

It was the year of picnics.

Simple at first – we started with crisps and tins of beer, sitting on an old quilt my mother had made for me. The grass was a little damp; I was underdressed. We huddled close to each other for warmth, trying to speak about normal things, like nothing was wrong.

Then the weather turned. It was sunny and still. This time we put more of an effort in – you made sandwiches, cucumber and cream cheese on soft white bread, cut into triangles. Just like when I was a kid, you said, and I always liked the crusts on. I brought a tub of strawberries, which were small and sweet. After we ate we lay in the sun and everything felt suddenly possible again.

It became hotter. Under an uninterrupted blue sky we put paper plates out and I scooped tabouleh onto them. We ate it with pita bread and creamy hummus that you had made from scratch. It tastes so much better than what you get at the store, I said. You were proud of yourself. We opened a bottle of crémant and it fizzed over the sides of the bottle. We drank out of plastic cups. Apples, we said, it tastes like apples.

Even as the weather cooled it remained dry out. We decided we'd do one last picnic, before it got too cold and rainy. But we have to go all out this time, you said. I looked up “classic picnic food” and turned up with grilled chicken legs slathered in barbeque sauce, and potato salad. You made a cake – vanilla sponge with buttercream icing. There were edible flowers on the top; it looked beautiful, too beautiful to eat. I didn't know you were so good at baking, I said. You laughed and said, I've gotten good. There was so much cake left over that we had to give some away to some other people, who were also trying to catch the last of the bearable weather.

After that last picnic, things changed. We both became busy again. It seemed unimaginable that we'd had all that time to sit outdoors and do nothing. It began to feel almost like it hadn't happened at all. We lost touch a little – it was natural. Texts here and there. When the weather started getting warm again, I found myself thinking more and more about those picnics. I realised what I missed more than anything were the times we found ourselves in an easy silence, sitting and looking out at the other people who were sitting like we were, or the people playing football or frisbee, the older couples making their slow circuits around the park, dogs running past us. All around us other people living their lives, creating their own little worlds, and there we were, in the little world we had created, so happy just with the simple fact of being in each other's presence, of being outside, of being together and having nowhere to be and nothing to do.

Finally I messaged you: *Picnic?* You replied quickly, *I thought you'd never ask!* I felt strange going to meet you, worried somehow that it wouldn't be the same. I turned up with my quilt in hand and a container of samosas I'd bought at the grocery store. You were there waiting for me and when you saw me your face split into a wide smile. We hugged, I lay the quilt out and we sat down. I brought watermelon, you said. It wasn't quite warm enough yet, but neither of us said anything about it. We talked and talked, catching up on all the things that had happened since we had last seen each other. And, after we had eaten, we sat back, propping ourselves up on our elbows and watched two Labradors playing nearby.

Look at them, you said, they're so happy. They've got no concept of time.

If that was happiness, I felt happy then, truly happy, if only for a little while.