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Daddy's Little Girl

The sun shines brighter over the garden at my grandparents' old house. Hidden behind an Ash tree with overgrown branches that hung low, stands the tall black iron gates of my mother's childhood home. The house rested behind black iron gates, and the walls held grand arching windows of stained glass that displayed the garden. It was full of trees that my grandfather would cover in cloth to protect them through the winters, as if they were children curled up in bed waiting for a story. The greens of the leaves, and the oranges, purples and yellows of the fruits, were colors of such intensity that only a child could see. My grandfather spent so much time in the garden, I would play alongside him and hope he wouldn't become lonely. My grandmother raised me in a glass house, where I felt suffocated by the rules of not climbing on branches. I played how I pleased when it was just my grandpa and I. That was our sanctuary, where the limitations of others evaporated. I was more than a little girl, and he was more than a mean old man. My grandpa tended to me with a certain fragility he never extended to his own children. He cared for me like he did his trees.

The Olive tree branch snapped from beneath my palms one afternoon, and I fell on my back into the grass patch. No one came running to pick me up again. The only sound following the thud was the leaves rustling beside each other. The sun was still shining through the branches, the wind was still blowing, and I was useless. For the first time, I felt the sort of helplessness my grandmother tried so hard to shelter me from. There was a run in my stockings and they were soaked by my young blood. I hoped my grandma would never see me in my new

dress like this. She would be upset that the braids in my hair had come undone, and that my spring dress was stained with dirt and blood. My grandmother's love is the softest gift my soul has ever had the pleasure to be close to. She's like honey- she's sweet enough to brighten a bitter tea. She makes me think of old vintage hat boxes, and hand-written grocery lists. An out of tune grand piano sits in her living room, but despite it's impracticality, she loves it too much to put it on the street. She looks at me with hope in her eyes, as if I get to live the life she wished for but could never say aloud. The only condition of her love was I would not have the same freedom my brother had. I realize now the denim of my brother's blue jeans were tough, they were made for play. My fabrics were never designed for a girl like me.

I was always *Daddy's Little Girl*. My dad always wanted to play, just like me. He found it amusing when I laughed too loud, or jumped on the couches when I made the floor turn to lava. I walked with my head down towards my Mary Janes, I never looked up long enough to notice how weak the men around me were. I was proud that my smile had the ability to turn cruel men soft. I didn't know my uncle was laughing at my joke book because he had 3 glasses of whiskey before noon. I didn't mind that my dad smelt of cigarettes, or that his white Bronco wasn't worth more than scrap metal. I only knew I loved to drive on unpaved roads and play his REO Speedwagon CD. I liked the way the sun reflected from the Marlboro Golds. I never noticed the look of fear in his eyes that I notice now looking through my baby books. I still hugged my uncle despite his sullen whisky breath, and kissed my father goodnight in between cigarette drags. I didn't know my grandpa had a temper because when I was little, he was just my friend that loved vanilla ice cream. I thought he was like me.

Cruel men know loneliness in the same way that I do, I am just veiled by long black hair and a sweeter smile. It is easier to hide anger beneath a dress that flows, or in the sole of your ballet flats, than it is to carry loneliness in stiff denim. It took many years after my afternoons in the garden to realize my grandpa was a different man than the one my mother grew up with. My family no longer speaks of my grandpa, and when they do, it is about his trees. The same loneliness that haunted him, looms over me. Love is different than what I once believed it was. My grandma loved my grandpa in the same way she loves the piano that's out of tune. Even when he was no good, she still kept him in the living room. Loving someone isn't as easy as it was when I played in the garden.