

Reunited

It all started with a little cough. We never thought anything of it. It was just background noise, like the swaying of a pendulum or the whisper of a summer breeze. You'd think I'd have noticed after seeing him week by week, coming over at eight o'clock sharp every Sunday morning. My mother and I had been doing that ever since Grandma died two winters back. Her death had taken quite a toll on him and he never was the quite the same since. His body and soul quickly began to wither away, stolen by the stresses of life. I always attributed his poor health to his numbered years, thinking he was just like any other old man: tired and worn out. As it turns out, I was wrong. My blissful ignorance was destined to be shattered one day and as it turns out that day was sooner rather than later.

All of my memories of my grandfather were of him and his wife, Margaret. They were inseparable, having been married for fifty years. I'd remembered driving out to their little farm in the middle of nowhere and seeing them quietly swaying on the porch swing, whispering and laughing to each other just like they did when they were young when the world was simpler. When their biggest concern was whether to paint the house blue or beige, instead of the constant worries of high blood pressure, writing wills and counting grandchildren that all came with aging.

His world was brighter with her in it. My grandmother was his own personal ray of sunshine: timeless and everlasting. But, his world was made much darker for his sun had shone for the last time. On one fateful evening, her heart stopped. There was no rhyme or reason; she was just there one day and gone the next. My grandfather retold the story every now and again

but it was just as terrible every time. His wife was curled up in bed, complaining of the bitter cold and struggling to stay warm. Her frail lips trembled and her body shook, taking a little bit of life from her with every shiver.

“I’m so cold,” she cried. “So cold...”

So, my grandpa wrapped her up in his arms until her body shook no more. And, she died that night, right there in his warm embrace; another beautiful soul just to become yet another coffin six feet under. But, that was just how the world worked. Clocks ticked and people passed on.

They say time heals all wounds but I have to disagree. People can be bent and twisted and shaken, yet still recover. Sometimes however, a person can be pushed so far that they just snap, creating scars and broken hearts that just don’t get the chance to heal. My grandfather never bounced back after his wife’s passing. A stone wall was built around his heart, never to be knocked down.

I was going over to his house yet again, just like any other day. The sun was warm against my skin and I walked down the sidewalk absent-mindedly counting the cracks beneath my feet. The pale blue shutters of the old folks’ home in which he resided creaked with the wind. I walked into his room expecting to see my little old grandpa watching the window with the grim expression he always wore, but all I saw was his small, lifeless body collapsed on the floor. I ran to his side and brushed the wisps of hair off of his face and immediately called my mother. The ambulance showed up shortly after and the last thing I remember was seeing my beloved grandfather getting carried out on a stretcher.

By the time we got to the hospital, the sun had set. We began searching for room two thousand twenty five where we had been told he was staying. As soon as we found it the doctor stopped us before entering his room. He touched my arm sympathetically and told us with great sorrow that my grandfather didn't have any time left. He had stage four cancer and we were too late. It had spread to his lungs and there was no treatment that could save him. He also told us my grandfather had known about it for the last few years. That was the first we had ever heard of it. My mother began sobbing uncontrollably. The man we had known and loved had been keeping such a horrific secret, fighting his own internal battle alone, every day.

Slowly, we walked into his room mentally preparing ourselves for what we were about to witness. The rest of my family arrived shortly after us. My grandfather's eyes fluttered as he slowly awoke and motioned for us to come closer to him. We all stood there, crowding around the impeccably white death bed, listening to his faint, rasping breaths for the last time. He opened his mouth to speak, but it took a while for the words to form.

"Please don't cry," he started. "I will finally be at peace, free from the cruel hardships this world has to offer. I'll be able to see Margaret once more, except this time I'll never let her go."