

Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities

Volume 5

Article 34

2023

Candles

Pearl Hagen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/rwc>

Recommended Citation

Hagen, Pearl (2023) "Candles," *Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities*: Vol. 5, Article 34.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/rwc/vol5/iss1/34>

This Narrative is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons @ Cal Poly Humboldt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Cal Poly Humboldt. For more information, please contact kyle.morgan@humboldt.edu.

Candles

by Pearl Hagen

“We couldn't fit them all”

Beatrice glimpses down at her birthday cake. It's filled with candles, 50 or 60 gold ones. She's turning 87. The candles are clumped together. Wax melts down and they melt together, some leaning on the others to not fall and choke the cake in flames. Beatrice has a melancholic flash in her eyes, but she doesn't let her family see it; they see the forgiving eyes of an old woman who is deeply, deeply in her secret world of oblivion. They are all in that overheated room, their hot breaths melting into each other to make a pungent scent. In the dim lights, they serenade her with birthday tunes. The candlelight picturesquely glows up Beatrice's wrinkled face, but when they squint their eyes, they see a young Bea, unaware that aging has to happen to her. She was always quite oblivious to her undeniable fates. She blows out the flames but she has nothing to wish for. They clap but she feels very little of the love that lies within them. Maybe the thought of deep feelings from others dies off with age, or maybe she was never one to feel it at all. There are supposed to be a lot of changes that come with aging, but if you're ignorant enough and don't take close notice, there isn't truly change.

After the consumption of cake and the shallow quick praises, Beatrice slips away to her porch to get some air. As she walks through the door into the subtle light she feels the suffocating cold fill her weak lungs. She moves to the steps to sit. She feels all the nooks in her legs stretch and releases the rust to bend down. She sits solitarily as she looks out on the lamplit street. She negates the fact so much time has passed. How could she be in the same body as she once was yet so aged, still with the same introspections, desires, and faiths, but not in the same youthful form? When other people looked at Beatrice they wouldn't see a woman with new progressive beliefs, or even one with a bright future, they'd only see a geriatric with antiquated resolutions. She looks out at the street that was earlier filled with the destiny she once had. Memories flow back like a cooling breeze.

Brought back to herself at age 7, it was a warm summer night. She noisily dashed through the front door, down the dusty road, and into the dried, towering grass. She jumped into the blades. Her body crushed the wheat. The ones that avoided the blow lined her silhouette. She looked up at the clear sky with hope. Watching each of the stars pondering on their births. She felt a connection to the stars; each seemingly insignificant, so many of them, but if lucky, someone would choose a single star to fixate on. Young Bea yearned for a supernova, one with an explosion that would blow her worries clear. She existed, rolling in the grass avoiding her mature issues. As an adult, she longed for the youthfulness she lacked in her girlhood. She constantly held tight to the moment, afraid of what the next would ensue.

Beatrice was a free spirit; although she had a lingering suspicion that she wasn't good enough at anything to bring any sort of real value to the world. She needed to see more of life, she had to see culture and how others lived. She went to Europe. Paris to Rome to London. But when she arrived she found the French to be too pretentious and the Italians too vain. She enjoyed the museums but spoke neither language, she felt desolate and disconnected. Thankfully she immediately found a fondness for London, it felt more familiar yet also foreign. She found companionship in a barista called Nancy. Beatrice and Nancy shared the same eccentric soul. They trusted each other immediately.

One muggy Saturday night Bea and Nancy went to a party at a friend's flat. Beatrice noticed a young man in a pinstripe suit. His body seemed prolonged with a mob of dusty brown hair and undistinguishable colored eyes that were laced with wire-rimmed glasses. Beatrice was immediately intrigued. She wanted to know more about this peculiarly sophisticated-looking man. Bea with her tousled black hair and smudged wine-colored lipstick made her way over. She tapped the towering man on the shoulder, "Bea," she stuck out her hand. With a wildly natural face the man shook it, "Theodore" he replied.

Bea naturally awoke from a soft sleep. It was her birthday, somewhere in her late 20's. She sipped lavender tea while looking out at the dancing reflection of sunlight on her street. The trees swayed with the wind of late May. Beatrice had the youthful desire to savor the small beauties in life: the blooming violets, her grandmother's tea set, and the wavering scent of incense. She was a romantic observer and remained one. She was always one to look up to see the wonders of life. The pure natural grace of the morning brought her mind to ease. Later, that evening she sat around the table with her loved ones. Bea always had a fear that the love she had been given was never natural; she had tried to search for reasons why someone would find a fondness for her but always she was at a loss. So there she sat slightly empty trying to grasp as much of the love as she could. She looked down at the candles, one for each year of her life, the timeless glow rippling over her dark features. Theo handed her a paper-wrapped rectangle. As she opened it she uncovered a musty clothbound journal. There laid an index card reading- Theodore's Journal: 1956; the year that they had met. The entirety of the journal was full of logs of different moments through the first year of their relationship, with reasons that he had fallen in love with her.

Face glowing on the porch, she expects tears to well up but they don't. Beatrice has a numb feeling when remembering Theodore. Once he was gone she was left with nothing. By then she was so far in life, she didn't feel the need to build an independent identity.

87. The age couldn't even process in her mind. Her mother died at 87. Turning that particular age couldn't mean anything good. As Beatrice saturates in her sorrow she hears the door rasp open. A glow covers the deck. She lets the shadow come into her sight. A slight sculpture in a powder blue dress stands in front of her. The young figure bends down and Beatrice is met with undistinguishable colored eyes. Eyes that bring her back to meet her late husband. Beatrice looks at the sculpt of its angular face, every notch and pore to realize it's her granddaughter Maggie. Maggie was never anything particularly special to Beatrice, she valued

her as a grandmother would value her grandchild, but never in any profound way. Maggie sits next to her in the dark stillness. They both sink into the silence trying to find ease in the awkward gap. Maggie drops her head to her knees.

"Maggie?"

Maggie's head darts up at the unexpected engagement.

"Yes?"

"Do you know how old I am?"

Silence.

"No? I'm 87. You're what, 7 or 8?"

"7."

"You're young... but I'm tired of speaking to everyone like they are kids... I feel awful to get to this age. Many people don't get so lucky... but *I don't want this.*"

Maggie looks at her with a blank stare.

"When I lost your Grandpa Theo, I felt like I lost a chunk of my mind"

Beatrice smiles to not make her granddaughter too uncomfortable.

"We contrasted each other. Theo was well-spoken, analytical, and grounded. I often stumbled over my words, and prioritized experience, I tended to live too much in the present. Though we did have at least one thing in common: we were deeply creative thinkers. That's what held us together until the end. Now that he's gone, I've forgotten how to properly think. Everything seems so meaningless."

Maggie understood little of what was being told to her but by Beatrice's passionate tone, she knew this was a conversation she had to have.

"When I look into the mirror I feel mourning for the life I used to have. Change is inevitable but I wish it weren't. My body and my mind are on different timelines."

Beatrice glances over at Maggie and realizes that she is only talking to ease her mind; Maggie's young brain can't process what is being told to her.

"You must be so confused by my jabbering, it's all nonsense!"

Beatrice lies with a laugh. She understands that dismissing the speech will make Maggie believe she has gone mad, but she knows it's better than Maggie seeing the depression that lies in the words. Within the glowing murk, Beatrice breaks the silence,

"How about we go back inside? You must be cold in that dress; Help me up."

Maggie extends her hand out and Beatrice gives hers. Beatrice pulls the mask out of her pocket, puts it over her blue face, and they walk back into the room full of melted candles.