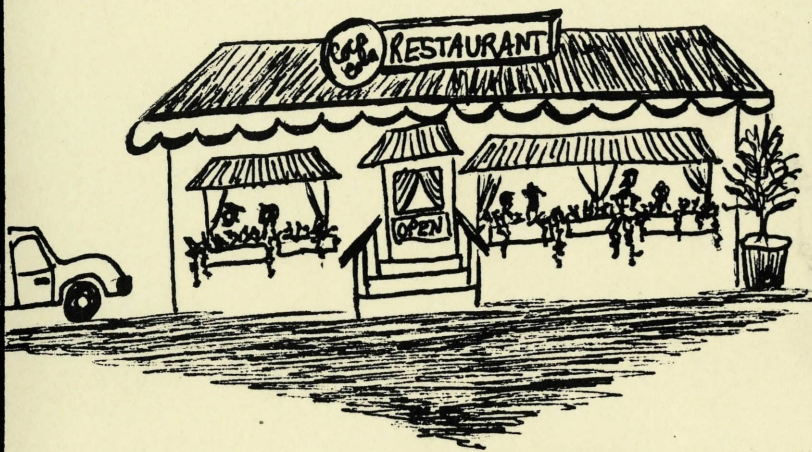


Good Old Girls



By Jennifer Whiteford
Illustrated by Jess Carfagnini

For our grandparents.

Good Old Girls

Four stories by
Jennifer Whiteford

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Car Accidents

I don't think that I'm meant to be a girlfriend.

Before I started up with Billy Holiday- I'm not kidding, that's really his name, but he's no jazz lady, he's just a guy my age, fifteen, anyway, before I started up with him, all of the stuff that I did with my life was all right with the town. If I stayed home to help with the garden on Sunday instead of going to the church socials, the ladies would say that I was very dedicated, helping my brother like that and getting all dirty. When I went to the library on Friday nights, Alice McCreary, the librarian, always acted like I was committing some divine and admirable act, just by being there. She'd go on about my brains and my grades and my "work ethic".

Then, when everyone found out that Billy and I had been hanging out together at the bridge, and that he'd been walking me home from the restaurant and holding my hand, they started talking differently about the things I did. I'd go to the library and Alice would ask me, "Where's Billy?" like I was missing my arm or something. And the first church social that Billy was at without me caused such a ruckus that Mom came home all frizzy haired and harassed, ordering me to come to the next one so she wouldn't have to keep answering questions about where I was the whole damn time.

It just makes me think of how when my little brother James goes and picks wild flowers people think it's all romantic and charming, but the one time he tried to pick from the overgrown perennial beds that the church ladies tend to in the town square, everyone got all up in arms about him "stealing". It seems to me that all the flowers grow in dirt, but for some reason those wild flowers can get picked because no one likes them enough to watch out for them. But those church ladies' flowers shouldn't be picked because the ladies take care of them. You might as well set fire to the ladies' bedspreads or something.

I didn't even really care about being Billy's girlfriend in the first place, not with him always trying to kiss me and his breath smelling like basketballs and his hands all slippery all the time. He's supposed to be some big deal because he doesn't have acne like the rest of our grade, and because he's okay at sports. I think he liked me because I beat him at track last year, but I didn't make a big deal out of it or try to embarrass him. Mom says that often boys like it when you're better than them at something but you don't let anyone else know that you are.

So, things with Billy were mostly half conversations at the bridge, a few irritating wrestling matches under burnt-out streetlamps, and some hand holding on our walks home. And then he decided that he didn't want to go out with me anymore. And since we'd never said that we were going anywhere in the first place, I was kind of shocked, but more just confused. He said that he'd like us to be friends but I said that I thought that would be hard, what with me not prepared to stop beating him at sports. People were sure to notice that I was better than him at

running now that they knew I was his *ex-girlfriend*. He said that was all right, he wasn't usually friends with girls anyway. So I went home and got into bed and felt pretty good about being able to go to the library again.

I had to get up at six AM and walk to the restaurant with the sun just barely in the sky yet and the smell of grease surrounding my sleepy head as it got carried down Main Street by the morning wind.

When I came in Mom said, "Grace Whitley was in a car accident."

Grace Whitley is a girl three years ahead of my grade at school so of course I don't know her very well. Grace is one of those girls that everybody likes even though she's an artist and a little bit weird. She has curly hair that goes in every direction, like Mom's, and she wears a whole bunch of patterns that don't match and she has lots of hats. She's just so nice and she smiles at everyone and she plays the cello in the school's string quartet, so no one can accuse her of being totally anti-social.

I asked if Grace was okay and Mom told me that she'd broken her neck. I waited for her to say something else but she just turned around and went back to flipping the bacon on the grill like she did every morning, without flinching, even though she's been a vegetarian since the seventies. When I didn't say anything and just stood there Mom turned back around and started to try and console me. She said that Grace wasn't dead, that she was going to be okay. Mom said that mostly she was telling me so that I knew why Tanya wasn't going to be in that day.

Tanya is the other waitress at the restaurant. Mom hired her because she's the only other vegetarian in town. Tanya is also Grace Whitley's best friend.

"Tanya's gone to the hospital," Mom said, "To be with Grace and the Whitleys. So you're on the floor alone today."

I rolled my eyes like "oh great!" and then I felt guilty because it's not like Tanya was skipping off or anything, or like it's really a party when your best friend has a broken neck. I tied my apron around my jeans and picked up my notepad and pencil. Tanya can remember all the orders without writing them down, but I never can. I have to write everything down or it just leaves my mind and flies away.

Partly I was upset about Tanya not being there because I wanted to tell her about what happened with Billy Holiday. I knew that she'd laugh her head off about it because she's always telling me that boys "aren't worth the spit in their mouths". She should know, I guess, because she's older, and pretty, and almost finished high school. She's leaving town when she's done for sure. She hasn't said, but I just know. I've already started thinking about missing her and about who the next waitress will be. Mom can't run things with just me to help.

We have the restaurant because my dad died four years ago. I was ten and James was six. Mom needed some "livelihood" she said. She couldn't live off the insurance policy for the rest of her life. Before Dad's accident she'd been working at Franklin's

Frames and Art. She was in charge of painting and busting up new wooden frames to make them look like antiques. Franklin's gets a lot of its business from tourists and the tourists like things to look old and charming.

Mom's job busting up the frames was only part time, so in order to make a living she decided to take over the Coca Cola Restaurant when its previous owners, Sidney and Dorrie MacDonald, decided to move to retirement home on the west coast somewhere.

It was actually quite a scandal. First of all, no one could believe that the MacDonald's were actually leaving, and where did they get the money to move all the way out to the west coast where there may be lots of beaches and coffee shops, but everyone knows that your shoes get moldy because it rains all the time. And where did they get off selling their family business to a widow who, up until that point, had lived a perfectly respectable life? And how was she going to raise her children properly if she had to make all day breakfasts and mop the floors after close? And what if she turns the whole place into come kind of vegetarian bistro?

*


Dad died in a car accident. Not from a broken neck. It was something like he was bleeding so much inside that his lungs drowned in his body. It was winter and he was driving alone and the car went off the road and turned over a few times. Nobody else was around and it took a long time for anyone to find him and call an ambulance.

After he died, we all went to the funeral. I was still expecting Mom to be herself, to be one of those ladies like on TV who loses someone and still nods politely to the people coming to the funeral and heats up casseroles and tucks her kids in at night. But Mom didn't do any of that stuff. She wore a black dress to the funeral and didn't say a word. She didn't meet anyone's eyes and didn't stay to accept condolences. We got a ride back home with one of the guys who used to work with Dad at his office in the city and when we got home she went right upstairs to bed.

The ladies up the street came and gave James and I the casseroles and I heated them up and made James take plates of food upstairs and leave them outside of mom's bedroom door. Then after a few hours I would send him up to bring the plate down. Sometimes the food was eaten, but mostly it wasn't.

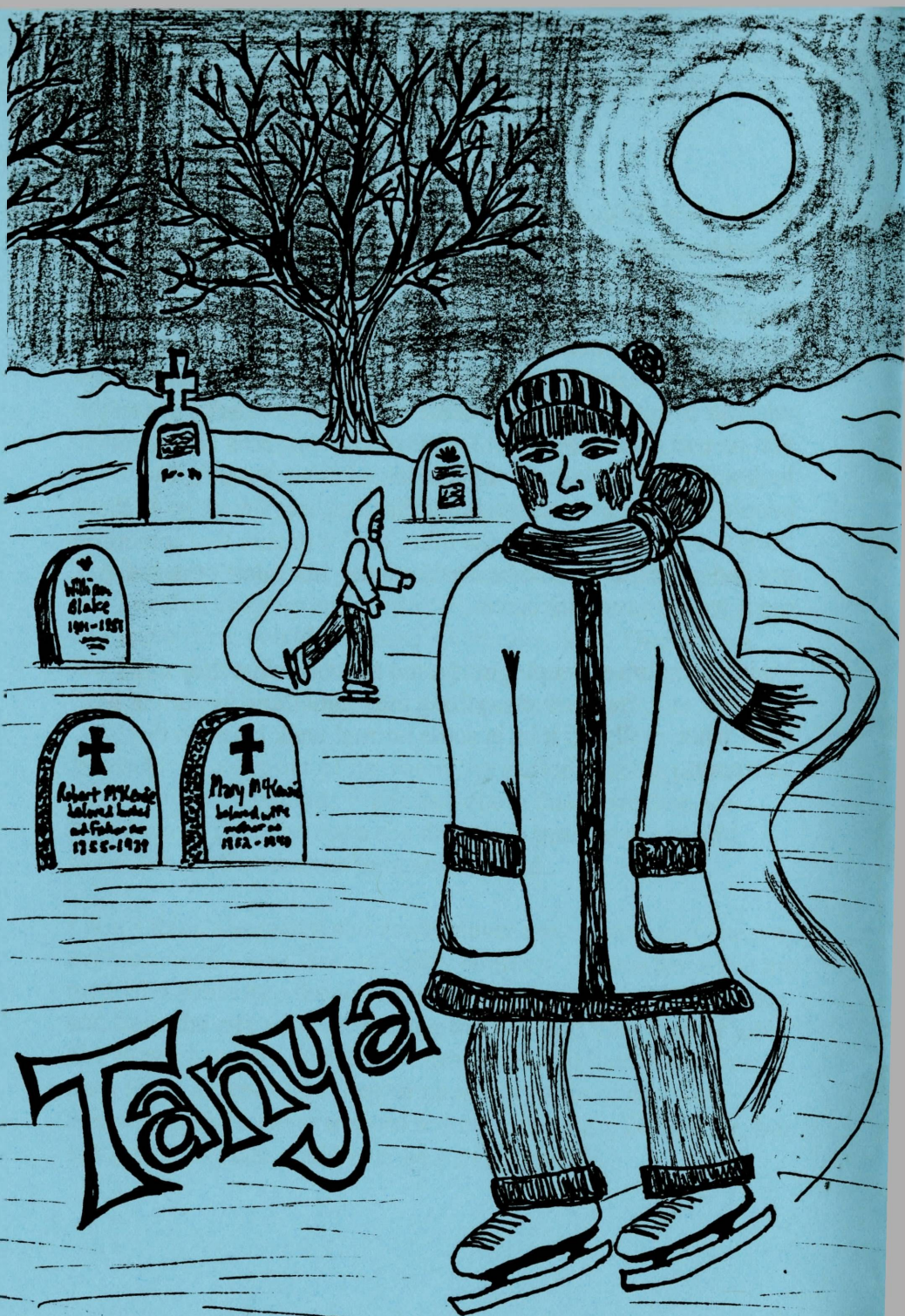
When Mom came out of her room she started making plans to take over the restaurant. We talked about that more than we talked about Dad, but once she did say to me that she would never see another man as long as she lived.

I don't think she meant she would never see anyone as in the way everyone said I was "seeing" Billy Holiday. I watch her serve the men who come into the restaurant. Even the ones who are young and from the city and just passing through and they kind of look like Superman with dimpled smiles and styled hair, even those ones Mom looks at like they're ghosts or rocks or cactuses. Something she's never noticed before, something interesting, but not something that could ever be part of her life.



I think about Billy Holiday and how if he broke his neck I might be sad because he's the same age as me and that happening to someone young just doesn't seem fair. But I would only be sad because I could imagine what it would be like if something like that happened to me. I wouldn't go and sit at the hospital, and I wouldn't go to bed in a black dress if he died and I wouldn't wish on any stars for him to come back and be exactly the way that he was before. So what I want to know is, how can people look at Billy Holiday and me and see us as such a pair, two people who are so much together that they can't even go to the library or a picnic without the other one? I'm sure that sometimes my dad's breath smelled like basketballs, but I don't think that mom would have ever cared.

I think sometimes people just go too far with what they think they see, and they turn everything into something important like love, when really all it is, is some normal walk home in the afternoon.



Tanya

J.C. '04

Carpe Bacculum

Today is Friday, so things are slow getting started. The bar downtown serves cheap drinks on Thursday nights, which means that weekends for some of the men in town starts, unofficially, one day early. I woke up at my usual time and when I walked up Main Street on my way to work not many pick ups passed me. On any other day they would be there, speeding along full of hay, or farm equipment, or old tires, or chickens. The drivers honk when they pass me. Most of them are going to the restaurant anyway, so when I get there the trucks will be all lined up in the parking lot and the greasy smell will be in the air making everything warm.

It's always warm in the restaurant. Usually Lorelee is already there with her apron on and her pencil tucked behind her ear. Lately Rayanne, who is Lorelee's mom and my boss, has been playing Latin music in the kitchen. She says a good samba can really move her along.

Since the fall, I've been living with my friend Grace Whitley. Grace was in a car accident last summer and she broke her neck. She had to spend a long time getting better, lying down in her bedroom which is in her parents' attic. I moved my mattress and most of my stuff in there. It's a really big room with windows on all sides. I love waking up there with the sun coming in and warming up the floorboards, even though I have to get up early and Grace gets to sleep in as late as she wants.

We were both supposed to go to college this year, Grace and I. Then the accident happened and Grace didn't think that she was going to be ready. She had to have this big collar thing around her head and her neck for months, with actual bolts holding her head still. Now she doesn't have to wear it anymore, but she can't run anywhere, or turn her head real fast, and a lot of the time it still really hurts. Sometimes she rolls over in bed and wakes up crying. When I found out that Grace wasn't going to college, right away I knew that I wasn't going either. That's when I moved my stuff into her attic.

The reason Grace and I became friends was because we were both ice-skating late one night and we scared each other. The town rink can occasionally seem kind of creepy, on account of the fact that it is also the town cemetery. When the town wanted a rink none of the farmers wanted to ice over any of their flat land and all of the parks were too full of hills, so the firemen just hitched up their hoses and flooded the cemetery. It actually makes a decent rink, all nice and flat, and once you get used to moving in and out of the gravestones, it doesn't even seem so strange. Some nights though, when the sky isn't totally black yet, and the empty tree branches loom up there and you remember that it's the bones and skin of dead people that feed the roots of those trees, it can start to get spooky

The night I met Grace I had just been to the city to get a new winter coat. The one that I picked was velvet and red. Aunt Eliza said it was impractical, but I'd never wanted a coat as bad as I wanted that one and I knew I was getting it no matter what anyone said. I still have the coat. I get it cleaned professionally every year so that it doesn't get all grungy. So that it stays red.

Grace has a red coat too. The night we met it was too dark to see each other's colours. All I could see was her shadow as she slid along in between the gravestones. At first I thought she was a ghost because of the way she was moving, so slow and so steady, like she was floating, with her long hair just flowing down around her.

We became friends right away. Best friends. Rayanne says sometimes you just know. I just knew about Grace. We'd been in school together for years, but we'd never talked because Grace doesn't really talk to anyone and I'm scared of most people. But once we'd met in the cemetery that night, once we realized that neither one of us was a ghost, we talked about everything. I got numb. Not cold, but numb. Like the only things working were my brain, my mouth, and my eyes. We sat all wrapped up in our red coats until it was so late that when we went home we both got in trouble.

After that there wasn't ever one moment when I didn't know exactly what Grace was doing. We never leave phone messages for each other because we're either at home, or we're together.

Oh, I've had boyfriends. Only a few, because I've always been nervous when it comes to talking to people who I don't already know. At first, being with a boy seemed okay. Walking to the bridge and holding hands. That was before I had Grace around to spend my time with. As we got older, the boys always wanted to kiss me in their cars. In the winter, when a car is turned off and the heater doesn't work the warm air leaks out quickly. I've heard, "But I'll keep you warm, baby," from every boy I've ever been to the movies with, and let me tell

you, none of them have succeeded. They don't really care if I'm warm or not. After I figured that out, I gave up on boys. I decided that they weren't worth their shaved turkey sandwiches. My life became like a bath in Aunt Eliza's old bathtub. All of the cold-water memories settled down at the bottom while I just try to keep myself floating in the layers of warm water that came later.

Lenny Hersch is the travel agent in town. He's considered by some to be quite an eligible bachelor, but I've also heard people in town refer to him as "Lenny the Louse". I guess he takes a lot of girls out. He has a degree from a college in the city and also something from a place called The College of Disney Knowledge that he had to go to Florida to study for. He gets his suits at Langston's Haberdashery, the place in town where most people can't afford to shop. I looked up "haberdashery" in the dictionary and it's supposed to be a place that sells sewing notions and accessories, not expensive suits. This just proves Grace's theory that Mr. Langston just named his shop that to sound fancy. But he sure has some fancy suits, and Lenny has a lot of those suits hanging in his closet.

I go in and talk to Lenny at the travel agency a lot. There is a whole wall in there of brochures for cruises and Club Med trips. Lenny doesn't like booking those kinds of vacations. He's more into sending people on elephant riding safari trips in Africa, or Amazon River kayak expeditions. Trouble is, most people in town aren't interested in vacations like that. They get all stopped up by that big wall of brochures for sunny places that are only a few hours away by plane. They like to go parasailing and play volleyball on the beach with strangers.

They want to know that they have unlimited access to the bar and to food that they could cook in their own kitchens but never do.

Aunt Eliza says that Lenny is a big fish in a small pond. She doesn't like me talking to him and she doesn't like that he let me cut pictures out of the sunny brochures so I could put them on the wall by my bed when I still lived at her house. I got the same feeling looking at those pictures as I do from the Latin music that Rayanne plays in the kitchen.

In the corner of Grace's room near where I sleep is one of her old science projects from elementary school. It is a paper mache volcano that, at the seventh grade science fair, exploded with a mixture of baking soda and vinegar, all dyed red with food colouring. The aftermath of the red is still there, dried to the sides of the paper mache which is dusty and coming apart at the edges. Grace got an A+ on it and she won the science fair. That's why she kept it, even after she lost interest in science and started doing painting instead. Sometimes I think of the volcano as a piece of art, just sitting by itself on the wooden floor like that.

At night, when we're falling asleep, Grace tells me stories about things. Usually historical things. She likes reading books about the parts of history that they don't teach us in school. We only learn the history of our town and about the war of 1812 and confederation and World Wars 1 and 2. Grace's reading goes back farther. She likes the Greeks and the Romans. She even knows some words in Latin. Sometimes, when I'm about to do something difficult, she'll smile at me and say, "Carpe

Bacculum!" It means, "Seize the stick!" Seize the stick! It always makes me laugh.

Just the other night when we were falling asleep I mentioned something about her old volcano project and then she started telling me about Vesuvius. It seems that when that volcano erupted no one had any time to get away. All the lava came down out of the sky and the ash blocked out the sun, and the people just got coated. When it dried, there they were, all preserved; looking exactly like they did when the eruption happened. There were probably a lot of them standing at their windows, looking up at everything, not believing, not admitting to themselves what was really going on.

When Grace falls asleep I look at the curves of her face all lit up by the night light that we keep plugged in by the closet. I watch her fluttery eyelids and I listen to her breathing. A lot of the time I think to myself, *she's mine*. Sometimes I whisper those words and they taste like honey in my mouth. One night it felt so good to whisper them that I started whispering all this other stuff too, like that I loved her and that I would stay with her always. Then her breathing changed and she said, "Tanya? What did you say?" and I was too scared to say anything else. I knew she couldn't see my eyes in the dark so I just started murmuring and grumbling nonsense so she would think that I was talking in my sleep. After she fell asleep again, I prayed that she hadn't really heard me and that everything would be just the same tomorrow as it had been the day before.

In the restaurant, people are ordering the same things they order every morning and Rayanne is cooking it all up from her

usual place behind the grill. Lorelee is laughing at the jokes that farmers are telling her, the same jokes that the farmers who had been in earlier already told her. Out the window people are starting to move slowly up the street.

Sometimes I think this town must really be covered in lava like the town near Mount Vesuvius. Sometimes I think years ago, way long before anyone can remember, there was a volcano that erupted and it froze everyone just the way they were standing, sitting, eating, and thinking. Like a curse on the town that whispers, "you can never change." Everyone is here still, encased in cool lava and only a few people, people like Grace, are really moving. They burn hotter than the lava and their heat has broken through so they can be real people, able to change and able to move, but also able to get hurt more than everyone else. That's why Grace got her neck broken in that car accident.

I'm not sure if I'll all encased like everyone else, or if I'm moving free like Grace. Sometimes I feel like what goes on in my head can't possibly be what has been in girls' head in this town for centuries. I don't understand how what I think and feel never seems to actually break through. And sometimes, I think I can see that big wave of lava flowing down the mountain and all the fire getting ready to rain on me. Then it's too scary to let myself see it for real, so I just stand there at the window, pretending like everyone else.

Dixie



Unbroken

If you stand on the corner of river road north and the fifth line, and then swivel around to your left, everything you see is *mine*. That means I own it. No mortgage left to pay. No loans or debts. The deeds to this land all have my signatures on them, and all the profit out of this business goes straight to me, with a little bit for my sister Eliza who lives on the other side of town. .

Eliza likes to think she's doing all right without me. She doesn't much approve of what I'm doing over here, never has. Sure, she likes gardening plenty, but she would never even think about owning the place where all those garden plants get bought. She told me once that she likes to spend one hour a day- maximum- in her garden. Otherwise, she says, she feel too "dirty". Dirty! Christ! You should see her out there with her gardening gloves and her apron, and her special "gardener's kneeling stool" which she got from some big American catalog that she subscribes to. I don't think there's ever a speck of dirt anywhere on her person. She's got all this gardener's...paraphernalia...not just the tools with the plastic handles that would break if you put any real use to them. Oh no, she's got a gardener's journal with all these poems about flowers and sunshine in it and she writes down what she plants. Just lists, that's all. To me that's no journal. I kept a journal once. It was satisfying, putting all my thoughts and frustrations down on paper like that. Eliza wouldn't ever let on that she had a frustration. Or a thought for that matter.

Eliza's also got pictures of gardens around her house. Her husband Dirk, rest his soul, used to give them to her for her birthday. These pictures all show blurry, perfect gardens that stretch out for miles without a dirty human hand in sight to tend them. And if there are any people in the pictures they're always women wearing long dresses and big straw hats to keep the tan away and they're carrying a watering can or something. Anyone, even my sister, who's ever planted any kind of garden, knows that those pictures are the most ridiculous thing this side of buttered toast.

I don't have any pictures like that in my house. I have some pictures of my family and friends, and a lot of the posters that the seed companies send me with my orders. I like those best. Big, glossy photos of flowers and seeds and vegetables and dirt. All looking like they do when you grow them right.

My house is right here on the lot by the nursery, so even when I'm sleeping I'm never far away from my plants. I knew that I wanted to own this place the first day I worked here. I was fifteen years old and I got hired on to work after school during the spring season, which is, obviously, the busiest time in the nursery business. On my first day, I didn't know a pansy from a petunia but Lacey, who owned the place at the time, didn't seem to think that it mattered. She was already old then and she was just glad to have an extra pair of strong arms around to do the grunt work. The first thing we had to do was load up the pickup with flats to deliver to the market in the city. Lacey always supplied the market with flowers and of course I've kept that contract going. Way back on my first day here my first job was to bring a couple of freshly watered flats of salvia out to the

truck. As I picked them up I raised one above my head so I could fit through the skinny little greenhouse door. All this watery soil just came running down my arms in these snakey, dirty rivers.

Now, I'm not one of those flaky types like Rayanne in town who runs around talking about the sky, and deep thought, and spirits and stuff like that, but that day I felt a shift. It was like an earthquake somewhere inside me. From that day on I wanted to spend all of my time here.

Lacey was the one who started calling me Dixie instead of Dorothy, which was my given name. Now Eliza is the only one who calls me Dorothy, and when she does it in public people look at her funny, like she's telling a joke. I usually laugh, but Eliza doesn't. We don't have much in common. Since the day she got married and her name changed to Cartwright, we've practically had to haul out our birth certificates just to prove that we're related. Eliza Cartwright and Dixie Oakes. Of course, that's something Eliza never could stand about my life, that I never up and got myself married like she did. Dirk was a decent man, don't get me wrong, but he was the first and last who ever came along for Eliza.

It's not like I never had a man around. Guthrie Jones and I lived in sin for a good two and half years before he decided that it was time to blow out of town again. Guthrie was a traveler, named after a folk singer, and he came into town just as I was getting going with the nursery after Lacey passed. He showed up right when I really needed someone to help me, and that has always lent him an angelic nature in my eyes. He liked plants just about as much as I did. The fact that he couldn't grow a garden while

hitchhiking was the only part of his traveler's life that ever made him think about settling down. I knew he was my kind of man because when he first showed up at the nursery he was dirtier than any human being I'd ever seen. He had nice blue eyes, and they were looking out from that dirty face when he asked if he could use my hose.

Guthrie ended up staying, like I said, for two and a half years. In that time he not only helped me with a lot of the work in the greenhouses and the fields, he also helped me build my little house on the lot next door. Then he lived there with me for as long as he stayed. We had a sweet thing going, waking up early and getting started in the greenhouses. We'd laugh and chat with customers while we worked, and we ate fresh out of the garden in the summers.

Guthrie even started me up a strawberry patch at the back of greenhouse number five. On the day he knew he was leaving, he came up to me with his hand held out and said, "I've got a present for you."

Well, of course I thought he had a june bug or a worm or something in there, so I stepped back and shook my head and crossed my arms. I wouldn't take it. So he turned her dirty old hand around, opened his fingers, and there were two of the most perfect strawberries I'd ever seen. The first of the season. Guthrie loved strawberries. I took his gift, handed one back to him, and we ate them standing there in the sunshine, smiling at each other. And then it was time for him to go.

It wasn't like either of us got dumped or left the other one. It wasn't ever like that. I was as much leaving him as he was leaving me. We couldn't stay together forever and that was understood. When I tried to explain that to Eliza she just shook her head and told me I was being an "idealist". I think she thought I was trying to cover up for being broken up with. She is fond of saying, in a woe-is-me tone, that I'm going to be single for the rest of my life. I say, I don't mind being single as long as I'm not alone and since I'm not alone I say, Hallelujah! And Eliza just goes on despairing.

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So I worked alone for a good long time. It took me longer to get everything done without Guthrie's help, but I certainly didn't want another full-time assistant. I also didn't want to have to get up at 5 AM every day, especially after being up until midnight getting things done the night before. I went through a bunch of part time assistants, but no one stayed for longer than one season. I hired some students from the university in the city, but they ended up being nothing but trouble. Fun to talk to, but always miserable because they really just wanted to be back at school with their friends, smoking cigarettes and writing essays and whatever else it is they do there.

Then last spring James Owens rode up on his bicycle and asked if I needed any help. I'd never talked to James before, but I knew his mom, Rayanne and his sister, Lorelee because I sometimes treated myself to dinner at the Coca Cola restaurant where Rayanne cooks and Lorelee is a waitress. James was barely ten years old that first summer and he had about as much body fat as

a geranium grown from seed. So I knew that heavy lifting was out of the question. Still, he had a load of energy, that much was clear. When I asked him why he wanted to help me out he said, "I like plants, so Momma said to come try here."

It turns out that James is the best assistant I could have ever had. He's always smiling and he can concentrate like there's no tomorrow. I tell him to do something and he does it, whether it's loading up flats of petunias or weeding the perennial boxes. I like to watch him watering with the hose on a hot day. He takes off his shoes and wanders the rows in his bare and dirty feet. He makes sure that every plant gets its fair share of water and every once in a while he waters himself. He just tilts his head back, raises up the hose, and lets the water splash down all over his face. He sticks his tongue out for a quick slurp and then gets back to the task at hand. James is a perennial. He'll bloom every year of his life.

Guthrie was a perennial too, only in different ways. I see him every season in the house we built together. There are the floorboards he laid, all the while swearing, and hammering, and stinking with sweat. There are the window boxes that he built one day to surprise me when I got back from a trip to the city. There's even a toothbrush that used to be his. I use it to clean the hard to reach spots at the base of the taps in the bathroom.

James also has flashes of Guthrie in him sometimes. Kind of like the son in a family that never existed. They have a lot in common, Guthrie and James. Especially music. Guthrie liked folk songs, which figures, considering his namesake and his lifestyle. He liked a good song that could be sung anywhere. He

used to sing to me while we worked and I'd hum along once the songs became familiar. On the first day that James worked I asked him if he knew any songs to sing. I'd been without music for a while, what with Guthrie gone and none of the other assistants being much for performing. James said he knew lots of songs, that his mom had records and she taught him songs when he was little. My favourite is this one, "Will The Circle Be Unbroken". You know it? *Will the circle, be unbroken, by and by lord, by and by. There's a better home a-waitin' in the sky Lord, in the sky.*

Now I don't know about that "better home a-waitin'" part. I can't imagine a much better home than the one I've got now. But that part about the circle being unbroken, I think I know what that's getting at. When you work with the seasons like I do, you get kind of used to things just going around and around. I guess that's why I don't get upset about things like Guthrie leaving. I think about him often enough to keep him coming around in my mind. And he says in his letters that every time he sees some under-watered kale in a garden somewhere, well he can practically hear me clicking my tongue in disgust. So I guess I'm coming around on him as well.

And I know that next spring James will ride up on his bicycle and we'll start mixing the soil and seeding the annuals. The nights will fall and the days will go and someday I'll be old like Lacey and all of what I see when I stand at the crossroads will belong to James. And I will be in the ground. Not in some better home in the sky, but in the ground. My nutrients will come on up and help everything grow as much as the seasons will allow.



Ingrid Bergman

Sidney always told me that the only woman he would ever leave me for was Miss Ingrid Bergman. I think he fancied her most in Casablanca. He always did like that sort of face. Me with my blue eyes and freckles, well, I'm no comparison. But it wasn't Ingrid's photograph he carried with him all those years that he was in the navy during World War II. No sir. I was there, grinning in his pocket.

I was no war bride, though. Ours was no marriage of panic and convenience right before he hopped on the boat. We'd been courting long before we even knew there was going to be a war. We were both at university back in Glasgow. I was studying to be a teacher, he an engineer and we used to go to all these university functions together, arm in arm. Our university was far from the small town where I'd grown up. My mother thought I was going to school just to find a man to marry me, since my taste did not run to the town boys who had known me since I was in diapers, eating my own toes. Sidney isn't Scottish, though you'll hear a twist of an accent in his voice now after so many years of my influence. He came from England and our university was his last choice. Seems he fooled around a bit too much in his last years before university and the school he liked best declined his applications. So he ended up in Glasgow where he met me. He's been a firm believer in fate ever since.

I've always known that I was meant to be in charge of things. That's why I became a teacher. Sidney says that there's something in my bones that commands attention. I guess it's true, because in all my years of teaching I never had any serious

problems with discipline. Of course, things were very different then. I see news items about kids bringing guns to school and I thank the Lord that I was doing all my confiscating in the days of slingshots and dirty playing cards. Whatever it was, when I said *give it to me* they handed it over, and when I said *sit down and do your spelling* they sat down and did their spelling.

It's not as though I was too strict to allow for any fun. We had plenty of fun, just as long as everything else was in order. We used to go for field walks instead of having an indoor science class. We'd see who could find the most insects in the grass and then we'd identify them together. If we were lucky we'd see a snake or a rabbit and they would all go crazy as though it was the best thing they'd ever seen.

I got a lot of notes on those days, telling me that I was the world's greatest teacher and those sorts of things. It always seemed to me that being a good teacher came easily. I just did things that were interesting for me, and the students were interested to. They hardly even noticed that they were learning anything. I loved teaching. Not because I was good at it. It was the other way around. I was good at it because I loved it.

My mother never forgave me for going through with a career even though I already had a husband. Sidney wouldn't have stood for a stay at home wife, I don't think. It would have made him feel odd, going out into the world every day knowing that the love of his life was sitting at home wondering which way to arrange the furniture and deciding what to cook for dinner. "I wanted a wife, not a maid!" he always says to me now, when I try to stay home to clean up or fix dinner and he'd rather we

were at the beach looking at the tidal pools, or walking in the woods.

The woods! My good Lord! The woods out here are a far cry from the fields in Scotland, or the little thickets of forest in Ontario. I knew the west coast was warmer than anywhere I'd ever been, but I didn't expect it to be so... tropical. It's like I'd spent my whole life looking at the colour green through a really dirty window and all of a sudden I get to truly see it in every direction and as far up as I can stretch my neck to look. I feel like those kids did when we saw the snakes and rabbits. If it wouldn't look silly for a sixty five year old lady, I might jump about and spin like they used to.

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We emigrated because Sidney lost his job. And our friends Seamus and Louise lost their jobs. And Sidney's friend Marcus, who he used to have a drink with on alternate Saturdays, lost his job and left town. Allison, who had the classroom across the hall from mine, got cut from the staff at school because they decided to take our grades two and three classes and make them into one big class with just me as the teacher. She and I didn't know who had the worse luck: her losing her job or me having to take on a class of forty children for the coming year. The day that Allison's mum and daddy came to pack all her things in a truck and move her back to their town, Sidney and I went out to lunch at the pub. Over his ploughman's plate and my ham and cheese, we decided that we needed to leave. Our life was starting to have a sense of dread wrapped up in the breeze. It was after the war and we knew that North America was full of prosperity, but I didn't want to live in the United States. Canada, on the other

hand struck me as the sort of place where people still spoke to their neighbours and maybe didn't care so much about shopping.

Of course I thought that I'd find a teaching job right away. I thought I'd have a small class again. Sidney assumed that jobs in his field would be there in abundance. We were both wrong. Every school board I applied to said they weren't hiring. They put me at the bottom of their waiting lists. Teachers were everywhere, apparently. Women who'd been out working during the war just didn't want to go back to being at home, so they used those degrees they got while they were searching for their husbands and rushed out to teach. I got there too late.

Sidney too, was out of luck. The engineering jobs were, for the most part, all taken by men who'd been working them before the war began. The entry-level jobs were taken quickly by men whose education had been paid for by their war benefits. Again, it seemed like we were just too late.

It got to the point where I was saving the grease from yesterday's bacon to fry tomorrow's potatoes. I was darning socks like there was no tomorrow and we stopped having nice Sunday dinners. We started thinking that maybe we should try our hands at some other kind of employment. One night Sidney looked up from the newspaper want ads and said to me, "Why don't we start our own business?"

It all came as kind of a whirlwind. We'd both worked in restaurants during university, so I suppose that's what made us think we could do it. And The Coca Cola Restaurant had been up for sale for so long that even penniless types like us could secure

a loan large enough to buy it and start things up again. All of a sudden, we were restaurateurs.

Of course, at first it was terrible. Oh, I used to cry every night. As soon as we got into bed my tears would start and eventually Sidney would hold onto me and whisper encouraging things, even though he probably felt like crying himself. I'd have wonderful dreams about Scotland and about teaching and our friends there and when I woke up in our cold, bare room I would just start crying all over again. Then I would go to work and start the cooking.

In those days the only place we could afford was a one-room apartment above the frame shop downtown. It had lots of windows, but none of them opened and they were all single-paned. In the summer time we took to calling it "The Kiln" because it would heat up so hot you could have fired your crockery in there. In the winter it was colder than the deep freeze in the basement of the restaurant. The radiator was right by the sink and our bed was way across the room. It didn't stay there for long. The first few weeks of winter we'd move the bed near to the radiator at night and push it back across the room in the morning. After a while, though, moving it seemed like too much a hassle so I'd sit on the mattress when I needed to use the sink to do our dishes, and Sidney would squeeze himself in behind the headboard if he needed to use the stove. Mostly, though, we ate at the restaurant.

It took us a while to learn the subtle differences between Ontario cooking and Scottish cooking. But my desserts were great hits instantly and Sidney was a master behind the deep fryer. We managed to gain some loyal patrons early on. The town had been

without a restaurant for a while and people were getting awfully tired of driving to the city every time they wanted to have a meal out.

Eventually I got to like getting up early in the morning and starting with my desserts. It got to be almost a game to see how perfectly I could ice the cakes. I tried each week to come up with new concoctions to tempt the regulars. We hired a few waitresses eventually, which eased our load. As soon as we could, we moved out of the kiln and into a real house with a mortgage that we paid off a few years later. The town, which at first had seemed cold and settled in its ways, began to engulf us. We knew all the restaurant regulars and their families and friends, and we catered enough church picnics to maintain a good standing in the community. I started to forget about teaching, and the fields, and our old friends. We still wrote letters home, but our accents lost their fierceness and sometimes it was hard to tell that we'd originally come from somewhere else.

On the morning of my sixty-third birthday, Sidney woke me up and said, "Dorrie, did you ever think that maybe we could go somewhere else now?" Sidney had been thinking about our retirement. I had assumed that, like everyone else, we'd eventually move over to the Balsam Ferns retirement community behind the grocery store. I was startled by the possibility that there were other things for us to consider.

The restaurant and our house both sold for tidy sums. Our new cabin was reasonably priced. We have hardly any expenses now, since we're both content to spend most days walking in the woods or sitting on the porch drinking tea. I know this may sound trite, but it really is like starting a new life. I think of how

many people see retirement as just the end of something, like all those fools up in Balsam Ferns. Most of them, granted, were born in town and haven't ever left it for any longer than it takes to hop on an all-inclusive cruise around some interchangeable islands in the Caribbean. They're going to die looking at the same view they've been seeing since the day they were born.

I can't help but wonder what they dream of. Myself, I always dream of the places I've left. I used to dream of Scotland, but now my nights are filled up with images of the restaurant, the main street, the tidy gardens, the snowy streets in winter. The difference is, now I'm in a place where I truly want to be. I can wake up from those dreams, realize where I really am, and smile.

I can't bitter towards the town or towards those dreams. No matter how much of my time and happiness that place took from me over the years, being there eventually helped me decide where I really wanted to end up. And now I'm here.

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