

Dandelion Memorial

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The sound of my feet beating the frosted ground is all I hear during my morning run. Normally this time the sun has already risen; but the days of summer have long since ended and the sky is black. Every so often an indoor light is visible and the streetlights provide me with light; yet it feels solitary. This morning I feel alone. I don't know yet where I am headed, down one street and then another. My breath turns to fog and there is a slight pinch when I inhale reminding me with every step, *I'm alive, I'm alive*. I smell wood smoke and can begin to see the curls drift lazily from chimneys ahead. I stop and take a deep breath. The sting is real, the smell invigorating. Now the sun is just peeking over the rooftops and I realize exactly where I am as I come out of my trance. The pool, the community pool it's tall stone walls beckon me to take a rest. I walk up the hill and lean against a wall. Underfoot are a mix of dead leaves and frost. *My shoes are going to be soaked when I get home, I should head back soon*. As I prod the wet humus with the toe of my sneaker it flips to reveal a dandelion gone to seed. Closed tight against the cold and dark its' fluff poking out waiting for the sun to open and release the seeds. That is when the memory strikes me like a tidal wave, as I lean against a wall looking at the last dandelion of the season. I'm sitting down here at this very spot maybe eight years old, perhaps even younger, picking flowers. I don't remember why, what was the context. I remember my grandfather was there and he sat with me on the hill and we picked dandelions and blew their seeds into the breeze...I remember.

Suddenly I feel ill, I need to get home. I shake of the nausea and start back running faster against this uneasy feeling. I will the memory out of sight to the back of my mind. Getting home takes no time at all and I am relieved to see the indoor light's on. *He's awake*, I sigh with relief and open the front door. The smell of fresh coffee welcomes me as does a sleepy call from the kitchen, "Hey sweetie, how was your run?" He is still in his pajamas, ripped flannel bottoms.

“Cold,” I replied as I untie my shoes. “I can’t seem to get warm,” I shiver as he places the warm drink in my hand.

“Give it a minute, you just got in” A soft smile passes over his face and he rubs my back. “Are you going to be okay today? Do you need me to do anything? I can stay home.”

I shake my head no, “Go to work, I will meet you at 11, I’m going to shower” with a quick kiss I head into the bathroom. Hoping that the water will ease my mind as well. Eight years old sitting outside the pool blowing dandelion fluff. Feeling warm sun on my skin but I remember, I remember I was unhappy. I remember I was crying. Why? I can not shake away the memory but I also cannot bring it to fullness which is equally frustrating. *Either go away or let me have all of you!* But there is no reasoning with the subconscious, it is the gate keeper and has decided that for now this piece of the puzzle would elude me. A grunt of frustration leaves me as I shut off the water.

“How was your shower?” he’s so attentive today, I can’t help but smile.

“Good, yeah it was good. On my run I went to the pool and I had a really strong memory. Almost like a dream. It kind of came out of nowhere. I remember being little and sitting on the hill by the pool, I remember I had been crying but I don’t know why. Then my grandfather was there and we sat picking dandelions.”

“That sounds like a lovely memory,”

“But it wasn’t...I don’t remember why but I know it was a bad memory. It is really frustrating.”

“Why don’t you call your mom and talk to her about it, that might help. I have to head to work but I will see you at 11.” With a kiss he leaves and I am alone with my thoughts.

I pick up the phone and dial my mother, it goes straight to voicemail, “Hey mom, I didn’t want to bother you today but...it’s stupid, I had a dream...I don’t know, I can’t explain it. Do you remember if

Grampa every took me to the pool? I know weird question...never mind Mom see you today, love you bye.”

I look at the clock it's only 8:30, I have hours to fill. Frustration is starting to rise, what am I supposed to do with myself? I begin to clean. Tackling the bathroom, scrubbing the grout in the shower. I carry on washing the walls as I try to wash away this dream of my grandfather. Lost in my thoughts and my memories, it feels too real. Tears streaming down my cheeks, landing on my new dress...why was I so sad? Sitting on the hill watching Grampa walk towards me. Watching the dandelion fluff drift away.

The dandelion seeds, I remember he told me about the seeds, that's how they spread on the wind to make new flowers. I was getting closer, I was starting to remember, it was coming back.

After the bathroom I dusted and vacuumed all the while watching the clock, making sure there was enough time to get dressed up before it was time to leave.

Then it was time, I slipped on my dress and shoes, took a deep breath and got in the car. *It's funny the two times you want to look your best, weddings and funerals.* The Church isn't far from our home and I am pleased to see my mother's car driving into the spot beside mine. Getting out I smile at her, “How you doing mom?”

“Good,” she replies and then with a little laugh adds, “I received your message.”

I shake my head and laugh myself, “Just ignore that, I don't know what I was thinking, today is weird.”

“That it is, that it is.”

Holding hands, we head into the Church, crossing the threshold it washes over me again. The memory stronger, fuller pulling me deeper down.

*I am in the Church, this Church. People are crying, and my mother is ashen faced standing rigidly in her pew. A picture of my grandmother is at the front surrounded by flowers. This isn't surprising she was an avid gardener. My grandfather stands beside my mother looking straight ahead. I sit through the service. I stand when I am supposed to, I am quiet and I am good. I know my Grandmother hated if we were loud during Church. Everything is exactly the way it should be except my Grandmother is not beside my Grandfather in the pew. She is up there laying in a casket. This is her funeral. I do everything exactly right until they carry the casket away. Then I can't take it anymore...then I leave. I run away, I'm small so it is easy to dart through the large wooden doors. I run and run for what feels like ages. My first marathon. I run until I get to the pool and I sit on the hill and I cry. It seems like hours passed when I see a familiar car drive up. My Grandfather gets out and scans the park pausing briefly before walking up the hill towards me. I play with the tulle on my dress and don't meet his eyes. He sits down beside me and starts picking dandelions gone to seed. Blowing one into the air we sit in silence and watch how it dances until it lands on the ground.*

*"You know, the seed only comes after the flower has died. It can float for kilometers if the right breeze carries it far enough. The flower will never know where the seedlings end up or how many will become flowers. It just has to trust that they will catch the wind and end up exactly where they should be." I look at my Grandfather, tired and drawn as he pats my hand and says, "Come along now, there are sandwiches to eat and people we should be saying hello to." We went to his car and returned to the funeral*

That's it, comforted with the return of this memory. Now precious like a jewel I hold my mothers' arm and walk in to pay respects for my Grandfather on this day. After all there are sandwiches to eat and people to say hello to.