

YESTERDAY CRUMB

AND THE STORM IN A TEACUP

YESTERDAY CRUMB IS NO ORDINARY GIRL...

There was once a girl named Yesterday Crumb, and that was not even the most peculiar thing about her. For one, she lived and worked in a travelling circus, even though she was only twelve years old. For another, her hair was the colour of pumpkins, fiercer than any shade of ginger you have ever seen before, while her skin was so pale it was almost silver.

Oddest of all, instead of ordinary human ears, she had the pointed ears of a fox, reddish-brown and tipped at the end with the black of burnt toast. They poked out from her tangle of hair, and even though they were fairly small, any vixen worth her claws would tell you they promised to be marvellous in the future.

She spent her days curled in the corner of her iron cage, gawked at by circus patrons who paid good money to see the girl with the fox ears. She slept there, on a bed of straw; she ate there; she lived and played and dreamed there, with no friends save for the donkey who pulled her cage whenever the circus travelled to a new town.

'Would you look at those ears!' said a young lady in the crowd, tapping on her husband's shoulder.

Yesterday was bathed in the yellow light of a sign which read, Yesterday Crumb, the Amazing Fox Girl! Snow was starting to fall, but she was clad in a simple white dress. And, although it was against the rules, she had wrapped herself in a tattered brown blanket.

'You don't suppose they're real, do you?' the lady continued. 'Surely they're glued on or some such.'

The gentleman leaned in and studied her ears, as if Yesterday were a specimen in a museum gallery and not a girl with thoughts and feelings and a heart that could ache. 'Hm. Look pretty real to me.'

'What an odd little thing she is,' said the lady, barely suppressing a shudder.

I can hear you, you know! thought Yesterday. I'm not called the Amazing Fox Girl for nothing, even if these ears do ruin just about everything else.

She held her tongue, the constellation of bruises on her arm a reminder of what had happened the last time she had insulted a circus patron.

Instead, she tried to ignore the voices, and disappear into her one and only book. It was only small, no bigger than her palm, and was practically falling apart these days. The title on the front cover read *The Pocket Book of Faeries* and there was a picture of a man with dragonfly wings underneath.

It was a kind of storybook, written like a birdwatcher's guide, only for made-up creatures rather than real ones.

Even so, every time Yesterday read it, she pretended that such creatures really existed. That there were river trolls who lived under bridges and feasted on moss and syrup for their supper. That there were pixies the size of toadstools who were born every time someone fell in love. That there were goblins who travelled the world with their markets, trading their wares in exchange for your earliest memories or the last years of your life.

Yesterday flipped open the cover, lingering briefly on the torn fragment of paper that should have been the book's first page. All that was left of it was a little scrap in the corner, on which her name, Yesterday, was written, and nothing more.

The book had been found by Yesterday's side, her only possession, when the ringmaster had discovered her as a baby outside his tent twelve years earlier.

Yesterday often wondered who had left her the book and had written her name in it, and if it was the same person who had left her all alone at the circus, but finding out the answers to such questions was not a luxury afforded to the Amazing Fox Girl.

Yesterday sat and read all evening until finally a grumpy-looking man in a top hat and dirty crimson jacket came over and slotted his key into the cage's lock.

'Grubs up, Crumb,' grunted Ringmaster Skelm, who was not well-known for his friendly manner.

Crumb was the surname he had given to Yesterday since, in Skelm's opinion, she was so small and obviously unwanted by whoever had left her behind.

Yesterday Crumb and the Storm in a Teacup by Andy Sagar, Orion Children's Books, £6.99

