

A Journey Home

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Maybe all it takes in life is one good story. So this story is about my grandma. A Soul of many lives

A New Purpose:

The day after I decided I didn't want to live anymore I had the chance to open my eyes again. It was a chance that most people didn't get after making that decision. The moment my eyes burned from a glaring white light, I knew what had happened, something I was half expecting.

I was never much in life, but one thing I was good at was imagining. Imagining everything that could go and come to be. That is one thing that helped me in life, so nothing was unexpected. And so when I woke up in the hospital instead of the darkness of the afterlife, I knew this was one of the possibilities. And when it was my doctor who was the one who sat beside me, and not my mother, I knew it was reality.

I had no particular reason I didn't want to live. I guess it was because I didn't have a reason.

Or maybe it was just because I had realized that I didn't have anything that made me who I was. It was crazy how fast your life could change. And how fast the people around you could as well. From being a person with dreams to not knowing who you are. It is easy to think about every decision in your life that has shaped you to the person you are now and how you could have done better, but all of that meant nothing if just one moment you lose yourself.

And now I didn't know who I was anymore. And the emptiness of being nobody even to myself was enough of a reason for me.

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The week after I decided I didn't want to live, a familiar face finally came to visit me. She looked even more stressed than usual and her eyes looked even more lifeless than mine had. In one hand she held a beverage like she always did and in the other a bouquet of flowers. She stared at me, lying on the bed for a while, with an expression I couldn't quite read. And the long silence with the hum of the glaring light bothered me even more than her cold stare.

Finally she sat in the chair next to me.

“Hello Sally,” my mother said, her voice unsure. It almost as though it seemed like she was forced to come here. But it was just probably to keep her conscious clean. I didn't respond to her but instead just kept on staring at the bouquet of flowers placed on the desk besides me. *Who could it be for?* My mother was never the type to do nice gestures, only when it was necessary. A part of me knew my mother would never bring me flowers, but just a small part of me hoped it was for me. *Maybe she had changed, maybe deep down she really did care about me.* And as all those thoughts ran through my head I couldn't help but wonder maybe the life I could have had with her.

“Uhm, are you feeling alright?” she asked me. I saw her reaching out to hold my hand but I scooted away. Her eyes were filled with a sense of annoyance and eyebrows slightly lifted when she was stressed.

“Now why'd you think to do such a stupid thing Sally, you know how busy I am?” I didn't know what to say to her and I could tell she was becoming more tense.

“For crying out loud Sally, say something, or at least tell the doctors to stop nagging me,” My mind blurred as my mother spoke. Her words were always hurtful but even more now. I thought maybe losing me was enough for her to care about me. But I just had to know one thing.

“Mom, did you ever love me?”

The room went silent, and I finally looked up at her. Her face was blank.

“Sally, please can we not right now.”

“The doctors told me you need a place to stay after you're discharged. So I'm giving you the address to your grandma, I already called her and she said she'll let you stay.”

“Here's her address,” She said, holding out a piece of paper.

“Now I'm leaving this town for good tomorrow to live in Tokyo with my new husband, so just please do me a favor and don't cause anymore trouble.” Saying that she left the paper on the table beside me and walked away.

And all hope left that day when my mother disappeared through the door and never looked back while holding the bouquet of flowers in one hand.

The Dandelion Garden:

Three weeks after I decided I didn't want to live I stood in front of a small cottage. Before I was discharged my doctor told me a few things about my grandma, since I had never met her. Number one, she lives far out in the Japanese countryside with barely any other civilization. But my doctor said nature would be good for my healing, I disagreed. Number two, her body was becoming weaker and was having trouble moving around and that I would now act as a caretaker. And lastly Number three, which was the most important, was that she was experiencing early stages of dementia.

My doctor told me that it was a surprise that my grandma was living alone in these conditions and it was perfect that I was visiting her so I could help her. At first I was hesitant about visiting my grandma, she was from the dad side and my mother never talked about anything related to him. It was like he never even existed after he had passed away. And I never even met my dad so for me it was like he didn't exist.

The drive over there was long and awkward. My driver from the hospital never even once said a word. But those long 6 hours were enough to clear my head and prepare myself. It was like the farther away we drove from my home, a memory was left behind.

So now I stood in front of her house. The place was in nature even more than I had imagined. And the weather was one of those dreamy early summer days. Ones where the sun isn't too bright, but enough to lighten up your day. Those days that feel oddly nostalgic from days you could just run around in the dirt. Days that remind you of the time you used to have. From the moment I was dropped off and the loud sounds of the car drifted into the distance the silence became clearer. But it wasn't a bad silence. The ones where you can hear everything. There's finally no distractions and you can hear every detail of your surroundings. Like the steady beat of the cicadas buzzing, or the rustling of the leaves on the trees, and if I listened close enough I could hear the soft rushing stream, something I had never experienced.

The entrance was small and the door bell seemed to have been broken. So I knocked a few times softly.

“Coming!” a gentle voice said. It took two minutes for finally someone to open the door, where I saw my grandma for the first time. The first thing I noticed was how she looked like nothing I had imagined, or nothing like my dad from the photos. My dad had very strong features and the vibe you get when you see something intimidating. But she was the opposite. Her eyes were soft, and I could tell she was one of those people who just always had a smile on their face. Then she suddenly embraced me into a strong hug.

“Oh dear, I missed you so much!” she cried, squeezing me even more. *Missed me?* I thought to myself.

“Have we met before?” I asked confused.

“Of course we have sweetie, all the time, but I don't blame you for not remembering you when you were so little! ”

“Now come on in” saying that she led me inside. I was still confused from what I just heard. My mother had said I never met grandma, even so I never met my dad. But now I'm told that I used to visit all the time?

“Here sit down there, and I'll go get you a cup of tea”

“Oh no it's okay-” but even before I could finish she was already headed towards the kitchen. Her house was close to what I had imagined it to be. Cluttered but not messy. It was like every inch of the space was filled with items, some that were unique and others that were just random. Finishing making her tea she finally sat right next to me.

“Thank you for letting me stay here, I know its a burden having me”

“Now while would you be a burden”

“Well you probably heard from the doctors about why I'm here, and what I did...” I said awkwardly. I knew deep down my grandma didn't really want me here. Nobody would want to deal with someone like me. And having the fear of me doing it again.

“I dont know what you did sweetie, but all i care about is that you're here” I knew that she was lying, but it was kind of her to pretend.

“Listen” my grandmother said taking my hand,

“Here you don't have to worry about things that happened before, this is your new life.” my grandma said gently, and her smile made me a bit more comfortable.

The whole time I couldn't help but notice a piece of dried flower carefully framed.

“That's a dandelion flower, isn't it pretty?” my grandma said, noticing me staring intensely at the frame.

“Yes it is, but may I ask why it's framed?” I asked, and my grandma chuckled a bit.

“Ah yes it is a bit strange isn't it. It's because it was of great importance to me, like all the other items in my room. Ones that hold memory.”

“What memory does that flower hold?”

“Oh well sweeties thats going to be a long story, is that alright”

“I would love to hear it”

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Well you see, dandelion flowers were my favourite when I was a rabbit. I would dream about eating them all day until my mouth became yellow! But I was a very quiet and weak rabbit. I never was able to become so courageous like my mother. I was just too afraid of the world. You know, the world we see as humans may not seem so scary, like a mouse. But fear is just a matter of perspective.

How is just a tiny mouse scary right? Well it was my biggest fear when I was a rabbit. Mice in my world were known to eat small bunnies like me. But no bunny was ever small enough to get eaten by a mouse, except for me. And on my first day outside in the fields I was chased by a big mouse, almost getting killed.

So everyday while my brothers and sisters were out playing in the field I never really got to see, I was inside my burrow with only my mother. While I only heard the stories of the outside world. And my dream place was the dandelion garden. I was only able to eat dandelion flowers on special occasions, and the thought of a field full of them was enough to make my heart flutter. But I knew the only time I could visit the garden was in my dreams.

And everyday I would cry to my mother,

Mommy, why was I born so small? I wish I could go outside. I wish there weren't any mice.

And all she would tell me every single time was,

You can't change the environment you were born in, you can only change your perspective.

Everytime she said that, I felt so frustrated! Because as a tiny rabbit I didn't know what she meant by that, I didn't know how to change my perspective. And I hated myself every single moment I lived.

But then my mother fell sick. And it was like the only world I knew came crumbling down. The only person that was by my side was now going to be gone, and I couldn't watch her so weak. I cried beside it until the very end. And one day she said to me,

“Please little one stop crying, and go live. Be brave for me”

That was the last thing she said. And those words were enough to give me courage, and go out there. And for the first time in months I saw sunlight. The way my mother always described it. But as I stepped out my legs shook, and my mind panicked. And all that courage I had seemed to have gone away, and my body froze. But suddenly I smelled it. It was very subtle but with the flow of the wind I could smell the sweet smell of dandelions I loved. My body felt lighter. I knew I could keep on going, I had to, for my mother. So I ran, like I've never ran before. Even though I was surrounded by hundreds of mice I didn't care.

And when from the moment saw the infinite yellow garden, it was like all the mice had disappeared. I ran through it with all my strength and finally stuffed my mouth with the flowers I dreamt about. Even though laying in the dandelion garden was the last moments I spent in my rabbit life, I was glad I did. And I realized finally what my mother meant, fear is just a matter of perspective, if you choose to only see the mice you would only see that, but if you choose to see the garden you its like all the other fears dont matter.

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I sat there not knowing what to say. Then my grandma started laughing.

“You probably think I'm crazy don't you!” she says. At that time I didn't know what to think. I just believed it was the dementia my doctor was telling me about.

“No, I think it was a wonderful story,” I reply, putting on a smile.

“It's okay Sweetie, your mother thought I was crazy when I told my stories too,” *That was why my mom lied about my grandmother* I thought to myself.

“But your dad believed it, he loved my stories”

“What was my dad like?” I ask her. She was the only person besides my mom who really knew my father.

“Your father was so full of life, and he also reminds me of you, he was so gentle and caring”

“I wish I could've met him”

“You have Sweetie, your father would've definitely visited you in his new form.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well in life, our souls have a chance to experience different forms of life. Like I have.”

That made me smile a bit. The thought of having a second chance in life. Then maybe things would have been easier.

Blueberry Pancakes:

The first night there felt strange. I didn't sleep at all but it wasn't the thoughts that awoke me but rather the silence of them. There was a weird comfort in staying up. As I went downstairs I was instantly filled with a sweet smell.

“Good Morning Sweetie!” My grandmother greeted me energetically.

“I was thinking we could go visit the mountains this morning” but that thought didn't excite me. Honestly I hadn't felt like doing anything. Nothing had seemed to spark my interest anymore. I just couldn't find the reason to do anything. Maybe if I had liked the mountains I would, but no, I didn't. The mountains scared me. Even when I was little and had dreams. It was just like a pile of things to fear put together. Just the thought of miles and miles of unstable roads and animals scared me.

“No, I'm sorry” I replied. Seeing my grandma's smile drop not fully but a little made me feel a little guilty. But it was nothing different, I was used to disappointing people, especially my mother.

“Why can't you do anything correctly!” my mother yelled and the usual pain struck on my face. I cried but I knew it was useless. Tears dropped, smearing the paper I was gripping so strongly. My mom noticed and snatched the paper from my hands, reading it out loud.

“Art scholarship program...” she said laughing mockingly.

“Seriously, This is what you have become now. Art? What happened to your actual dream of becoming a doctor?”

“That was never my dream” I mumbled softly.

“What?”

“That was never my dream!” I yelled louder now. And the expression on my mothers face shifted.

“You're just looking for an excuse to escape from what truly matters” Saying that she threw my paper, along with my dream.

“Thats all right sweetie,” my grandma said, never even once losing that smile.

“You know, on days where I feel down I always eat blueberry pancakes, here have some” She then placed a plate of imperfectly stacked blueberry pancakes in front of me. I was hesitant. I didn't feel like eating anything, I never really found joy from it.

“These were the pancakes that make me hopeful everyday”

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In one of my life as a human, this particular one was very tough on me. At the beginning my life looked very bright. I was a very smart one. With a college degree in law and everything, graduating at the top of my class. I was also married to my husband Arther. We both were living a very happy life. But one day I was diagnosed with cancer. I think the hardest part wasn't the pain but having to give up on my dream, and my life but the fear of losing Arther. I couldn't even look at Arther because I was afraid. Afraid how

he was going to look at me now. I had become silent, shutting everyone out. And for a while I had made peace with the dark, and my only hope was to die peacefully.

But one thing about Arthur was he was stubborn. He wasn't just going to give up, or even let me give up. For a while he just came to my hospital room and talked to me. But I often just ignored him. I know it seems cruel but it was better than giving him hope. Every story that he told me, every present, and every reaffirmation that it was going to be okay was just brushed off by me.

And one day he did something different. He didn't greet me like he usually did. He didn't tell me how his day went. He just sat on my bed and pulled out a blue tupperware and placed it in my hand. I slowly opened it to see blue pancakes. I wanted to tell him it was pointless. I wanted to tell him food wasn't going to help me. But I just couldn't hold it in and began laughing.

“Why are the pancakes blue!” I giggled, it was so stupid but something about it just made me laugh.

“Well I knew you were too good for normal pancakes!” I'll never forget the way Arthers face lit up. And those were the best pancakes I ever had in my life. Even if they were cold and stale, they were warm from Arthur's love.

From then on he was there every morning with the same blue tupperware ready to feed me my pancakes. And everyday that gave me the hope to live, just to see Arthur give me his pancakes. So it was just something so small like pancakes that helped me live and a reminder that true love will always accept you for who you are.

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I smiled and stared down at the pancakes and took a bite. It was exactly like how my grandma had described it. There was just something about it that felt warm. I took a bite, then another, until I had already finished my whole plate.

“You know you really do remind me of your father” she said while I was stuffing my face.

“The way you become so eager about things”

I felt like I was the quiet opposite of that. The last time I was eager about something was probably even before I was conscious. The only dream I remember having was art. But maybe it really was just to escape my real responsibilities that I should've done. Being eager has only disappointed people, and myself.

“What was my dad eager about?” I asked curious. I wanted to know more about my dad. He was like this big piece of chunk missing in my life that could explain everything, and how it fell apart. And why my mother hated him so much. But most importantly why my mother hated me so much.

I only have one memory of my mother even mentioning my dad. It was when I was in middle school and I had just won an art submission project at my local school.

“Mom?” I said fearfully, as my mom drove me home from school.

“What Sally,” I remember the look on my moms face. Her eyes were always stressed and tense. Like she has never caught a break in her life. I don't think she has ever genuinely smiled in front of me.

“Do you want to see my drawing? It won at a competition today.” I held up my drawing, it was a portrait picture of my mother. I wanted to paint her smiling and I looked for so many opportunities to capture her smiling but I never did.

Her expression shifted the moment she saw my portrait.

“Dont ever show me that again. Do you understand!” She snapped. But I didn't understand. It was a drawing I had worked so hard on.

“But mom...” I sobbed.

“You're going to end up just like your father at this rate! Useless and dead!”

That was the only time she even mentioned his name.

Then my grandma said,

“Here I'll show you.” Saying that my grandma stood up and led me upstairs to a room.

“I kept your dads room exactly how it was”

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From the moment I stepped into the room something hit me. It wasn't nostalgia it couldn't be. It felt like my father was there. Like I was meeting him for the first time. Like I finally understood him. His room was filled with color. Reminding me of the joy I used to have painting them. There were hundreds of paintbrushes and canvas that I used to once dream of when I was a kid.

And in one of the many paintings he had, there was one that made me freeze, a beautiful portrait of my mother, smiling. And all of the sudden I couldn't hold it in anymore and I collapsed to the floor, sobbing. Tears flowed out of me with emotions I couldn't understand. My grandma rushed to comfort me by my side.

“Im, Im sorry I dont even know why Im crying”

“Yes, you do, you finally met your father,”

“Here take them, your father would've wanted you too,” then she handed me a canvas and a worn out paintbrush. I gripped them tightly.

Sunrise:

I stared at the empty canvas in front of me. *Maybe just one more try.* And I stood up and picked up my dads paintbrush. It felt strange knowing that my dad once held it. Grieving was harder when I finally knew who my dad was. But it felt like the connection I needed to finally get up. So I did. My hands trembled as I brought the brush up to the canvas. But the moment the paint touched the rough fabric, my chest began to loosen. I didn't know what I was going to paint but it didn't matter. As the colors spread, a

rush of memories came back, and I finally felt free again. I began to remember what it was like to have something of your own, my own dream.

As the colors began to bleed together, I realized I had painted my grandma, with her gentle smile. And naturally a smile formed on me too.

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The next morning I woke to a soft creak of my bedroom door pulled me out of a deep sleep. I blinked against the darkness, the room still pitch black. Grandma stood in the doorway, a gentle silhouette

"Grandma?" I mumbled, my voice thick with sleep and confusion.

"What time is it? Is something wrong?"

She walked over and draped a warm shawl over my shoulders.

"Nothing is wrong, sweetie," she whispered, her eyes crinkling with a soft smile.

"Just trust me. Come with me."

I was confused, and a part of me wanted to crawl back under the covers, but the certainty in her voice made me stand up. I followed her down the stairs and out the front door. The early morning air of the countryside was crisp and cool, and the sky was still almost pitch dark.

We walked a short distance to a small clearing and sat down in the dewy grass. We didn't say a word. As the minutes passed, the darkness began to lift. The horizon bled from darkness into a soft, glowing pink, and then erupted into a vast golden yellow. It was the most beautiful sunrise I had ever seen. The warmth of the light washed over my face, and for the first time in my life, I felt entirely at peace.

I turned to look at my grandma. She was staring at the horizon, her eyes reflecting the golden light.

"Grandma?" I asked softly, breaking the silence. "Out of all the lives you've lived... which one was your favorite?"

She didn't hesitate. She turned to me, her smile widening, and took my hand in hers.

"This one, sweetie. Right here, with you."

A lump formed in my throat, and I squeezed her hand back.

"What about your next life?" I asked.

"What do you want to be next?"

She looked back up at the vast, colorful expanse above us.

"Well," she breathed out, her voice filled with a quiet contentment.

"I think I'm already satisfied. I've seen enough, and I've loved enough. So in my next life, I think I'm just going to be a part of the sky."

This was the last story she told me before her dementia had become worse. But her kindness always remained.

Life now:

My grandma passed away in late fall. She died peacefully in her sleep and that morning there was a beautiful sunrise of bright pink and soft purple. I was devastated but I knew she was living happily in her next form and it was not a permanent goodbye. I stayed in my grandma's house for a while even after she passed away. I guess just to connect with my dad and her for the last time before I went back to the chaos

of the world. But this time I am not afraid, because I know who I truly am and I know why dad and grandma will always support me.

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So now I am 1 year after I decided I didn't want to live anymore. But now I am far from that. Maybe life isn't so complicated that you need a reason to live. Maybe it is enough of a reason to just want to see the dandelion garden or eat blueberry pancakes.

I will never know if my grandma really had lived all those lives or if it was just made up stories from her dementia. But to me it didn't matter, because it was *her* stories that taught me not to be afraid, to find the light in the dark, and most of all I learned to be myself. And as I stared at the golden skies, I realized in my next life I was going to be a bird.