

White Roses on Mommy's Grave

Meghan Sonder

The season is mid-autumn. The leaves have all changed to their brilliant hues of bright yellows, oranges, and reds. While the ancient trees have retained many of them, many more have already fallen upon the ground; their colors standing out all the more against the grey stone masses protruding from the earth. The sun seems much too bright, and the sky much too clear to bear witness to the events about to transpire upon this hallowed ground. Still, with a certain air of stubbornness it persists in its' attempt to brighten the darkest of times with the light dappling this tract of land reserved for the dead.

The man standing before the heavy iron gates watches his daughter run through them. She does not yet understand what this place is and he has not yet figured out how to explain it to her.

Rather than the solemnity that he and his son have arrived with, she runs with the exuberance of a child anticipating a slumber party among friends. He has told her where to go and has let her run ahead because of her insistence on finding the one they have all come to see. He does not find it at all strange that she should want one last moment alone; one last conversation with her mother before her hopes are snuffed out with the crushing of the innocence every child must eventually lose. Watching her now, misunderstanding in her sweet childish innocence his heart broke just a little more.

Her long black hair billows behind her with the force of her bounding steps as she races along to the place she will find her mother. Intent on one mission, she has paid close attention to the directions her father gave her, and quickly finds the black granite stone set in a lonely corner off

of the paths made through the soft earth. She stops abruptly in the center of the path and frowns with what seems like disappointment. Despite this, she continues slowly off the path towards the polished black stone. She carries with her a small, silk black pouch, its' contents known only to her. Softly it swings back and forth at her side. When at last she stops her careful steps in front of the stone glistening with the light of the sun dappled through the treetops, her pouch alone continues its' silent motion at her side like a pendulum counting out time. There are beautiful flowers and a name inscribed on the stone as well as numbers that she silently reads and quietly wonders at their meaning.

Amillay E. Beckly

May 16, 1969-March 24, 2006

At first, she stands staring wide eyed, waiting. Her father had told her that this is where she would find her mother, but there was no one here. She knows she will not have much time before her father joins her at this very spot. Self-consciously she looks down at the ground and only then does she notice the freshly turned earth in a mound before her feet. Breathing deeply, she gathers the courage to speak the words she has rehearsed so many times in her mind, but it does not come quickly. A quiet breeze gently blows through her hair, causing her to look all around her in wonder and finally, her courage built up as much as a child's courage can be, she speaks. She knows in her child's heart that this gentle breeze will carry her words to wherever it is her mother has chosen to go.

"Why did you leave, Mommy? Where did you go? Daddy won't tell me. He only says that you

went away the night I was with Nana. I know you said it isn't right to listen to conversations I'm not supposed to, but I heard him tell Nana that there was a lot of blood. Why was there blood, Mommy? Maddox leaves all the time. He stays out late. Sometimes he doesn't come home at all. I think he's doing bad things. He says it doesn't matter because you're gone. I hear him and Daddy fighting a lot."

She hangs her head in sorrow at her own words. Despite her despair, she does not cry because she knows her words have been heard. Suddenly she raises her head, eyes wide as she stares at the stone before her. It is as if she has forgotten something that she has just now remembered.

She exclaims, "Oh! I have something for you!"

It is only now that she seems to think of the silent pouch that swings at her side. With great, almost exaggerated care she lifts the pouch and pulls it open. The drawstrings shorten as the opening widens. Reaching into the silken abyss inside, she extracts a single white rose. She stares at it for a few seconds before walking up to the stone, taking care to avoid walking over the mound of fresh earth. Silently she sets her gift on top of the glittering surface before quickly backing away. The quiet breeze ruffles the soft petals but it remains where she has placed it.

"I hope you like it!" She exclaims excitedly, "I got it from Mrs. Hemly, the florist who lives next door. I asked her for it because I remembered what you said. If I take something without asking, it's stealing."

The sun seems to shine a little brighter at these last words, as if signaling its' approval. It is this change in light which draws her attention to the sky and the trees which have formed a luxurious canopy over this spot. Like the petals of the rose, the breeze gently ruffles the leaves that have stubbornly remained on their branches. Blinded by the dappled sunlight the girl turns her gaze back to the ominous black stone. Its' polished surface glistens in various areas as the shadows of the leaves dance across it. She watches silently as a sudden calmness wraps about her. So mesmerized is she by the dancing shadows and the comfort brought on by that enveloping serenity that she doesn't notice the shadow which approaches from behind.

While the hand gently placed upon her shoulder is familiar, she is still startled out of the tranquility she has experienced. Looking up behind her, she is saddened to see her father's familiar, yet somber face and understands that it is now time for her to go.

"Worry, go wait by the car with Maddox," he says softly.

With a sigh she turns her attention to the mound of earth before her, and the stone before it, "Daddy says I have to go now, Mommy. We all miss you..." Hearing her father sigh, she pauses to look back at him and the sorrow he can't seem to hide from his eyes. "So, please come home soon."

An obedient child, she turns and begins her walk back toward the car. The exuberance she felt when she arrived is now gone and her pace is slow. The sun now hides behind storm clouds that seem to have rolled in quite unexpectedly and she hears thunder in the distance. The soft breeze

has now turned into a gusting wind which whips yet more leaves from their precarious hold on the branches of their parent trees. She watches them as they flit through the air and lightly flutter to the ground in brief periods of stillness. The leaves left to decay upon the ground are picked up by the same winds and swirled in funnels along the path before her. She doesn't understand why, but this troubles her. As she crosses the threshold out into the land of the living, a feeling of sorrow fills her as she wipes a stray tear from her eye.

The man now standing before the stone turns and watches his daughter as she makes her meandering way back up the path that will lead her to the car. He is still unsure of what to say, how to convey to his youngest child things he didn't want to believe himself. Once he is sure she is well on her way, he turns back toward the stone.

For a long while he can do nothing more than stare. After a time, his stare becomes a glower as anger overcomes his grief. He feels the wind gradually gaining force as it blows the leaves carelessly against the exposed skin of his face and hands. The sky darkens and the thunder rumbles louder as if reflecting his rising temper.

Though he wants to shout he finds himself unable, "How could you do it, Amy?"

Though his voice is strong, it is hoarse from the grief, to which he has found himself a slave. He has so many questions. He wants a great many things, none of which, the silent stone can nor

will provide.

"Why would you do it? Your family needs you. I need you. You could have talked to me. We could have worked this out together. I would do anything; give anything to see you smile, to make you happy again. Wirry doesn't understand. I can't bring myself to explain; I just can't find the words."

Interrupted by the crash of thunder he stops. His anger becomes rage at the thought of his daughter as his mind continues its' relentless circle around how to explain why her mother will not come home. With this thought his anger boils over and he begins to shout as though it has torn away his restraint just as this storm would tear away the remaining leaves from the treetops.

"If I wasn't enough to keep you here, did you even think of your children? Maddox understands but just how *do* I explain it to Wirry? Do I tell her the truth? That Mommy committed suicide because she couldn't stand the idea of being alive anymore? You didn't realize that you were killing us all that night. But you did. You killed us all."

With his last words a soft, clean rain begins to patter to the ground. In silence, he stands and allows it to soak him, hoping that it will wash away his anger. Instead of cleansing him of his anger however, it merely masks his tears; tears he has been holding back until now. He has forced himself to be strong for his childrens sake, but his strength is fading fast.

The storm intensifies around him as a bolt of lightning cuts across the sky and for a brief time,

illuminates the dark stone he faces. Thunder quickly follows. The storm is closing in. He realizes he must leave soon but he is not yet ready. He continues to watch the rain as it steadily falls and the earth which swallows it. It is then that he notices the single white rose placed atop the dark splendor of the stone which remarkably has not been blown away. It reminds him of the bouquet he grasps tightly in his own hands.

With a deep breath, he prepares to say his final goodbye but the storm drowns out his words. In one fluid movement, he throws the bouquet of white roses on the mound of earth converted to mud from the rain. Turning on his heel he walks away. Without looking back, he can sense that the petals, torn from their stems with the force of his throw, are now swirling in the wind he fights against. The naked stems are all that remain lying upon the earth before the grave marker where his wife has been laid to rest.