

EPOCH



AFTERMATH

SPRING 2021

THE LINGERING OF MAY 21ST

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Every year on May 21st, I do the same thing: I cross the threshold of my closet to peruse the contents of a blue satin box. I reflect on 17 years of this sombre ritual as I turn the doorknob. The safe, which holds my box, rests on the carpeted floor behind the door, hidden. I spread the clothing above to let in some light and stare at the unlocked safe before cranking the handle open. Inside there are important papers, like my will — changed three times due to marriage and divorce — and birth certificates and passports for me and my two children. The most important item, atop the papers, is the blue satin box that holds the memories of my stillborn son.

The box was given to me by the hospital staff when I was discharged without my baby. With a timeworn lustre, the once glossy deep blue container is about the size of a good novel, like *Moby-Dick* or *Wuthering Heights*. I take my place on the floor, back against the closet door jamb. I situate the blue box on my lap, a substitute for my baby boy. Instead of capturing the scent of powder and magic, I detect the odour of musty paper fueled with disappointment, even now, 17 years later.

Each year on May 21st, I journey to a part of me where I am continually evaluating my past. I revisit the choices I've made and usually find fault in many of them. Yet the process is cathartic, and the guilt and regret feel strangely comfortable to me. It is the only

way I have found to hold on and move on at the same time.

It's not only my son I remember every May 21st, but also my life choices, and the affair I'd had. Like many affairs, it ruined my marriage, yet it was a non-standard affair in that it was emotional, not sexual. I found solace in the company of a much younger man who listened when I spoke and looked fiercely into my eyes, seeking.

At that time, I had two young children and had just suffered the loss of my father. As an attempt at healing, I returned to college to get my degree and focus on writing, *not* to meet a college student and violate my marriage vows. Ironically, I met him in a Shakespeare class reading sonnets from an overpriced anthology the size of a toaster oven. There is nothing of him in my blue box, yet his memory rises like a phoenix each time I open it. He was no one I knew, no one I had seen before. He sat behind me in class but didn't have a book and asked if he could look on mine. His charming smile and gentle attention set me at ease. A slightly less rugged Chris Hemsworth-type, he carried my books and held open doors, and we began to talk each week about everything from current events to whether or not gophers sleep. One day in the student lounge, we sat in the box-like, neon-coloured chairs and talked about our futures: he, excited to be transferring soon to a college several hours away and leaving his large, too-close-knit family and me, trying to figure out how to fix my broken marriage by discussing it with a young, handsome classmate. We met twice a week for class and life discussions. With practically nothing in common — him living at home with his parents and attending college for the first time and me living with my husband and two children going back to school later in life — we somehow had much to talk about. We laughed, and sometimes I cried, talking about my marriage problems and the death of my father. At the time, I felt like I had lost both men in my life. My dad, but also my husband, who had grown distant and unapproachable. His physical attendance was evident, yet I almost always felt alone in his presence. To the contrary, this man — boy? — shared with me his difficulties with girlfriends, school, and his parents. He comforted me, and I gave him advice like I had a clue. The relationship lasted through the semester, but it quickly transitioned from mutual complaining to kissing. It felt strange when he asked; “Can I kiss you?” quietly invaded our platonic conversation. I said no, I remember saying no. What I don't remember is how we went from that audible *no* to kissing. The first was a soft

and quiet kiss. I don't even think I was touching him with my hands, only my lips, but before long arose a curiosity, a desire, an actual need to touch. Admittedly, it was exciting having the young college boy-man hold my ridiculously large book and walk me to my car. The long talks and kisses became an after-class ritual. I remember as my leg cramps up, demanding to be stretched. I do so within the limited closet space and return to trying to understand why I might have strayed from the only man I'd ever loved to a young man with whom I had nothing in common.

When I ended the 'almost-affair' at the close of the semester, the guilt burned in my belly like a hot pepper eaten too quickly; I confessed to my husband. I could no longer carry the mental load of those lies. Yet, it's almost comical to recall the moment: the drama, the betrayal like a 1980s episode of *Dynasty*. I remember crying as I admitted to the lies I'd told for the duration of a fall semester. I also remember sensing the anger I had grown used to seeing in him intensify and lock his jaw. With my gaze to the floor, I uttered the insufficient words, "I'm sorry." I recall his reaction to my admission, how the disappointment in his blue eyes raked over me, enough to cause life-long guilt. Then, as his anger took hold of him, he demanded I speak every insignificant detail, a shocking, disturbing request.

"Where did he touch you? Where did you touch him? How many times did you kiss each other? Where were you kissing? Did you have your clothes on? Did he?"

It seemed an endless barrage of invasive inquiry. I wondered why he would want to know such details and feared it would leave him haunted, but I told him everything I could remember, knowing it was a terrible idea to provide so much visual fodder. His outrage was frightening yet understandable; his shift, a change in his eyes that occurred when he was exceptionally angry, scared me more. The rage bubbling beneath the surface had come to a complete boil. I sometimes wonder now if that's why I did it. I had been unable to access what was hidden deep inside him so I convinced myself that if I could see it, I could fix it. I no longer have delusions of such magnitude.

After close to an hour of interrogation, he finally spat, "You are never to speak to or see him again, you hear me?" I nodded in

agreement. The memory always makes me feel like a child who was punished for being mean to another child, with an understanding of wrongdoing but an inability to communicate the feelings that led to the act. I wonder now if he was more upset at the physical aspects of my infatuation than the emotional ones, yet I only recall the value of having this person to talk to each week who would listen. It seemed to me that the emotional connection was the greater betrayal, yet my husband largely ignored it, a further fragmentation to an already shredded bond.

My husband hadn't liked the idea of my returning to school, and after this 'incident' he liked it less, but school was the distraction I needed to manage my father's death. I keep a photo of me and my dad inside the blue box; he wasn't alive when my stillborn son touched my life, but I think I hoped (perhaps still do) that they are together someplace. I don't know what I believe about that 'place' or if there is one, but I realise now that losing my dad was not just an experience of sadness and grief; it altered my reality. I no longer understood the world without him in it.

I hold his picture at the edge where the white border outlines our faces: Dad's wide smile and short, tobacco-stained teeth stretching across his happy face. He was outside in his favourite lawn chair, holding me, about four years old, in front of him under my armpits while I lifted my feet hanging in the safety of his grip. At that age and for many years after, I followed him around wherever he went: the garage, the hot dog 'joint' he loved, his brother's house for a visit, or our backyard. Taped to the back of his picture is a short poem I wrote while he was in the hospital. He died before I had a chance to read it to him and recount all the activities and events that he brought to life for me: watching football, planting and gardening, handing him tools while he worked in the garage or house, playing with the dogs, and laughing. Sitting here in my closet, I can almost hear the booming echo of his laughter.

I reach back into the box to collect the small burgundy satin pouch where I had deposited my wedding rings. Most divorced women I knew had sold their rings, but I haven't been able to part with mine. My engagement ring was given to me when I was 19, a happy memory despite all that occurred afterwards. I smile when I think about the beautiful string of seven small diamonds in a row sitting high in their base and sparkling even now like the edge of a

knife. I thought the perfect ring meant the perfect marriage. Jiggling the ring and its gold band in my palm, I feel its lightness, the almost imperceptible weight in my hand. I wanted a lasting marriage, one like my parents had. I still look back to the early stages and try to find the exact moment it began to unravel. Of course, there isn't just one.

After my father's death, I regarded my husband differently. Every shortcoming was intensified and when I looked at him, all I saw was 'not my father'. It wasn't fair, since he couldn't possibly be someone else, nor could he fix this gaping hole in my heart left by my dad's absence. My husband had always been judgmental and what I noticed in place of my father's encouragement was his criticism. Like the day I was excited at the planting I had done in our garden, as I had done with my dad. I pulled my husband outside and proudly pointed at the rhododendrons peeking out from their new brown piles. In an instant, his response deflated my joy: "Oh, you planted them *there*? It would be better over here, no?" The 'no' at the end was the worst part. His disdain for anything with my creative touch became more pronounced and frequent.

Each day that passed moved us further apart, despite the 18 years we had shared and the two children we had together. We fought often and there was little on which we agreed. We looked at life differently. He, a rule follower, prided himself on being the 'good guy' and expecting compensation from the universe for his efforts. I like to break the rules sometimes. I walk in the 'out' doors, don't always wear my seat belt, and laugh when people fall. Each small infraction became another point of contention and suppression of my uniqueness. As parents, we each had a different approach. I was open with our kids, sharing my trials and shortcomings, while he kept his distance, more the authoritarian. My desire to bond with my children grew to a discovery that he and I loved differently, too; his idea was possessing a level of comfort that allowed him to deliver stinging criticism without a retort. In contrast, I was vocal about every thought I had, which, for him, was hard to handle, yet those thoughts were my refuted attempts to grow closer. We most certainly grieved differently. We had been together through the losses of our grandparents, my father, and now our son. I went to grief counselling, journaled, and talked incessantly to friends who would listen. He did not want to talk about it or explore what it might mean. His life remained largely unexamined, and he preferred it that way.

The doorbell shakes me out of my unpleasant flashback, and I drop the ring pouch back into the box. Downstairs, I sign for the postman and stay in the doorway a few minutes after he drives off. I look down the walkway at the cherry blossom tree near the driveway. It is in bloom, which it only does once each spring. In my area, that is usually around May 21st. It is the tree my sister-in-law gave us to plant in memory of our lost little boy. The blooms bring me joy because I believe that each flower represents a part of him and his life force. Breathing him in hard as I close the door, I scurry back to my ceremony in the closet, reaching into the box for a small plastic bag with a locket of hair, so soft and worn from touching. I don't touch it anymore for fear the tiny cinnamon-coloured wisp might evaporate, as he did. I have studied his footprints from heel to toe and every crease in between, all 62 of them. Those little feet. I'll never forget the way they hung there, the way they drooped. I was only able to hold him once, and I worried about his feet. Now I must be content with only his footprints inside a box.

I carefully lift the next item out: the PDF I'd printed of Poe's 'The Raven'. I unfold the dried and yellowing pages with care. My favourite pregnancy moments were when things were quiet, and I could steal away for a while. I'd grab the book and find a spot to read to him. I don't know why I picked 'The Raven'; I knew it was melancholy, but somehow it was comforting, and the rhythm calmed him in a way I had imagined was peaceful.

I'd say, "Hi Baby. Mommy's going to read to you now." I recalled rubbing and gazing at my belly while using it as a book stand.

Kick, kick, kick.

"I can't wait to see you. Mommy has so many books to read to you and so many things to show you. But for now, you rest and grow and be happy. I love you."

Kick, kick, kick, kick.

"Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,

Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore "

Soft kick, soft kick, pause.

“While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,

As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.

‘Tis some visitor,’ I muttered, ‘tapping at my chamber door

Only this and nothing more.’”

Flutter, flutter...

I recite the entire poem without wiping the tears that crept down my cheeks.

I was 40 weeks pregnant – full term and ready for this new life to enter mine. We were only going to wait another few days before induction, but I went into labour. Throughout my pregnancy, my husband was able to get the baby moving by talking to my belly, but that didn’t work the night I went into labour. We watched *Wheel of Fortune* after dinner, as always. Our two children, Jessica and Ryan, announced the letters as Vanna White turned the lighted blocks, Ryan looking to his big sister for approval each time. My mom was there too, guessing the puzzle before anyone else, and knowing I would need to leave soon. As the night wore on, the contractions increased, but the baby hadn’t moved in a couple of hours. So, I called the doctor who told me to go to the hospital immediately, in a tone I had not heard from him with either of my other pregnancies. I hung up the phone and removed the already-packed bag from the closet – the same closet I sit in today.

I peer into the box, searching for the picture Jessica had drawn for her baby brother. I couldn’t have saved all the pictures she drew for him without a wheelbarrow, but this one she handed me on our way out the door that night. Across the yellow construction paper she had written “Welcome Home! I am happy to see you”. The folded paper card was filled with multi-coloured Crayola marker flowers, a blue-violet sky, and a rainbow with the word ‘welcome’ arched over it. I kissed my children’s soft, chubby cheeks and waved goodbye that May 21st. As soon as I was out of their vision, my smile evaporated. My lips clenched tightly, holding in the dread.

My husband followed me in his own cloud of fear and brain fog; we both knew something wasn’t right. The baby hadn’t moved in nearly three hours at that point. Although a lack of movement

in a baby ready to be born can be normal, I knew this wasn't. Our marriage had been tense during this pregnancy because I found out I was pregnant only a few months after the affair had ended. I feared it was time for my infidelity to be punished. I held my silent burgeoning belly on the equally silent drive, praying for forgiveness. To whom, I'm not certain.

As we rode along the highway, I gazed at the green blush sweeps of the countryside, a beautiful place to raise children and borrow sugar from neighbours. I looked over at my husband's worried jaw tensed and set. As I attempted a comfortable position in the passenger seat, I became aware that though we were trying to rebuild our marriage, I could not simply walk away from my sins. It had been over a year since I'd seen my college companion, but before my husband and I had had a chance to work through that pain, I found out that I was pregnant. We had been trying to reconcile, not have another baby. But here that baby was, and I was elated, thinking this was the gift that would save my marriage.

I uncross my stiff legs and stretch them into the closet, placing the box next to me on the floor. In my memory, I revisit the arrival at the hospital, how I was whooshed into a wheelchair, down the hall, up the elevator and onto a bed in the maternity ward. The hospital staff were like an experienced NASCAR pit crew. Nurses lifted me and my shirt simultaneously and tied a thick, brown monitor belt around my bare belly almost before I could tell them, "Yes, I have insurance." The nurses then frantically turned the knobs of the machine that should have located signs of life inside me. The labour pains came faster as I tried to comprehend my reality. It still doesn't seem real sitting here now, holding only his tiny remnants.

I shudder as I remove the next items from the box, three Polaroid pictures: one of my sweet baby's face; one of me looking down at his swaddled little body, my lips pursed and droopy eyes ready to cry again; and a third photo of our family then. Me and my husband, our two children, and my big belly. I notice my and my husband's tired faces and forced smiles for our family 'baby prep' class photo. The kids were so excited about that class and their new sibling. He and I were worn and battered. I drop the family back into the box with a single tear diving in after them.

The picture of our baby alone I hate admitting I'm sorry I had them take it. Yet, I can't bring myself to get rid of it either. The extreme close-up of his puffy little face and droopy mouth in a sideways crescent moon brings me back to the delivery, the worst part of May 21st, the moment of lost hope. Once I could comprehend that my child lay dead in my belly, there was a terror in not knowing what would happen. Were they going to cut me open? Was I going to have to deliver this baby?

It seemed like days until the doctor arrived to confirm what I already knew but wanted not to believe.

“I can't locate a heartbeat. We've lost this baby.”

I shook my head vehemently in response. There was no heartbeat. Evermore. My sweet baby was gone. I don't remember the conversation, but someone told me the delivery would not be via C-section; I would be delivering this baby, if only to hand him over and say goodbye. I didn't have a chance to process how I felt. The pain waved and pounded over my belly like high tide slamming the sand down firmly on the beach. The rhythmic rise and fall of the pain made me feel seasick.

Nurses scurried around me, adjusting my body, checking pulse and heart rate on their monitors. I wondered if the monitors also showed that heart in pieces. I remember the delivery the way one recalls a dream, in flashes and bits that carry enormous intensity but lack order. At one point during delivery, I was standing on the bed in pain and completely distraught, leaning on my husband for support. The medications had ceased to work or simply stalled, I can't remember which. With each contraction I was writhing in pain, lifting my legs like a monkey, climbing my husband like a tree, a fact he later criticized me for. At some point during the delivery, I relented to the pain, feeling it was the sentence for my crime. I had believed May 21st was my day of reckoning. Now it serves as a day of reflection and a practice in detachment, a way to look at my life as a kind of outside observer might, employing forgiveness and compassion where I hadn't before.

As the contractions increased, in a weird way, I longed for the pain to slow down, to linger. Our time with our son was almost up. My husband's eyelids, his lips, every facial muscle turned downward to the depths of him. My heart broke for him at that moment. For a

second, we connected in our terrible grief. Then, after the endless tornado of stress and scurry, there was the quiet and excruciatingly still birth of our boy. I cried a silent, open-mouthed, guttural scream of anguish. I see it in my mind now like a scene from a movie rather than an experience I lived. They cleaned him off and wrapped him in a blanket with geometric shapes in soft pastel colours. He lay limp in my arms with his droopy feet not moving. I don't remember what he smelled like, a fact that still bothers me, but when I held him close, I felt more love in a moment than I had ever experienced before, even with my other children's births. I believed that would be the only chance I would have to express that love.

The next morning, I awoke alone, lifting my hand to shield my eyes from the sunrays bleeding in through my hospital room window. How dare that gaseous ball of fire rise today? Doesn't it know the world ended? My resentment filled the room like steam permeating a sauna and stole my breath in much the same way. I didn't care; I had hoped to stop breathing while I slept, calling on death like a saviour, but I would find no such grace.

In the hospital bed, I wagged my big toe back and forth a few times, my foot feeling separate from my body. I didn't remember what drugs I had been given, but apparently they were the kind that glues your arms and legs to the bed. Just a few weeks prior I had been happily pregnant, your everyday pleasantly round woman carrying life around inside her. Now I lay defeated in a paper gown; there were no balloons, no flowers, no newborn baby. *You can't make me move, sun. I don't care how brightly you shine.* I didn't speak out loud, which was probably the reason why I wasn't in the psych ward. They moved me out of the maternity area right after delivery, didn't want me around all those 'live births' and happy parents whose babies weren't limp and lifeless. They whisked me away in a wheelchair on a brief journey from maternity to another room, for my benefit. Or it may have been for everyone else's benefit; I am not sure. Either way, it was likely a good idea. The orderly pushed me into the elevator at lightning speed and when the elevator doors opened again on floor 13, a flash of memory jabbed me in every molecule with feeling left. From the elevator, I saw the room my father had died in almost three years prior. My biceps began to twitch and pain radiated down my arms to my fingers that gripped the arms of the wheelchair so hard the handles lifted. My arms quickly gave out, flopping into my lap; I

surrendered to the memory, the shame, the fear. I realise now that pain never goes away, but becomes part of our bodies. How we house it determines how it affects us. I crossed my arms to rub them and comfort myself. I rolled my eyes, “Sure, this floor is much better,” I said sarcastically to the orderly.

While in the hospital, I obsessed about how perfect he had looked, like nothing was wrong. He had ten little fingers, ten little toes, a cute button nose, but his eyes would not open. I felt a recurrent twinge in my biceps, like I had spent the night doing curls with 40 pounds of weight instead of birthing my stillborn son. I thought of my kids at home, and I winced at the thought of my babies receiving such bad news without me. I had heard the word wince and used it before, of course, but I don't think I ever fully understood what it meant. I discovered your body could react to something happening purely in the mind. It was like what I later found out they called the ‘aching arms’. I had had so much pain in my arms in the weeks following the birth-death experience that I finally asked the doctor what was wrong. He looked terrified at the question, like he'd hoped I didn't have it. I didn't even know what ‘it’ was. He said it was a psychosomatic response my body was experiencing. My arms knew there should be a baby in them, and they were aching for what they were being deprived of. This makes perfect sense to me now, realising our bodies and minds are not separate identities; we are in it together.

I look around the closet, noticing no traces of my marriage, except inside the box. Just like now, I remember that I did not miss having my husband in the hospital with me, though I did not envy him the job of telling our children they would not be getting a baby brother. Does it make it more real if you say it out loud, I wondered? For my husband, there were now more convincing reasons to stay angry and he gripped that emotion tightly, letting it carry him inward, like a person forced to live inside-out. Meanwhile, I sat three doors down from where my father died and wondered what I had done to deserve such a harsh punishment. I was aware of my transgressions, but I had thought this baby was my redemption for owning up to my mistake. I had yet to learn that disastrous things don't happen as a penalty for mistakes, though it felt that way.

With a downward glance into the box, I remove the last Polaroid of me holding my baby boy, who we named James after my father. I am transported back to the day I returned from the hospital

without him. I recall the ivory-coloured elastic material worn to bind my breasts, suppressing the milk that naturally wanted to flow. I remember vividly the feeling of that corset – its coarse material reminding me of every missed feeding. The edges pinched the soft skin under my arms and caused me to shift in my seat, always aware of its suppression. Those close to me didn't see that suffocating bodice under my clothes. They couldn't see all I held inside. They didn't see that James was with me, yet he never would be. Nor could they know that I would perpetually search for answers and blame myself.

Once at home, every stinking day, whether I wanted them to or not, family and friends would check on me. The pre-school moms organised a dinner drive and each day someone showed up at my house with food. Every day for nearly a month someone cooked for us, and now I can barely remember their names. I remember their kindness and the feeling each time I ate food prepared by someone who wanted to lift our family up. It was hard not to be affected positively by that. Maybe not at that moment as much as I would have liked, but now I tear up every time I think of their kindness.

The anguish of birthing a stillborn child, I think, is the lack of hope. The outcome of this work and pain is... nothing. There will be no beautiful baby. That grief consumed me for months, like fire engulfing the wood it burns. Sometimes at home, I'd enter my bedroom alone, skulking off to find a secluded place. I'd pull down the blinds to the base of the windowsill and slide the curtains across to seal out light. Then, I would climb onto my bed armed with all the pillows and blankets I could find, a fortress around me, sinking into the depths of the material. Other times, I sat on my bed in complete darkness, wide awake, like self-induced solitary confinement, yet it hadn't felt like punishment at the time. The darkness welcomed me, no light to make me feel unworthy of its beauty and warmth.

One day after many weeks had passed, while confining myself to my pillowy bed, daylight came through the door in the form of my little girl. Jessica was only eight then, yet wise beyond her years and experienced with grief. The loss of her grandfather and her brother had had a profound effect on her, dimming her smile to one of anxious anticipation. Our shared sorrow was a heavy load for her little arms to carry, much like my aching arms were for me. She ambled into my dark room.

“Mommy, where are you?”

“I’m right here, baby,” I said as I tried to rise out of the mountain of blankets.

She replied, “But, Mommy, I can’t see you.”

I reached up above the pillows and blankets behind me to turn on a soft light and said, “I’m right here, sweetie.”

She persisted, “I don’t see you, Mommy.”

Sometimes when someone gives you a riddle, at first you don’t get it. Then the words make sense after you look at them differently. Not only was she missing her brother and grandfather, but she was also missing the mother who had always made everything okay, who kissed boo-boos and made this big, ugly world bearable. I stared at my little girl looking up at me with eyes of expectant mercy. I understood then; I was hiding the shame to remain safe inside the barricade I constructed around me. When you barricade yourself, though, even love struggles to get through.

The longer I held her gaze, the weaker the rage inside me burned. She needed me, came to save me, not from grief or pain or the imaginary wrath of God. She saved me from myself. I thought there had to be a reason for something so awful to happen to me, but my tragedy wasn’t a payment for wrongdoing. Tragedy illuminates our deepest fears, and in facing them, contains possibly our greatest gifts. There she was, one of my great gifts in all her youthful splendour, showing me how the world works. I dug myself out through the layers of coverings to reach out my hand. I remember how she tugged, pulling it toward her, urging me back. I shooed the billowy bedding aside and rose. My little girl opened the bedroom door, and I squinted at the brightness of the hallway. As my eyes adjusted, my son Ryan appeared in the doorway with love brimming from his innocent smile. I allowed my diminutive guides to reintroduce me to the big, scary world, where I am imperfect yet loved.

From my closet, I look over at the bed where I cried, and hid, and screamed, and raged, and loved, and eventually healed. I close the blue satin box on this 17th May 21st, rub my arms that no longer hurt, and send love to my baby boy, wherever he may be. My children’s love has healed me as much as anyone can be healed, I suppose. I wonder if everything in life overlaps this way, loss and

love working together like opposite sides of a railroad track. Each May 21st, I consider trying to find out the names of those women who nourished my broken family with dinners all those years ago. I never do, but when the opportunity presents itself, I deliver a special meal to the door of those in need, smiling at the thought that years from now they may not remember my name.

Recently, my daughter and I attended my ex-mother-in-law's funeral. After paying respects, I found a quiet place to tuck myself, outside near a cherry blossom tree in full bloom. I had read cherry blossoms represent mortality in the Japanese culture, their brief season serving as a reminder that life is short and to live each day to its fullest. I appreciated how their culture celebrates a brief but powerful existence and acknowledges that brevity does not measure worth.

At the wake, a cousin of my ex-husband approached me and thanked me for showing up at her place years earlier with trays of baked ziti and desserts when her father had suddenly died. She recalled how I had barely known them, and the kindness she had felt at my offering. People always say you must forgive others, but the forgiveness is for yourself, not for the other person. I never understood what that meant before. As I smiled softly under the shade and beauty of the cherry blossom, I realised forgiveness begets self-love, and that is the shelter where my healing began. I listened as she told my daughter standing near me: "I hope you're learning from your mom. She is a wonderful person."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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