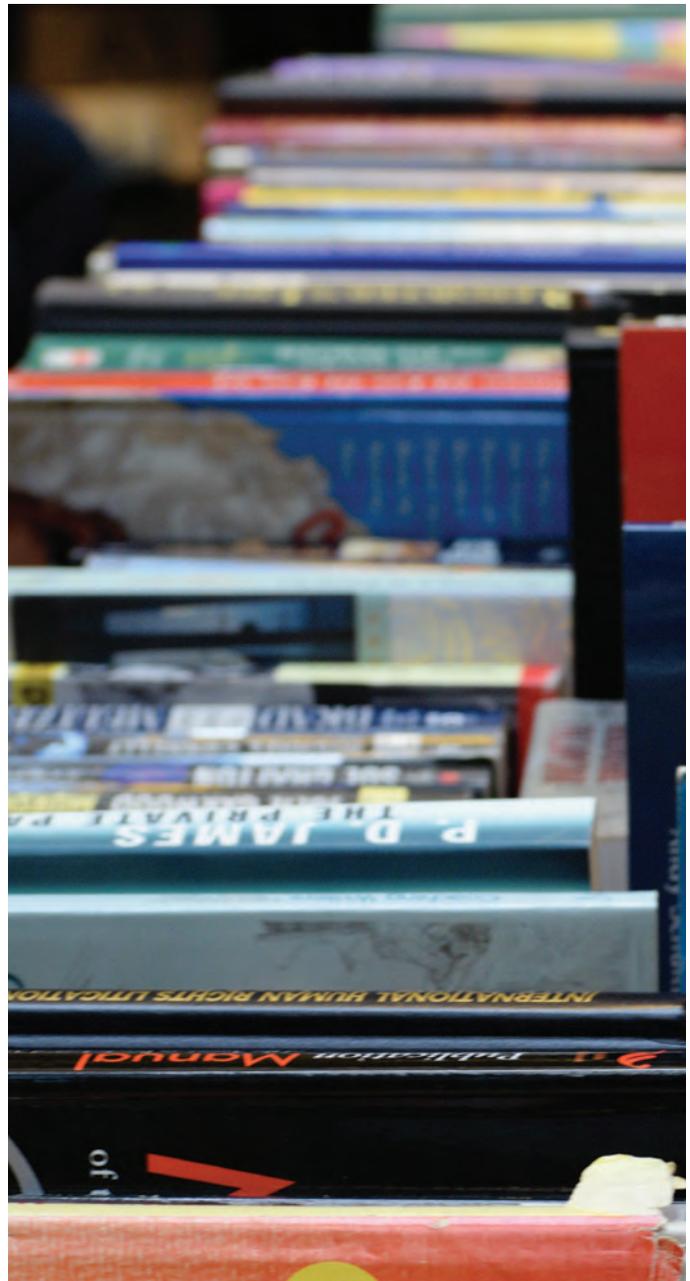


In Autumn

Kinsey M.E. Cox

After my grandmother was moved into a nursing home, my father put me in charge of cleaning out her attic. Her attic was vast and had only one light, and in the summer heat it was stifling and reeked of stinkbugs. I didn't really know Grandma very well, since she lived states away. The last time I had seen her before the strokes that had left without control of half of her body was when I was six, and we were there for my grandpa's funeral. I vaguely remembered the smell of blueberry pie and her hazel eyes, young although surrounded by deep lines. I still remember looking into her eyes and seeing the sadness framed by her smile. Grandma had been very welcoming of us, and was in every way the best grandmother anyone could hope for.

Since I didn't really know her, I was eager to paw through the dusty boxes that cluttered the attic and learn a little bit about her past. I began with the old cardboard boxes that enveloped most of the attic. Mostly, they contained her old clothes. The mice had gotten into the vast majority of them, and so I spent hours throwing out bag after bag of beautiful clothes riddled with holes. The less dusty boxes were plastic and thankfully unchewed, but further inspection revealed that they were full of Christmas decorations. Besides a box of old ornaments that



looked as if she had kept them from her childhood, there was nothing much of interest in any of those. Dad let me keep some of the decorations in good shape, and the rest ended up either in the trash or in the garage sale with the rest of her stuff, where we were helping to earn a little money to pay Grandma's medical bills.

After that, all that was left were



Books, Kieran Rundle, photography

the pieces of furniture that were most likely family heirlooms. Heartbreakingly, the only person alive that knew for sure was Grandma, and since she was in no state to tell us their history most of it went to the garage sale.

My brother and I made a system to get the old furniture, mostly solid oak and maple, out of the attic. We

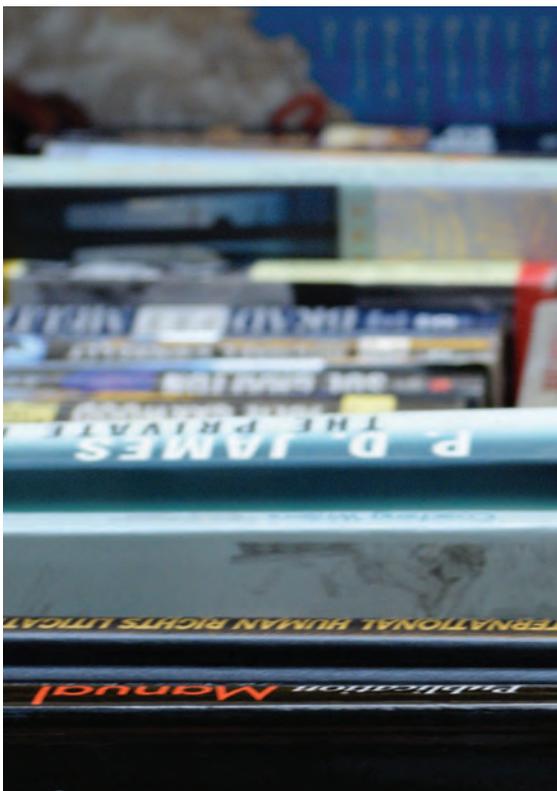
lifted the corners together and I slid old rags underneath their feet so I could slide them across the floor to the hatch. He would lift up one side over the edge and together we would lower it to the floor. I was attempting to lift the corner of an end table by myself when I realized too late that it was heavier than it looked. The table began to tilt to the side, so I

slammed one hand on the top to keep it from toppling, and to my surprise the top pushed in a bit with a click. Once I had the table safely on all fours I removed my hand and the top opened slowly with a rusty squeak. Inside the top was a sturdy, locked wooden box. My brother and I couldn't find the key so he used a crowbar to peel off the lock. Inside were all of my grandmother's diaries.

Finally, I had found the way into her past that I had been looking for. The oldest one that nearly crumbled in my hands began when she was five, and the one on the top ended halfway through grandfather's



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death. They were years and years of changing handwriting to match a young girl transforming into a wise woman. I eagerly began to read through her life—her childhood in the end of the Great Depression, her grief when her brother left for World War II and never returned, pages and pages of wedding plans and stories of my father and his seven siblings growing up, and in the middle of all this sadness and joy and hope and thoughtfulness, pressed in between the pages was a frail leaf. Its colors were miraculously preserved, burnt orange spreading out into crimson. In the pages behind it was a story about a single day.



My grandmother was 14. She had gotten lost in the autumn woods, following the daydreams of fairies and collecting late blooming flowers. She was sure she was going in circles, and the sun was setting. When she had entirely given up hope and had begun to cry, a gangly teenager found her and lead her out. She referred to him as her 'knight in shining armor.' He gave her the red leaf to remember him by and asked to meet her at the edge of the woods the next day. Just as he left, she remembered to ask his name. "Joseph," he said. She wrote that she couldn't sleep that night with his

beautiful voice singing through her head. This boy was my grandfather.

I couldn't help but marvel at the leaf in my hand. It wasn't anything significant on its own—just a simple leaf. But in its pressed vibrancy lay a story—a single meeting that set a line of events into action that eventually led to me. If my grandma hadn't gotten lost, if Grandpa hadn't been in the right place in the right time, I may never have been born. The leaf would no longer decompose and feed the trees and earthworms; instead, it held a bigger meaning. It was full of the possibilities unexplored and explored, and the first hints of love. ◆