

Ad Infinitum

As Amelia lay in her bedroom, dying, she thought back over her life, as most people do. Certain events loomed all out of proportion to their significance at the time, and some were more insignificant than she had believed – but then, hindsight weighs the past as it wishes.

She remembered the time when she first saw Sean, for example. It was her first day at her new school. Her third new school, to be precise. At age ten, she didn't really care for boys, not yet, but she had noticed his friendly smile. She had been a shy child – probably a side effect of moving so often – so her friendship with Sean had taken years to develop. But the memory of his first smile still warmed her heart, even as it broke.

So many of those small, seemingly insignificant moments revolved around Sean. Which, Amelia admitted to herself, made perfect sense. At fifteen, he had asked her out for the first time. But she got food poisoning from some bad convenience store nachos, and had to call off the date. He had been angry with her, not believing that she had spent the night throwing up in her bathroom. *If you didn't want to go out with me*, he had said, *you could have just said so*.

It had taken him a year to move past the incident and the injury to his pride; a year during which she suffered in agony, believing that she had lost her one chance at true love. The wisdom of fifty-three laughed at fifteen's innocence. After that, he had been awkward, uncertain with her. They didn't share their first kiss until they were seventeen. But after that, things got better.

Amelia remembered her wedding day. Twenty-two years old, fresh out of college, and with barely a penny to their name. But she had been happy.

At thirty, their first and only child had been born; a daughter. They named her Jirelle. She was all grown up now, with a husband and a daughter of her own. That made Amelia feel easier about her impending death. It wouldn't have been so easy for her to give up if she had had any worries about Jirelle being taken care of, but she knew her daughter was in good hands.

Amelia remembered their silver anniversary with a mixture of joy and pain. Joy, because it had been such a wonderful day; pain, because she knew too well what was coming. Grief colors the past, if we let it – but so can joy.

Altogether too soon, she found herself remembering her fifty-third birthday. Sean had been on his way home. In a hurry to make it home with her ice cream cake before it thawed, he hadn't been paying as much attention to the road as he should.

She remembered the call from the police. The visit to the hospital. The vigil by his bedside, and the decision she and Jirelle had to make to let him go. What was letting herself go, compared to that?

Amelia closed her eyes and slept. Seeing Sean, she smiled.

As Amelia lay looking at the yellow hospital wallpaper, waiting to die, she thought back over her life, as most people do. She thought of all the little things that had made up her life with Sean.

She remembered moving to town at age ten, and seeing Sean for the first time. She remembered how she had been afraid that she wouldn't find a friend; she remembered how the way he smiled at her eased her fear.

She remembered the dress she had worn to the 4th of July picnic when she was seventeen. It had been red, with a belled skirt, and a blue sash she had tied on just for the occasion. Even

after she had outgrown the dress, she had saved it because Sean had first kissed her when she was wearing it.

She remembered the feel of Sean's hand on hers, trembling as he slipped her wedding band on to her finger. She remembered his smile as she placed his band on his left hand; the same beautiful smile that had warmed her heart twelve years earlier.

She remembered the flowers at their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. She had told him not to worry about getting her a fancy present; twenty-five years with him was a wonderful gift. But he brought her flowers anyway – red roses and white carnations, just like on their wedding day.

She remembered asking Sean to pick up her birthday cake on the way home from work, rather than going to get it herself. She had had a headache, and was worn out from a long day teaching school. At fifty-three, she had been beginning to feel too old to be teaching high school kids.

And in the back of her mind, where she couldn't forget about it, his funeral played over and over in her head. She had been oddly grateful when the doctor had shaken his head and told her daughter Jirelle in a loud whisper that he couldn't find any reason why her mother's heart was failing – but that she didn't have long to live.

She remembered her lessons from church as a child, and wondered if there was a Heaven. She closed her eyes and slept. Seeing Sean, she smiled.

As Amelia lay dying, she thought back over her life, as most people do. She thought of her husband, Sean, and their life together.

She remembered how when she met him, at ten, she felt like she had known him forever. Even then, even before she had really cared about boys, she had known somehow that they would spend the rest of their lives together.

She remembered the time when he had asked her to a school dance. She had been starving after school, and had begged her older sister to stop at the convenience store on the way home. At first, she was going to get the nachos like her sister, but at the last minute she decided to get a hot dog. After watching how sick her sister got, she was glad she hadn't chosen the nachos. That had been the beginning of her life with Sean, really. They had been high school sweethearts from that moment on.

She remembered finding out she was pregnant with their first child. Sean, now her husband, had been so excited. They both had been convinced that the baby was going to be a girl from the start. And when she suggested the uncommon name of Jirelle, he had agreed immediately. They both felt like it suited her, even before she was born.

She remembered the feeling of dread that filled her when the phone rang, six months earlier. Phone calls on her birthday normally made her smile, but for some reason, she knew that this one was bad news. She had been right.

Even before the doctor had given up on her, saying she had lost the will to live and he couldn't do anything more for her, Amelia had given up on herself. Her life just wasn't right without Sean.

But somehow, she knew that he would be waiting on the other side for her. And as she fell asleep for the last time, she smiled.

As Amelia lay dying, she thought back over her life, as most people do. The tattered blue wallpaper seemed symbolic of her life, in a way. She wasn't sure what she thought of her life, as a whole; whether the good outweighed the bad. Somehow, it mostly felt . . . incomplete.

She remembered getting ready for her first day at her new school, when she was ten. She had been oddly excited and optimistic; something she had never felt with the other moves. She had thought the day would be special. While everything went well, she couldn't really figure out why she had felt so good. It was a feeling she had fought to recapture for the rest of her life.

Odd feelings and premonitions had plagued Amelia her whole life, it seemed. When she was just fifteen, the night of her first big date to a school dance, she developed a sudden dread of nachos. She'd never been able to eat them again. She went to that dance, feeling vaguely unsettled, and ended up fighting with her date, Sean. He hadn't spoken to her for a year afterward.

At seventeen, she had gone to a 4th of July picnic with her boyfriend, whose name she couldn't even remember now. Amelia had convinced herself that it was going to be a wonderful night. But he hadn't even tried to kiss her. She did remember seeing Sean there, kissing his new girlfriend.

One of the main reasons she couldn't decide whether or not she was pleased with the direction her life had taken was what had happened when she was twenty-one. She had been in college, getting a degree in English teaching, when the bomb had fallen. She was pregnant. Her boyfriend left her once he heard the news. Amelia had dropped out of college to have the baby, deciding later to give the baby boy up to be adopted. Her old friend Sean had offered to marry her and help her raise the baby if she wanted, but she didn't want anyone to marry her out of pity.

At thirty, she and her husband Dan had made one of the few decisions she had no doubt about in her life. Unable to have children of their own, they decided to adopt. A little girl, who they named Jirelle. Jirelle had been the one consistently bright point in her life.

Her uncertainties about her life had really begun to surface at her 30th class reunion. Seeing all her old friends there, including her first boyfriend, Sean, had been odd to say the least. Something about the way her life had turned out just didn't feel right.

Giving into a ridiculous impulse, Amelia had called Sean on her fifty-third birthday. She felt somehow that renewing their grade-school friendship would help her put her uneasiness to rest. Sean had listened sympathetically, offering to take her out for coffee the next time he was in town. He apologized for cutting the call short, but he said he had to leave or else he would be late for dinner. He had actually remembered to call her the next time he was in town, and she had enjoyed their coffee date more than she thought she would. Talking with him had helped ease a little of that nagging feeling of incompleteness.

But now she lay dying in the hospital, feeling like she hadn't really done what she wanted to do with her life. Even in dying, she felt surrounded by uncertainty. The doctors were puzzled over her condition. A healthy fifty-three year old woman's heart didn't just give out, but hers had. All they could say was, sometimes, it's just someone's time to go.

Amelia closed her eyes, and slept.

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