



White Rose

Kara Stevens

*The wandering mind blurs the vision of reality.
-Unknown*

Every day is the same for 16-year-old Grace Carter, and she fears it always will be. But this recurring feeling of unrest has nothing to do with the current stay-at-home orders. She felt isolated long before the pandemic hit. It's as if life is moving all around her, and she's simply a passenger watching it go by.

Grace is curled up on the couch when her mom, Lydia, arrives home from work.

"Gracie, I brought dinner," her mom says as she gives the door an extra shove with her hip.

Tonight is her mom's last shift at "El Jefe's Cantina." The state closed all restaurants because of the virus.

"Did you sanitize your hands, the boxes, and wear a mask?" asks Grace.

"Yes, yes, I'm the Queen of Clorox," her mother says.

Grace nods in approval and sets the boxes of Mexican food on the kitchen table.

"Mom, what are we going to do now that you are out of work?"

"Well, I am glad you asked ... I have a plan," Lydia says confidently.

"We are going to Crescent Pine."

Grace looks up from her taco plate. "Grandmother's house," she says through a mouth full of guacamole.

"Yes, it's just temporary, and we can help clean up the place."

Grace grabs a second taco.

"When are we going?"

"We have to be out by the end of the week."

"Mom, that's two days!"

"Well, I guess we should start packing."

Crescent Pine is about an hour away from the city. Her Grandparent's house is nestled at the top of Hill Street. Grace's grandfather passed away a few years after they bought the home. As they pull up the long driveway, Grace is flooded with fond Thanksgiving memories. She can almost smell turkey smothered in her Grandmother's famous gravy.

"Are Emilio and Alice still here?" asks Grace. The couple stays part-time with her grandmother to help take care of the home.

Lydia shakes her head. “No, they are back in Mexico. All travel is closed remember.”

As they walk in the house, the warm scent that Grace imagines is gone and the house smells a bit rancid, like a soggy old bath towel.

“It just needs a little TLC,” Lydia says, trying to stay positive.

“Hey, I bet your art supplies are still upstairs. This is a perfect time to start painting again.”

“I don’t know,” says Grace.

“Just give it a try, you might be inspired.”

Grace heads upstairs and sees her old easel set up with fresh paints.

She grabs a brush and runs her fingers through the soft bristles. Grace hears a voice from across the hall.

“Gracie, Dear, is that you?”

She walks into her Grandmother’s room and sits on the edge of the classic four-post bed.

“Hi Grandmother,” says Grace as she hugs her. “I missed you ... oh, I’m sorry is it okay to hug? I promise I’ve been hand sanitizing and wearing a mask.”

Her Grandmother laughs. “Oh sweetie, I don’t care about that right now, I’m just so happy to see you.”

“Have you been painting?” she asks, noticing the brush still in Grace’s hand.

“No, not in a while, I just haven’t felt up to it.”

“Why don’t we paint together,” her Grandmother says. “Bring your easel next to mine.”

Grace and her Grandmother paint together the entire day. They tell stories, laugh, and just enjoy each other’s company. Grace feels better than she has in years.

“Oh Grace, your painting is beautiful,” her grandmother says.

“I want you to have it, a white rose, your favorite flower.”

“If you insist,” she says smiling. “I’ll hang it above the downstairs fireplace right in the middle of the room, so everyone can see it.

“I love you, Grandmother.”

“I love you too, Gracie.”

The next morning Grace wakes up to the smell of pancakes and bacon. Her mom is already sitting down at the breakfast table.

“Mom, this looks delicious,” says Grace as she takes a seat next to her mother.

“Aunt Renee called me this morning,” says Lydia as she puts her hand on top of Grace’s.

“She wanted to let us know that Grandmother passed away yesterday.”

Grace yanks her hands back and grips both sides of her head as if she is trying to steady her mind from racing.

“What do you mean?” she says. “I don’t understand.”

Lydia hugs her daughter. “I know it was hard not being able to see her, but no visitors were allowed at the hospital ... not even family because of the Coronavirus,” she says.

Grace runs upstairs and opens the door to her Grandmother's room. It's empty ... except for Grace's easel and paints.

“No, no ... she was ... here, right here.”

Grace runs back downstairs and her mother grabs her.

“Hunny, it’s okay ... I know you are upset, but I found this last night.”

“Look,” she says pointing to a framed family photo with a note, “*For Gracie.*”

“Grandmother must have left this here for you before she got sick.”

In the picture, Grace and her Grandmother are sitting next to each other smiling. In the background above the fireplace is the portrait of the White Rose that Grace painted.

“Strange,” says Lydia quietly. “I don’t remember that beautiful painting.”

