

A Comforting Breeze for Georgie

[Click.]

Sunlight streams through the two-inch wide horizontally slatted blinds in Georgiana Sandefer's bedroom as she monitors the sounds around her.

Click, the slight but measured pace of the clock on her boudoir is aligned to its hands as they move circularly to count time.

She closes her eyes.

Her mind spins as she waits for her loved ones.

Everything is so different, so much safer when there's sunlight. Georgie can ruminant on life in the sunlight.

She hears footsteps in the distance and she has no doubt who the tall, solid form is behind the cadence. A shy smile crosses her face.

Georgie picks up her make-up mirror for a quick survey and realizes a fresh layer of lipstick is not out of the question.

Ben Sandefer materializes out of nowhere. "How is my beautiful, adorable wife? The woman I miss like crazy."

"My heart aches when you're not here, Ben. It's hard to carry on."

"You are the most gorgeous pregnant lady I've ever seen."

"And you're one lucky man because I'm going to let you kiss me wildly."

"With no abandon?"

"None," this thought brings a smile.

“You’re not the shrinking violet you used to be when I first visited you on your daddy’s porch,” Ben jokes.

“I was sixteen, Benjamin, not a mature woman of twenty two.”

[Click.]

Ben is sitting at the dinner table. “If it’s a girl, you can name her.”

“And if it’s a boy?”

“We’ll call him Archibald.”

“What a perfectly horrible name.”

“Cary Grant did all right by it.”

“That’s because he *changed* his name.”

“Yeah well during his formative years, Archibald was his test.”

“We are all tested equally differently.”

“You tell me that all the time. Do I get my kiss now?”

“Depends on whether we put Archibald to rest.”

“Give me my kiss and then if we have a boy, you get to name him, too.”

[Click.]

“Georgie, hey,” Lucille calls, “You sure you should be here?”

“We’re building a house, remember?”

“The whole world knows about the house and the whole world is happy about the house. You’re four months pregnant. This is a tough job.”

“I asked Supervisor Greenwood for advice. She says plenty of nurses stay on into five months as support staff. She told me not to lift anything heavy.”

“Follow that advice.”

“Your eyes are dark circles, Lucille.”

“Yeah, well I can’t sleep a lick.”

“Is this because of Harry?”

Lucille nods. “I thought he was my Ben. Turns out he was anything but.”

“Get some coffee. I’ll keep an eye on the floor for you.”

[Click.]

Screams of pain shatter the temporal silence.

Georgie runs to the room behind the voice. The bed rail is down. A woman squirms on the floor.

“My God,” she says. Without thinking she tries to help her up.

The delirious patient wrestles Georgie to the ground.

[Click, Click.]

Blue eyes pierce the darkness as a face greets hers.

“Ben, is that you?”

“Yes, my love.”

“I lost our baby.”

“We’re young. We’ll have more.”

“I am so sorry.”

“Georgie, you are my world. I thank God *you* made it through.”

“Please stay with me.”

He kisses her head, “Always, for as very long as I can.”

[Click, Click.]

Six months spin by in a whorl.

Georgie watches a house being built. She savors the smell of new lumber and fresh paint. Ben is funny to watch, his attention to detail endearing.

Another twelve months offer up their memories in a whoosh.

The Sandefer's have been given many gifts, youth, a new home, mutual love and respect and now another heart is beating in Georgie's belly.

Ben asks her to quit work the day he finds out and she agrees. They will take no more chances. Parenthood is going to be the best experience of their lives. This time, they don't discuss names until the baby is born.

"What a beautiful daughter you have given me," Ben says. "I do believe she is as gorgeous as her mother. Have you decided what you want to call her?"

"Janette means God is gracious," Georgie says turning tiny fingers over into hers.

"I love it," Ben leans in to caress his wife's thick blond tresses. Then he rubs his baby's head gently.

"I am such a lucky man," he says. "You girls are my world."

"You will be a spectacular father." Georgie nods.

"And you will be a caring, loving mother. Our girl will grow up happy. She will be smart. She will marry well, because of you."

[Click, Click.]

Georgie stirs the hearty stew and monitors the sounds of loved ones.

Ben is at his work bench in the cellar restoring a lamp. As long as he says *damn*, periodically nothing is abnormal.

She hears the Chevy Camaro motor as the car approaches.

"Be nice," Georgie calls down the stairs. "Supper is almost ready."

"HMMMP," says Ben.

"Hi dad," Janette greets her pop with a kiss on the cheek.

"What's up?"

"I'm going to marry Armand Bedoier."

“His last name means grave knower. I looked it up.”

“You don’t like him because of a name?”

“Has he held down any job for more than six months?”

“He’s finding himself.”

“His eyes are dull. There’s nothing behind them.”

“Daddy please, you just don’t like him because he’s a guy.”

“You’re wrong, Janette. I just don’t like *him*.”

[Click, Click, Click.]

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m cleaning.”

“I see that but you shouldn’t be reaching for cob webs on a rickety stool.”

“It was quicker than pulling out the step ladder.”

“Might be quicker but it’s more dangerous, Georgiana.”

“You’re such a worrier, Benjamin my love. Why do you look so funny?”

“Not feeling right all of a sudden.”

She’s off of the stool in a flash. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

“Hurts,” Ben points to his chest before he collapses into dead.

[Click, Click, Click, Click.]

Georgie sits in darkness. The clock on the simple dresser clicks off seconds in the background. Across the hall a shrill voice repeats, “help me, help me, help me.”

[*I got careless after Ben,*] she realizes. [*I should never have gotten up on that stool again.*]

“How are you feeling?” An attendant asks.

“Better,” Georgie says.

“Great. It’s time for physical therapy. We have to get that hip *healed* before we let you go home.”

[Click, Click, Click, Click.]

Sitting pensively in the living room, Georgie dreams about her life.

Amidst swirling memories she watches tiny Bria, whose nickname is Breeze, sleeping on the divan across from her. The precious little girl looks adorable snuggled up in her favorite pink and green patchwork quilt.

[*What a comfort you are,*] Georgie thinks.

At the sound of the garage door lifting Bria’s eyes blink open.

“Mommy’s home,” Georgie tells her.

Turning off the car, engaging the genie, a young woman with long, now tawny hair thinks, [*I’m home.*] She breathes deeply before entering and repeating the words, “I’m home”. She hopes her voice sounds pleasant and confident.

Audrey is standing at the kitchen table, all six foot two of her. The light from the chandelier adds purple tinges to her piled high, black jelled hair.

“My charges were wonderful today,” the nurse reports tying her signature red scarf around her neck. “They gave me no problems at all.”

[*Why would they,*] Janette Sandefer wonders. [*No one messes with Audrey. Besides, my girls adore her.*]

“We had tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches for lunch,” the caregiver continues. “Then we exercised and I gave both girls massages.” Audrey arches her eyebrows for effect. “It was a workout.”

Janette’s baby blues are fixed on the tall woman’s almond shaped orbs. “I appreciate everything,” she says knowing the more strenuous effort was Audrey’s.

“We’re all pretty spent. Go say hi, I’ll let myself out. See you mañana.”

[Click, Click, Click, Click.]

Bria, who is closer, gets the first hug. Huge brown eyes survey mommy, studying body language. Bria knows mommy doesn't like noise when she comes home. She remains very still. Bria is a good girl.

Janette kisses the tiny head and is comforted by the scent of innocence. 'I'm going to make dinner now. Then we'll play. Rest a little more. I'll get you when everything is ready.'

Crossing the room Janette greets Georgie. "How are you doing, sweetheart? I hear you all had a full day."

"We did and our Breeze walked well."

"Not a lot of limping?"

"Audrey massages and rubs. The oils she uses help."

"The woman is a saint. Watch our angel while I fire up the stove, okay?"

"Okay. We're *very* glad you're home," Georgie says.

"And I'm glad to be home! Later, we'll talk about today's exercise routine."

Janette cooks the shrimp stir fry quickly since preparations were complete the night before. She doesn't clear the dishes because Bria is waiting, her attention span is limited *and* a promise is a promise.

It's an activity they perform regularly. You throw the ball to me, I catch it, roll it back and you throw the ball to me.

Janette cherishes play time. She loves her "special" girl unconditionally, and these moments bring her heart rate down close to normal.

“Here you go, Breeze,” Janette says throwing the bright blue rubber ball overhand. She doesn’t toss it hard but she doesn’t toss it softly either because her girl needs to be tasked. Bria catches it cleanly and rolls it back to Janette.

Georgie likes watching the game. Janette came up with it around the time her divorce was finalized and its one part of night Georgie can stand.

When the phone rings, it triggers an alarm that makes the goose flesh on Georgie’s body rise.

[Click, Click, Click, Click, Click.]

Janette sets the ball down, leads Bria to her chair and tells her she will be right back.

“Hello,” Janette’s voice is breathy and Georgie thinks she knows why.

She watches a sweat bead wind a path around her daughter’s eye and sees her swipe at it with a piece of paper towel.

“I can’t,” Georgie hears Janette say. “I just got home a short time ago. I haven’t even finished clearing dinner dishes.”

Georgie tries for what might look like a natural, uninhibited smile.

“Can I call you back in a little while?” Janette’s delicate hand is clenched so tightly around the phone her knuckles are turning white.

When she is off the call, Georgie says, “You made a wonderful meal tonight, daughter.”

“It was nothing, mama. You make too much out of what I do.”

“You do a lot for Breeze and me. You’re a spectacular woman, plus there was ice cream.”

“If ice cream was all I ever gave you girls, I believe you would be completely satisfied.”

“Who called on the phone? It was one of your friends?”

“Yes, mom, it was a friend.”

“You’re lucky to have your girlfriends. Cherish them while they’re here.”

“I know and I do.”

Janette sees Georgie is waiting for input. She wishes she could tell a white lie, like she would have in the past but the Armand-geddon years changed her.

“It was no-one you know, yet, mama,” Janette says watching a look of dread cross Georgie’s face.

Once a formidable force, that many relied on for council and support, Georgie has grown tamer. She never presses issues Janette doesn’t offer up immediately. But, tamer isn’t even close to right and Janette, who rolls words around to describe the difference in her mother’s personality, is never satisfied with the choices.

“Our beautiful Breeze is very quiet,” Georgie says reviewing her quietly placed hands, knowing no one understands the determination that minor miracle requires.

Georgie was not prepared for the transformation when it came. By the time she understood how delicate a balance life required, her precious husband was gone. Georgie and Ben were a team. After fifty years together how could one survive without the other?

“Well,” Janette responds, when her mind finishes ruminating about how their mother / daughter roles reversed, “How about you check on our girl, while I steal a moment in the bathroom? I’ll be right back. Okay?” Janette pats Georgie’s head and wonders when her own hair will begin to gray and thin.

Life plays lousy jokes on the elderly. Strong bones turn brittle, macular degeneration clouds once healthy vision, assertive personalities become apprehensive and worse than a woman losing her lovely mane of hair, is the steady demise of family and friends.

[Click, Click, Click, Click, Click, Click.]

Georgie silently counts the measures on the clock which are getting faster all of the time. When her daughter returns she says, “Our girl is asleep. Audrey worked her hard. I don’t want to wake her. Two hours would be enough, Janette, true?”

Janette wonders if she hears correctly.

“I can do it for two hours,” Georgie repeats.

“Mom, we have Audrey here all day because I don’t want to leave you alone with Bria by yourself. It’s too much of a responsibility.”

“I love her,” Georgie replies. She listens to me. I know you want to get out with your friend. It can’t be just work and us. I’m a big girl. I was a nurse for thirty years ---- wasn’t I?”

“You were an exceptional nurse. You took care of a lot of sick people.”

“I can handle it with Breeze for two hours.”

“I haven’t even had a chance to sit with you.”

“We’ll catch up later.”

“You are certain you can stay with Bria on your own, mama?”

“I can do it for two hours,” Georgie asserts.

Janette holds her mother close for several precious moments.

“You’re positive?”

Georgie nods.

Janette's pulse is off the Richter. Can she leave mom with Breeze, again? Will her conscience allow that? On further reflection, she dashes for her room.

[Clickety, Clickety, Click.]

Janette dresses quickly.

"How do I look?" She says gliding into the kitchen.

"You are beautiful," Georgie replies honestly.

"Mom, tell me one last time I can leave you both alone."

"Yes, for two hours," Georgie nods.

"Then let's get you settled. You need to be together."

"I should go to my room and you will get our girl?"

"That's the way we do it, honey."

Georgie drives the electric chair up to her hospital bed. She feels for the bars that help lift her frail body out of the mobile seat. Arthritic bones creak as they meet the mattress. Pillows are aligned and ready. She sets her head down slowly.

Janette returns with a wide-awake and now very alert little girl and lays her on the bed next to Georgie.

The two twisted limbs Bria was born with slow her some but her tenacious spirit makes up for any deformity. It's true she marches to her own drummer and speaks her own very different language but Breeze knows more about people than most give her credit for. At this moment she understands what mommy wants, and what Georgie *needs*. She scoots over to the older woman as close as she can, and gives her a wet lick on the side of her face.

"You see how Breeze loves me."

“She loves you very much,” Janette, affirms, “It doesn’t hurt that you leave so much ice cream in your dish, when you let her lick the bowl after you.”

“Our girl is crazy about ice cream.”

“I know mama. I’m keeping lights on in the living room. What do you want me to do in here?”

“Leave one on in our bathroom,” Georgie says, “It will be enough for us.”

“What are you thinking about T.V?”

“We’ll be fine if you turn headline news on low.”

“Okay,” Janette answers. She walks to the adjoining room, switches on the light and closes the door partially. Then she turns on the T.V. which is already set to the requested channel.

“I’m going now. Please see that your clock is here, where it always is. It is now 7:00. I will be home by 9:00, which is two hours, mama. I have my cell phone on my belt. Your phone is where you can reach it. If *either* one of you gets scared, call me.”

“Be careful, daughter,” Georgie says.

“I will,” Janette pats her mother’s hand and Bria’s black, furry head.

“Take care of grandma,” she tells the little dog. “I’ll be back soon.”

[Clickety, Clickety, Click.]

When the garage door lifts, Georgie closes her eyes and says a prayer.

[*Dear Lord, let me be strong tonight.*]

Sundown is never kind. Vipers, demons and the specters of dead souls coil in the darkness surrounding her. They pierce her body with their sharp teeth and tear at her flesh with razor-like nails. Georgie grabs the bed and fights from being sucked into the dizzying abyss.

Clickety, clickety, click ---- the footage whirls and whirrs.

Why had she never noticed until the day she woke up and nothing was the same that all of the serpents came at night to take tiny poisonous, bites?

Georgie can't watch her past anymore. It burns her heart. She turns and surveys the clock with dread. [*Two hours and only two minutes have gone by.*]

The lonely tear that slides down the side of her cheek is caught by a wet, rough tongue.

Georgie understands Janette's sacrifices. Not many young, single women would take on a broken specimen like she has become.

Bria pulls up closer on the older woman's shoulder.

"It's only two hours, little Breeze. Help me be strong."

[Click, Click, Click, Click, Click.]

The measured beat signals a picture re-spin. Nothing ever stops it for long.

Ben is at the kitchen table with a steaming mug of coffee in his hand. The American Standard Bible is open to Philippians 4: 6 -7.

Do not be anxious about anything . . . present your requests to God, and . . . peace . . . which transcends all understanding, will guide your hearts and minds.

Georgie reaches out. [*Stay with me,*] she pleads as Ben dissolves.

Bria turns over. She closes her eyes so grandma knows they are safe. She has good ears and lungs. If she needs to she can sound a *healthy* alarm.

Clinging to the last being on Earth, who loves her completely Georgie repeats, "Please, my comforting Breeze, help me be strong."

[I can do this for two hours,] Georgie tells herself again. *[I must, I will, for my daughter's sake. But what would I do if it weren't for you?]* She pats the dear head nestled up next to her.

Breeze moves her head even closer to Georgie's. Then she wraps her paw around her friend's shoulder and sighs.