

After Math

It has been 78 days since Grandpa died. 72 days since his funeral. 70 days since I stopped crying about it. 67 days since I last ate grape nuts and swore not to ever again. 59 days ago Mom offered to move Grandma into our home. 59 days ago Grandma gave her answer by slinging a coffee mug at Mom's throat. It's been 56 days since I last took Sawyer to see a movie that neither of us liked. 53 days ago I noticed the purple blotch on Mom's clavicle had turned yellow. 48 days since the hurricane Gina said was going to close school for a month, only managed to steal a soccer ball Sawyer abandoned and put a small hole in the backyard fence. 45 days since the last of mom's bruise faded. 42 days since Dad started talking to Grandma again. 40 days since Morgan made fun of my crush on Peter Rogozinski. 39 days since Sawyer convinced himself he broke his pinky toe. 38 days since Lulu escaped through a small hole in the backyard fence. 37 days since the fight. 36 days since Chinese food. 35 days since I officially got over my crush on Peter Rogozinski. 34 days since my last camping trip with Dad. 33 days since I asked the wrong question. 32 days since we found Lulu's collar. 31 days since Mom bought a DVD of *Eat, Pray, Love* even though she already owns 2 copies.

It has been 30 days since my grandmother fell coming out of the shower, cracking her head against the bathroom vanity, splitting the skin right above her eye.

Now Grandma hogs the tv.

It pisses Sawyer off (his words), as it greatly impedes his ability to play Rainbow Six Siege. He'll complain to me, but I don't think he'll ever talk to her about it. I don't think he's ever even made eye contact with her. No one hates it more than Dad. Says he can't think with all the noise. He'll spend days out in the garden, treating tomatoes and wrestling zucchinis, just so he doesn't have to listen to endless reruns of *Murder She Wrote*. Mom tunes it out the best; it's the practice. She'll clean and cook and cry with it on. It doesn't seem to bother her. I don't really mind, Netflix is better on my computer screen anyway.

Grandma's spending the rest of her life propped up by a beige recliner, straddling the center of the living room. The recliner isn't that big and neither is Grandma, but she takes up the whole room and makes it harder to get to the kitchen. She won't leave the house to get the stronger prescription glasses she's needed for the past 7 years, but she'll make Dad move the recliner three feet closer to the tv screen. Whenever me or Sawyer would get that close to the tv, Dad would tell us that we were straining our eyes and cooking our brains and make us sit back on the couch. He doesn't say anything to Grandma.

Grandma likes my chicken salad sandwiches better than Sawyer's mac and cheese. It was a victory, at first. Now when she comes back into the living room after her 3 o'clock nap and doesn't see a sandwich ready, she makes comments about how no one loves her. Not in a funny way. In a

sad, Grandma-y way. So, every day just after 3, Grandma gets a chicken salad sandwich and cranberry juice in a red solo cup to keep her company while Days of Our Lives threatens to outlive us all. I tried to talk to her about making her own chicken salad sandwiches, but it didn't go the way I wanted it too. Grandma's really good at making people feel guilty. It was Mom who cleaned up the shards of broken coffee mug.

I ask Grandma if she'd like to play cards to temper the obligation I feel to engage with her in some way. Grandma was the one who taught me how to shuffle a deck and play Gin Rummy. Mom and Dad played games, like Jenga, Twister and Scrabble, but not cards. Grandma and I played card games, it was our thing. I liked the banter, she liked the competition. Gin Rummy was when I could get the fun and the stories out of her. I learned about the time Grandma met Humphrey Bogart and got the number of a real Hollywood agent after playing Emily Webb in her highschool's production of *Our Town*. Grandma's lived an interesting life, and I feel like we all forget that. Even Grandma. But for whatever reason, when Sawyer got old enough to explain the rules of Gin Rummy to, after I turned 13, Grandma and I stopped playing Gin Rummy. It was after she had broken her arm, but we didn't get back to playing once it had healed. The stupid part of me always figured we'd get back to playing someday. Up until 78 days ago, I always brought a deck of cards when we visited Grandpa and Grandma's house. I would always ask her to play, I think I got on her nerves the last couple years. But I don't feel too bad about that. No, I feel bad that Sawyer missed out on that part of Grandma, the part that would tell stories, and jab my sides when I beat her, and sing to herself when she beat me. I would try and play with Sawyer, but it wasn't the same. He has a hard time with focus, and I don't have the patience to make it happen or the stories to make it interesting. The stories are sadder looking back anyways. Grandma never called that Hollywood agent, and she still doesn't want to play cards.

She doesn't really ask me questions. I don't think she's that interested in anything that isn't transmitted through satellite. She'll ask if I'm doing good in school, whatever that means, and I'll say "good" which I'm pretty sure is a lie, or she'll ask if there are any boys and I'll say "no" and wish it was a lie- but that's it. Maybe she just doesn't know how to talk to real people anymore. All that brain-cooking.

I can't ask her about when she was in school, she doesn't remember. I can't ask her about her childhood, she's worked too hard trying to forget. I'm too afraid to talk about Grandpa. I don't want her to cry. I don't want to cry. So instead I try to speak her language.

"Grandma, what's good on TV?"

She likes that Jeopardy is still on. She doesn't like that Wheel of Fortune is on. "That one's for the idiots" she likes to remark. She's funny, if you let her be. She likes Full House, hates Seinfeld. Something about the way he talks. Dad mentioned during our last camping trip that he thinks it's because he's Jewish. She enjoys talking about how much she doesn't like comedies, but I Love

Lucy is a regular. And she doesn't talk through it or complain about it, in the way she will with everything else. She just watches. Apparently there's too many sitcoms and not enough murder mysteries. But not like the Law and Order ones, she doesn't like how much walking and talking they do. She doesn't think the actress playing Benson is attractive. "Too masculine. She doesn't have the right face". Reality shows are too fake. The news is too real. She gets upset whenever Titanic is on because she thinks Kate Winslet's too fat. Whenever Kate Winslet shows up she says that she likes how skinny I am. She forgets that I have Celiac's, and it's hard for me to keep the weight on.

"You'd make a good actress. You've got the build, but not the face. It doesn't matter though, you'll be fine, Glenn Close has a career"

There was a point in my life where I wanted to be an actress. Then I got cast as the Ugly Beggar Woman in a school production of Beauty and the Beast, but not even when she was also the enchantress, they brought out another girl to play her when she was supposed to be beautiful. It was a big school, the director made a point to say that she was trying to cast as many people as she could, but she didn't even put any makeup on me. I mean even the beast got makeup, and he got to be the beautiful prince too. I had to hunch forward and talk in a pitchy old woman voice, which I had a good reference for, and then hid behind a pillar after her "grand reveal". I never auditioned for anything again after that. Grandma still thinks I want to be an actress, and I just don't have the heart to tell her. I don't like having to explain things to her.

Grandma wanted to be an actress, and she could have.

"You've got the build," Grandma says, every time like it's the first time she's ever said it, "But not the face". She says it and every time I wonder who was the one that said it to her first.

Grandma was a beautiful woman. You'd know it just by looking at her. Her cheeks sag a bit, but the bone is still high and sharp. She gave up on eyeshadow years ago but never lipstick, and she still makes an effort on her hair, even with all the matting that must happen against a beige recliner. It's like she's always ready for the camera to pan over to a beige recliner and then she's the one in a green flapper dress dancing with Gene Kelly.

When we were clearing out the house I found a lot of pictures of Grandma when she was young. The summer of 1956 was spent at a house she and her friends rented by a beach. Or was it a family house? I didn't really get the story. I don't know who was the one that brought the polaroid but they must've loved Grandma, she's center stage in every photo. Posing and laughing and smiling- a real natural. She must've had a great laugh. I don't think I remember how Grandma laughs.

It's funny to get a clear picture of the young person trapped inside the old one. I think about that a lot when I look at Grandma. The woman stuck in there- a beautiful woman. More beautiful than Mom. Grandpa had big ears and round face, Mom took after him. Maybe that's why Grandma's so mean to her, she can't see any of herself in Mom.

I miss Grandpa. He was better to talk to than Grandma, less distant and he always had more things to say, even though the things to say were usually about other people. He would talk a lot about Grandma, I learned more about Grandma through him than anyone else. Apparently she never stopped believing she'd see herself on a movie screen someday, and she wouldn't let him forget that either. Grandpa says that whenever she got mad at him she would talk about getting famous almost like it was a threat. "She's gonna be famous but *she* won't do anything about it. She didn't even call that fucking headhunter she keeps bragging about."

Now the only time she ever sees herself on tv is when the wifi router cuts out at 12:00 through the timer dad set up, then it's just her and a black screen and no Grandpa and no Gene Kelly either.

Yesterday I asked her; "Grandma, what's good on tv" and she told me the day time TV event where every wednesday for the month of May back-to-back John Wayne or Clint Eastwood movies would play from 4 to 6- Wild West Wednesdays- ended the day before which is how she knew it was Thursday and that it was no longer May. Last Tuesday she mentioned that it was the first time she'd watched Gilligan's Island in 10 years. A week ago she mentioned during Rear Window that she hadn't seen Jimmy Stewart since the day before Grandpa died.

All Grandma does is watch TV. She drinks out of red solo cups and talks about all the right and wrong faces in the world. Grandma loves you but she stops liking you when you turn 13. She calls you ugly and slings coffee mugs at your throat. She'll drive you out of your house and have you sleep out on the garden bed. She'll criticize everything you do and she'll completely ignore you. She doesn't really know you but she'll have you make chicken salad sandwiches for her even though you've got Celiac so you can't even enjoy them. The only thing she'll cook is her brain. And while the rest of us count the days in bruises, lost dogs and Peter Rogosinski, Grandma talks and counts in movies because it's all she knows and nothing is real to her that isn't scripted and so nothing is real.

I watch her. More than anyone else in this house I watch her and try to figure out what makes a person so disinterested in life. When we're seated at the table for dinner, I just watch her. Watch her pick at her zucchini, watch her struggle to lift her red solo cup to her flat lips, watch her argue with Dad, watch her completely ignore Sawyer, watch her treat Mom the way she does, watch the bandage that completely covers her left eyebrow rise and fall as she gets better and better at making the rest of us feel guilty. And I'll look at her and I'll think-

"What is keeping you alive?"