Dandelions

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An endless field of soft yellow stretched out as far as his third-grade eyes could see. The beauty of those flowers seemed to exist solely to compliment her as she stood in the middle of that field, eyes shining as bright as the sun in the crystalline blue sky. It was clear that the universe at Bellmont Elementary revolved around her. Her long, golden hair flowed delicately over her shoulders, lifted by the slightest breeze, inciting him, inviting him. And, like all bodies orbiting the sun, he was drawn to her, powerless to resist her breathtaking loveliness.

For a single week every spring, the children of Bellmont raced out to recess expecting green grass only to find themselves engulfed in that sea of yellow. By the time most people reached middle school, this event was generally known as the beginning of allergy season, but to elementary students dandelions were a symbol of freedom, of approaching summer and grand new adventures. The phenomenon always started with a single, tiny flower in the middle of the soccer field, but by lunch there was scarcely a spot on the playground free from dandelions. For that single, eternally long week, they covered every available space.

The appearance of dandelions heralded another anomaly amongst the students, for with spring came the promise of young love. The dandelions, in strong supply, became the third grade equivalent of a red rose.

The moment he saw her in the midst of those dandelions, he felt that she above all others deserved to receive one. And, despite what his friends would say and his fear of cooties, he wanted to be the giver. So, on one fateful Friday afternoon after a full week of tireless searching, a sandy haired, freckle faced little boy named Jason walked up to an lovely little blond girl named Sarah and handed her a single, fresh-picked dandelion.

As she reached for the flower her fingers brushed his gently. His heart pounded wildly in his chest. He was not certain what reaction he wanted from her, but his hands shook with anticipation, nevertheless. Time seemed to stand still as she gazed at the flower. Her expression remained stoic. If his gesture moved her in any way, her face did not reveal it. Her fingers twitched ever-so-slightly and the dandelion tumbled to the ground, cast away, more a weed than a gift. Both children stared at it for one infinitely long
moment. Then, as Jason knelt to recover the flower, Sarah took a small step forward. She leaned into him, sending renewed hope flitting across mind. Then she pivoted and walked away, the heel of her cute, black, patent-leather shoe grinding the dandelion into the pavement.

Crumpled on the blacktop, the dandelion seemed to wilt and fade. Even at such a young, carefree age, Jason could not stand to see something so vibrant, so precious, tossed away without appreciation. He could not stand to see her walk away. He lifted the dandelion gently in his palm and ran one finger down its broken stem, wanting nothing more than to see again its bright golden petals shining in the sun.

That was how it all began for Jason. One little blond girl. One tiny yellow weed.

“Do you remember third grade?” Jason asked, reaching out to run his fingers through Sarah’s long, golden hair. Doubts plagued his thoughts about her, about their almost-relationship, but he couldn’t put a name on the ominous feelings. He was unable to find words for the questions that haunted him.

Though they sat side by side on a bench outside Bellmont Elementary, she stared boredly away from him. “No, that was like nine years ago. Why?” She rolled her eyes and checked her cell phone. “Look, I have to get ready for Katy’s party tonight. I thought you said you had something important to talk about.”

Jason frowned and let his hands slide out of her hair. He plucked a dandelion out of the soft spring ground under the bench and slid it behind Sarah’s ear.

She jerked forward and swatted his hand away irately. “What are you doing? God, you’re so weird sometimes.” He pulled away slightly, letting the dandelion fall to the ground.

A deep sigh passed Jason’s lips. He paused, then plunged forward, fighting to pinpoint the root of the uneasiness in his heart. “Do you remember the dandelion?”

“No. Sorry,” Sarah said. Her voice was icy with indifference and annoyance.

Jason shivered in the warm spring air.

“Is that all you wanted?”

_I wanted you!_ Jason longed to cry out. _I’ve always wanted you. I’ve tried so hard for so long. I’ll bet you don’t remember the necklace, either, the one you said you wanted more than anything in the whole world. I got that for you! And your smile when_
you opened it... God, nothing in the world can match that smile. Why can’t I make you smile like that without presents? I try so hard... and for what?

But he said nothing. He sat instead in silence, lost in his own insecurities.

Sarah stood up and began to walk towards Jason’s car. “Hurry up, I want to stop for ice cream on the way home. And you’re driving me to Katy’s later, right?” She stopped and looked back at him. “Right?”

Jason jumped up, the standard response. “Sure, no problem” was already poised on his lips. But the words wouldn’t come. Even after so many years, she was still the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. He wanted so much to touch her, to hold her in his hands like a delicate flower, treasuring, cherishing. Yet, as her words resounded in his head, he found exactly the word to describe all his doubts. She had used him. Since third grade, she had used him. And he had practically begged her to do it.

“No,” he said unsteadily.

“What?” snapped Sarah, frustrated and confused. There was no pain in her eyes, no fear, only anger and an air of self-defense.

Somehow, seeing that made Jason feel stronger. His doubts had been confirmed. “No,” he repeated. “I’m not driving you anywhere. Not to Katy’s party, nowhere ever again. I’m leaving, so find another way home.”

Sarah gaped at him, unable to managed a response.

Jason walked around her, climbed into his car and drove away from Bellmont Elementary.

To say he never looked back would be a lie. To say he never considered returning to her and begging her forgiveness would be an even worse lie. Despite his longing he drove away, because he wanted to be free from doubt. He wanted something more than she would give him. He wanted something real.

So, he drove. As far away. As his car. Would. Go.

And the dandelion lay forgotten, trampled into the dirt.