

CRACKING OPEN

Adventures of
A Reluctant Medium

For Josephine

When you look at me
I am special

When you sing to me
I am at peace

When you hold me
I am priceless

CHAPTER ONE - IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS FEAR

I swept the white charcoal pencil across the black page. Grandma had been moved to hospice a few weeks earlier while I was stuck fidgeting at home a thousand miles away. I filled the time sketching a portrait of her. As I placed the final details in the curls of her hair, the phone rang.

I picked it up to hear the voice of my mother on the other line. She was rushing to the hospice house. She had received word that Grandma wasn't going to last much longer and was frantically driving through traffic to get to her before she died.

"Honey, call them and tell them I'm on my way."

"Alright Mom. Drive safe," I responded before I hung up the phone.

I was in my bedroom in New Hampshire, half a country away from where I wanted to be - by my grandmother's side, holding her small, plump hands as they squeezed all the blood out of my fingers. It was that special grip she had that reminded me how much she loved me. Words couldn't do justice to what her short little fingers could do. But there she lay in a hospice house in Minnesota, surrounded by a room full of family, all but my mother. My mother's relationship with the family wasn't a good one. Most of them refused to even speak to her - she had done things over the years to alienate them all. Although this family dynamic was often difficult for me, it worked in my favor this time because I was given the task to call the hospice house, and, as a result, one last chance to talk to my grandmother before she passed.

Looking for the number in my phone, I was struck by the realization of what exactly my grandmother had meant to me all these years. I felt incredibly blessed to have had her in my life. She was there through the toughest times, holding my head up and loving me for exactly who I was. I felt my face warm as I imagined her squeezing me with all four-foot ten-inches of her, telling me she was proud of me. She had always been my support, the maternal figure in my life that provided me with a precious unconditional love no one else could.

Shaking, I dialed my Grandmother's room and counted the rings. With each ring, my heart sunk deeper and deeper into my chest. Two rings. Three rings. Four rings....

"Hello." The voice of my aunt answered.

"Glynda, my mom is on her way," I said.

"Okay, sweetie. I'm going to put the phone to Grandma's ear so you can say goodbye." Her voice was warm and soothing.

I sat silent for a moment as I listened to her broken breath. I was falling and knew the ground was coming up fast. Would I have enough time to say everything I wanted to say? I found myself speechless. I reached with my ears to grab on to

any sounds I could pull from the other end of the line. The rattling coming from her throat was a sound I had heard described before but one I had never experienced. A part of me was crushed to hear it, and a part was overwhelmingly grateful. I felt connected to her - one last time - and I started to speak.

“Grandma... I love you. I love you so much. I’m going to miss you so much.” I gulped. “You’ll be all right. You’re going to heaven. You’re in good hands. I love you. I love you so much.”

In these last moments, all I wanted was for her to be fearless. I knew that I had years to mourn, but she only had moments to be brave.

My aunt pulled the phone away and told me she loved me just before she hung up.

I set the phone down and stared at the clock on my nightstand hoping time would stand still. Hoping that by looking at it I could contain the tears that were quickly building up. The minute clicked over. My chest tightened and tears started to fall. My king-size bed felt huge as I curled up into the six fancy throw pillows to cry. I pictured myself at the store, picking out those pillows, spending a significant amount of time selecting such insignificant things.

After what seemed like a lifetime of crying, I pulled myself together and opened my bedroom door knowing I would have to explain to my young boys why my eyes were swollen and my nose was as bright as their favorite holiday reindeer. I thought about what it would be like to open the door and have the world back to the way it was an hour before. I wanted to pretend the last fifteen minutes didn’t happen and life outside my bedroom was normal again. But this was not the case, not on this day.

I wiped the sadness from my face and opened the door. On the couch sat my two boys, Michael and Max. Despite my best attempts to appear content, as soon as they saw me they knew. My husband, Troy, and I had been expecting my grandmother’s death and had talked to our children about it days before. Without a moment’s hesitation, Max walked away from the television and Michael dropped his colored pencil. They both put aside what was happening in their lives to wrap themselves around me. For the first time in their lives they were strong for someone else. They were strong for me. I was flooded with pride as I knelt down beside them.

“We’re sorry Mom,” Michael said, holding my head.

“Yeah Mom. We’re sorry your Grandma went away,” Max added, patting me on the back.

I was overwhelmed. In this moment of pain and loss, here I was immersed in the arms of my sons. I soaked in their love until I was full.

Troy came home within minutes of my calling him.

“So,” he paused gently, “I’ll take the boys to the store to get some chocolate and wine for tonight and give you some time to be alone.”

“Thank you honey.” I paused, and looked up at him as if I was a lost child. “What am I supposed to do now?”

“Get yourself on a plane. I’ll work things out for the boys,” he reassured me as he kissed me on my forehead.

The door shut behind them as they headed out to the store. There I stood in the corner of the living room, frozen, trying to decide if I wanted to curl up on the beige leather couch and cry, or busy myself with travel plans. I paused for a moment, decided not to decide, and instead listened to the silence. Taking in the enormity of the room at that moment, I felt isolated and alone. My security blanket - the woman who was my safe place through a challenging childhood - was now gone. I wanted time to stand still, to hold my position and never have to move again. With my legs locked below me and my mind fogging over, I was startled by a brilliant flash of blue in the center of the room.

My eyes snapped out of their daze and instantly found their way to the small frame of my Grandmother. Standing just ten feet away from me wearing her favorite blue oxford shirt, she beamed a smile so big I could barely see her eyes. Slightly transparent but clearly standing before me, she glowed with a brilliant light that seemed to come from within.

As quickly as she arrived she was gone, leaving me terrified, shook, and alone once again in my living room. In that flash of a moment I was yanked out of reality as if an earthquake had woke me from a deep sleep. When it was over, warmth began to swell from my center, pouring out to my fingertips and surging through my face. I stumbled backwards and searched for the wall behind me. After fumbling across glass, framework, and molding, my fingertips found their way to the smooth sheetrock, pulling the rest of my body flat against it. Somehow it made me feel safe.

I inhaled deeply, working to get a full breath, and sputtered, “If that’s you, don’t do that again!”

Silence. Odd silence. A new type of silence I had never experienced before wrapped around me. Distinct, like the smell of a strong odor, the silence was deafening. I stared at the spot where her image had stood just seconds before and battled with myself over the possibility that it could have really been her, the warmth now sneaking out of my body as I became more aware of the room around me. I began to shake uncontrollably, my mind racing violently to rationalize the situation, telling myself that ghosts aren’t real. But no matter what words tried to convince my intellect, the rest of me wanted it to be real. The rest of me, the child in me, wanted that sensation to wrap itself around me again, break this new, uncomfortable silence and take me away from the pain.

I slid down the wall landing on my back end as guilt rushed in. If it was truly her, had I just asked her to leave? I let the child take over, and wished for one more moment with her.

In a quivering voice, I said out loud to the empty living room, "I'm sorry. I, um... I love you."

