitar, and spending time with her family. She currently resides with her husband and daughter in Washington, DC. She is currently at work on her next novel.