

Girasol

Before we begin, it should be known that this is no story to be read before bed; it is not a story of overwhelming cheer; but it is a story to be read when lives are lost. For this is a tale not about the rabbit who left to get married and have babies, or the fish who ran away, but it is the truth: un cuento de muerte, and it begins on a serious note.

Once upon a time there was a mother. This mother had a son, a son that was so perfect in every way that she swore he was an angel. She gave him all of the love she had, and everything he could have asked for though he never asked for much. Every Summer, they would run through the gardens together, picking the most radiant girasoles to decorate their home.

Upon his tenth birthday, the wonderful boy fell deathly ill. Within a year, during the season of warmth and new life, the mother was kissing his cold lifeless body goodbye while the entire family came together to mourn the tragic loss; all bringing with them sunflowers to honor his memory. So overwhelmed by her grief the mother shut down. Every day felt like one hundred years, and every year felt like an eternity. For her, to give birth to such a child, was to produce an extension of herself, and to lose that child to death was to lose a part of herself. As time went on family and friends moved on with their lives, but not the mother. And as people began to forget the pain that she suffered, she began to lose her friends and family. Sick of the sadness of the grieving mother, friends and family began to turn their backs until she was eventually completely alone.

Upon the fifth year of this endless grief, on the anniversary of the boy's death, the mother visited his grave where she cried so much that a pool of her tears sat on the ground beneath her

somber face. When the weeping became less, she began to sing, she sang the first song she thought of, reminding her of her son:

ay mi flor

ay mi flor

eres mi vida

sonreír

reír

no olvides vivir

girasol, girasol, girasol

has sentido el calor en tu cara

tenemos el sol, agradecer

pero ahora brilla la luna

ay mi flor

ay mi vida

tus pétalos van y vienen

pero mi amor siempre se quedará

ve a dormir

Still blinded by her sadness, the mother did not realize that upon the last word of the song, a small sunflower began to sprout from the ground beneath her tears. Whether by magic, hope, or delusion, the flower began to grow a face and open its eyes. The sunflower looked up at the woman, and examined her face. It noticed that under her eyes laid more wrinkles than

mounds in a desert, her tears were lonelier than the last drop of rain on a gloomy day, and her skin was so pale and dull that it was as if it had never seen the light of day.

When the flower opened its mouth it said: “canta, no llores Mamá. Remember sonreír, reír, y vivir.” too exhausted to be startled by the presence of another, the mother simply opened her eyes only to see the most beautiful and radiant sunflower. It had petals that were the most vibrant yellow containing specks of gold that glistened in the sun. Its face was made up of thousands of seeds signifying all of the tears she had shed. And it was in the flowers' kind, warm smile, that the mother found her son. This flower was her son's spirit, back to visit her one last time.

Barely able to contain herself and her joy, the mother managed to ask:

“How can this be? It can't be real.”

“What is real and what is not, is not what is important,” replied the flower.

Too excited for her second chance, the mother did not question it. Instead she ran home to grab a pot, she scooped him up, and placed him inside. And over the next 125 days, they spent every second together, making up for lost time. They would sing, walk through the gardens, talk by the stream, anything that they could do, they did.

One day he said to her “Mamá, do you know why I came back?”

“No mi cielo, I tried not to question it, afraid that all of this would turn out not to be real.”

“I am here because you have forgotten how to live. You have decided that my absence means that you are empty. But the truth is that I was never really gone. My body has become part of the earth, helping to bring life to what surrounds you. And once again, my time has come to rejoin

the earth, providing nutrients and absorbing the sun's glow. Any day now, I will leave you, but know that you will not be alone.”

As the seasons began to change, and winter was around the corner, the petals one by one fell off, gently floating back onto the ground from which they originated; they dematerialized into a pile of dust and nutrients, the seeds then joined them, and in that moment it was officially over. With a gust of wind, the pile was carried off, joining the sun somewhere along the horizon.

Though this was the second time she had lost her son, the mother was not sad, because petals come and go, so do people as does life. In that moment she realized that Everyday she would see him in the sun's glow and feel him in its warmth, and every Summer she would feel his presence return with the return of the girasoles.