

## Change of Fates

I opened my eyes and stretched. I blinked a few times but my vision stayed foggy. I guess I had forgotten to take out my contacts last night. I slid them out clumsily and rolled over onto my other side, closing my eyes again. I laid there for a few minutes before my eyes shot open and I sprang out of bed. I practically jumped to my desk and grabbed my computer. I flung it open and typed in my password, barely giving me time to see “Welcome Mason” spelled across the screen. My fingers flew across the keys and then I waited. My heart stopped as I pretended to read the words that my subconscious had already read twice over. “Mason, we are happy to inform you that you have been accepted to our university,” I jumped out of my chair and stood for a minute staring at the screen. I immediately dialed my grandma’s number as I ran down the hall toward my parents room.

It felt like it was the very next day that I was unpacking my bags and moving into my dream school. The move happened faster than I thought and before I knew it, we were done. I stood outside, looking at my new dorm with my parents and grandma behind me. I turned around just in time to see a tear roll down my mother’s cheek. I hugged her and she whispered

“I’ll miss you. Have fun, but be safe,” as she pulled away she added, “and don’t forget to call!” She stepped back a bit as my dad approached me.

“I know you’ll do well. Take advantage of the city.” He was referring to the fact that I was planning to be a Political Science major in Washington D.C. I had always had a some interest in Political Science so I thought I would try it out. My school is known for two things: Political Science and Medicine. I had never had an interest in medicine and honestly probably wasn’t smart enough for it either. My grandma then stepped forward and hugged me. She said,

“I’m very proud. You have already brought honor to the family. I know you will here too.”

At first I was nervous and homesick. I didn’t know anyone. I missed my family and my house. However, things picked up quickly as I got to know people and made friends. Within a week I was having a great time, meeting people from all over the world. My best friend was from Puerto Rico. Just when I thought things couldn’t get better, classes started and I loved them. The professors were so engaging and knowledgeable in their fields.

One night I was sitting at my desk studying when my phone rang. It was Alejandro, my Puerto Rican friend.

“Yo you wanna go into the city tonight?” I was kind of tired and didn’t really feel like going out, so I tried making up an excuse about how I had to study. He clearly wasn’t about to let me decline.

“Come on it’ll be fun, let’s go out. Vamos. I’m coming to your room right now.” I heard him knock before I even hung up the phone.

As we walked into the city I was immediately glad that he had pulled me out of my room. The air was crisp and refreshing and the lights of D.C. at night were beautiful.

“How are your classes going?” I asked him as we walked slowly, searching for somewhere to eat. He was a Political Science major too, so we had a lot of the same classes.

“I think the professors are very good. They are so experienced.” He replied, and I agreed. We walked and talked for a few more blocks. As we turned a corner, we both saw a place to eat and walked in without ever breaking step.

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After a few months of having an amazing time, it was finals week. These were my first college finals and I wanted to do well, but I just couldn't seem to motivate myself to study for more than a few minutes. There was always something going on somewhere, and I felt like I was missing it if I was studying in my room. I was trying to force myself to study when I got a call from my grandma.

"Hi Mason. I just wanted to ask how everything is going, and say good luck on your finals." I told her that everything was going well but I had to call her back later because I was studying.

"Okay Mason, talk to you later then. Love you, bye!" I probably should've talked to her for a bit but I was getting a good amount of work done, so I decided I would just call her some other time. It wasn't even 10 minutes before Alejandro called me. He was saying something about going to a festival or something.

"Yeah okay I'm coming now," I said, eager for any excuse to get out.

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"That was a lot of fun," I told Alejandro, as we walked back in the dark. "Thanks for bringing me out." We walked to where we had to split and said goodbye. I got back to my room and realized I had forgotten to call my grandma back. It was too late now, she would probably be sleeping. Besides, I had to cram for my first final. I sat down and studied until I fell asleep.

The next morning I woke up and got my stuff together. It was the day of my first final. I walked out of my dorm headed toward a coffee shop. I pushed through the door and heard the gentle jingle of the bells above me. There were enough people that it felt lively but not too busy. I don't like coffee, so I usually get tea. I can probably attribute that to my grandma. She loves tea

and constantly would make it for me when I was younger. Some of my favorite childhood memories with my grandma are chatting over tea about trivial things. It was never really about what we talked about, just that we were talking and having tea. Despite this I got coffee because that's what everyone else got at college. Pushing my tea-time memories aside, I got my coffee and headed out to my class. I was a little early, but that was good. I liked to arrive early so I could get in the testing mindset.

A few hours later I walked out of my class feeling great. I had studied all the right things and felt extremely prepared. I threw out my empty coffee cup as Alejandro walked up next to me. We talked about the final for a few minutes before he said, "You want to get food?" I hadn't even realized I was hungry until he said it.

"Yeah, let me put my stuff in my room first and I'll meet you back here," I replied.

"Okay. Te espero aquí, ten prisa."

I walked up to my room and dropped my stuff on the bed. I grabbed my jacket and put it on as I heard my phone ring from across the room. *Alejandro really has no patience*, I thought. I walked over and picked it up, realizing it was actually my mom calling.

"Hi mom, I just finished my first final. I'm on my way to get food with Alejandro, what's up?" I waited for a few seconds but she didn't say anything so I spoke again. "Hello? Mom what's up?" It was a few more seconds before she spoke.

"Mason. I don't know how else to say this but, Grandma was diagnosed with lung cancer." I wasn't really trying to drop my phone, it just sort of slipped from my hand and hit the floor. I slumped to the ground with my back against the wall. At first I was just in shock, unable to even be sad. When I felt the first tear roll down my face and onto my hand, it broke the

stillness that had temporarily kept my mind from itself. A huge wave came crashing down, and I was no longer safe from my thoughts. The tears came in wave after wave. I couldn't stop them, even if I wanted to. I didn't even hear a knock, or my door open but suddenly Alejandro was in the room. He looked around for a few seconds before he noticed me on the floor.

“Mason, are you okay? Qué te pasó??” My phone lit up and I saw that my mom had texted me. I handed my phone to Alejandro hoping my mom had said something that would tell him what I couldn't. He looked at the screen for a minute before sliding down the wall to sit next to me. He put an arm around me as another wave reached my eyes.

The next day I woke up and my eyes were red and dry. I got up and put on clothes. I didn't really know where I was going, when I walked out the door. It was a cool, crisp morning and I was glad to get the fresh air. I just started walking and thinking. Sometimes I need to be alone just so I can think through things on my own. I stopped walking and looked up. I was in front of the guidance office. For the first time in awhile I didn't think, I just let my body take me. I found myself walking into the office and up to the desk.

“I'd like to change a few of my classes. Is there availability in any of the medical classes?”

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Over the next few months I took various classes in medicine. I was past my initial grief and my drive took over. I was determined to learn as much as I could about my grandma's condition. I rarely went out anymore, preferring to spend my time on my medical classes or reading research articles on lung cancer. I think I had high grades in my classes, but I wasn't

sure; I never really checked the grades. For the first time in my life, I saw education as a way of learning something, not just trying to do well in a class by focusing on scores and test grades.

As the end of the academic year came closer, classes started to slow down and wrap up. I was reading an article on my computer one day when I got an email from the class advisor saying that the end of the year was approaching and I needed to choose a major, in order to set my classes for next year. He told me that I had a large selection of major options and was also in a unique situation where I could choose pre-medicine due to the number of medical classes I had taken. I closed the tab and decided to give myself more time to think about it.

I looked out the window of the bus thinking about what to declare as my major. I was headed home for break, and had a few hours to think. Before my grandma got sick, I had never even considered taking a medicine class. Now, I had the option of pursuing it as a major. I tried to think about what I liked, and what kind of job I could see myself in. I thought in circles for the whole bus ride, reaching a “final decision” many times on various majors. I arrived in my home city, and shortly after, was walking up the driveway to my house. My parents were waiting for me. I hugged them both and was about to go inside when my mom said, “We need to go. She’s gotten worse.”

I hadn’t seen my grandma since she’d been diagnosed. When I first stepped into the hospital the overly-clean smell was immediately recognizable. A young nurse led us to Grandma’s room. When I walked into the room I was immediately hit with another wave of emotion. I looked at my grandma lying on the hospital bed and wondered how she could have deteriorated so quickly. Her skin was many shades lighter than I remembered, and her hair was

mostly gone. She looked tired and frail. I walked up to the bed and put my hand on her arm. She opened her eyes weakly and whispered,

“I’ve been waiting for you. Thank you for coming.” I sat beside her on the bed and listened to the consistent beeping of the heart monitor. She spoke in a faint voice that trailed off toward the end of each sentence.

“Promise me you’ll do something you love. Chase your dreams and try to change the world. Even if you fail, you’ll change someone’s world along the way.” I didn’t know how to respond or why she was saying this now.

“Okay Grandma I will.” She smiled and closed her eyes pulling the light hospital blanket up around herself. There was a short silence, the only noise being the steady beeping of the heart monitor. I listened to it and watched my grandma’s slow, shallow breathing. While I was lost in my thoughts the beeping conjoined into a constant ring. I looked up and saw the bright green line stretching uninterrupted across the screen. I felt a silent wave of tears rise up from within me. It didn’t feel like I was crying; the muscles in my face weren’t moving. The tears just came and I let them.

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I was in front of the guidance office again, this time I knew what I was doing there. I stood for a minute looking at the silver lettering that spread across the building. A light rain pervaded the morning, the weather seeming to understand my mood. I pushed through the heavy door and told the woman that I was here to see my advisor. She led me to his office and I sat down.

“I’d like to apply for the pre-med major.”