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In My Garden

By Anihime

I have walked this path many times before. Three steps along the dirt path followed by a right onto the sidewalk. The craft store was just down the road, past the florist, and right next door to the milkshake parlor. All of this rooted itself deep within my garden of memories.

Flourishing were the daffodils of childhood, beaming bright as my father sipped his mint chocolate milkshake, nourishing their roots. Daisies sprung from mother's laughter as she held his hand, patting down the soil. Ivy vines twirled as father presented mother with a mahogany picture frame, innocently decorated with rainbow stickers I often kept, his hands coarse from hard work. Then chrysanthemums bloomed, hesitant to poke through the dirt as a coffin— father's coffin— was lowered into the grave.

"He will come home soon," said mother, holding my hand. "Just you wait, Sonya. Father will come back."

There was nothing I could say at the time. All I could do was tighten my grip, reign in my tears as best I could. Pansy sprouts shrunk back into the ground.

A whole year came and went, following up to mother's birthday. She sat in the living room, wine glass in hand, mustering up swirls in between sips. Father's face was framed here and there, on countertops, bookshelves; even the coffee table had his smile.

"He will come home soon," said mother, sipping her wine. "Just you wait, Sonya. Father will come back."

It was difficult, seeing mother like this. I had to do something, hence why I now stand before the doors of the craft shop. My heart sank. On the door was a message that read:

CLOSED FOR REPAIR.

I shake my head. *Great, just great.* The craft store had possibly suffered from water damage due to last night's storm. Father used to assist with the leaky roofs, but now there was no one.

With a heavy heart, I turn away. *Now what do I do?* I couldn't make mother's gift without materials, the florist was closed today (pansies weren't in stock anyway), and milkshakes didn't make for good gifts. Sitting within the milkshake parlor, waiting on my drink, nothing came to mind. *Think Sonya, think!*

Looking out the window, a small grasshopper bounds up to the sill. It stays close to the glass as if it were watching me, mocking me. I don't like grasshoppers much.

I tap at the glass, shoos it away. It hopped off elsewhere.

No ideas, no inspiration, absolutely nothing came to mind.

"It's quite simple, isn't it?" I ask my own reflection. "You find help, of course."

The question was who could help. *Perhaps Jen has some ideas. Maybe she'd let me borrow some paper or even some ribbons!* I nod, sipping my strawberry milkshake, the sweet tang and milky sweetness intertwining in harmony. It was the only idea I had so far. Quick as I could, I reach into my skirt pocket and pull out my phone.

Hoping her number was still the same I dial Jen and wait for the onslaught of rings to end. Somehow the darn grasshopper found its way back to the sill again during the wait. I tap the glass again; it hopped away, again.

“Hello?”

I jump, Jen’s voice echoing in my ear.

“Hey Jen!” I said, hoping she didn’t notice the squeak in my voice.

“Sonya?” she said. “Hey! How have you been?”

“Doing okay. Trying to make a gift for my mother’s birthday.”

“How’s that working out?”

I try my best to explain the situation. The craft store being closed, the florist being closed, and not having a clue as to what to do.

“Do you mind if I stop by your house to grab some crafting supplies?”

“Um, Sonya—”

“Any materials will do,” I said, unaware of my friend’s words. “I just need something to craft with.”

Silence permeated the line. My palms began to sweat. *Why isn’t she saying anything?*

After a while, Jen finally said, “Sonya... I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

A brief bout of static akin to a sigh broke the silence.

“I just left town with my family. We’re going to visit my grandma for summer vacation today.”

What does one say when faced with a situation like this? How could I forget that she was away for the summer holidays? I took a deep breath, trying to stay composed.

“When will you be back?” I asked, fingers crossed it was soon.

“I don’t know,” said Jen. I could feel the shrug in her tone. “Probably until school starts again.”

I sighed. School wouldn’t start again until next month. Mother’s birthday is in three days.
Just my luck.

Once again, that grasshopper was back on the sill! I tap on the glass. It refused to budge this time.

“Sorry Sonya,” Jen said. “Wish I could help you out.”

“It’s fine.”

I tap once more. Still, it wouldn’t move.

“You sure?”

“I’ll figure something out,” I said, slamming my fist against the windowpane this time.
“Have fun on your vacation!” I hung up before Jen could get in another word.

The darn grasshopper finally left.

The walk home felt like an eternity. My head spun, making me dizzy. *What am I going to do now?* I tugged my beret, teeth tightened beneath quivering lips. Tears blurred, turning the path home into a watercolor picture.

But there were no pansies. Bland colors. No relief for me.

My heart ached for father. *What would he do? Where is he when I need him most?*

Frustration echoed around me. My beret became friends with the dirt. Shame coursed through me as I lift my foot off the beret. I dust off the dirt. Father deserved better than this.

More flowers burst through the soil of my garden.

Tulips popped open as father stitched two pieces of fabric together. I bounced on his lap, no older than four, laughing and clapping in joyous wonder.

“Hold still, Bud,” he said. “Daddy’s almost finished.”

‘Bud’. Such a boyish term, yet father always called me that. Flowers are important in my family, so to him, I’m a bud waiting to bloom.

He continued to stitch the fabric piece by piece. Thread by thread. A few more tulips bloomed when father asked me to pick a color.

“Stawbewwy!” I said. Father laughed at my childish pronunciation.

Still, he took strawberry red fabric and continued to sew. Another set of tulips bloomed, though hesitant this time, as father finished the trim.

“And done!” he said. “What do you think, Bud?”

I clapped once, twice, then three more times. Satisfied with my answer, he placed it on my head. My head, however, was too small for it.

“You’ll bloom one day, Bud,” said father as he noticed my pout. “When you become a beautiful flower, this hat will fit you just right.”

Laughter faded as lilies bloomed on a glistening pond. Frogs made their homes on the lily pads while I, a child of ten, cast a fishing line out and into the pond. Father stayed by my side, teaching me everything he knew although neither of us knew how to fish. Mother laughed at our efforts as we fell to our first catch. Soaking wet, we joined in the laughter.

“You’ll bloom one day, Bud,” said father as he wrung water out of his shirt. “When you become a beautiful flower that fish will finally be ours!”

I wrung my beret out, water helped nourish the roots of roses that began to wilt. My heart broken at thirteen with father handing me tissues as he held me close for comfort. My tears never seemed to end.

“You’ll bloom one day, Bud,” said father. “When you become a beautiful flower, someone will pick you and you alone.”

“What if I never become one?” I asked between sniffles.

“You will, Bud,” said father with a smile. “You just need to believe in yourself.”

Raindrops brought me out of my reverie. *If only I could.*

I ran home, damp from rain and just wanting today to end. Mother was still in the living room, sipping on what appeared to be her third glass of wine. She turned to me, a dazed smile on her face.

“Oh Sonya,” she said. “You’re home...”

I walk to the kitchen.

“Do you need some water, mother?” I ask.

“No thank you, dear.”

“Do you need something to eat, mother?”

“No thank you, dear.”

“Then what do you want me to get for you?”

Mother took another sip, staring at father’s smiling face within its frame.

“Another bottle maybe?”

We have no bottles left. I turn to the dishes to wash them, just to keep my mind off the rain. Suddenly, on the windowsill above the sink, the grasshopper was there! *It must’ve followed me home!*

“Sonya?”

I glare at the grasshopper. I hate it. I absolutely hate it!

“Is everything alright?”

“Just fine, mother!”

I tap the glass. Once again, it would not budge.

“If you’re sure...”

Again, I tap the glass. Still wouldn’t budge!

“I just—”

No words escaped. My roots are drowning. My garden is dying. I fall to my knees.

“I just... can’t do this.”

“Do what, Sonya?”

“This!”

I struggle back to my feet.

“Just wait for father to come back,” said mother. “He will today, I’m sure of it!”

I didn’t want to hear more. I ran out onto the back patio. And there it was, still on the windowsill. That darn grasshopper!

I stomp over to it, ready to swat it away myself. But I stopped. It stared at me, but it wasn’t mocking me this time. It pitied me.

Frustration ebbed away as I took a deep breath. Getting angry wasn’t going to help me. But what more was there for me to do?

Just then, the grasshopper leapt off the sill, hopping away from the back patio to the grass-laden backyard. The rain was but a light sprinkle as I chase after the bouncing insect.

It landed with a graceful bound into a small patch of flowers. I couldn’t believe my eyes. They were pansies. Small, vibrant, beautiful pansies!

Their fragrance made my eyes misty, a smile spread from ear to ear. They bloomed. Right in the middle of my garden, they finally bloomed.

I pick a handful of them, mostly yellow ones among purple and blue ones. I weave them together, stem by stem, flower with flower. It felt just like sitting on father's lap all over again, watching him work on his special gifts.

Soon, my gift was done and I ran back into the house. I place the gift on mother's head. Confused, she pulls it off and looks at it. In her hands, a crown of pansies, yellow with purple and blue jewels blossomed in a dainty ring. She looked at me; I smiled.

"Happy birthday, mother!"

Tears sprung from my mother. She placed the crown back on her head, then stood from her chair.

"I told you, my beautiful flower," she said, hugging me tight. "He came back."

I hug her back. She was right after all.

Today, I became a beautiful flower. Just like father always believed.