

MEMORIES

By Dr. Amulya Cherukumudi

Email id amicol91@gmail.com

The rain had finally come to a halt, much to Sheila's happiness. The yellow streak of the sun rays delicately broke through the bedroom window, adding a golden glow to the cozy room. She was still curled up in bed, unaware of her surroundings. She had awoken from a satisfying slumber, one that had evaded her for days. As she opened her eyes, she slid her wrinkled hands across the bed, only to be greeted with emptiness. Robert was gone. It was the first thought that came to her as she woke up. He was gone. And, soon, this bedroom, the house in whose eastern corner it sat, and the tiny garden outside with its gnarled old red hibiscus and the half-grown mango tree they had planted together, all those would be gone as well. It was the strangest feeling ever. Her smile quickly vanishes, her eyes welling up. It had been exactly 98 days since her beloved husband had passed. Her heart ached for his touch, his warm hug in the morning, his breath reassuring that all is well. That was gone forever. All that remained is the memories, the time that they shared. To her dismay, she found those slowly fading. She feared losing the one thing of Robert that remained- memories.

After much contemplation, she gathered the courage to slide out of the bed. Her walking stick was her only companion these days, her support in her lonely world. She wobbled across the floor making her way to the window, and found herself struggling to recollect the days she spent with Robert in her now withering garden. As the drizzle resumed, she shed a tear. After she helped her children, Millicent and Ronald, find their niche in the world, Robert was all she had left. Their whirlwind romance continued to the day he died, whispering sweet nothings while he took his last breath. They always hoped they'd die together; that was not to be.

Sheila was a looker in her early 20's, hooking young bachelors along her path. She was unlike any woman of that era; she was tough, always looking to be challenged. She marched to the beat of her own drum, much to the surprise of the society. She was a woman trying to compete in a man's world. Armed with a degree in literature, which was a struggle in itself to obtain, she finally found herself working as a secretary to the editor of a local daily. She craved for the excitement journalism brought, eagerly awaiting opportunities to be out on the field. That, however, wasn't given much consideration by her colleagues. Her friends often told her to give up this nonsense, and get married like the rest of them. Well, she had a different plan in mind. Her mother was more understanding than the rest, encouraging her daughter to follow her dreams. Although she worried about her future, worried if she's find someone as supporting. She lost her father young to Malaria; she was only 6. She suddenly felt overcome by a sense of responsibility, towards home and her mother. Her mother blames her father's early demise for her tough exterior, her determination.

Sheila was impatient, but very hardworking. She kept herself updated with the happenings of the world, and secretly wrote articles on them, hoping she would be called upon soon. One gloomy morning, her prayers were answered. The senior reporter called in sick, and the editor

had no choice left. Although Mr. Smith had admired her tenacity, he didn't dare admit it out loud. He barked the orders at a gleaming Sheila, who was about ready to rule the world. She was to cover the 25th anniversary of Gleeman Bakers, as they set to make a record breaking 40 foot cookie. Almost the whole town gathered in the square, this was a feat unlike anything this small mountain town had seen. She interviewed a few of the people gathered there, and was unanimously met with disapproving glares. Sheila was unfazed as she made her way towards the owners. After a few questions, she resigned to a spot with a clear view of the activity. While she jotted down a few responses, she sensed a person in front of her. She picked up a hint of musk, and was intrigued. She looked up to be greeted by the smile of a roguishly handsome man. He held his hand forward and introduced himself politely. His name rings in her ear as she puts on the kettle for tea. She sighs, however, as she finds herself forgetting his familiar odour. This is what she always dreaded, forgetting what they had.

Determined to see her work through, Sheila smiled half-heartedly while she watched the giant masterpiece being brought out by the gleemen. That was a historical moment, for everyone present at the town square. However, it had a different significance for Sheila, which she didn't realize until much later in the day. As she headed back to the office, she worked tirelessly to write the best article she ever had, when she heard the door open. She heard a familiar voice; she couldn't remember where from. While she tried desperately to focus, she couldn't detach from the baritone of the stranger in the next room. As she reached the end of her 3rd draft, she heard laughter wafting towards her. The door swung open, and the subtle hint of musk jogged her memory. It was the handsome man from earlier that day! While she found her heart racing with excitement, she couldn't help but wonder if he followed her. Her doubts were soon put to rest as Mr. Smith introduced her to his nephew, who was in town for visiting his ailing grandmother. Amidst the sadness of an ill family member, Sheila and Robert were finding some happiness of their own.

This journey down the memory lane was brought to an abrupt halt by the doorbell. It was Millie coming by for her weekly visit. Millie was quite like Sheila, tough and beautiful. Millie was yet to find her Robert. Millie was a budding lawyer, creating quite a stir in her firm. It isn't as difficult for women as it used to be, but there are still numerous challenges to overcome. As they sat down for lunch, Millie looked over at her frail mother, and suggested she come stay with her. Sheila wouldn't oblige; she was as tough as she was when she met Robert. This is all she had left of her husband, their memories together.

Looking at Millie, she reeled back to the day that changed her life. It was his grandmother's funeral, and she attended the funeral with the rest of the staff. She hated funeral; it brought up the suppressed memories of her father's death. She realized she had never processed it completely, and she wasn't about to do it today either. Those thoughts vanished as she saw him, sadness drawn over his face. She hesitated to speak to him, but gathered up the courage to do so anyway. She walked up to Robert, who was surrounded by his aunts. He excused himself as he walked away from the chattering women, who cast a glance at the woman he approached. He grabbed her hand and walked out the door, away from the crowd. They sat on a bench together, yet they hadn't exchanged any words. They didn't have trouble communicating on their 3 wonderful dates, but they did so today. To Sheila's surprise, Robert

leaned over and kissed her deeply. It felt so wrong, but felt so right at the same time. She found herself softening in his arms, falling for him. It was then she realized why she got to be this way. The loss of a person you love changes you, for better or for worse. In her case, no one could tell for sure. She was afraid of feeling like that again, and was wary of all men as a result. In a moment of great mourning, Sheila found herself again.

Sheila reminisced with her daughter about their small wedding in the church, but struggled. Sheila was feeling fogged as she tried to remember the details of their romance. She shrugged the feeling, and moved onto the story of their fights, especially over that mango tree in the garden. She bragged about how Robert frequently came home from work early to take care of the kids, while she was out there creating a storm in with her articles. Soon, it was dark, and Millie got up to leave.

Even though they spent the whole day recollecting the good times, there was an ominous feeling Sheila couldn't shake. She felt like she was losing a grip on reality, and her sanity. She couldn't tell if this was a manifestation of her grief, or she was slowly beginning to forget him. As he took his last breath, she made a promise to herself to keep him alive in her memories. However, her memories were failing her; she was struggling. She found it hard to cope with the loss of her better half, her life, the reason for her existence. As she looked out at that gnarly hibiscus plant, she cringed. As she found the strength to cope with his loss, he never imagined that she would have to face a loss bigger than that; that of their memories.