

## *Mine, Ours*

Even though I was outside, it felt awfully claustrophobic where I was sitting, on a thick gray slab of stone. I think it was the fences that made this place feel much like a prison. A prison full of old, rotten flowers, and row upon row of the same rectangular plots of grass. Mine was freshly lain, for what significance I had no idea, and the rest of it was untouched as well. Even though I'd been here a while, the sense of claustrophobia would not dissipate, which disappointed me to no end.

There was this constant, belligerent fog which had been there as long as I had, and made it difficult to see further than the fences. Not feeling like testing my boundaries, I just sat. I didn't really envy the others for their visitors, but the thought did cross my mind that I must be unimportant to be worth no one's time. The others didn't even speak to me, besides a nod or a grunt, but I could tell we were one and the same. We all were stuck with the same lack of air, the same barrier of dark iron fence.

There were invisible lines drawn between us, separating us, making it apparent that we were not so similar after all. And though I couldn't recall the meaning to words such as 'prisoner', some part of my subconscious wondered if we were divided with cell walls, too, designed to make us feel the isolation.

Stranger still was how I could recognize that this was not the way things were supposed to be, even though I could remember no different. The cloud cover seemed ominous, but I had no recollection of anything other than gray skies.

Even though I'd never seen a person so close to me, nothing about the man who walked up to my plot seemed out of the ordinary. He was made up of all muted tones, sepia, black, gray, white. His voice, mutterings to himself as he looked around, only reached my ears as echoes, each word bouncing off of the invisible walls which kept me contained.

He seemed slightly unaware of me as he studied the clean stone, analysing its emptiness in a way I simply did not understand...or take the time to. I didn't pay much attention to him, which maybe I should have, but he seemed so plain, so normal, that it was almost painful to look at. More than that, it was irritating that he was taking up my already limited space.

"You're standing on my plot," I said boldly, tapping him on the shoulder. He reeled, skin whitening, fist tightening on something behind his back.

"Sorry," he murmured, like he couldn't find any other words. It was a pained voice, stricken and cracked. Very, *very* distant.

"It's where I *live*, you know? Do my thinking. It's mine." I watched his lips form a tight, thin line, but there was still no response. "How would you like it if I just came up to *your* plot like I owned it?"

He stared at me blankly. “Well, I don’t have my own plot. I’m just visiting, for now.” blinking quickly, he looked away, down to his spotless black leather shoes.

“I don’t get visitors,” I said plainly, trying to rid my tone of all authoritativeness. Perhaps this wasn’t his fault. Maybe he wasn’t trying to disturb me, but was simply managing it anyway. Maybe he was here looking for someone else.

I couldn’t grasp why he was looking at the marker with a cold reverence, the way soldiers look at war monuments. If anything, *I* should be looking at my marker this way, not him. And besides that, it was nothing from a museum—not a work of art.

He just stood there for the longest time, feet planted on the six foot long patch of soil. I was slightly annoyed at the two footprints where fresh grass seed had just been distributed.

Pulling out a freshly cut flower from behind his back, his lower lip wavered slightly. He was blinking back what I assumed were tears. My suspicions were confirmed as the droplets of moisture grew, each and every one making the journey to my plot, too. I cringed at the dents in the soil, similar to the ones his shoes had made.

I noticed the smile on his otherwise stoic face, too. So these were tears of...joy?

“This is for you,” he finally said, holding it out to me. When I didn’t take it, he did not look as defeated as I’d expected, but still appeared somewhat injured. “I guess I’ll just put it down here.”

Oh, so he had recognized that my transparent hands couldn’t hold anything. And here I’d thought he was slow on the uptake.

“You’re the same as...before,” he faintly said, when I didn’t answer. “Look the same, but you’re a bit less...solid.” I laughed at his attempt at humour, the first laugh in a long time. “And, *God*, Miriam, you still have a terrible memory!”

He laughed, but it died into silence.

“I don’t have anything to remember.” I sounded bitter, even to my own ears. What was left of them, anyway.

He looked distraught again, white eyebrows narrowing, then moving back into place. “Well, you can’t remember much, because you don’t remember that eventually we’ll be sharing this little piece of real-estate. We always swore that we would, because one plot costs less than two.”

He sighed, and then triumphantly said, “I’m at a loss, Miriam. I am selfish, maybe. Here you are, not able to remember your own name, or even that you *died*, but I had expected you to remember little old me. I had expected that if you were a spirit out there, somewhere, you would be thinking back on the time you spent with me.”

I tried to recall him, looking at his gray hair and leathery skin. His face was so wrinkled that it was practically decayed. His eyes were old, too, as if there was a spark that made someone young, and his had faded away. But he did look less distant, and more determined.

Importantly, though, I didn't recognize him at all. Not his crow's feet, not his gray hair. I did recognize the funeral garb, but that was standard issue.

"I'm sorry," I said, echoing his original tone. I really couldn't find the words to say to this perfect stranger, one who was claiming to be something that I couldn't have *here*.

"I was honoured to be your first visitor," he whispered as he walked away, "But it's only your first day."

I was puzzled by that, but maybe time felt a whole lot different when you died. I understood then that I must be dead, not because he had called me a spirit, but because I was definitely not alive.

Another man came by in a gardening suit, with a chisel, involuntarily shivering as he passed through me and kneeled where the other man's footprints had been. He cursed when he realized he was crushing the rose given to me by the first visitor, who could actually *see* me. I was about to give him a similar tap on the shoulder, the same 'you're standing--no, *kneeling*-- on my plot', when I realized he was carving something into my previously blank headstone.

"Miriam Joy Andrews," it read, "Beloved Wife and Mother."

So he was right-- it wasn't *my* plot, it was *ours*.