

## Blueberry Pancakes for Remembrance

Remembrance. *Re-mem-brance*. It's the word people use to honour and commemorate the fallen, as if somehow acting "in remembrance" of the dead affirmed that their spirits still roam the Earth and would, for whatever reason, be gratified by wasteful tributes. As if six resigned feet of hard soil and upturned green could possibly be the portal allowing souls passage back to the people who offer *remembrance*. What a silly idea.

I wonder if you remember the very day I'd tried to proselytise my skeptic view on *remembrance*, how it started over the fact that you'd noticed the bundles of rosemaries set out in mismatched vases and plastic Coca-Cola bottles across the chess-tiled diner.

*In honour of my Papa fifty years ago today—he started this place with mushy blueberries and a sack of flour*, the questionably young busboy declared, evident pride ripening the apples of his cheeks when you asked what looked a little different that day. It was a heartwarming sentiment, the idea that the little boy had taken the time to set out rosemaries in honour of someone whose life and decisions clearly inspired him. Regardless of how ill-assorted the vases were, he'd done all of it in *remembrance*. Yet again, I declared—rather brashly—how silly such an idea was, the amount of things we living, bleeding-heart humans do for that which no longer has a beat in our world.

You always had too much patience for me though (a virtue I took for granted), so your reaction was as usual: a small, ticklish smile accompanied by a shaking head and laughter that was always a little nervous no matter how much time we spent together. You didn't know it then, but your laughs were like nuggets of *pure gold* to me; I collected them and hoarded them and dutifully counted my earnings like they could one day buy your feelings.

My most valued currency would be won during Student Council meetings, when pursed lips to disguise your mirth at my horribly punny morning announcements meant you'd

initiate post-meeting banter and I'd drop a casual invite to go to the diner after school with our group of StuCo officers. Or, you know, just me, if the others weren't available (I knew for a fact that on Wednesdays, Marie had theatre, Joe had water polo, and Kayla would say no in favour of napping).

It was on our thirtieth weekly visit, another Wednesday with just me and you, that we'd encountered the clumsily arranged flowers. After our brief back-and-forth over rosemaries for remembrance, the busboy finally arrived again, out with another stack of the diners' signature pancakes. While I'd never gotten quite comfortable with the cloying fragrance of the overripe berries and house made syrup, I could also never tire of the way you melted with every bite. After all, it was in the same booth, with the same food, from August to late May, that we had debated anything from politics to pop culture and school gossip, most of these conversations ending with your final piece of pancake disappearing into a conceding grin.

This time, though, you swallowed like it was difficult, like you really didn't want to but you'd looked at my ignorant face and decided it was better to stomach the stone in your throat for both of our sakes.

*My dad is sick. Money has to go to treatment so we might be going back to Canada,* you'd said, so casual and "cool-guy" that I'd mistaken your tone for light, disbelieving indifference rather than stone cold fear. I hadn't taken you seriously then, didn't think there was a way you could ever go back after less than a year here. With me. So I'd said that I was sorry, and that if you ever needed anything, I'd always be there, *blah blah blah*. Then I'd gone back to the stupid impression I was doing of Ms. Z, whose lengthy assignment on creating a Civil War-era podcast had seemed like the most burdensome matter at the time. You'd smiled, weakly I remember now, as you called over the bill at the same time and footed it for the both of us.

*By the way, you interrupted, hesitant for a split second, before the year ends and StuCo won't be meeting anymore, I just want you to know I wouldn't have chosen to lose to anyone else, Prez.*

And so the next day, I'd arrived at the final StuCo meeting extra early to go over President & VP announcements with you, shining with the fresh-faced, naive hope that your confession meant something *more*.

7:01. Per usual, a minute late.

7:09. The other officers trickled in, and while I loved them all dearly, I was now irked that we had lost time with just the two of us.

7:15. Something was wrong. I called over the others.

*Hey Joe? Could you text A? He's not answering me and we haven't finished editing announcements.*

7:16. A pause.

*...He didn't tell you? They left yesterday. He had to disconnect his US number but he told me he'd call once he got a new one.*

I peered down at my phone then, realising that the text bubbles had gone from blue to green and then green with the little red caution mark indicating that my messages were no longer going through. I nodded idly, not registering what the fact of the matter was: that you had up and left. That you hadn't bothered to tell me—not entirely, anyways. And that I was now alone in a job that required two, and more specifically, the two of *us*. I didn't care that I had won so many months ago; had stopped caring for longer than I could remember. I just knew that I was now missing something dreadfully significant, the same way a five year old knows they've lost their favourite sweater to the playground.

Now, I would be lying if I said that the truth of it all had sunk into me at once. Instead, I'd held onto the hope that your absence from StuCo, graduation, and then the diner

were just temporary. Until they weren't, that is. And then when that realisation had hit, I heaved and hiccupped over the dearth of calls or texts from new numbers (all the while still trying my hardest to clutch onto the memory of an occupied booth seat across from me).

Interestingly enough, many of those details, though not so long ago, were not recovered until very recently. Truly, it astounds me how much I had forced myself to forget (especially about you); how the brain stores the smallest of details in so many deep recesses, sometimes they are laid there only to never be withdrawn again.

And yet, one day, the grief still greets me the way a friend of a friend does in a grocery store while their hand is halfway to a bottle of syrup: wide eyed, shy, with a slightly hesitant, flustered smile that says,

*Hey? How've you been? Haven't seen you since such and such event!* And all of a sudden, the breath slams out of me in the middle of crossing the road on a beautiful sunny day, and I think that I've been hit by one of those godawful mobile COVID-testing trucks, that truly I was destined to be struck down on my daily morning run.

But I blink, turn my head, and there is just a man with one hand on the wheel and the other holding a blueberry waffle that he does not bother to savour, the ignorant man. He is drumming his fingers like he is slightly irked at the pedestrian traffic, until a small breeze wafts by his lowered window, and then his countenance abates and melts, all patience as I make my way to the other side.