

Wilting Flowers

Grade 7-8

I watched the others mill around the old, mossy yard, chatting idly in an attempt to cover the silence brought by the night. Large trees towered over the entities, blocking out the drizzling rain that threatened to soak every animal, person, and thing to their cores.

Though drenched and heavy, the Spanish moss waved in the wind, hanging from thick branches of a tree of which I didn't know the name. It made me wonder to whom the plant was waving. Did the moss have friends outside of the gate? Why did it wave throughout the day and night, during the sun and rain? Did it wave to the night-walkers and day-walkers who stalked the paved roads, just like I did?

A low, mournful song rang through the yard as two lovers tried to calm a whining baby. Their lullabies were in a language I didn't recognize, but I listened along with everyone else, as the lovers' quiet voices crescendoed off the trees and gate and stones, echoing the endless song of mourning and loss. Though the others listened to the sad tune, they still tried to talk over it, to cover the dreariness with nostalgia and memories, but this place was a breeding ground for tears and dread, and its effects couldn't be overcome.

Two sisters played old schoolyard games, clapping and chanting, hopping about. Their smiles didn't reach their eyes.

Two boys drew in the dirt with sticks. One of the branches snapped, and the boys couldn't find a new one.

A woman and man talked, but they couldn't hold a conversation, so they fell quiet.

Even though the gated plot was filled with talking and singing, movement and activity, the night never felt so cold and lonely.

I sat on my stone, listening to the murmurs from the friends in the crowd. I never joined in on the conversation, though, and neither did the boy that always sat next to me. Instead, we watched quietly, observing those who remembered and retold stories of their lives. They recounted their tales every night, as they never really could spin new ones. The boy and I had no stories to tell.

The boy next to me sat on his stone, his head tilted as if trying to listen in on a specific discussion, but he looked away when it grew dull. His emotionless eyes found mine. Neither of us smiled or began an exchange. We did not know each other or share a past. We were both alone together, tucked into the corner of the gated plot.

I looked down at the stone he sat upon, filthy and bland, identical to mine.

Nobody bothered to wash off the grime and algae that held our gray rocks because why would they? Our rocks were not pretty like the others. Ours were not in the shape of an angel or a spire. Ours had no pretty engravings, no lovely carvings that made people look. Ours had no words that held meaning. We had nothing, and we never would.

No one cried, gave us flowers, or shared small stories carried on hushed breaths to our stones as they did when visiting others.

Night-walkers started to retreat to shaded homes as the day-walkers emerged to bask in the warm sun rays. The rusted iron gates were opened to the walkers.

A few walkers came and left, roaming around and leaving gifts for those sitting on their stones. Some of the stone-sitters cried as the family they hadn't seen in years approached to whisper or cry or just stand for a few moments before leaving.

I was not envious of these people. Why would I be? I did not remember my own family or even my last name. Why should I miss something I don't remember having?

I was expecting just another day of watching the day-walkers flit about and stone sitters crying, but my suspicions were proven wrong.

A small girl with what appeared to be her parent approached the low iron edging that bordered our stones and read a small plaque that I couldn't see at my angle. Whatever it said usually deterred the reader from walking further and looking at our stones.

The girl glanced at her parent and murmured something, to which they agreed. The girl and parent were crying, but smiling, which wasn't an uncommon sight here. What was an uncommon sight was the small child stepping beyond the plaque.

She held a bouquet of flowers from which she pulled two, burgundy and white, and presented them to our stones, before turning and running back to her guardian.

Though I knew the flowers would wilt, like everything here did, I couldn't help but smile softly at the child who could spare a gift for an unmarked grave.