



NORA'S QUILTS

Short Story | Fictionalised Memoir



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Description of Work

Nora's Quilts is my submission of my Extension II English Major Work for 2021. It is, in essence, a fictionalised memoir that seeks to explore the way other people's perceptions of us contribute to our own identity. We truly are not only made up of who we think we are; but who others think we are too. The memoir is made up of a collection of vignettes that retell Nora's story. For myself, the story has been immensely personal- I have learnt a whole new history of my family, discovered a sense of self I didn't know I had, and memorialised and lamented my Great Grandmother in a way that is indescribable. As a student, the piece has helped me investigate the tropes and conventions of the form; expand them in beautiful fragments of memory; and has ultimately developed my style as a writer.

This is my submission for the UC Creative Competition, and I hope you enjoy it :)

-TG.

“Where is wisdom gained without struggle or discourse?

*Find the common threads; find the varied remnants,
and include them as integral to the final product.*

*What can and will transpire is a unique quilt;
one unlike anything else that came to light.*

Pattern your life and thoughts so that you honour yourself as a thread upon a hallowed quilt.”

-Ed Belliard.

We are all stories. We are the complete sum of stories gone before us, and ones we leave behind. Our narratives are shaped and stitched together by remnants of snatched conversations, chance encounters and enduring connections. The rich tapestry of life that entwines and enmeshes us all, creating, teaching, and sharing. Whether we know it or not, we live our lives following a universal, lifelong quest of learning and discovery. We thread our own tapestries through those of others, allowing experiences and people to weave themselves into our fibres in the hopes that, by the time we reach the end of our lives, we have a better idea of who we truly are.

When Nora Clarke passed away, she had done just that: woven her very own tapestry into so many lives of others - a patchwork of stitched up remnants, precious scraps, and memories. Her entirety is founded in these moments, sewn in time. Advocating for love, community, and a strong cup of tea, she became imbued within tapestries of those who surrounded her.

As the elderly often do.

The Funeral

May 15th, 2019.

A vibrant array of quilts lay around the church. Some full of colour and bursting with life, others faded and displaying the tumultuous existence they had endured. Each quilt, uniquely embroidered with signature patterns. Each stitch, a telling tale of family residue and reminiscences, patched together with love, loss, and other lamentations. Each square, a much loved and worn reminder of Nora. All elegant, all mementos, all ceremonial ordinations of life once bursting at the seams. Quilts were draped along the altar, woven over and under pews, entangling themselves with the nostalgia of the mourners filing into the church. Nora's quilts - each garment a work of comfort and art, encapsulated melodious memories of the lady pictured on the altar; each grieving family's memories culminating in the consecration and celebration of Nora Clarke. Her legacy loomed; a kaleidoscopic shadow caressing the rafters of the church, dancing through stained-glass windows and etching into hearts of those heavy with the weight of her loss. Somehow, even though her quilts lay morose with no shoulders to envelope, no limbs to hug, no bed to be stretched out upon, the quilts reached out, still, to embrace and comfort.

Each quilt, however threadbare, lay like a monumental rainbow of life, rich in challenge and triumph. Nora was very much alive and present, in every thread.

Our lives are filled with a multitude of greetings and farewells, celebrations and sadnesses. One of the major lessons we learn about life as we stumble gracelessly through it, is that we have nothing to prove and yet - everything to offer. We must savour our celebrations and make them unforgettable, whilst also experiencing the entirety of our sadnesses. We will not grow unless we morph this into our entire being. If anyone had become the living embodiment of this practice, it was Nora Clarke. Undoubtedly, as evidenced by the streams of people that filled the church. Those that were influenced by her had travelled across the continent to be present. To recollect her outlook on life, and once again be sheathed in the world of her quilts; to be taken to a place they knew was patient and kind, that rejoiced in truth, and always persevered. To once again be welcomed.

Those threadbare quilts, all bestowing a sense of life, all building upon the passage of time that creates the embroidery of those we love.

* * * * *

Lyn sat at her kitchen table with Wendy, her youngest sister, their hands interwoven. Mellow rays of sunlight streamed in through the window, warming their backs, helping them feel at ease. A large red pot of English Breakfast tea sat on the table in between them, cooling with every minute they sat in silence. While the passing of their mother was expected, they were shocked by the surprise they felt. Within an instant, they had lost their history. It had been snatched from them. No amount of preparation could have readied them for the death of their mother - she was a vital part of their fibre. They were surrounded by loved ones but felt so alone. Grief clawed at the cave in their stomachs, clamouring to be heard, yet astonished by its own reverberation. It was an ache that neither had often experienced. They stared into the abyss of loss, hands parched by new branches of despair, newfound lines spider-webbed across their skin, drooping with permanence. Lyn felt every year of her age. She clasped onto her sister's hands tighter, hoping for a sense of comfort, to make sense of the surrealness she felt. Lyn felt the warmth envelop her, a compass to their new ordinary. Gradually, her heart rate slowed. The sisters, hearts heavy yet so full with nostalgia, harkened back to younger years together, along with their mother's novel personality traits. Nora had many idiosyncrasies. In her passing, these became jewels of the family, and as the sisters sighed into their teacups they smiled too, remembering the solemnity of her instructions: a pot of tea should always be brewed with tea leaves, never tea bags - and, when pouring tea, always pour milk first. This was the only way to create flavoursome tea the whole family would enjoy. Nora herself never took her tea too weak, and when she grew older and was forced to give up milk and revert to black tea, she made it known that she was deeply disappointed.

The two sisters would have many cups of tea that afternoon. Their mother's ritual, officially sacred.

Grief reminds you of the strangest, most inconsequential things.

Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald sang together into the background, the CD stereo player floating through the house. 'Tenderly' spoke softly to the sisters, and the faint buzzing of the trumpet sent another wave of nostalgia over them, gently coddling them, reminding them of their youth.

The Dance

September 25th, 1945.

'The evening breeze, caressed the trees, tenderly,'

'The trembling trees, embraced the breeze, tenderly,'

'Then you and I, came wandering by,

And lost in a sigh were we,'

'The shore was kissed, by sea and mist, tenderly,'

'I can't forget, how two hearts met, breathlessly.'

The brassy song of Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald echoed around the local Town Hall. A bustling room of people in dazzling rayon dresses and navy-blue suits engulfed sixteen-year-old Nora Kearns. She stood in awe against the wall, taking in all she could. Aside from the rows of fairy lights that glittered from the ceiling, the room carried a sombre darkness with it. This darkness was only ever interrupted temporarily by bursts of splendour from occasional shimmering of drinking glasses or jewellery. Nora's eyes savoured it all. A constant hum of chatter crept through the room, the rhythmic swarming of what looked to be at least a hundred people, providing Nora with an oddly snug sense of warmth.

She wasn't much of a dancer, so she stood against her wall, observing, bopping awkwardly out-of-time with the music, heart clanging with anticipation. Amid figuring out her own feet, the silhouette of a tall young man caught her eye. He was chaperoning what she assumed were his two sisters, guiding them safely into the hall. The girls made their way to their friends and the man took a seat against the wall, directly opposite her. As he unbuttoned his suit jacket to sit down, the pair embraced in a glimpse of momentary eye contact and Nora's stomach flipped, cavorting with a sudden rush of curiosity. It blushed her cheeks, wandering thoughts staining her complexion. Suddenly very shy, she looked down at the non-compliant feet she feared would see her buckle with the return of his gaze.

"Excuse me, Miss," he began, walking over. "I'm Ron. I'm here with my sisters and haven't found anybody to dance with."

His well-intentioned, though poorly-worded invitation made her giggle. His awkwardness gave her confidence.

Ron's suit was all-grey, and his shoes were polished to a military standard. Looking down, Nora could almost see her reflection in them. A small, pink rose stuck out of his breast pocket, giving him a charming splash of colour. She was amazed.

"You're awfully pretty, would you mind if I dance with you?" he continued.

Her face flushed a vivid red.

Arms entwined, they shuffled to the middle of the room. The music flowed through them both, uniting them as one, directing them in circles around the room. They paced with the beat in startling syncopation. She was elegant and graceful, and he - sturdy and nurturing. They danced, truly, from the heart, their own inner orchestras in harmony. They stumbled and scuffled time after time, but it was these moments that birthed a duo to withstand time.

Dancing - especially in tandem - is not always perfect: there are moments in which you will falter and are expected to recover seamlessly. There are moments in which your steps will not be in synchronisation. There are moments you will stand alone on the dancefloor, only to feel yourself falling. Yet, there will also be moments that you find yourself caught. This defined Nora and Ron. Upon recovery, they were as melodic and beautiful as the notes of music themselves. His hand brushed against hers, and her heart whispered for time to stop, to give back the seconds that she would now live in forever.

So, as the flowers bloom in spring, so did her heart for him. She could not possibly imagine anybody else she wanted to be with. While her heart had fallen for Ron, her mind had chosen him - she had woven herself into his being, his fibres.



August 4th, 2009.

Ron Clarke's Funeral

Sprays of lavender perennials and white roses were arranged neatly along the casket, and Trish and Lyn, now well into their autumn years, two of the five threads of Ron's patriarchal garment, watched with dreary eyes as the pallbearers removed their late father from the church. The children had only known their father as a constant, rigid character, and they didn't expect to feel grief this

deeply. He lay dormant, yet still foreboding, in his casket. His stern eyes, never again casting judgement. They prayed he had found peace.

“Why are we crying so much?” whispered Trish, her lips praying for an answer.

“Dad was prickly, but he was captivating,” replied Lyn. Her wisdom was therapeutic for the both of them.

Both laden by the knowledge that if their father were to awaken, his first words would be to silence their hysterics and erase their tears, they reflected. Without his monumental presence, the two women’s vaults were finally opened, and a lifetime of private and hastily shushed tears cascaded down their cheeks. They felt once more like little girls again, but this time, their despair came without reprimand.

“Do you think there was ever a time that he was different?”

“Oh, Trish, anybody whose favourite colour is lavender is sure to be a kind soul on the inside. He wasn’t always a stern old man. Men weren’t known to talk about their feelings in Dad’s time, that’s all.”



From outside the hall, Ron Clarke waited on damp grass for his sisters to adjust their hair, ready to go inside for the ball. They were illuminated only by a rusty spotlight mounted just above the outer doorway. People queued down the lawn, waiting eagerly to begin dancing. Flickers sparkled out the door, enchanting those passing by.

The announcement of the end of the World War had been received well in their town, and everyone was anxious to celebrate. The buzz of excitement and relief settling within the community was infectious. Seventeen-year-old Ron felt himself warming up to dance. He was a talented dancer, dubbed a natural by those in his friend group, but hadn’t danced since the beginning of the war. The conflict had taken a forlorn toll on those around him, stripping him of motivation to dance.

But now, he stood tall with his two sisters, and as the queue grew smaller, he chaperoned them into the hall. The silky voice of Ella Fitzgerald blared around the hall as the three of them entered. Chatter carried itself around the people, bouncing off walls and embarking on new adventures. Ron stood next to the door of the hall, watching his younger sisters make their way to the dancefloor, perusing partners, and getting twirled around courtly as ballerinas do. The dim light of the hall caused Ron to feel pleasant and relaxed. He wanted to smile. As his shoulders loosened and he observed his surroundings, he saw, from across the room, a pretty, young girl of around his age dressed in deep lavender. Her dress looked as if it had been handsewn from cotton, and it stood out to him, outshining all the dresses he had seen. The purple was enriching and exuberant, and, as the plastic chair against the side of the wall creaked with the weight of his body, their eyes locked. Ron was smitten.

Keeping his gaze on her, Ron stood and made his way across the floor. His legs moved themselves and his mind burnt with decisions; crafting the perfect thing to say, something unique to grab this girl's attention. He introduced himself, telling her she was awfully pretty. He was desperate to dance again, and he already knew this girl was the perfect partner.

Nervously, he asked her to dance.

"It would be a pleasure to dance with you. My name's Nora, by the way," the girl spoke. Her voice was eloquent, full of passion and tenderness.

"I was lucky in meeting you," Ron replied. Her hand in his, an electric current appearing to connect them, Ron twirled her into the middle of the floor, and they danced and swayed for hours. He danced her around the moon and the stars of the night, and he had never felt more alive. He held her in his arms as the pair waltzed into the very beginnings of their relationship, and finally, it was enough. She was enough.

He didn't have a favourite colour until he saw her in deep lavender. But from that moment on, the mere mention of the colour invited fond memories of the destined first meeting and ineffable joy. The encounters the two would soon share, Ron knew, would be the pinnacle of what it meant to love: to weave another being into the tapestry of your own life.

'Your arms opened wide,'

'And closed me inside,'

'You took my lips, you took my love,'

'So tenderly.'

* * * * *

The song ended and Ella's voice drifted away, fading into nothingness. For a short moment, there was silence before the next track came on. It almost seemed like, in the brief instant of nothingness, that as the audio faded away - so too did parts of their mother. She had dissipated. When someone of such calibre vanishes, you inherently grasp with ferocity whatever remains tangible. The notes of the music carried their own memories and stories of Nora. Lyn and Wendy were beckoned back and forth between the ingress of the living and the dead.

As the tea grew colder, the sisters navigated their way through artefacts and mementos from their parents and family. The most protruding of which, a big black book with a thick spine and pointed edges, held their parents' most sacred, most precious wedding pictures. Black-and-white snapshots of a younger Ron and Nora Clarke were arranged in a scrapbook style throughout the book. Nora looked younger, more innocent than ever, and Ron, far less worn out by fraying ends of life. They were both grinning jovially into the camera. After feeling like they had lost their mother entirely, thread by thread, these memories engrossed them in comfort, and they looked on. She materialised once more before their eyes.

The Family

September 25th, 1948.

A blossom-cheeked couple stood next to each other, whispering subtle jokes while they faced the cameraman. Nora and Ron Clarke, both only an eager nineteen-years-old, stood outside the church celebrating their marriage. Gentle rays of afternoon sun caused stained-glass windows to shimmer, and the newly-wed couple appreciated the sky's blue together. Budding spring leaves began to bloom from the trees, life sprouting from within each leaf's veins. Nora's dress, which had been hastily self-sewn, hugged her comfortably. It strained, but her smile did not. She was now more than a partner; she had become a wife. Dutiful possibility simmered inside of her, and life danced within each of her fibres.



January 8th, 1949.

Nora & Ron's First Child is Born

This was it. The moment the couple had been preparing for since June. These next few hours would forever alter the pair. Ron stood against the faded blue hospital wall, his weight shifting from foot to foot. He gazed from the corridor as his wife was taken away into a separate room. His heartbeat relocated from his chest to his head, gaining prominence with each recurring throb. White light glared from the ceiling. It was bright and clinical, yet the light of day ebbed and flowed itself into night. From behind him, a small wooden chair beckoned. It knew it would be a long evening and was ready to accompany Ron through every moment of it.

Hours passed, and Ron waited patiently. A new, unspoken weight gripped him tight, responsibility ensnaring his mind as a snake ensnares prey. He waited for news on a baby, for news on his wife, if they were okay. The bittersweet reality of starting a family with such rapidity engulfed him and he felt the years of his youth begin to slip away. No longer was he free to do as he pleased.

And then, the resounding click of a door handle from the hallway.

A nurse emerged, sporting a short, slowly-greying bob of hair, and a freshly-pressed, blue-white uniform. She was smiling.

“Excuse me, Mr Clarke?” she whispered.

“Yes, ma'am,” Ron replied. His voice was unmoving. The nurse had slowed his mind for the time being, and his only focus was for Nora to be okay. For the rush of a wedding to be worth it all.

“Mrs Clarke has just given birth to a baby girl. She’s only tiny, but she’s beautiful. Congratulations on becoming a father, Sir. I can take you through to hold her - if you feel comfortable?” The nurse asked.

“That would be perfect. Thank you very much.”

In that diminutive thread of a moment, Ron’s heart was full with emotion. His wife had become a mother. And he, somehow, a father.

Parenthood finally settled in. He would have to work harder, provide for and raise a child, keep his family safe. Ron couldn’t quite name the feeling he was experiencing. He had never felt so ecstatic in his life, and yet, he carried with him a serious embrace of the responsibility he was undertaking.

He entered the room tentatively. Nora’s eyes fixed on him, and a broad smile replaced her weariness. She gestured with giddy aplomb to the mewling infant waving her arms in greeting, swaddled in a purple quilt, made in loving anticipation of a precious child. It was the first of five gifts his wife would bestow upon her family. Overcome with both pride and uncertainty, he quashed the tears that threatened to stream. Nora looked different. He was overwhelmed by the vastness of love he felt for her, and the little babe now howling for nourishment.

Still, Nora was changed, wiser, more noble, however tired. He gingerly reached into the crib and plucked his first born into his arms, extending her to his exhausted yet elated love, who somehow instinctively knew exactly what needed to be done as he fumbled clumsily by the bedside before looking away. Mother and daughter were again one. The baby suckled, Nora smiled, and Ron sighed. They would name her Eve-Lyn.

No wonder this was strictly women’s business. It remained a mystery to Ron all his days.



June 13th, 1961.

Nora & Ron's Last Child is Born

Washing basket on hip, a fatigued Nora began the traipse from the backdoor to the clothesline, a monotonous daily custom. The basket creaked with the weight of wet clothes, and she felt the brittle crumbling of the cane beneath her hands, a sure sign of the life in the sun it endured day in, day out. As she walked, she counted the brick pavers of the pathway along the grass.

One,

Two,

Three,

Four.

She reached the metal clothesline, its wiry arms outstretching to welcome her back. The practice began and, one by one, an exhibit of blues, pinks and whites filled the line. Motherhood had come with its benefits no doubt; she was blessed by God to have successfully birthed five beautiful children, and each day she was taught a new lesson on human verities. She had learnt to become patient no matter what happened, and to take life as it came. It was these lessons that she attempted to pass onto her children as she learnt them herself, in the hopes they would be set up for a future in which they would flourish. Despite her positivity, these lessons had, in due course, significantly increased her daily tea consumption.

No longer was a single cup of English Breakfast in the morning satisfactory. She would need a cup with her scones and jam and cream at morning-tea time, and a cup in the evening with supper, just before bed, to help her wind down. All of which were consumed with a generous helping of milk, a strong brew of tea leaves, a hefty dose of reflection and often, some exasperation too.

The hills-hoist strained under the sweltering sky, laden with rows of haphazardly pegged miniature clothes. Odd assortments of cloth, waving in rebellion at the woman bent over the wilting laundry basket.

Nora squinted into the sky, and the line heaved with row upon row of faded fabric and hand-me-downs.

I think it might be time for a cup of tea, she thought, as the garments danced above her head, twisting with the wind and astonishing Nora with both the ferocity of love she felt for the five small children she toiled for, and the mundanity of the task.

She had five children.

She was thirty-one.

The clothesline sagged with the enormity of it all.

The thing Nora realised, as she stood back to admire the artistry of the clothesline, was the reality of five children. There had always been so much excitement and busyness around the continuation of children that it was only now, in the mundanity of hanging out wet clothes (that wouldn't have taken so long had she less children), that she felt the wholeness of the world around her. Her family, birthed out of generosity and compassion.

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Lyn's eyes glistened with fading memories of childhood. Wendy, noticing the beginnings of distress on her sister's face, took the photo album from Lyn's hands and returned it to rest with the dusty remains of their mother's life. Shadows of the sun, cast by vertical blinds, danced with one another, playing amongst the profile of the two sisters. Their teapot had grown cold, so to distract herself, Lyn rose from the table to boil the kettle a second time, interrupting the light from its game. All the while, the sisters continued to chat.

They talked about their parents' relationship, and the way in which the girls spent their younger years. They discussed the different opportunities their parents presented them, and somewhere within this chat was an epiphany on how loved they were, and how strong the values they were taught came through amidst strict parents.

After it felt like all possible reminiscing was done for the day, they began to talk about the fabric of their mother, what had built her character. Inevitably, the loss of their sister arrived and once again, pangs of loss clawed at their stomachs, settled only by the pouring of fresh tea. Among their mother's belongings was a smaller box, labelled only with, 'Jan.'

Opening the box, they found artefacts of their lost sister, including her handbag from the night of the accident. Forty-five years had passed, and this was the first time they were able to acknowledge the tragedy together, the first time they could dare open the purse. The bag's contents held: a red leather purse, a tampon, and her driver's licence. Residue of an accident unbeknownst to the world.

Wendy threaded her hands with her sister once more and recalled the gut-wrenching report of the death of her sister.

The Loss

28th November, 1974.

3:45am

Wendy Clarke awoke to a soft knocking on her bedroom door from her mother. Nora wore a blue quilted robe, and as Wendy's eyes adjusted to the room's dark, she noticed how incredibly shallow her mother's breathing was.

“Wendy. Your sister has just been killed in an accident. Jan's gone. Your father and I are going to tell Lyn and Tony at their house. Go back to sleep.”

Behind Nora, Ron stood - his face stoic, displaying no grief. Not a hint of emotion could crack his veneer. He observed his wife meticulously, ensuring no emotion was revealed either. It seemed his heart would collapse with the mere mention of the death, that his emotional barrier would erode and crumble if he were exposed to the grief. Wendy was only thirteen, but she picked up on this very well. She knew that despite feeling the grounding reality of the destruction of her world as she knew it, despite the shattering of her heart into a million fractals, she would have to subdue the emotion to spare her father the anxiety and allow him to lament.

As her parents left to tell her sister of the loss, Wendy stared blankly into the abyss of the darkness of her room. She remained like this for some time, attempting the best she could to feel deeply, every wrenching moment of her grief. Her pillow was drenched by a spool of tears and acted as a buffer to the screams that threatened to escape. A small, baby-blue quilt sewn by her mother lay still on the end of her bed. It was the one item to provide comfort on such a harrowing night. In an event that was so confusing for a little girl, the quilt hugged Wendy, providing the only source of love from her mother that she so wished for. Blue was Nora and Wendy's favourite colour, although, as Wendy grew older and apart, she would learn to appreciate the richness and depths of colours like those of purples or pinks; a subconscious attempt to grow away from being perceived as childish, and to disassociate from a night of loss.

Her wound demanded to be audible, but she dared not utter so much as a whimper. Instead, the pain ate into her insides, burrowing deeper into the pit of her stomach where it would feed for a long time. She wondered terribly how her mother was truly feeling. She knew her father was purposely

distancing himself from the panic of loss, but her mother didn't show her emotion, however, nor did she lack it. If it was possible to find such a middle ground, her mother had achieved it. The darkness swamped her, and although the moon and the stars shone brightly outside, she did not know, nor did she care. All she could know in this fragment of time was that her heart was ruptured, and she could only cry.

Nora yearned desperately to comfort the overwhelmed Wendy. To cry, too. She felt as lifeless as her lost daughter, now gone forever.



30th November, 1974.

The Family's Reunion

Nora stood in the kitchen, boiling a pot of English Breakfast, as her husband and four children sat for the first time since Jan's passing, around the dinner table. They had just returned home from the funeral. The atmosphere was dry, and nobody dared usher a word. She poured the kettle into the open pot and observed the stream of boiling water. She aligned her breath, so it was in sync with the flow of the water, taking deep breaths in and out. Her brushed-knit slippers shuffled against tile as she made her way to the table and placed down the pot.

She took her seat at the head of the table. Opposite her was Ron. On the left of her sat Lyn, Ron Jnr, and Trish. On her right was Wendy, and Jan's seat remained unoccupied, opposite Trish. The empty chair, a forlorn presence.

Nora sat for a minute, simply observing. Trish gazed earnestly at Jan's spot; her best friend, lost forever. They were in their early twenties, and only one year apart. The night of the accident, they had been on the phone together - neither of them knowing it would be the last time. Trish didn't know it would be the final time she would hear her sister's voice, but had she been aware, she would have never hung up. The final conversation played over and over in her head. They talked about boys and about work and about all the small absent-minded things that play out in a long day's tapestry. Jan told Trish she was going to a Teacher's Federation dinner that evening, and Trish's last words ever spoken to her sister were, 'good luck.'

Death is always unpredictable. The difference, however, between an expected death and an unexpected one, is in the particles of life that we glance over. With expected deaths, thank-you's are said, goodbyes are whispered, and I-love-you's are uttered. An unexpected death robs us of this opportunity. They force us to say it all in the simple, careless, words of everyday conversations.

Emotion caught up with Trish ferociously, and she wept. She longed for her sister to be present. To somehow, still be alive. Her body groaned and ached with every ounce of pain and loss she felt. The parasite of grief crawled from the dormant pit in her stomach. Her back gave way and she heaved with regret. There was so much she wished she could say, yet - her family refused to acknowledge the existence of Jan. Her best friend. It was as if Jan had been abandoned, left to die once more.

Nora continued to observe as her husband began to panic, shouting for someone to call a doctor, to give Trish a sedative and calm her down. Amongst all the noise, Nora's heart froze. Internally, she was distraught. She knew the death of her daughter needed to be discussed amongst the family, but she was terrified of the idea. It would hurt too much. She had already been put through the suffering of loss once, she was not prepared to go through it again. Clearly, neither was her husband. Despite this, she wanted to comfort her daughter. To tell her that it was okay.

And yet, she refrained.



In the light of her sunroom, Nora sat at her sewing machine. The room was long and rectangular, filled with pastel shades of pinks in both the blinds and sofas that stretched down the wall. On the closest of these sofas her neighbour, Mrs Edwards, sat gingerly.

Mrs Edwards' daughter had also been killed in a car accident, which provided a common ground for the pair to debrief. These meetings would only ever be done in private and occurred randomly throughout their forty-year friendship. They spoke of their daughters: what they missed, how their lives had changed since. Nora often spoke of the withheld grief she endured with her family. Nevertheless, these visits were never emotional. Never a tear was shed. This would become the defining part of Jan within Nora's tapestry.

In this particular visit, Nora had been finishing sewing a quilt she was making for Jan to take back to her home, where the winters were extraordinarily cold. She was hesitant to resume sewing for many years after the death, although Mrs Edwards knew it was a necessary mechanism for Nora to grieve silently. Nora's heart was big, but she could only grapple with grief to an extent. Profound loss urges us to grasp onto the things we love and admire most, hoping for some semblance of permanence. This would be Nora's permanence.

"The quilt won't finish the way Jan would have liked it. She's not here to give her approval," Nora said, plainly.

"Is that not the reality of quilting, Nora?" Mrs Edwards replied. "You've sewn for as long as I've known you, and we both know full well that sometimes the life of a quilt changes its course, just like its creator."

"But-

"Oh, my friend. Jan is smiling down at you. It will be okay. You're not letting her down. I promise."

* * * * *

Lyn gathered Jan's belongings and set them back down into position in their box. Both her and Wendy were quiet for a moment, simply indulging themselves in the nostalgia of memories long passed. They did not make eye contact, for they were afraid it would spark more sadness. Instead, Wendy moved her seat from opposite her sister to right next to her, and they simply embraced. They hugged one another for a while, still silent, still ever-thinking.

"I regret having her funeral so suddenly after the death. We should have said something to Dad," commented Lyn, continuing to avoid eye contact.

"You're right. I was thinking about the difference between her funeral and Mum's funeral today. One was a tragedy, and the other was a true celebration of life. It rattles me a little if I'm being honest." Wendy stated.

To the daughters, it felt like abandoning their sister all over again. With their mother, it would be different. They would make it different. They would talk about her, keep Nora's essence and foundation alive. They would remember her existence; memorialise her.

Nora had become many things in her lifetime - a friend, a partner, a wife, a mother, a grandmother, and great-grandmother among them. This time, however, in her passing, she had become a luminary.

The Story

May 15th, 2019.

Lyn and Wendy's embrace was interrupted briefly by the celestial chiming of the doorbell. Lyn's grandchild had promised after the funeral to visit for a cup of tea, continuing the legacy forged by Nora since she had first become a mother.

In Nora's later years, she had learnt to use this to her advantage, nurturing beautiful threads of relationships with friends, family, and acquaintances alike. Lyn knew this well, taking it in her stride and paying homage to her mother by doing the same.

A good pot of tea is defined by this:

It should be communal, a cultivator of family life, smell fantastic, and most importantly, made to relish. It is all that is needed to bring the family together - even in the most chaotic of times, and this was no different.

The grandchild sat at the table with Lyn and Wendy for hours, asking questions about Nora and delving into her past. Together they unravelled like twine, the history of his great-grandmother.

Finally, after a while of discussion and looking at old photos, he knew.

"I'm writing a piece for my HSC. I think I want to write about Nan."

And so, it began.

Thoughts, like strings, lace together to form the tapestries of our minds. A little entanglement is inevitable, but that is part of the veracious blessings of a hand-sewn quilt. As such, we go forth to live our lives with this in mind, knowing that eventually, we will find our way.

“The world's perception of you exists only in memories. Give them new ones.”

-Atticus.