

The Old Man's Journal

By Rafael Linhares

For Mom

There was once a man on a bridge, he stood there looking at the water and his face staring back at him in the rippling reflection. The man sighed, and took a cigarette out of his pocket; a nasty habit, but it helped him get through the day. Today was his seventy-fifth birthday- an age that made him hesitate celebrating. He was standing in the same spot he was a year ago, cigarette smoking in his mouth, staring at his wrinkled face which stared back at him with youthful, excited blue eyes. He took a small black leather notebook out of his coat pocket, and started writing.

*Another birthday, another day
And now I am seventy five
My age seems unreal to me
I still feel twenty-five*

*My skin wrinkled
My hair turning gray
Soon I'll have to wonder
If I'll live to see another day*

*Even I don't know my destiny
And what I may be
My life has passed before my eyes
I don't mind, as I've learned that happiness is key*

*My life has been a journey
A cruise with many stops
Is it a series of events
Or simply a collection of memories and thoughts*

*Another year has passed
A new number added to my age
I wish i was still twenty-five
When I didn't have to count my days*

“Depressing”, he said out loud. He flipped through his notebook- a poem written for every birthday. He flipped through the journal, filled with old, yellow pages covered in writing. Every page

contained a poem from a different year, containing memories of his life at both its best and its worst. He flipped to page 8, the poem he wrote on his 18th birthday.

*I saw my parents cry today
Tears of both sadness and joy
My age has come to quickly for them
I'm no longer their little boy*

*I saw my face in the mirror today
And I no longer saw myself
I saw the memories of me
But looking back was someone else*

*These 18 years have been a ride
Through happiness and sorrow
Every day was truly bliss
And I couldn't wait for tomorrow*

*Now my days can count for something
My time has just begun
With these 60 years of life ahead
Spring has finally sprung*

Halfway through writing this poem, he stood up and went outside. He took in everything surrounding him- birds singing their tune full of love, the distant sound of car horns, every leaf on every tree, every house, every color his eyes could see. The sky looked different to him that day, like leaves the day before autumn; he had never looked at it so closely before. He turned around and looked at his home of eighteen years. He had never seen in this way before- every shade of blue on the walls became more vivid, resonating with its surroundings until everything around him lost its solid form and to him looked like no more than a colorful swirl of his environment. Everything he looked at around him became his one and only focus- his eyes locked on his front door, until his door was the only thing he could see; it bulged at him in and out, and in and out again, sharply outlined to the point where every line, dent, and detail of the door became immediately visible. The door opened and he saw his twelve year old self walk out and wave back to his mom- he immediately remembered the day this was; twelve year old him dressed in his favorite dark blue NASA hoodie, his lucky black khakis, backpack full of empty binders and folders. "First day of sixth grade", he thought to himself. He watched himself walk in and out of the door for hours, watching himself grow taller and older, being forced to remember days that haven't crossed his mind since the day they happened. He saw himself come back home dirty, crying and stumbling, drunk off of vodka and heartbreak. He watched himself come back home with a girl for the first time, and the proud smile on his father's face when he opened the door (as well as his mother's mixture of pride and concern, with a pinch of sadness). He looked at a day he remembered well, him bringing home his blonde, pale-skinned girl for the last

time, and the girl leaving, walking quickly, brushing tears off her eyes as she left. It seemed like he was there for days, watching the door of his childhood open and close over and over again. Finally, he saw the version of himself today, who walked out with a smile of sorrow on his face, carefully taking in his surroundings, taking deep breaths of the fresh July air that he would come to miss so soon. He watched as he went out onto the grass by the sidewalk and observed the trees, and then suddenly he saw himself walking towards him, and hopping into his own body. He felt a sudden rush, a re-awakening of his senses, and he opened his eyes and felt whole again. He took a deep breath, processing what he just experienced. "Good shit Lucas", he said out loud, as he checked his watch and saw that in reality, only 15 minutes had passed. He sat down on his porch, and began writing again.

*Every second of my life has led me up to this
Every breath, laugh, and tear
I don't remember exactly what caused them
But I hold all those moments dear*

*Today I saw the trees breathe with me
And their leaves rise and fall as they did
The sky was smiling looking at us
The clouds started crying and were comforted by the wind*

*The grass I stepped on yelled in pain
And sighed when I stepped off
Everything around me was alive
As it was before, my eyes were simply off*

*There is no real age, I could be 18, 17, or 20
I will be an old man one day regardless
My birth and death, I now see are the same
Just a new cycle in a system that is flawless*

*From my birth I grew, a seed of knowledge
Sinking my roots in my own thought
Free from the soil I found most lost in
I grew from the wise people I met, the ideas I was taught*

*My coming of age has finally arrived!
I'm free, I'm free, I'm free!
How great his idea had sounded
When it was taught to me*

*Now I see my reality has just begun
Enslavement lurking in the darkness*

*I may beg and plead on my hands and knees
But my true savior will be the power I learn to harness*

*Oh well, I shall see what happens
There are no predictions when it comes to gambling
I'll roll the dice and come to love the number
As the ones filled with sorrow before me haven't*

The old man laughed out loud. "I remember that day well", he said to himself, "How could I not?". Again, he began flipping through his journal, looking for the next poem to read in his solitary celebration. "Ah! Twenty-five, my favorite age." He thought back to this day, one of his favorite birthdays, on one of his favorite years.

*I look around, I see shining dark blue water
Reflecting the dark, starry sky
Inside the water is full of life and love
If only I could see it with my eyes*

*The large, full yellow moon looming over the sea
The guardian of the night
I lay back watching it, admiring its immortal wonder through my mortal eyes
I felt safe and happy, what could go wrong under such a beautiful sky?*

*My watch alarm beeped and I saw that it was twelve
I had now turned twenty-five
An age I had been longing for
The day I begin to thrive*

*This year it seems so long to me
Never will I wish for its end
It may just be another number
But to me I see it as a friend*

*Those I love sleep happily below my body
When they wake up they'll think of me
Blessed I've been with love from them
Because of them I know true bliss, and now I'll know it at sea*

*Today I turn twenty-five
I'm ready to leave my mark
I hope to be known someday
As one who brings light into the dark*

*I love you world, friends and stars
Don't let fear sink its roots into your hearts
Instead let's rise and fall together
Like beautiful waves in a vast ocean, we are all just playing our parts*

He watched the calm, glimmering surface of the ocean for a while. He could hear the snoring of his friends below him, as they were calmly asleep to the rocking of the boat. Islands surrounded him, with beautiful coral reefs a few feet from their shore. The trials and tribulations of adolescence he had survived, and an enormously heavy weight was taken off his shoulders as he realized he no longer needed to go to school. At last, his life was finally starting to take off- his name growing, his brand starting to succeed; he thought about it all with a smile on his face, content and happy, excited for whatever was coming next. For now, his worries were at their lowest point, and if their sudden reappearance happened all he would have to do is take one look around him and they would be gone again. He laid back and closed his eyes, yawning and falling asleep the second his head touched the pillow. Under the glowing, cratered moon, above the dark, sparkling water he slept quietly and happily, guarded by his surroundings. That night he dreamt of his mother, likely because of the words they exchanged that day. In this dream he met her younger self, same age as he was now. They were sitting at a cafe in the South of France, one she took him to when he was a kid. They laughed and spoke with each other for hours on end, like old friends who had just seen each other for the first time in years. In this dream they were strangers, comparing their separate lives, she told him her greatest journeys and adventures and the strange things she had seen through time. He had told her about his too, from a shark attack in Hawaii to his DMT fueled journeys through space and time. As they spoke, her figure grew older and older, until she no longer looked his age- he looked down at his hands and they were smaller, and he realized his feet no longer touched the ground. Suddenly they were there again, a mother and son in Southern France; enjoying their food and the life around them, they were speaking once again. Only this time, he asked a lot more questions, and she in reply would mostly just smile and laugh. Every now and then he asked a more coherent one, in which she would give him a real, thought out reply.

"Why is the sky blue mama?"

"Because that's the color that shows the best when all the colors are scattered throughout our atmosphere as sunlight by gases and particles sweetie".

"Why is that man not wearing shoes mama?"

"Because that's what he chose to do sweetie".

"Why is my food hot mama?"

"Because it was just cooked sweetie".

And on it went until the check finally arrived and the energetic little boy jumped up and was ready for his next activity of the day.

"Why don't we get some ice cream?", said his mom, and the boy grew a smile of pure joy the moment she said that. She laughed and grabbed him by the hand, and walked with him out of the cafe, down the streets of Southern France. The grey and white buildings lined with detailed carvings began to swirl, and all of a sudden all the people did too. The sidewalk and all the bustling stores began to mix

into one another, and just like that, the dream was over. He turned over in his sleep smiling, already dreaming of something new.

The old man wiped a tear out of his eye, remembering his kind and beautiful Mom who was the only reason he had this journal in the first place. He flipped the pages to the very first page, titled: "Happy Birthday Mom".

*My mom, its true, she is a hero
A brave protector of lives
She lives not just for herself but for others
Even those who may be full of lies*

*To her true happiness lies in the hearts of others
Her love will light the the love of others
Though love may be extinguished for years
Her love gives people the ability to find happiness through their tears*

*To bring people out of pitch-black darkness
To see hope at the worst of times
My mother is a real hero
At least to me, she's mine*

*Every friend of her's is truly blessed
For everyone she's met she's saved
She's saved me and countless others
Despite the way we've all behaved*

*A hero, she is, I'll say it again, and maybe one more time
Once you give her a cape and a mask she'll even start showing up on time
A doctor, a poet, a biologist, a tour guide, and more
Name anything one can do and I guarantee she's done it before*

*Sorry mom for the lack of figurism
This poem does lack metaphors
But everything I've said is true
And if I do have a guardian angel, it's her.*

October 26th:

The old man walked down the path he was on on his 75th birthday, the same one with the bridge with the rushing water beneath it. In his hand he was carrying a shovel, and in his coat pocket, the journal. Today was his mother's birthday, and although she had already sadly passed away, he had thought of the perfect way to honor her memory. He tried not to think about it that way, instead he

thought of it as a celebration of her life, as she would've wanted him to. He took the journal out of his coat pocket and opened it to the first page. He proceeded to rip it out and place it on the ground. He took the shovel and dug a small hole, then put the poem in it. He covered the hole back up with dirt, and let out a sigh of happiness. In her philosophy, there was no afterlife- the only thing that was truly immortal was the cycle of nature itself. The poem would be eaten by worms and made into soil, and that soil would provide nutrients for a seed, and one day, that seed would become a tree. Through her poem a beautiful oak tree had grown, providing shade for the passerby, and food for the animals living in the park. Just like her, her memory became something beautiful and helpful, something that brought nothing but joy to those who saw it. Only this time, she could finally rest, as her memory had turned into nature.

Many years later, the old man's great-grandson sat on a bench in the shade of his favorite oak tree. It had always given him a serene and peaceful feeling, and he felt safe resting under its leaves. He was writing a haiku for his class and had come to the spot for inspiration. He took out an old, black leather journal, with the pages a light shade of yellow from time. It was passed down to him by his father who got it from (the boys) his grandfather, all the way back 3 generations. He looked up at the tree above him and wrote:

*the wind is singing
carrying seeds with its tune
may they grow someday*

The End.