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Dandelion

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Dandelion

Jane Muir Greene

The old man was hunched over his walker on the garden path, having a tug of war with the wheels of his walker and the pea gravel that barely delineated the pathways in the overgrown, weed strewn expanse of planting beds that hinted of a former hey-day. He was a short man whose middle had increased with every decade, now giving him an egg shaped profile, a ridiculous outline for such a dignified person, dressed in a three-piece suit with a white carnation in his button-hole, a uniform he had worn every day since he first started at the law firm and even on Sundays, like today, while he tended to his garden. At the age of eighty-three he had been retired for twenty years, but his routine had not changed much. He had retained a tiny office at the law firm, where he kept his letters and made himself useful in small ways, bringing in cut flowers from his garden, and keeping an eye on things. But he had let go the office once his walking had become tentative, and now busied himself with his papers at home and an occasional social caller.

The dandelion crossed the old man's path as he gradually nudged his walker in its direction, its wind-swept dance skittering on and off the gravel, sometimes hovering over the sweet peas gone to seed. Its course was lilted and hesitant, sometimes coming to rest for a moment before a small gust lifted it further along between the gnarled roses and the cosmos. Noon sun reflected a sparkle on the dandelion, and the old man thought instantly of his wife, Lenora. He always remembered her when she was in her early thirties, with three children underfoot, scurrying from the sunroom, where the children had their toys, to the kitchen, where she directed the cook in preparation of family meals. His favorite meal was Sunday dinner of leg of lamb and mint sauce. It was always served at one o'clock on the dot so as not to interfere with the children's afternoon nap.

Lenora stood shoulders and head taller than her husband, and was rail thin her whole life. The old man remembered her ginger red hair and fair Scottish complexion, with paper thin skin that he was always afraid to touch for fear it would rub off. Her blue eyes were like water, like an endless pool that showed nothing but layers of transparent blue. If he could see into her soul through those eyes, he would only see pure blue. They sparkled like the dandelion that beckoned him down the pathway as visions of his wife wove in and out of the old man's memories.

The old man stopped, craning his head sideways, marking the dandelion's progress until it blustered into a dried mound of winter's leftovers, leaves scattered against the base of the avocado tree. His shoulders slumped, taking with them his head, which gradually dipped until his chin rested on his chest, eyes downcast and turned in on themselves. He froze in this position. Lenora had been dead four years now. It was difficult to keep to his routine without her, but she had been bed-ridden for several years before her passing, so the old man had been missing the order she brought into his life for long enough. How could he enjoy a garden that was now just a wasteland, after all the years he had so tenderly cared for each new shoot?

Gradually the old man roused, his heavy eyelids lifted and drew his glance back to the avocado, just as the dandelion became caught up in flight from a gusty breeze, twirling up and aloft, buoyed ever forward. Following the dandelion's journey, head held high and shoulders

back, he bounded along the edge of the camellias. Lenora would have Sunday dinner on just about now. His clattering walker and tear stained cheeks strained to keep up, in eager pursuit of a diminishing speck.