

## **Passing storms - Tahlia Hall**

Creaking floorboards and the waft of rose petals carried by an uneasy breeze wove together to create a tapestry of nostalgia, climbing through the bare branches of the old gum tree and under the crack of the window sill. Soft, grey light filtered in, sparkling through thousands of dust particles frantically dancing through the air, startled into movement after years of slumber. But melancholy ate away at this perfect picture like a moth, the familiar tapestry fraying at its edges. Forgotten knick knacks and old mattresses stared up at the unrecognisable face that climbed up the ladder and through the hatch. When that face hadn't seen the stress of university exams, overdue bills, and breakup texts, there had been a glint in her eye. The youthful glow shrouding her soul had since faded, now a net of burden hung over her, like a fish she was dragged through the water - alive, but never free.

She slowly rose to stand in the small space which once had seemed so massive, so elusive... Now it was merely a small, dimly lit room, cluttered with what once was. Surveying the task ahead of her, her shoulders slumped with a shameful resentment. Her late grandmother's hoarding, once endearing and eccentric, now just added to her list of burdens.

The room was warm, too warm... The window protested, disturbed from its slumber as she opened it to let the cool breeze in. Taking off her jacket, she took a deep breath as the wind carried once far away clouds closer and closer. Waves of duties had been relentlessly crashing against her, the tide rising as she trudged from the hospital, to the funeral, to the will reading, and now here. The house she hadn't visited since she had moved out... It was untouched, but nothing

was the same. The walls no longer breathed, the flowers no longer sang, and the old gum sat quietly, its heavy arms empty of life.

Goosebumps pricked her arms as the wind picked up outside, the first plump drops of rain beginning to fall. Fat and heavy they tumbled from the heavens. Her eyes flickered across a familiar old trunk, a soft smile began to play on her lips but it didn't quite have the strength to wash over her mind and clear away the grime of numb grief that covered her. The hinges sang hello, greeting their old friend as a bundle of buried memories tumbled out. Teddy bear tea parties perfected with freshly baked scones, late night bedtime stories whispered through the dark, warm hugs from soft, strong arms... Turning away, her eyes began to blur as a lump of unsaid words rose up, choking her throat with their magnitude.

The soft drum on the roof rose to a roar as a small hurricane began to sweep across the room, picking up loose pieces of paper and scattering them. Flailing her arms, she tried to collect this deconstructed scrapbook of memories. Gathering them, she pieced together a puzzle made up of countless photos of her grandmother, young and happy - beaming up at her from a sea of faces she didn't recognise, in places she didn't know her grandmother had been. The faded smiles and black and white skies created a collage of a life she didn't know her grandmother had lived. What else that wasn't captured here in these photos had she missed out on knowing? The paper was stained by an escaping tear as she slid the window shut, blocking out the howling wind.

An untouched box caught her eye, sealed underneath the window, the label reading;  
“For Maddie's future little one”

Slowly tearing off the tape she peered inside. A jumble of colour was nestled in this little safe haven. Burrowing through the cradle of pastels a crochet blanket softly grazed her arm. Pulling it out and wrapping it around her shoulders, the scent of her grandmother enveloped her. A blend of fabric softener, musky rose perfume and earl grey tea. Embraced in one final hug, it wrapped its arms around her - the key to a lock she didn't even know she had kept around her heart. The dam broke. Tears washed over her, their cathartic tingle clearing away the musty grief which had suffocated her, freeing her.

Gazing out the window, she watched the garden. It had begun to glow, light cascading down in a stream of gold as the clouds opened, releasing the home from their grasp. She was gone, but now her presence watched over as the flowers opened their faces to the sky, breathing in the fresh evening air. The vines climbed up the fence, and once again the garden was full of life. The seasons would change, leaves would sprout and fall, but the old gum tree would remain and continue to grow, tall and strong.

**Word Count: 805**