

## Magnolia Flowers

My nana's voice is strong, but dainty. A fast-shifting tone, but always polite and proper. What seems like a dwindling St. Vicentian accent always makes a surprize reappearance on the word Tuesday. "Choos-day," she says. It always seems as though nothing bothers her as she speaks. Like everything in the world is easy and can easily be solved. She's a like a tree that stands tall and still above every trouble there is. Collected and calm, with leaves intact and emotions grounded.

It's her voice that recites the family stories from every photo hanging on her living room walls, from large portraits to grids of tiny 4 by 6's. She makes the stories seem like they come a from magical place, where everything doesn't need to be seen through rose-tinted glasses, because that's how it really is. Each photo is accompanied by a story or guessing game of who's who if she catches you staring for too long. "That one, your father was only about nine there. He didn't want to have his picture taken." "Do you recognize anyone there?" "Who do you think that is?" There were always a few I could pick out, my father, myself of course; nana often exclaimed I looked just like Lisa in certain photos. But often times I'd find myself confused between photos of nana when she was younger, and another beautiful girl who hung from her blue walls. Soon enough I learned that the massive photo that took up most of the wall above the couch, the girl who was the spitting image of nana, wasn't her at all. The girl with a tilted head of wavy auburn hair, and a luminous smile that seemed contagious even from the paper. This was Lisa, my nana's daughter, my father's sister, my aunt who I never met. Lisa died in a horse riding accident in Barbados when she was only sixteen. When I was younger I don't think I fully

grasped what had happened to her. My nana would talk about her so much, I could've thought she lived down the street. It wasn't until I was probably about eight or so that I fully realized that after sixteen years of Lisa's presence, my nana had to bury her eldest daughter.

I grew up listening to stories of Lisa, probably since before I could talk. I knew she loved to paint, rode horses, and had great taste in music. What my nana had us all believe was that Lisa was a happy memory, a controlled smile that warranted only a funny story. Certain songs on the radio would make my nana smile and she would yell over it, "Lisa used to love this song!" From Bryan Adams to Journey, and all the rest of my favourite songs, Lisa seemed like she would've been a friend of mine.

When my family and I moved Barbados we would only come back to the states every summer. But one January my parents went on a business trip to the Bahamas and nana flew in to the rescue to watch over me and my little sister. I don't think she'd been back to the island in years. I wasn't sure how long, but I found myself constantly, and fearfully reminding her to drive on the correct side of the road. We loved having her there though. Between getting picked up early from school and having homemade lunches, my sister and I really were in paradise.

One day, when nana was driving, I in the passenger seat beside her, we made our way to her sister's house, who still lived on the South Coast of the island. Nana chattered the whole way, as she always did, and I at fourteen daydreamed out the car window. The day was blindingly sunny, as most days were in Barbados, but the air wasn't as humid as usual, and the Caribbean wind was finally doing its job. The radio was awful here, and only played dance music that all followed the same mindless rhythm. My nana would put on the cds my mom left in the glove compartment. Surprisingly, one of them was Journey, which my mom hated. "Is this yours?" I

asked nana. “Yaah, I brought this one from home” she said. “Lisa used to love Journey!” I smiled. The first track came on, and she sat up even straighter than usual with the funniest look of surprise as the piano alternation for *Don't Stop Believin'* started up. “Lisa used to love *this* song!” she yipped. We continued down past the golf courses and white apartments, with magnolia trees lining the street and their flowers blowing in front of us as the song blared. It took me a moment to realize, but soon enough those magnolia trees were getting closer. We were pulling over. I turned to her. Her head was turned down a bit, and tears were streaming down her face. I froze, in a sort of awkward fear that struck me, and my stomach sank to my feet. I had never seen my nana cry before. Really, I hadn't seen her much in any other state than just happy and talkative. Now her strong voice that I knew so well was breaking. And it made me have to take a deep breath through my mouth and look away to not break too. She cried soft and gentle to herself. And I knew I didn't truly believe this, but up until that point, I didn't think my nana cried. Not that anything didn't make her sad, but just that she wasn't one to show it, if she could help it.

She didn't say a word, only cried. I knew I didn't have to ask why. I didn't ask if she was okay. I knew the answer. You don't ask a question like that when you already know the answer. I stared out my window at the magnolia tree beside us. They stood tall and firm, but their flowers lost their grip once in awhile and flew away into the street. Then I looked back at nana. Perhaps it was being back on the island, perhaps it was that I reminded her too much of Lisa, or perhaps it was just the song itself. Whatever moment, whatever picture, whatever memory that came rushing back to her in that second that was enough to break my nana down, it didn't stay long. In

another minute she lifted her head and wiped the tears away, and quickly put the car in drive.

“Sorry,” she muttered with an embarrassed smile, and pulled back onto the road.