

# A Seed in Time

By Olivia Kyriacou

The apricots were brushed by the warmth of the sun as the trees swayed to the whisper of the wind. A trio of birds perched themselves on the mailbox cheerfully chirping. Each brick of her house was weathered over time by the seasons. I loved the creak of the timber floor that sagged in a few places. Her home was my favourite place to be, securely wrapped in her love, I always felt protected. Her soft face was gently yielding to the passing of time and her white hair looked as if it was entwined with daisy petals. She meandered around happily in the yard, an empty bucket in her hand ready to pick this season's apricots. The smooth air draped around me like soft fresh linen on the hills hoist. With a deep tenderness, she admired her creation. Her garden thrived off her god-like aura. Together we picked apricots until the bucket was overflowing.

My return three springs later was alike but permissibly different nonetheless. The sunlight sliced through a slit in the apathetic clouds. A duet of birds was perched on the mailbox, singing softly to each other, their small claws tapping the metal mailbox like pins popping. She gazed into my eyes with great power, but her limbs were weaker. The dynamic she shared with her garden seemed maternal. Despite her kind glow, deep inside frustration fumed as she would see putrescent land over the fence. Each time I swung on the branch of the great oak or plucked flowers out of the soil, she would open my hand and press one seed into my palm.

"You must take care of them before they are all gone," she snapped, shaking her head. She stared into my eyes innocently, but I could feel the glance pounding into my soul. She taught me a lesson that day, a lesson that I did not understand at the time.

The few years leading up to my next return were tough. I came back to see her hobbling around the house. Despite her pain, she still gifted me a smile. The apricots were dark and wrinkled, much smaller in size and number than in years before. The fragrance was slight and fleeing. The air that we slowly exhaled guaranteed our health no more, for it was corrupted like the weeds choking the overgrown hedges. I assisted her outside and she took a tearful and precarious breath, for she could no longer support her despairing garden. We picked half a bucket full of apricots, some bruised and some soft and sat on the porch to peel them and give thanks to the gifts the earth provides to us all. She fed some to a small bird sitting at the end of the porch. That day she took me to the back corner of her garden, to a rustic door. I tilted my head at her while she persisted that I open it. Precariously I unlatched the stubborn rust-ridden door and pushed it open. She sighed hopelessly as I saw it, no swaying trees, whistle of the wind, chirping birds or greening grass. An uneasy silence settled under my goose flesh as I gazed at the dry, battered and neglected land. Her aged palms held my forearm as we walked back towards the porch. She drew from her pocket a small woven bag full of seeds of all sorts and held it up to her head to pray.

"Have you returned the others to the earth yet?" she questioned. I looked at her puzzled as the woven bag was lowered into my hands.

Last month, I returned once more to her house this time startled and confronted with what I saw, what remained and what was gone. With each step I took inside, the house cried in pain. The stirs of whispers were no more, the apricot and great oak trees were corrupted

with rotting limbs, longing for her return but unaware of her final status. The air was murky green like fog over a stagnant moor. It felt as if the land outside the gate spread like an infection, leaving me a haunting message. I coughed filthily the horrid tangy air out of my lungs and gazed up to listen for chirping, but there was only silence. It was not hot, nor cold, not windy, nor still. How could I have been so oblivious?

My return home was wistful. I walked through my hallway and stopped, blinded by a gleaming container coming from a draw only a fraction open. Curling my fingers around the brass knobs, I slid it fully open. Slowly, I lifted the container of seeds saved from all my visits to her house. Only then did I realise what I needed to save.