

The Windmills of Your Mind

He had no idea why he was drawn to see *The Thomas Crown Affair* but a song in the film was to leave him with something that filled his consciousness for the rest of his days. A song that resonated with something deep inside his psyche. A song that stayed with him all his life as its words attached themselves to his memories – or was it the memories that attached themselves to its words?

His mind went back to the farm. It was during their umpteenth time playing around the farm windmill that he first experienced the feeling that she was no longer just a playmate. But he never dared tell her.

“I love windmills,” she’d said, “they’re so beautiful. Dad says that without them we could not farm, we’d have no water, they bring us life.”

His heart jumped at her words, “I love them too, and I.” his voice trailed off.

“I what?” she questioned.

“I forgot,” he lied.

He left the movie house with *The Windmills of Your Mind* ringing in his ears.

To his delight the next morning he found a 78 single, “You’re lucky,” smiled the salesgirl, “now we’re sold out.”

It did not take long for the words to cement themselves into his memory. They reminded him of his life so far – and of her.

Memories of her began to circle with the song in his mind.

For the first time he understood his lifelong fascination of windmills. Whenever he saw one he photographed it. His consulting room walls were festooned with photographs of windmills.

It gradually began to dawn on him that the reason that he was forty-two and single was that he was hopelessly in love with her. He always was, and he always would be.

Could he find her now? She’d probably be married – with kids. He could just say hello and ask, “Do you still like windmills?” She’d laugh and respond, “What makes you say that?” People forget things that are meaningful to you and not to them. Her reaction would confirm that she had no reciprocal feelings.

No, he could not intrude on her life. But she could live on in his mind, as an image in the song. Did it not say, “*When you knew that it was over in the autumn of good-byes for a moment you could not recall the color of her eyes?*” To his chagrin he could not remember.

And so the years passed.

He was a loner by nature but still his few friends could not understand that he would not react to any of the many women in their lives who found him charming, amusing and attractive. He seemed to be asexual. He simply remained an enigma to all.

As the first of January 2006 dawned he pondered over the fact that he would be eighty that year. He’d often idly wondered why he was still carrying on. Perhaps it was that vague feeling that he still had something to complete.

As the morning progressed a strange feeling arose, a feeling that began drawing him, as never before, to the town where they met on the first day of Sub A and where they were inseparable till the end of standard five, when his father was transferred.

Yes, that was it. He had not been back in sixty-eight years. He could make some discrete enquiries. Perhaps see the farm. Her family may still be there. And the windmill. For the first time the feeling that he may intrude on her life was not present.

He stopped outside the local hotel and sat listening, as his USB has just moved to *The Windmills of Your Mind*. He turned the volume up slightly, as he always did when he played it.

When it ended he turned off the radio. As he did he became aware of someone next to the car.

"Hello," she said, "Forgive me, I could not help listening to that song, it was my Great Aunt's favourite."

Stunned, he sat quietly.

"Are you alright?" she frowned, noticing a tear roll down his face.

"I'm sorry; you're almost the split image of someone I knew here years ago."

Her voice became tender, "She must have meant a lot to you?"

He nodded. Feeling himself choking up.

"How long ago was that?" she asked

"Nearly sixty-eight years."

"Wow, that's so fascinating. I love the history of my town. Would it be an imposition if I asked you if you would you mind sharing your memory with me?"

"Of course not."

"Oh thank you, there's a coffee shop just across the road."

He told her of the school and the year and the windmill and her eyes widened.

She covered her mouth with her hands, "Oh my gosh, what was her name?"

He told her and she gave a whoop of delight, "No way, that was my Great Aunt."

"You're - you're joking," he managed to blurt out.

"No. No, that was her."

He overcame his shock, "How is she?"

Her face softened, "I'm sorry . . . she died last year"

As the images unwind, like the circles that you find in the windmills of your mind! arose in his mind and oddly the first thing that came to his lips was, "Was she cremated?"

"No, for some reason she wanted to be buried next to the windmill on our ancestral farm. She often used to sit there for hours. It seemed to have some special meaning to her but she would never tell me."

"Did she come back here after her marriage?"

"She never married. She never left the farm. She lived here all her life. She never spoke about it but we were all sure she was pining, possibly remaining true to a lost love."

He felt as if life had driven an ice cold dagger of remorse deep into his heart.

His reaction told her all she needed to know, "Where you going to the hotel?"

"Yes".

"Not anymore. You're coming to the farm with me; my folks will love to meet you."

The next few days passed in a blur even though he felt as if he was moving through treacle, as in a dream.

Every day her Great Niece accompanied him to the grave and the windmill where they talked for hours about the past.

One morning he asked her if he could be alone at the grave.

She knew. She kissed him tenderly on the forehead and turned away so that he could not see her tears.

The headstone faced the windmill. He sat on the grave and leaned back against the headstone. He watched the windmill lazily turning in the slight breeze. He swore he was hearing those words again, "I love windmills, they are so beautiful. Dad says that without them we could not farm, we'd have no water, they bring us life."

He'd mixed the cocktail and put it in the phial before he left. Now was the time. He smiled wanly as he swallowed the contents.

He began singing softly, more to her than to himself. The words; *Like a tunnel that you follow to a tunnel of its own . . .*, were his last.

As his body went limp an impish gust of wind sent the windmill spinning . . .

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