

wed-nes-day

June. 1998. Home. A scorching breeze whips across my back and coaxes away every surviving drop of water from my body. I am the Gobi. I am the Sahara. I am without.

Do you know who your mama is, Lilia? Yes, Granma, you're mama's mama. Mama's name is mama. *Oh no, sweetheart. Your mama is Emily Dickinson.* Who's that, Granma? *Who, Sylvia Plath?* No, Emmy Dickinthon. Are you Emmy's mama too? *Oh, Lilia. Don't you know God's little secret?* Is God my mama too? *Lilia, we are all just characters written by other writers in God's big scheme of life. All writers are our friends and creators.* That sounds a little silly, Granma. No one can do that. *Everybody is a little silly sometimes. That's how we get things done.*

My grandmother collects words for a living. She lives through the sighs and whispers of Angelou, Wilde, Silverstein, Frost, and Hughes. Her eyes are the miner's pick, the artist's brush, the violinist's bow. She sees, feels, and writes. She sees everything that moves, stays still, exists. She finds blue in red, water in fire, and moments of the world that are hidden from the rest of us. She is both the creator and the actor on the world's stage.

Every morning, she fetches her ink pot and feather pen and intricately writes her *word of the day* on a part of my body that most closely reflects the word's color and significance. Yesterday, it was *antiderivative* on the bottom of my left foot. Today, she excitedly scribbled *serendipity* on my forehead. All in all, I define my grandmother by the letter E: eccentric and embarrassing.

I have found my ways to erase her marks on my life, both physically and emotionally. The word she stamps on my body every morning escapes from my reality as soon as I push through the front door. My loathing for English, both the language and the subject, always expands exponentially when I find I cannot erase the ink stains on my body. It is not that I am bothered by the humiliation brought on by my merciless peers, but by my Grandmother's irrational obsession with something that only exists to her. Is it not selfish to write about things only she can see? Why is she obsessed with the small, unessential aspects of life? Words are not beautiful. Words are only ways to flaunt one's power over others. If writers control our world, why must they favor rhyme over reason?

a wounded little raven cries

but still sings

flapping her wings, she can never escape the hell that

is lush green and black & white.

the sky is too high to reach, too high

too

high

too

high

It was a Wednesday. Dark, demeaning, and wet. The little drops of heaven that fell from the skies were cold and unwelcoming. I cracked open the window in my closet and cupped my hand, catching a drop and a half. I closed my eyes as my floral dresses of lavender and lace danced around me in the moist breeze. I skipped downstairs in my checkered, knee high socks and left the window open. Polka dots and pleated skirts continued to dance.

While finishing my calculus homework with ease, I checked the clock. 6:42. I turned my eyes back to my work and robotically inhaled my breakfast. The cereal had turned soggy during my time rushing through particle motion equations. The table squeaks like an old friend as I shift my leg to the other side. It is made of a soft oak. A deep, resonate, blueberry chocolate brown colors its every crevice and crater. My attention turns back to the numbers of my existence. Numbers are so reassuring. So rational. So reasonable. So straightforward. Everything Gram is not.

Granma sits across from me at the table and gazes longingly outside. She sucks in a deep breath as if she could smell the wet rain. She hums an unrecognizable tune as if she could hear the leaves crunching and crackling. I look at the clock again. 7:01. She feels the shift in time and walks over to her drawer of nuisances and brings back her block of ink. I watch her look at the pen affectionately as she slowly dips the tip into the ink pot and watches the black diamonds *drip drip*. I groan in anticipation and mutter curses under my breath. She was impossible.

As she reaches over the table, I see her eyes flicker with excitement. Despite her aged figure, her eyes remain youthful and sparkle like exploding stars.

The tip of her pen is inches away from my lower lip when something is wrong. I watch as a splotch of ink rolls down my calculus homework, kissing every problem with its dark touch. Confusion and pain frame Granma's face. Her eyes are now blank palettes; the star is dead, a black hole emerging. She remains static for what seems to be hours and days until she finally begins to blink. I see her rosy lips tremble in their attempt to form audible words, but she fails time after time.

Lilia, where are you?

I was at a loss of words. She was right in front of me. Her eyes were fixed on my face, and I looked no more different from how I did yesterday.

“Gran, I am right here,” I say anxiously, patting my hand on her sunken cheek. What was she imagining *now*?

Lilia, I can't see you. It's too dark in here.

“Gran, I don't understand. It's not that dark outside. Why can't you see me?” What did she mean, she couldn't see me? Sight. Her greatest gift. Her life. Where had it gone?

Lilia, I can't see anything. I can't see. All I can see is...

nothing.

I looked down to see my calculus paper completely covered in black ink.

It had become Nothing.

I spent the next few weeks at home with Granma. She blatantly refused to go to the hospital out of fear of a diagnosis until I threatened to run away and join the COBP (Cult of Bad Poetry). I knew the both of us stopped listening to what the doctor had to say after the two words “yes” and

“blind” slipped from between her lips. We were so dumbfounded on the way home that I forgot to mention that the COBP did not exist.

She was rendered completely helpless with her blindness and needed my help for every task. No longer being able to write, she stopped eating. Her translucent eyes surrendered tears whenever we took walks around the neighborhood. She could hear and feel everything, but could not *see* the colors, the movements, the shapes, and the shadows. I patted her hand in unconvinced empathy whenever she felt these moments. Why does she suffer over something that never truly existed? Suddenly, her hands found their way to my face, and she murmured into my ear,

I was fooled.

I began to take Gram to the community garden house every week so she could find inspiration through the scent of the flowers and the sounds of the buzzing bees. She had not written a single word since that Wednesday as if she was on a strike against God.

I held her hand through every moment of the day. I fed her meals and tried to get her to write again, but she always found a way to squirm her little hands onto her ears and childishly block me out. She had stopped being Gram. She was no longer anybody. Did that mean she was a nobody?

During one stroll around the community garden, she finally began to talk about something that was beyond the parameters of necessity. Her voice was hushed and weak, as if her body was being suppressed by her mind. She grabbed a handful of flowers from her left and levitated them in the air.

What do these look like, Lilia?

I looked at them uncertainly. I stumbled over my words.

“They...they’re the color red. And there are two leaves coming off of the stem,” I said self consciously. I saw her eyebrows knit in a combination of frustration and disappointment. Of course she wished she could see them herself. Her silly words possessed a certain magic mine lacked.

Ah...alright. Thank you.

Silence ensued for the rest of the afternoon.

The next few months consisted of me caring for Gram while keeping up with schoolwork. Numbers were always my friends during these times of pain and distress. I liked to linger over complex equations, examining the relationships between each symbol and number. There were no questions to be asked. The reason I adore the logical side of humanity is because of the Law of Identity in mathematics, which states that “A equals A.” Uniquely to Gram, she would always see it as “A equals B.” However, I had a feeling that this belief was wavering as her world of Nothing approached darkness faster and faster.

It was a sunny Wednesday afternoon. I had been planning on taking Gram to the community garden again when I heard her tiny feet *tip tap tip* down the stairs. She looked gaunt and tired.

Her resolve was as broken as her voice.

I can't go.

The only reason that this was unbelievable to me was because Granma loved the community garden more than anything. In these past few months, it was the one thing that inspired her to keep moving, despite her inability to see. Just as my mouth opened in protest, she interrupted me with the five most painful words of my existence.

Lilia. I can't even see.

I felt the sticks and stones of my mind pelt my heavy heart ruthlessly.

Had I been the blind one this whole entire time?

No matter how many numbers I crunched or formulas I memorized, Gram was not someone who could be figured out through any logical method. Gram would always be Gram, regardless of the circumstances. It was I who needed the mending: my mind and heart were closed to the truth.

It had never occurred to me that everything Gram loved had been taken from her. Being able to see the neighborhood boys run around the basketball court, their whimsical shadows twisting here and there. Being able to watch the graceful blue jay twiddle and twaddle every morning, or being able to gaze at old pictures of Grandpa in his blue overalls, splattered with her favorite mustard yellow paint. I had assumed this whole entire time that I would be enough for her. But just like any other human being, Granma couldn't survive with just bread and water. She needed excitement, companionship, and a bustling world of dreams and beautiful skies. Granma needed more.

I dove into Gram's little whimsical drawer near the oak table. I scavenged for all that encompassed the "Gram who could see," or really, who Gram was on the inside. I found her ink pot and feather pen, and most importantly, I found a paper bundle of her poetry. I spent the rest of the afternoon reading poem after poem, trying to absorb as much of Gram as I could through her words. I was determined to get Gram to write again, and if I had to be her sight, I would do it.

the raven cannot sing for
she has lost her nest, her
twigs toasted on the ends, speckled with
morning dew and wintergreen leaves.
she saddles the night skies with no song.
chirp for home.

The following week, I encouraged Gram to touch all that was around her—every flower, every bench, every insect—truly *everything*. She took her time brushing her fingers through the shimmering daisies, feeling the rough yet smooth cherry red bench, and curiously stroking every precious speck of dirt she could find. Alas, she paused in front of the big oak tree at the heart of the garden. She hesitated for a moment, resting her thumb on her lower lip. Her silent eyes flickered as though she had made a discovery.

What is it, Lilia?

I took a moment to assess the situation.

The entire garden seemed to be chanting, “you are Gram’s sight, you are Gram’s last hope” in unison. I sucked in a deep breath and gently let go of Gram’s small, wizened hand.

Stepping up to the tree, I looked at it from head to toe.

“Don’t assess it quantitatively. Assess it from your heart. Your instincts,” I murmured to myself. The memories of Gram’s poems came rushing through my head and before I could even think, I felt my arms swing around the tree to envelope it in a big embrace.

My cheek rested against the sharp bark, and my arms were not long enough to hold the tree in a loop. I was no longer thinking of *what* was going on, but *how* I felt. I flared my nostrils and took in the scent. What came to mind?

“Musky, charred, pointed, friendly, and bitter,” I noted. I heard footsteps coming from behind. *Tap, tap, tap.* I gazed at the tree at a close distance.

“The bark looks like rusted, shattered glass. Wizened. It reminds me of an old, wrinkled man with gaps in his teeth, smiling incessantly. Satisfied, I imagine,” I chirped, giggling to myself. I sounded so silly. I sounded like *Gram*. I heard more footsteps; this time, they were approaching more slowly. *Tap...tap, tap.*

Lastly, I felt the tree’s embrace.

“Warm. The tree loves me back,” I whispered, giving it a kiss. The footsteps stopped. Turning around, I saw Gram’s face inches away. She had a soft smile lingering on her lips.

Lilia, I want you to do something for me.

She touched my hand, and in response to her request, I gripped it tightly.

I want you...to write a word that describes this old friend on my eyes, unseeing as they are.

Gram reached out and patted the tree with as much affection as she held my hand. She had caught me off guard. Without saying a single word, my hands fumbled in my pockets while I dug for her ink pot and feather pen.

Without even taking a moment to think, my hand took on a life of its own.

Gram closed her eyes, and on her left eyelid, I wrote: TABLE.

On her right, I quickly scrawled: HERO.

On my own forehead, I scribbled: HOME.

June. 2013. Home.

It began on a Wednesday. It ended on a Wednesday. It started anew on a Wednesday.

Wednesday. A two syllable word with three syllable significance.

the raven can sing on wed-nes-days for

she is finally

h o m e.