A reason to like this summer

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A reason to like this summer

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Summary

He didn't allow himself to think. So he shouldn't have been surprised that he ended up in front of her house. Or, to be more specific, in front of the fence that surrounded it.

Notes

Fic for teloisstuff/DrunkJazzmin writted during Foot2Rue Summer Festival Exchange 2026

Tag had no reasons to like the summer.

Summers were lonely. During the school year everyone craved being alone: not dealing with someone else's things thrown around the room, no line to the shower stalls, no running to the dining hall to claim the best table. Tag thought that sometimes, too. But as the summer crept closer, he was getting restless and angry, while people were leaving, and the halls were getting quieter.

Until he was the only one staying behind.

Tag wasn't superstitious (he wasn't five, after all), but on these summer nights the Riffler Institute was unnerving, with every minor noise amplified through empty rooms. Draught blowing through an old window, a creaky door, pigeons nesting under the roof. Usually Tag preferred to spend his days training, whenever he wasn't asked to help with something on school grounds, so when night rolled around, he fell asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow. That way he didn't have time to think, and if he didn't have time to think — he didn't have time to worry about some dumb thing that would never happen anyway.

Unfortunately, he didn't have time to exhaust himself into dreamless sleep today. The weather got surprisingly bad for the early summer, and while Tag himself didn't care about the cold or the fact the field was slippery after the heavy rain, he wasn't allowed to train outside. And now, full of restless energy, he couldn't fall asleep. He stayed in the quiet and empty room, listening to how the movement on the first floor got quieter, how Miss Adelaide went upstairs and paused near his door for a moment before moving further down the corridor. He was lying in his bed and listening until the moon moved higher in the sky, hiding from the window, and he couldn't stay still anymore.

Tag got dressed in record time and sneaked to the basement. He had the combination for the secret tunnel memorized as a back of his hand, and he crossed the passage without even consciously thinking about the number of bangs and whistles. Pipes groaned ominously in the dim light as Tag hurried forward, and the ground was wet.

He climbed out of a trapdoor into Caesar's Alley and just walked without any clear goal in mind.

The air was still humid after the rain, and the night streets were eery quiet, but Tag paid little attention to the world around him. He was trying not to get spotted, because a young teenager walking the streets at night would raise too many questions, but otherwise he allowed himself to just walk and walk, to feel the pleasant burn in his muscles, the same as he did during training.

What he didn't allow himself was to think. So he shouldn't had been surprised that he ended up in front of Eloise's house. Or, to be more specific, in front of the giant wall — to call it “fence” was to put it mildly — that surrounded it. He realised it would be extremely annoying to walk around it in any direction, but he didn't want to return back to his dorm either.

So he stopped, paying more attention to himself and his surroundings.

Tag didn't have a wristwatch — too expensive and too easy to break in a match, — so he had no clue how late it was. His feet were uncomfortable and a little wet, his ears were cold. While he felt physically tired, he wasn't any more sleepy than in the evening. Tag was sure that he would feel like shit in the morning.

He couldn't see anything past the fence, but he could imagine the Riffler's mansion and it's curvy nonsensical lines that were meant to be cool architectural features, but made it look like a weird modern art museum, too cold and open with rows of floor-to-ceeling windows. Tag couldn't imagine how it would feel to live in it day-to-day. He thought that the rooms— and Eloise's room, though he didn't dwell his thoughts on it too much — must be ridiculously large too, overly spacious and lonely for one person.

The yard definitely was ridiculously large, based on that fence. It was probably larger than the school territory.

“Ps-s-s! Tag! Up here!”

It took him a second to realise someone was actually calling him, and another moment to raise his gaze upwards, where stars shone above the fence edge, and see a dark silhouette.

Tag recognised Eloise immediately, even though her hair was down, not in her signature buns, which made her features softer. Tag drowned a weird feeling in his chest he couldn't explain and asked:

“What are you doing here?”

Eloise silently raised a brow, and he immediately felt stupid. “Who even asks that? Of course she is here, that's her house,” he thought. Tag looked down and rubbed his palms together. Not that he was particularly nervous, but his fingers were getting cold too.

“There is a gate on the right, not far from here,” finally said Eloise, gesturing to the side, “I'll be waiting for you there.”

She immediately disappeared behind the fence again, not even waiting for his response, and Tag choked on his argument. Grumbling quietly, he started walking in the direction Eloise showed him. While Tag hated being bossed around, he was cold, uncomfortable, and pretty far from the school — all in the middle of the night. So he met Eloise at the gate — the door in the wall, really, — and silently followed her through moon-lit and meticulously kept garden, trying not to stare at her pink pajamas under the gray zip-up hoodie she put on.

Tag had no idea what to say or how to explain why he was just standing in front of her too-tall fence in the middle of the night. He was waiting for that question. It was the logical one, after all. So the longer Eloise kept her silence, while she walked him through the garden, the back of the house and a somewhat hidden emergency staircase, the more agravated Tag became. He hid his hands in the hoodie's pockets, looking downwards, and waited. By the time they had climbed through an open window on the top floor, Tag was ready to crawl out of his skin.

“Tea or hot chocolate?”

“I don't… ” Tag snapped, but then paused, registering the question. “What?”

“Do you want tea or hot chocolate?” repeated Eloise. She was looking through stuff in the room, searching for something. Finally, she approached Tag with a fluffy throw blanket in her hands. “Shoes off — don't drag the mud across the whole room,” she commanded. “So? Today has been pretty chilly, you need a hot drink if you don't want to get sick.”

Completely embarrassed, Tag shrugged, pointedly not looking at her.

“Hot chocolate, then,” cheerfully said Eloise and threw the blanket at him. She pointed her finger, mock-treatening him: “I'll be back soon. Don't you dare die of hypothermia, Captain.”

Eloise quickly left the room, keeping her steps as light as possible. Tag barely heard her moving, tracking her shadow that dances across the wall. That place was dimly lit with a small yellow nightlight, and it took Tag embarrassingly long time to realize that he was in Eloise's room. It looked the same as he expected, and it didn't, at the same time. While it was pretty big, giving her more personal space than Tag had at his corner at the dorm, it was cozy, almost crampled, unlike other rooms he had briefly seen through the windows before. They were open, sterile and picture-perfect. Eloise's room looked lived in, with little trinkets, posters, and clothes scattered across the room. If not for the giant windows, opening the space to moonlight, quiet city and bustling port far away, it could had looked like it belonged to a normal, while expensive, house, and not the giant mansion in the most prestigious district.

There were a lot of pink. A lot of fluffy, impractical, girly, excessive things. They too felt like they fit Eloise and kinda didn't, as if Eloise Riffler and Eloise the Blues' goalkeeper clashed and melded together here. And Tag, with a pink fluffy blanket at his lap, felt like a fish thrown on the shore, completely alien to his environment to the point he didn't know how to breathe.

Still, he took his shoes off. Tag had no idea what to do with himself, but he wouldn't make an unnecessary mess in someone else's home (he would if he was feeling petty; but it's not Eloise's fault that it was summer, and he had been stuck at Riffler Institute with no end in sight). Tag focused his attention on the city down below, feeling as if he were intruding just by staring at Eloise's room without her here. It didn't last long; she returned quickly and silently. If Tag hadn't noticed the door moving at the corner of his vision, he would've missed it. When she passed him a small cup, Tag finally dared to look her in the eyes.

Eloise smiled at him, a bit worried but genuine, and Tag felt like something in him unwound, the pressure of the past few weeks lifting off his heart. The orange nightlight, casting shadows across the room, and the warm drink at his hand reminded Tag about the gatherings they had with other teams of Maryport late at night. It was easier to imagine himself at a dark corner of an abandoned factory, dimly lit by bonfires, than in Riffler's opulent mansion.

Eloise left her own cup on a table nearby, and after a brief search returned by his side with another blanket and a laptop. Tag felt a pang of… something (he didn't want to describe it as

longing, not even in his own mind), but he definitely felt something about the fact Eloise decided not to cuddle under the same blanket as him.

“So, how is your summer?” he tried to ask politely. His tone betrayed how aggravated he truly was. Tag hid his face behind his cup, desperately trying to look nonchalant.

“Same old,” she shrugged. “Can't do much useful while most of our team is away. Mami helps with training, of course,” Eloise added, full of pride and affection, “but it's not the same, you know?”

“Yeah,” said Tag. “Same. I have nobody to train with.”

“Oh! Do you think Miss Adelaide won't mind if I visit? I really want to practice with something other than tennis balls.”

Tag shrugged. Miss Adelaide probably won't mind them practicing on school grounds, as long as they don't break anything. They would be occupied and under supervision and not looking for trouble — not like Tag was doing now.

Eloise nodded. It was obvious that she had already decided to do it, and Tag could only prepare for an unannounced visit sometime in the future, though he couldn't complain. It sounded like an exciting change to his lonely summer routine.

“By the way,” Eloise continued, changing the topic. “I've been talking with Sinead over that street football chat we've found. She sent over some videos of their local matches. I wanted to show you one of the cool moves Rose did!”

That immediately piqued Tag's attention. Gabriel promised to keep up with the chat whenever possible, and to share any important news when he would be back; Tag hadn't expected to see any of that during the summer.

“Yeah, that sounds great,” he smiled widely, feeling elated for the first time since Gabriel left to visit his parents. “Thanks, Eloise.”

“No problem, Captain,” she actually winked at him, and Tag was immensely grateful for the fact the lights in the room were so dim. “Let me just set the alarm for the morning, in case we fall asleep — you'll have to get back to the dorms on time. So, Sinead told me that...”

Tag smiled again. Maybe he had one reason to like this summer.

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