

Her Flower Garden

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Ever since I can remember, I have loved to play in my mother's flower garden. She would plant new flowers each year, perhaps dahlias, petunias, or perhaps her favourite, sunflowers. They would grow larger and more vibrant each year, hypnotizing to watch. Sometimes she would let me help, both of us laughing at our dirty, soiled overalls. I especially remember the first time she taught me how to plant a sunflower.

"Plant it facing towards the sun, it'll always find its light," she said as I dug into the soft ground with my trowel, my calloused hands sticky with mud and face littered with dirt. She would laugh as she wiped my cheek. "It's going to be beautiful, darling, even if I'm not here to see it." I would shake my head vigorously. "No, because you will be here!" I urged her, pleading with my eyes. She would eventually give in, saying that she promised, but now I understand why the smile always seemed softer, forced.

She died two years later. I was ten. That was the last time we were in the garden together. Before she passed, her hand gripped mine, her eyes firm despite the pain. "Oh, ma! Please don't go!" Tears fell from my eyes as I clenched her hands harder.

"Dear," she rasped, voice like sandpaper. She was so quiet I had to strain to hear her. "I will never go far, you must know."

Her lips continued to move, but only rasps came from them. She tried again: “I love you... my sunflower.” She coughed. Her breath subsided, and her beautiful ocean-blue eyes hardened like bits of sea glass.

Sometimes I wasn’t careful enough. Like when I didn’t get into my dream college, or butchered my first job interview, I had wished and hoped that she would be there to console my countless tears. In that moment I had realized, her absence hitting me again, blunt like a dagger. She was truly gone.

From there, a grudge formed. I couldn’t have believed that she lied to me. For years, in fact. She had promised that she would stay. And foolishly enough, I believed her.

At twenty, I came back, refusing to let tears fall from my freckle-ridden cheeks. I had stayed clear of the reminder. Clear from her. This was the first time in ten years that I had been to the house where I grew up.

As I continued to the backyard, my stomach lurched at the sight. It was all overgrown. The beautiful flowers that we had once placed with care and precision were gone, riddled with weeds,

thorns, and dandelions. Oh, what would she say if she were still alive? I shuddered before continuing to sweep my gaze across its entirety. My breathing suddenly hitched, and my eyes widened. There, in the middle of the field, its petals reaching to the sun and laced with dew

from the early morning, stood a sunflower. It seemed to mock her absence. My eyes narrowed slightly, and my fists clenched. How dare it. How dare it mock my late mother and I. It was pathetic, really.

Walking quickly, despite the weeds in the way and brambles raking my legs, I found myself in front of the flower. Gripping the stem, I tugged and, with much difficulty, ripped it from the ground. I dropped it, beads of sweat dripping from my temple as I stared at the upturned earth where it now rested, glinting in the morning rays. I swore I saw it shiver, as if almost daring me to try again.

“You don’t get to speak for her!” I yelled hoarsely, my voice quivering as my pulse rapidly beat.

There. It was done. Heavily panting, I pushed the thorns from my path, earning more scratches on my palms. It was worth it.

The next morning, I woke up. I slept with some unease, but I brushed it off. The flower was gone. And finally, I was rid of the memories that plagued me.

Sweeping open my blinds with a loud yawn, my blood ran cold, and my legs buckled as I collapsed to the ground, head reeling. There it was again. The sunflower looked as if it hadn’t been rid of its life the previous day. Tall and elegant, reaching its sun-kissed petals upwards so as to receive better light. The garden looked the same, the weeds heavily overgrown as they

wrapped themselves over any possible thing within their reach. The brambles were climbing like mountain goats upon the moss-stone walls encasing the wild mess. How could it have grown back so quickly? Maybe I was just imagining it, I concluded. I would go back outside and properly unroot it from the soil. Then, it wouldn't return.

It happened again the following morning. I was speechless. How was it possible?

This time, I didn't rush to uproot it. Instead, I stood at the window, watching the garden where I'd once felt at home. Memories flashed in front of my eyes. A younger me, gap-toothed, laughing among tulips and daffodils, with my mother smiling beside me. It sounded like honey, echoing in my head. A faint smile traced the curves of my lips. She always had a way of making me feel better when I was down or happy when I was sad.

Taking a tentative step outside, I walked towards the sunflower, the sun already above my head, shining on my neck. It wasn't unpleasant. It was warm.

Reaching the flower, I knew then that maybe it refused to be forgotten, like I so stubbornly tried to make it. And just maybe, I too didn't want to forget. The thought shook me. After all those

years of holding a grudge against my mother for leaving me alone without her company, a twisted knot freed itself from within me.

Kneeling so that my knees touched the ground, I examined the flora. The stem was longer than I expected, and even small buds were beginning to form. It looked inviting up close. It was genuine. My hands found their way to the soil. It was so dry that I was stunned. I didn't know what I expected. For it to be moist and healthy? No, of course not.

The water pail teetered as I carried it to the sunflower, its contents spilling occasionally. I didn't notice, my mind was on more important things. Reaching the flower, I cupped my hands and poured a meagre amount of water gently onto the roots. The soil accepted it gratefully, and I swear that the flower grew just a little bit more.

Determined, I pruned the garden. The weeds came out easier than expected, and with each one removed, I felt like my soul was being healed from the inside out. With each bramble I cut, my heart felt softer, lighter.

Dirt plastered beneath my nails, clothes soiled beyond repair, and cheeks sunburned, I stepped back and admired my work. Though imperfect, it no longer looked abandoned. She would like this, I thought, my mind spinning with so much emotion that I felt dizzy.

The sunflower still faced upward, its golden face bathed in the afternoon light. I could almost feel her smile, guiding me still. It would always find its light.