

Forgetting
By Acadia Guliani

“Blair!” I hear my grandmother's voice floating to me like a melody from a violin. I come running, my short seven year old legs hitting the moist grass as I near her. She sits on an old porch swing, and I land in her lap, giddy with excitement for the masterpiece she will create. She smiles at me, the aging lines around her eyes wrinkling with joy.

“I’m here, Grandma!” I try to copy her harmonious tone, but my young voice can’t compare. Grandma says I sound more like small windchimes being played by the autumn breeze. My grandma’s white hair, long and thinning, is always up in a low bun, pinned with clips she will give to me. Her mottled hand gently reaches up and begins to braid my cool blond hair, still fine and delicate. The braids twist and turn over my head. She has created a crown. She tells me to run off and gather spring flowers from the surrounding gardens, and she weaves them into my hair. Baby’s breath, dandelions, and daisies encircle my head.

Grandma’s house is full of watermelons. Watermelon napkin holders, earrings, and other watermelon trinkets. Mama told me that she would sometimes ask for a watermelon instead of a cake for her birthday. I decide I will have a favorite fruit, too. Maybe strawberries, or grapefruit? Lemon, perhaps?

Her house is also full of matryoshka dolls. I take them apart, clapping my hands with delight as I discover yet another smaller doll inside. I play with them for hours, making villages and families. Grandma warns me not to break them, so I treat them with extra care, eager to please her.

As a reward for swimming lessons, we sit out by the pool together and drink from tea cups adorned with delicate blue flowers. We eat mini cucumber and dill sandwiches, too. For dinner we have salmon, which only tastes good when Grandma makes it.

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The sun is warm on my back as we swing together, drinking ice cold lemonade from tall glasses I can barely see over. Together we point out different butterflies as they flit through the cloudless sky.

“What is that butterfly?” Grandma asks, and I turn to look at her quizzically.

“A monarch, of course - you know that!” I brush it off. Grandma knows her butterflies.

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I notice the fireflies’ twinkling lights begin to appear from through the window as she twists my hair, the strands interlocking. Though it is still summer, the sun is beginning to set earlier. Grandma’s eyes are glazed, and her forehead is wrinkled. I gaze up at her, confused. It’s then that I remember Mama’s words: “Alzheimers, forgetting, sick.” I’m not exactly sure what all this means, but I know something has changed. Forever. Her hands, usually gentle and sure, now falter and pause. I reach up and begin to guide my grandma’s hands at the thing she knows best. Seven years of her doing my hair has taught me how. When we finish, I run my hands along the braid we have made. Not perfect, but it will have to do.

She doesn't move the way she used to. She walks around the house staring at pictures on the wall with a faint confusion. She doesn't remember recipes, doesn't remember people. I can feel her forgetting. The way she talks is more broken and frantic than melodious. She is losing her joy. My grandma was usually a bright and happy person, content to sit and watch the birds.

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Mama says that Grandma has to move to "Memory Care." When I first visit her there, I immediately hate it. The blank white walls suffocate me as I walk by them, pressing in on all sides. I don't see how Grandma could be happy here. It's full of nurses in boring blue clothes and old sick people. My grandma is *not* sick. My young mind can't comprehend how only a little while ago she could have been fine. What happened to her?

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Now I am standing outside the door to her room waiting for Mama to let me in. Whispers make their way through the wood, and I catch a few words.

"Mom, Blair is coming soon," my mother's soft voice reminds. "Her name is Blair - she's your granddaughter."

There is silence for a few moments. Then Mama comes out, her eyes red and puffy. I try not to notice.

I step hesitantly into the small room, shyly hiding behind Mama. A nurse looks up from beside Grandma's bed and smiles at us. Her face is pale and thin, and her skin hangs loosely from her arms. I want to cover my eyes, but I don't. Instead I hold tight to Mama's hand as she guides me over to her side.

"Grandma?" I ask softly. Her eyes look around the room blankly, landing on me. I want to get her out of this place. Mama motions for me to hold Grandma's hand, and I tentatively reach out and take it. It's cold and clammy, but I grasp it gently. She asks me unrelentingly where my granddad is, and I can't bear to tell her that he died a long time ago. I see now that I was wrong. My grandma is sick. She has been for a long time, I just couldn't see it until now.

I sit at the side of her bed. Her eyes are closed and her breath is shallow. Her beautiful hair, now so limp and dull, lays strewn across the pillow. I reach my hands out and begin to braid her hair the way she used to do for me. It has been passed on to me. Her hair is done now, and Mama comes into the room, motioning for me to follow her. It is time for me to go home. I kiss her forehead gently, my tears wetting her cheeks.

Never again will she braid my hair, never again will I hear the song of her voice.