

How I Love You, Grandma June

The clouds drift apart, beams of sunlight radiating down
To breathe life into the hardy Midwestern countryside
That today is an endless expanse of green
Waving to me like an ocean through the window

Shadows dance along rocks on dirt roads and blades in green pastures
Down onto tractors, rusty trucks and unused cars
And the world shines with the warmth of the summer sun
Swaying to the rhythm of a soft breeze

A single ray of light slips through her kitchen window
Spiraling through the weathered glass and dusty windowpane
Her wallpaper faded and chipping, dust gathering at the edge of the countertops and sink
And she reaches across the table for the cutting board

I am young, small hands holding tightly to the edge of the table as I watch
My mind captivated by the rhythm of what can surely only be
Magic
At the movement of her hands as they reach for each ingredient
At the impossible precision of each measurement
And time is quiet

In our old farmhouse

Her apron is so faded that it evokes serenity

Her smile creases with a life filled with satisfaction

And she's pushed everything aside today to illustrate this one task

Put a pause on every necessary thing to show me something priceless

Her ingredients are scattered across a kitchen table

Nothing could be more perfect

As her movements bring her favorite recipe to life

The grandfather clock booms from the dining room, echoing

The boards creak beneath her as she moves through the kitchen

Table teetering with its one bad leg

As she kneads the dough

I watch, memorizing the movement of her hands, the way she breathes

Making sure I have it all right

She leans across the table, gathering up the reds and tans

And pours them into the crust

Falling, turning, tumbling together to nest

And with delicate fingertips

She evens them in the pan

With silver hair reflecting sunlight

She turns to me, and with a smile, says:

“Would you like to crimp the crust?”

And I beam with joy

She steps aside, pulling my chair up

To the countertop

And my bony knees slide across the cedar

As she lays the circle of dough down over the apple slices in the pie

I look up into her eyes and she reaches towards it, pinching just once

“I got it!” I shout, and she laughs as I begin to pinch the edges

One after another

Her hands guide me, her voice soothes me, and suddenly she is not

A person, limited only to the space behind me

She is the ticking of the clock, and the whisper of the wind

She is the music of the hummingbirds, singing

Her presence is everywhere, all around me

And I can only know, the smallest

Bit

How much she adores me

But I know it

“Would you like to add the little x?”

She grabs my tiny fingers, hands trembling with seventy-nine years of life

And she shows me

Very slowly, gently listening, guiding me

To score the vent

And I know her mind is busy, occupied, surely with

A lifetime of thoughts, a laundry list of things to do

Yet she takes this moment with me, and she sacrifices it

For the rhythm of the motion, the request of her granddaughter

Who wanted to know how she makes her apple pie

Time stands still in this afternoon

Like a picture forever on the wall

I want to stay here with her, letting her hold me and guide me

Showing me meaning

Yet as she smiles down at me

I cannot help but tremble, I cannot help but feel swept up in the emotion

That constricts my throat so tightly

And brings tears to my eyes

Because she is only

A memory, now

She is resting

In a place that is warm, beside a field overgrown with wildflowers

And I know that somewhere beyond, she's on her front porch, watching the sunset
Waiting for me to come home to her

She will be there for my lifetime, until the crickets call
Until a sleepy call guides me back to her front door
Until the trees sway from cool evening winds, and the creatures cry out to the moon

Oh, how beautiful a life can be!
How much those gentle hands and soft words taught me
How much that place became a paradise
A place that was nothing until she made it a home

Oh how I don't want to go, but how much I know I must go
To the house at the edge of the day
Where the pie is sitting on her open window
Its sweet smell drifting through the cornfields
Back to me

Oh how beautiful it is
The endless, stretching fields and pastures
Twinkling with lightning bugs
Under a sky of stars that are calling out to me

How dearly I wish to go back to that busy kitchen, one so messy with love

How much I yearn for that warm feeling, that guiding hand

How desperately I want to see her face

To touch her hand

To feel her presence

One more time

Oh what a beautiful life is one filled with love!

What more could be necessary?

Than to live a life of wonderfulness

To spread a contagious joy

And to do so with a grace and tenderness

To do so endlessly, until the night calls

Even now,

I can feel her, I can hear her singing to me

Her voice is a song sung by wild birds

Her scent is the warmth of the earth

Her embrace is the summer wind

And she is with me now, in my movements

As I roll the dough onto the boards

And pour

The slices inside

Filling the space with her presence

Knowing that she is not gone forever

I know she's on her front porch, waiting

I know she's looking off in the direction I am headed

Waiting for me so patiently

More than anything, proud

That I still make her apple pie

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