

It was a sight that had taken firm hold of my mind in boyhood, and that will remain in it as long as it can make pictures for itself out of the past.

I am sitting on a porch swing rocking back and forth watching my grandchildren run around barefoot picking flowers. I have a big front yard full of flowers-daisies, dandelions, posies and blue-bonnet. My wife has all different flowers in her part of the front garden. Sunflowers stretch and gently stroke the wall. Vines grow and wrap themselves around the pillar that holds this part of the roof.

My youngest granddaughter, Joan, is five and still thinks that dandelions, which are actually weeds, are the prettiest flowers just because, “when dey get owd like you, dey get gray hair like you too.” She runs up to me and gives me a whole pile of them. She has some in her hair. Her pretty little smile reminds me of my wife when age didn’t have any say in how she looked. Her wavy red hair tumbles around when she runs back and gets me a second pile of the weeds. She gets it from her grandmother. Not only her green eyes and red hair, but also her personality. My mind pulls another picture out of the past.

I remember when I was young, probably fifteen or so, my father told me to go pull weeds in the yard. I reluctantly went outside with a bag and gloves. It was hot and my head was already sweaty. About thirty minutes into my weed-pulling, I heard singing. I dropped the bag and turned to look outside the gate. I saw a girl who was dragging behind her a wagon full of sweets. She had a simple dress of blue, with a yellow sash with brown sandals that complemented her skin. Her red wavy hair was up in a partial ponytail tied up with a pink bow. Her eyes were big and green and she had a splash of freckles on her nose. She saw me looking at her and said in a clear and sweet voice, “Hi!”

“Hello,” I answered rather stupidly, wiping sweat from my brow.

“What are ya, doin’?” she asked.

“Pulling weeds,” I answered, somewhat annoyed at the interruption.

“Really? In this heat? Wow! You must be so thirsty.” She smiled and bent down to her wagon and brought up a pitcher and a plastic cup. She poured out yellow sweet - smelling liquid and handed me the glass.

“There ya go! I had some lemonade my mom made. It’s really good. Try it.”

I blushed because I didn’t like lemonade, but something in the way she smiled and looked at me with honest, big green eyes told me I had no choice but to taste it. I touched

the rim of the glass to my lips. The tart sweet drink dripped into my mouth. It was cold and surprisingly good.

“You like it?” she asked.

“Yeah, it’s sweet,” I replied.

“Yay! I hoped you would,” she laughed. I smiled. Her laugh was so gentle and innocent that I had to.

“Anyway,” I asked casually, “what are you doing?”

“Oh, I made these goodies for a family down the road. They just had their first baby and I love babies, so I made them some snacks as a congratulations,” she explained.

“Well, that’s nice of you,” I said, surprised.

“Well, I do it all the time. Also, I really love baking.”

“That’s cool.”

There was an awkward silence. She opened her mouth to say something, then her eyes drifted toward the bag of weeds on the front lawn.

“Can I have those dandelions?” She asked.

“Um...” I was really confused.

“Sorry, unless you want them,” she sighed.

“Um, no. Take as many as you want.” Her face lit up as she walked over to the bag. She bent down and grabbed a handful of the yellow flowers, blushing.

“Sorry. I really love dandelions. They remind me of people. They start out as a seed, then they grow up, then when they get old, their hair gets white and fuzzy and all it takes is one blow.” She laughed. I looked at her with wonder. How could someone look at a flower and think like that? Not even a flower, but a weed. My mind was being wrapped in my heart strings. “Oh, I’m sorry if that sounded demented. I’m just crazy for these cute little things.” She laughed again. I laughed too. I had only talked to her for five minutes, but it felt so good. I didn’t know why. “Ah! I’m so sorry! I have to go! I had a good time! What is your name, anyway?”

“It’s Anthony Barton. And yours?” I asked with urgency.

“Anabel Drew,” she said gently, “See you later, Anthony Barton.”

“Anabel Drew,” I whispered as she skipped away with her wagon running behind her. “What a beautiful name for a beautiful person. How can she make Anthony sound so soft and sweet?”

But before I had time to wonder too long, there she was again, pitcher in hand.

“Here , have a refill!” she laughed. “Bye, now!”

“Thanks!” I stuttered, but she was gone, red hair sparkling like a gentle fire being stroked by the wind.

Slowly, I resumed my work, no longer complaining, but made happy by my thoughts. Even the heat sent my heart pumping. I picked up a dandelion and put it in my pocket. I never looked at dandelions the same way again. Throughout my life, whenever I would see one of these flowers, I picked one or two and placed them in a scrapbook, edging out less important things such as old concert ticket stubs.

I saw Anabel often that summer. Walking hand in hand , drinking lemonade and eating sweets she made me, friendship grew to something more. Months turned into years, fifteen drifted slowly toward twenty, when I finally did it.

One spring morning, I put on my best church clothes. In my hand was the weirdest bouquet you could ever see. Dandelions. Old fuzzy ones, mixed with vibrant yellow ones all wrapped in pretty blue paper. She opened the door. She hadn’t aged much since that first day—a bit taller, a couple more freckles, longer hair and darker eyes-she was just as beautiful to me as always. You can piece together what happened next. Engagement. Matrimony. Babies. Nine of them, actually, because she sure did love babies.

So now, I am sitting here on my porch swing. Anabel comes out with lemonade and cookies.

“Grandma!” Joan runs toward her. A little duplicate of a younger Anabel.

“Slow down, Wildflower,” Anabel laughs as she hands her a cookie. Joan grabs it and runs away. Anabel sits down on the swing next to me. She is ageless with her gray hair, emerald eyes and those freckles. A wrinkled hand reaches out to mine.

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