

## Time Machine

By Sarajane Rodgers

"Dementia." The neuropsychologist continued but I lost track of most everything she said after that point. Grandmother was muttering about a time machine like she had been all week. Words like "Capgras" and "guardianship" floated past our heads. They had nothing to land on, so they slipped out through the ceiling vent as if they had never been there. Ghosts. Before we left, the doctor made me promise-I wouldn't leave Grandmother alone. I told her "Okay." But that was a lie. There is was no one else to help.

We went home and I threw some pasta on the stove. Grandmother tried to help. We ate burned noodles for dinner before I left for work.

When I got home the next morning, I saw that it was one of Grandmother's bad days. She was talking about a time machine again. I ignored her and began to clear away the mountain of candy wrappers Grandmother had left on the table. She began shaking a withered finger at me. "Are you the person who stole it?" I continued to ignore and went into her room to find more wrappers. "Who are you? You look like my granddaughter but you're not her!"

I once saw a documentary about the Himalayan Mountains. The wrappers on her dresser looked like that. *Where did she even find all this candy?* I used my arm like a snowplow, clearing the great mounds of sticky wrappers off the dresser in large swoops.

As I did so, my elbow brushed up against something hard that fell on the floor. I heard a cracking sound that snapped me out of my sweeping craze. An old watch looked up at me. The wristband had long rotted away, but there was a hairline fracture on the face that was probably new. *Shoot.* I sunk to the floor, exhausted. The imposter accusations stopped, and Grandmother picked up the watch face in her wrinkled hands. Her expression had softened. "Daddy gave me this when I got sick and had to go away." I didn't know if this was a true story, but she looked more lucid. It theoretically could be true. "Years later, we had a fire. Lost everything." *This seemed familiar.* "But I was able to save this watch." *I think this is real.*

As I looked at Grandmother, cradling this old watch, I saw a girl who had become sick again—but a different kind of sick. I saw her carrying that watch through a fire, through the loss of her parents, through a short-lived marriage, through decades of children and grandchildren, through time. The hands of the watch were probably rusted into place. The watch could no longer do what it was designed to do. But in a way, it was a time machine. It brought life to a person whose brain is slipping away. I was looking at a girl who once was. And still, at least in this moment, is. She dipped her wizened hand into her pocket and then pressed a butterscotch candy into my palm.

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