

Grandwhat?

Once I was a granddaughter to two.

There were two porches, two gardens, two birthday cards, two holidays: one Christmas, one Hanukkah.

They bought me dresses and called me 'princess.' I was no princess, I was a planet. But how could they have known?

In mid-December, I lit Hanukkah candles and ran around the chipping, wooden grand piano in her basement. I should've listened when they spoke Ladino. Did they even?

In late December, I ate baked ziti and ran around the Christmas tree in her living room. I should've frowned a little harder when she called me a princess. Would it have softened the blow?

Two holidays minus one equals one holiday, though I didn't understand the truth of this calculation as I watched Connecticut recede in the window of my mother's car. Peace was on the horizon of the Merritt Parkway that September afternoon, and she was hustling.

My father, a few hours behind, made the same pilgrimage in a moving van, the family cat as his copilot.

I held my mother's hand zooming over the Tappansee Bridge. As the wheels bounced over the bump into Nyack, I was no longer of eight blazing candlesticks, I was the Shamash standing alone.

Once I was a granddaughter to one.

One porch, one garden, one birthday card, one holiday, one side.

She hosted gatherings of abundance: in food, frequency, and family. Calendars were filled with dinners, and attendance was mandatory (it's a good thing the other side didn't take attendance, but we'd already dropped out).

There were back to school shopping sprees, lunches at California Pizza Kitchen, and sleepovers in the guest bedroom. She fell asleep on the verdant afghan that rested on the edge of the bed, never daring to leave my side.

Still a princess by her definition, I was given jewels on special occasions. A lobster necklace, a rhinestone-monogrammed headband, a pair of diamond earrings. I was polite, but can't recall smiling after opening those dreaded, bowed boxes.

Some weeks out of the summer, she became my camp counselor. She led me out to the sprawling garden, netted and fenced, and taught me how to eat tomatoes.

First, you hold out your hand beneath a cluster of ripe, red gumballs, glistening in the sunlight as if they came straight from Andy Warhol's silkscreen. Next, you gently nudge the loosest one off the vine. This creates a chain reaction, and suddenly five more thud softly into your palms. Now it is time to eat. *Like candy*, she advises, popping six cherry tomatoes into her mouth with the precision of an artistic swimmer.

Sometimes, tomato eating calls for more aggressive measures. The sweetness becomes insatiable, so ripping the ripest fruits off the vine, letting some fall, stuffing them into your mouth, is equally acceptable.

Her backyard candy store closed as she moved into a new garden, although this one was cultivated by the HOA, not my grandfather's tender green thumb.

It was here, in this new abode, that I promised her I would play Gabriel's Oboe at her funeral, wiping tears from her eyes as she heard the angelic melody for the first time. It was here that she watched me grow more beautiful. For a moment, I felt like the princess she always thought I was.

Once I was an enigma to one.

As my hair escaped the jail of my upper back and liberated itself onto my calves, peeking out faintly amongst the peach fuzz, eyes that once gazed proudly at my developing feminine mystique twisted into themselves, grimacing, with brows in zigzags.

"Why haven't you shaved your legs?" She asked, for her own sanity, not for mine.

"I usually do when summer starts...Oh wait," I began to joke nervously, "it's August!"

Once I was a grandson to one.

I answered her two years of silent questions, head shakes, confusions over the phone. Shaking, shameful, in the spring evening Twilight, I re-introduced myself.

Relieved, she told me she loved the name I chose.

It's a shame she can't bring herself to utter it.

Once I was a shadow to one.

Slip after slip, ignorance after ignorance, I found myself at the concave of a mortar. Like a clove of garlic getting macerated, she crushed me under the pestle of her grief.

Numb by the confusion I brought her, there were no longer jewels, nor trips to any sort of garden, nor sleepovers, nor phone calls.

No matter how much she was reminded, educated, or even scolded, there was no changing just how perplexed my identity made her feel. It paralyzed her. It paralyzed me.

I could not be burdened by paralysis any longer.

Arms stretching wide towards the liberating sun, legs kicking against the dust of unencumbered expression, I ran.

Once I was a grandson to none.