

A HEAVEN IN A WILDFLOWER
BY MOHAMMAD KHAN

The wake was held at John & Charlotte's home. A home once was filled with running children and a loving family, now John remains its sole inhabitant. Many friends and family attended to pay their respects to a woman whom many referred to as purest soul to ever walk this earth. Her coffin, sparsely decorated contrasting their decorated home, was in the living room, the largest room of the house. Portraits of family covering the walls and drawings from their kids and grand kids. His two kids, Michelle and Kyle, are at the wake taking care of the house, the arrangements, and John.

"How's he doing", Kyle asks Michelle. "I tried calling yesterday when I got the news, but he didn't pick up."

"I don't know. He's been sitting at porch since."

John stayed outside on the porch surreptitiously while the mourners sorrowfully ambulate through his home. Even to a person of adequate hearing, the house was immensely quiet. The nearly silently chitter-chatter of mourners passing on their condolences to the family and hesitant to speak to John as he solemnly sits on the porch; a place where he and Charlotte once sat.

"Do you think he needs anything", asked Kyle.

"He needs mom back." Michelle spoke in a somber tone. "I've never seen him this upset."

At the funeral, Charlotte was being laid to rest at 89. She was married to John Latimer for 65 years and was mother to 2 kids and grandmother to 5 grandkids. On her gravestone it said: 'Charlotte Latimer: mother, caretaker, voyager'.

John returned home with his daughter Michelle. They walked into the living room and John sat on his chair in the living room.

"Do you want anything dad?" Michelle ask kindly, careful not to replace the role Charlotte played in his life.

John looked around slowly taking in his surroundings. He stood. He grabbed a portrait of him and Charlotte and walked outside to his porch without a word.

On the porch were two rocking chairs and one large swing chair for their children when they were younger.

He sits in his rocking chair and watches the world continue on in front of him. He looked at the portrait of him and Charlotte. They were young, just married. During that time, photos were expensive for John and this is the only photo that survived the 65 years of marriage that John had. The call of adventure is engrained in Charlotte's hazel eyes.

"One last time?". John sighs to himself quietly as he stifled a cry. John stood and walked slowly back into his living room. He walks to a record player, plays a record, turns up the volume so he can hear it on the porch, and returns to his porch seat.

La Vie en Rose by Louis Armstrong plays in his house, on the porch, and the nearby street. People walking on the sidewalk can hear the gorgeous tune.

Michelle joins him on the porch. She's holding a small book in her lap.

"I remember you and mom dancing to this", Michelle said as she sat on the large swing chair where she sat as a kid.

John reminisces. "Oh we didn't just dance to this. She walked down the aisle to this. There are no photos unfortunately."

John and Michelle sat in quiet for a while taking in the surroundings. The calm summer afternoon and warm breeze. People are enjoying the outside with their families.

"Y'know she always wanted to travel", started John. He turns to face Michelle. "Your mother was always an explorer. Wanted to go places where no one else ventured, at least to the hidden tourist attractions she always showed me."

"I don't remember going beyond the Great Lakes. Did you travel before you had me and Kyle?"

"No. We never did", John tears up a bit. "Money was tight when I was growing up and I was always hesitating on spending it on things. Your mother lived with that. She did have her objections, but we lived through that. And then when we had you and your brother, that was another reason to save money."

John leans back in his rocking chair. "Oh god. I wasted it. Every year she'd ask if we have enough to go on a trip and I'd say no. I never took the chance. Why didn't I take a chance? I wasted our life together."

"Dad", Michelle spoke softly. "You didn't waste it. You did what you thought was best for us."

Michelle hands John a small book. "You didn't waste it. I have been taking photos since mom got me my first camera and have put them in a book. She helped me fill and bind the pages. We were going to give it to you as a birthday present."

John flips through the book. First page was Kyle's 4th birthday. Charlotte, Michelle and Kyle were gathered around the birthday cake. Charlotte's arms were around Michelle and Kyle in a warm embrace as Kyle was blowing out his candle.

Next page.

John and Charlotte are dancing in the living room. John's hands on Charlotte's hips and her hands on his shoulder as they gently swayed to the music hand in hand.

Each page filled with memories. Michelle's day graduating high school, graduating college, master's degree. Kyle graduating college. Michelle's wedding. Kyle's wedding.

"You remember what she always told you and Kyle?"

"Life happens wherever you are. Make the most of it. Told me when I graduated high school and college and when I got married. How could I forget?" Michelle spoke in a lovely manner. "She

always cared for us. We were always young ones to her.”

John turned each page in an introspective rhythm.

One page had a flower taped to the page.

“Mom’s favorite”, Michelle said. “She gave me one from her garden when I was married.”

John smelled the flower and leaned back into memory lane. His eyes look upward towards the sky as he lives briefly in his memories and closed his eyes in a moment of reminiscent ecstasy.

He flipped to the next page and it was a photo of him and Charlotte going on a walk.

“It was on days like today”, started John. “That we’d go for a walk by the river. She’d point out the different plants, animals, and how they work together. I’d pretend to know what she’s talking about. I’d point out how the boats worked on the river, and bicycles passing on the road and-and she’d correct me,” said John laughing.

John’s words heavy with experience and memories fill the air with wonder and awe at the life that he and his wife shared.

“She could’ve taught anywhere if she wanted to. She was a sharp as wit and helped many researchers with their papers and work. She probably helped someone get a Nobel Prize and kept it to herself.”

“I didn’t know that. Was that why she always tried to hide a stack of papers from us”, asked Michelle.

“Couldn’t show anyone proprietary research. Smartest person I met. I helped whenever I could as an engineer. But she was busy.” John continues to flip through the photos. “God the things we could’ve done.”

John gets to the last few pages. Photos of Charlotte in a hospital bed and John at her beside posing for a birthday photo. This was Charlotte’s 89th birthday a few months before her death. The sunlight came in from the window behind him and the single candle glowed brightly between them. Their final spark.

The last photo was of Charlotte staring out the hospital window. Staring into the sunlight that shrouded her in heavenly light.

John’s hand gently rests on the photo. His finger gently strokes Charlotte’s cheek one last time.

“You didn’t waste your time with her, dad”, Michelle grabbed John’s hand. “Mom loved every moment with you. She wouldn’t trade for anything.”

The bottom of the page was inscribed by Charlotte.

‘Life happens wherever you are. I’m glad life happened when I was with you.’

THE END