

The Buried Truth

Only one person knew the truth.

But he had never meant to keep it under wraps. With time, the truth had simply lost its ability to break through the surface. The truth had no place out in the open, yet it couldn't be discarded by its much too sentimental owner.

It was that day of the year, between the last remaining leaves and the first snowfall, when those same heavy footsteps trampled across the deserted terrain.

Accompanied by laboured panting and a rhythmic crunch underfoot, the man paved his way through dead leaves to the oak tree he knew by heart.

The tree's silhouette enveloped him against the glare of the setting sun, as he gently placed a bundle of white carnations beside the skeleton of flowers from the year before.

The speckled grey tombstone looked the way it always did; he had made sure it was the best marble that would brave weather hardships of an eternity.

He knelt in front of her softly, and let his knobby fingers trace over the carvings of her name. For the first time in a year, he felt chilly fresh air enter and emanate to every pore on his body.

Slightly overcome with emotion, he reflected upon the whirlwind of events cast his way since he had last been here. He had pushed the business into new markets by opening up the first store in Brazil. He had led the negotiation team that resolved the suppliers' collusive price hike. He had managed client relationships through incessant high profile parties and strategically played golf sessions.

But at night, when the calculating businessman and boisterous entertainer disappeared, he would tuck away profit driven ambition and clear his throat of raucous laughter. Boxed away in the privacy of his mind, he felt astoundingly empty.

In those times, he missed her so much and condemned himself for living the future they had promised to build together. During split seconds of idleness, his longing pierced through his social facade while greeting esteemed clients with his stiffly smiling wife on his arm. The most insurmountable pain came after returning from business trips with his mistress, when the empty vacuum reverberated with the realization that he would forsake everything to see her genuine smile for the rest of his life.

The truth was that he loved her. He still loved her.

He had been intrigued after hearing her cheeky remark in a college party that summer night. He had fallen in love with her for defying her parents to be with him. He had loved her when he carried her sickly form to the wedding alter.

Loving her and watching her life deteriorate had been the most painful thing in his life. But he had tried to fill her last months with joy. He journeyed with her to the shores of the Caribbean, and held her in his arms under the stars in Tenerife. She had told him she was happy, that she had been the happiest with him. But he had felt wracking regret watching her being lowered into the ground all the same.

Then he was swept up in the hailstorm of people who were moving on. His mother pushed his impassive heart into a practical second marriage, but that's all that it ever was—a loveless relationship made for a social image. He took on his father's role in the family business, which he expanded in both magnitude and influence across the continent. He did his best to raise three children, who were smart and kind in their own right.

Yet nothing in the fifty years that followed could ever live up to those three years with her.

He never spoke of her again after laying her into the ground. He knew he had his responsibilities to fulfill. Yet his actions—ruthless workaholic behaviours, loveless inter and extramarital affairs, and periodic clouts of heavy depression—screamed of the gaping chasm she left in his life.

He had tried *so hard* to forget. To move on the way everyone else had.

But his limbs still carried him here every year on the anniversary of her death.

He missed her so much.

Behind his gruff appearance, glamorous wealth and successful career, this was the truth infused into his being.

The truth rendered him powerless and robbed him of speech, yet armed him with the conviction to guard it for the rest of his life.