

## *forget-me-not*

Her laughter was rare but contagious, echoing smoothly off of the walls in our home. It was moments like these that I cherished the most, as her eyes crinkled in laughter and her mouth turned upwards into a wide smile. The reason for my grandma's laughter was because I had misspelled the name of her favourite flower *forget-me-not* as *furgot-me-not*. I had become distracted by the way she glittered in the sunlight peeking in from our window, almost as if I could see right through her. I brushed away the thought before I joined in with my grandma's laughter, our expressions mirroring one another. The joyous moment, though brief, seemed to last a lifetime.

When the laughter faded, I was desperate to prolong the feeling of happiness and suggested we go for a walk, as I knew how happy it made her to get a breath of fresh air. As a girl of few words, I simply took my grandma's hand, aged from hard work and delicious cooking, and led her outside. The weather was mild and not as nice as it could have been for spring, but I was confident that we would be able to keep warm from each other's company. The sidewalks were deserted for the most part but we didn't mind, much preferring to spend the time together, isolated in our own little bubble.

As we slowly walked side by side, cars frequently passed by beside us and I found my mind wandering as quickly as the vehicles travelling down the street. Once in a while, a sports car would whiz by and I was curious as to where they could possibly be going in such a rush or if they simply felt the need to go fast just for the sake of it. My grandma wisely once told me that *those who seek power often lack it themselves and so they use other means to satisfy their need to feel in control, even temporarily*. The cars flying past are undoubtedly one of the situations she was describing, though I could never understand their desire to speed through life as I favoured cherishing each moment slowly - especially those spent with my grandma.

While walking, I glanced around me and observed the emerging forest area that the sidewalk was leading to. I noticed the path we were on had shifted from dirt to gravel and the ground was more uneven than before. Knowing this might've been difficult for my grandma to step on, I attempted to warn her to tread carefully but realized she was nowhere to be found. It seemed that my feet had unknowingly matched the pace of my rapidly changing thoughts and I must've travelled too far ahead of my grandma before she was able to catch up. I frantically searched behind and around me, worried that I had gone too far or that one of us had taken a different route without realizing it. I stood in the same position for a minute or two, hoping she'd reach me by then, but when she still didn't show up, I began to panic and desperately called out her name. Tears formed in my eyes as I chastised myself for being so carelessly unaware of my surroundings. As I shouted for her, I retraced my steps and slowly made my way back from the way I came.

Eventually, from around the corner, I was able to make out the brown, curly bob of my grandma's hair from behind a tall maple tree and relief flooded into me as I let out a contented sigh. I rushed over to her as quickly as my legs would allow and apologized profusely before explaining what had happened. When she turned to look at me, her eyes looked vacant and barely recognizable but in the blink of an eye they returned to normal and she simply smiled and laughed in response to my rambling. I was just about to question her regarding her whereabouts but before I knew it, she was well on her way back home

without me. Not wanting to lose sight of her again, I quickly matched her pace so we were walking side by side, ensuring that I didn't proceed too far ahead without her.

Though I was disappointed that we were heading home so soon, I realized it was probably for the better as I glanced up and noticed the sky had begun to darken. The clouds that had appeared bright and fluffy now loomed over us like the bearers of bad news and I guess, in a sense, they were, letting us know that rain was imminent. I don't hate the rain as most people do but instead, I enjoy it, especially because, in the words of my grandma, *though rain is temporary, it leaves a lasting impact on those it touches, helping them to grow.* Of course, she was speaking about plants in this instance but the truth of her words never failed to leave me speechless and, like the rain, she left a lasting impact on the way I now think.

Coincidentally while on the topic of plants, on our way back I saw the hint of a few light blue flowers with bright yellow centres peeking out from the grass beside us. I stopped and got the attention of my grandma, instantly recognizing the appearance of her favourite flower. It was funny that they were called *forget-me-nots*, as there was no way I could ever forget them because of how often I saw them - both inside and outside our home. It was rare to see them so far away from our house and so I pointed them out to my grandma in amazement, hoping to see the same look on her face as my own. She followed my finger to where the flowers lay and gazed at me with astonishment before the expression on her face changed to a sad sort of smile and she hurried on.

I watched the back of her frame walk away, dumbfounded and concerned, and opened my mouth to ask her what was wrong. Before I had the chance, she stumbled over an upturned rock in her haste to leave and fell onto the ground below. The fall seemed to happen in slow motion, her fragility exposed for me to see, and my world tilted off of its axis as she went down - as if I was falling with her. When she collapsed, her entire body shuddered with the impact and briefly, it appeared as though she flickered like a candle that was on the verge of going out. The brief flicker caused her shape to look smaller and faded and it saddened me to realize how different she was from the strong, resilient woman I once knew in the past. Age had worn her down and at that moment I wished nothing more than to take her place or at least return her to her youth.

Knowing I was wishing for the impossible, I decided to focus my attention on my grandma and ran over to her just as she was beginning to pick herself back up again. I grinned as I recognized her determination and understood then that she would always be the woman that I knew and loved inside, regardless of her physical struggles. When she was able to fully stand up again I put my arms around her in support and asked if she was okay. She nodded and ever so slowly, we continued our journey home. The sky above had darkened even further by then and, wary of the impending rain, we gradually picked up the pace, being careful of where we stepped. It had been a few minutes of silence when my mind returned to my original worries about my grandma's reaction to the flowers.

Soon, my thoughts were interrupted by a drop of water on my nose. As I gazed at the sky above us, rain droplets were beginning their descent from the clouds. I looked over at my grandma and she too was watching the sky, her expression hollow. When she caught me looking, her face changed back to normal but not quickly enough for me to miss her previous expression. She took my hand in hers to bring me closer and, thinking she was going to explain herself, I leaned in to hear her better. Instead of giving me an explanation, she simply murmured that she had something to do before joining me inside when we got

back. I frowned and was about to protest but decided against it, as I knew it must've been something important for her to stay outside in the bad weather. It only took a couple of minutes for us to reach our home and while I travelled inside, my grandma lingered on the sidewalk in front of our house and promised she wouldn't be long. By then, the rain was falling unrelentingly into our eyes and our clothes so I hoped she'd be alright by herself outdoors.

When I stepped inside, I made sure to take off my muddy shoes and place them on our front mat, careful to leave room for my grandma's. My damp clothes were sticking to parts of my skin and some portions of my hair dripped rainwater onto our wooden floors. Aware of the mess that could be made, I took giant tiptoed steps to our kitchen to minimize the trail of water on the floor and grabbed some paper towels to dry myself off. I glanced at the clock on the stove and was surprised to see it blinking incessantly, stuck on the time we had left home. The storm outside must've interfered somehow so I made a mental note to tell my grandma about it when she got back inside. After the majority of my clothes were dry, I wandered over to the living room, sat down on our burgundy couch, and turned on the TV to pass the time. As much as I felt the need to take a shower, I wanted to be here when my grandma walked in so I could help with her rain-soaked attire.

After flicking through the TV channels for what seemed like forever, I got up to look outside our front window to see if my grandma was there. When she was nowhere to be seen, I checked the back as well, figuring she'd be spending her time in our garden to ensure the plants were able to weather the storm. Scanning the entire backyard, I realized she wasn't there either and I began to pace in the living room, trying to think of where she could be. It had been at least 20 minutes by now since we separated and I anxiously awaited her return. It was easy for my mind to work double-time, overthinking and listing all of the possible scenarios that could have occurred - the majority of which were unpleasant.

As I paced back and forth between the back of the house and the front door, I was startled by a loud rumble of thunder that came from outside, accompanied by a bright flash of light. Now I was really starting to feel distressed and began chewing on my fingernails in an attempt to distract myself from my worries. It wasn't like her to stay out for this long without me, especially in this weather, so I decided to go out and search for her. Anything would be better than staying inside and doing nothing while letting my thoughts overwhelm me. I took off the TV, grabbed my coat and boots from inside our closet and rushed to put them on.

When I was ready, I opened up the front door and nearly crashed into someone in my hurry to leave. To my surprise, it was my grandma - although it didn't seem like it at first as she was completely motionless, just standing there in the rain and staring blankly at nothing at all. I gasped and bombarded her with questions about where she had been as I helped her inside, though she barely even acknowledged my presence. Eventually, her demeanour normalized and she was back to her old self, although she deflected all of my questions by telling me not to worry and I could tell something still felt off about her.

Though her outward appearance seemed natural, beneath her calm exterior I sensed a strange sort of vacancy, causing an uneasy feeling to pool in the pit of my stomach. It was as if she had been wearing a mask this entire time and it was finally beginning to slip. Even so, I told her how glad I was that she was here and she looked at me with the same heartbreaking smile as before in response to my heartfelt gratitude for her well-being. I

swallowed and my saliva felt thick, developing a lump at the base of my throat. Regardless of my wariness, I knew her outfit must've been heavy after being soaked through with water from her extended time outdoors. I bent down to take off her shoes, expecting them to be coated with mud, but instead, they were completely spotless. Astounded, I asked her about them and she simply brushed me off with the same reply she kept giving me: *don't worry about that, sweetheart.*

When I tried to examine her clothing more closely, she moved past me into the living room and sat down on the couch. It was then that I realized there wasn't a drop of moisture anywhere on her and I blinked a few times to make sure my eyes hadn't deceived me. From where I stood, she appeared to be shivering despite the lack of water anywhere near her so I thought I'd find a warm blanket in hopes of making her feel better. Before I went, I sat by her side and held her hand in mine, giving it a light but reassuring squeeze. She grasped my hand tightly, almost afraid to let go, and offered me a shaky smile with anguished eyes. Leaving her felt like I was saying goodbye.

After obtaining the thickest blanket from our linen closet upstairs, I was in the middle of telling her about our faulty stove clock on my way down until I entered the living room and stared in dismay at the empty couch. I stopped myself mid-sentence, placed the blanket on the floor, and questioningly called out my grandma's name for the second time today. When I had searched the entire ground floor, I peered out of the windows and doors yet again but she had completely disappeared. I explored upstairs just to be sure, even though I knew I would have heard her come up, and got the sinking feeling that wherever she was, she wasn't coming back. Refusing to think like that, I desperately double and triple checked the whole house and even briefly stepped outside, though the storm was so bad I could barely see two feet in front of me and so it wasn't long before I reluctantly made my way back inside empty-handed.

Feeling defeated, I returned to the couch where my grandma had been just moments ago, praying by some miracle she would be there. The couch was no longer empty and I stared in awe at what had taken the place of my grandma, apprehensive about the reason for why it was there. Instead of the familiar, warmhearted woman I knew and loved, there lay a basket of her favourite flowers - *forget-me-nots* - that were flourishing with life. I crumbled to the floor as the realization hit me like a punch to the gut. These were the flowers I gathered from our garden yesterday, the ones that I was supposed to carry to her grave. I let out a broken laugh which soon turned into cries of despair, realizing that trying to find my grandma was futile; she was never even here to begin with. Sobs racked my body as I painfully opened myself up to the truth: she was gone, forever, and the only place she'd ever exist again was in my head.

Once the crying had ceased, I was left with an ache in my heart and glanced outside the window to see if the weather looked as bad as I felt. It was still pouring out and the tiny droplets beat against the glass like a heartbeat, a sound that I desperately wished to hear from my grandma once more. Watching the rain fall, I was struck by the hopeful thought that my grandma had returned to me and she was bound to do it again. She was the rain and *though rain is temporary, it leaves a lasting impact on those it touches, helping them to grow*, just as I knew my grandma would do throughout my life.

Mournfully, I looked back at the flowers and went to sit on the couch, placing the basket in my lap. As I delicately touched a petal on one of the forget-me-nots, I remembered a conversation I had with my grandma about the reason why these were her favourite. She

told me, quite simply, it was because, similar to the flowers, she never wanted to be forgotten. *We have the ability to be immortal*, she said, *as long as there is one person in this world who remembers us*. She made me promise her then that I would never forget about her, no matter what. I smiled as I realized she had ensured that I would keep my promise, as the rain and these flowers would always be a constant reminder of what we had and had lost.

I laid my head back on the couch and placed a firm grip on the *forget-me-nots*. Closing my eyes, I listened to the soothing echoes of rain from outside. And, just as my grandma had always wanted, *I remembered*.

***forget-me-not***