

One Day to Blossom

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Woman tells me come, links her arm through mine and pulls. I step, one foot, then the other. She tugs again. We pass the nurse station. I wave. Nurse Sherry waves back and says enjoy, Mr. Ray.

Woman smiles and says you will like the garden today. I think I know her. I know her scent, that lavender sweetness. I stop. She turns to face me. I open my mouth and my tongue pushes against my teeth. "Laa." Nothing more comes. She points to her throat and tells me try again. I say "Laaa." She tells me it's o.k., let's keep going, the time is short. I think I know her.

She says open and I hear a buzz. She pushes the door that chimes, the one that opens for her. Glorious sun makes me blink, warm on my face. She smiles warm, too, and I remember her.

I lift the veil and her lips are on mine. I blink again at the brightness. A yellow zephyr flutters by us and she laughs. Yes, her laugh, squinted eyes, mouth wide open, head thrown back. I close my eyes and remember, champagne bubbles up my nose and in my eyes. I wipe them away and laugh, too. Yes, we are dancing, her hand on my neck, floating together, her long white dress rustling as we spin round.

I want to dance. I put my arm around her waist reach for her hand. I smile and try to say "duh." She grabs my arm and says steady. I stop and stare. Her eyes mist over. Her eyes, yes, the song words come. "Your eyes, your eyes, your eyes. They tell me how much you care. Ooh, yes. You will always be my endless love." I hear the music. I open my mouth to sing. My tongue doesn't work. I put my hand to my eyes. I point to hers. She smiles and grasps my hand. I know her.

Come, let's walk and enjoy the garden. She says be careful, the stones are rough, don't fall. I step, one foot, the next. She talks. Don't you love the garden, the smell of green and flower? She asks if I see the white-bellied towhee scurrying beneath the bush. It darts up into a pine. I nod. She says listen and I hear its long shrill. I recall the rising whistle to its mate, nests under the deck, the hanging feeders, hungry cardinals, and one called chic-something.

I squeeze her hand. She looks at me. I pinch my lips together to say “bird”; a puff of air comes out. She says birds, yes, we had many feathered friends. She says yes, we had many wonderful things. She turns her face away. She turns back to me and cups my face. She says we have now, we have today. I take her hands and kiss them.

She pulls me toward a bench. Let’s sit. Do you like the clouds, she asks? I look up and nod. The sky is no longer so bright. I want to look at her. I want to touch her hair.

They take good care of you here, she says. You understand that, don’t you? I say yes, but the word is a hiss. I nod again. I close my eyes and inhale her lavender.

She stands and says it might rain we should head back. She helps me up and we walk. She stops and points and says look, sweetheart, see it? An orange-throated daylily stands blossoming tall. Beautiful. I look at her. Beautiful. She puts her arm around my neck and lays her head on my shoulder. She stoops to pick up a faded, spent blossom from the flower and takes my hand. She says it’s time to go.

We walk. Careful, she says, go slow. She presses the door button and it chimes as we go through. Nurse Sherry meets us and says time for meds and nap, Mr. Ray. I nod my head. Wife hugs me, kisses me and says I love you forever. I curl my tongue against my teeth to say “love”. My open mouth is empty. She says yes, love. Our endless love.

I squeeze her hand and feel a silky softness. The daylily blossom. I clutch it. She turns, hurries to the door. It buzzes open. She passes through, turns and throws a kiss goodbye. The lock clicks as the door shuts.

Nurse Sherry slips her arm through mine and says let’s go. I take one step and another. I stop by the wastebasket next to her desk. I release the crushed flower into it. Nurse Sherry pats my hand and says it’s o.k., Mr. Ray.