

grandma nature

by Kesi Augustine

an offering for
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Kinetic Communities Consulting



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“I lie down in my grave / and watch my children / grow / Proud blooms / above the weeds of death.”
—Maya Angelou, “Elegy (For Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass)”

on a Saturday afternoon
me and Grandma Nature sit in the park
near her favorite bench.

we've closed the distance between our hearts
for the first time in a year.

it's a family reunion!
cherry blossom trees surround me
wise with wrinkles
arms raised in alleluia
praising the return of spring.

their pink patchwork quilt
of flower petals
blankets the grass.

I sit with them like a loyal disciple.

Grandma Nature finds me kneeling
at the foot of one cherry blossom tree.

"I missed you," I say to Grandma.
"How you been?"

Grandma hugs me with the warmth of the sun.

She says, "*I'm good, baby.*
I missed you so much."

"It's crazy," I reply.
"I haven't seen you in forever.
I don't even know where to start.
How to start."

a cool breeze whispers *shhhhhhhhhhh*.

"*Don't worry,*" Grandma replies.
"I'm always happy to see you. Come here."

I rest my head on her shoulder
and welcome the tears
I've been too afraid to cry.

“You’ve been changing, Grandma,” I say.
There is a quake in your bones.
A storm in your moods.
One minute you’re hot.
The next you blow cold.
Everyone is worried about you.
We’ve never seen you like this before.”

Grandma Nature’s laugh
is the chirp of a little brown sparrow.

*“People love to talk about me,” she says.
“When they could just talk to me.
If they asked, they would know. I’m good.
It’s y’all I’m worried about.”²*

“Grandma, what?” I ask.
“How could you say that?”

*“I’m old,” Grandma says. “Not dead.
I’m changing. Just look!”*



the cherry blossom tree sheds petals like confetti.
even in death she celebrates.

Grandma says, *“But it’s been lonely, baby.
I missed y’all running up and through my house.
I got to know myself again.
I realized I’ve been carrying so much pain.”*

I see barbed wires with angry teeth
snaking around the tallest branches
of the cherry blossom tree.

She continues, *“It turns out,
I needed the rest.
I needed the quiet.
I needed time to tend to my garden.
The birds & bees came back!”*

her voice calms my heart.

² New York vesper sparrow © New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

but Grandma's not done with me yet.

*"Now, I know y'all are rushing around again," she says,
"But I need the family to help me.
My garden is damn near destroyed.
My petunias! Lord, have mercy.
My flowers only ask for water.
Some peace. Some love.*

*And you know what else, baby, I got arthritis.
Trash gets cluttered. Look."*

I see a fallen soldier from a war of chess:
a deserted cup of coffee bleeding into the grass
summons an army of ants.

*"And it's grown folks carrying on like this!" Grandma shouts.
I feel neglected. I know I'm strong.
But from my own children?
I deserve more respect."*

"But how, Grandma?" I reply.
"It's not safe. We've been poisoned.
It's in the water. It's in the air.
It's the clouds that block the stars every night.
They say we don't deserve"



*“They?” Grandma huffs. “Who is ‘they’?
“Your ancestors tilled the land of these parks
before there were maps & concrete & cherry blossom trees.*

*At the very beginning, they were present.
they walked barefoot in these soils
& sang songs to seeds
& befriended flowers
& asked herbs to protect them.*

*“They are the earth.
You are the earth.*

*Remember, baby,
‘Generations come and generations go,
but the earth remains forever.’³*

*“I haven’t been helping,” I say.
“I’ve taken you for granted.
Are you disappointed in me, Grandma?”*

*“Never, baby,” she replies.
“I’m learning my own lessons.”*

*A basketball game creates
a bouncing bassline on the courts.*

*“That feels good,” Grandma says.
“Mmmhmm.
That’s the music I missed.”*

*“How can I support you, Grandma?” I ask.
“Just say the word, and I’ll do it.”*

*“Well, call me up.
Read me some words.
Write me poetry, the way you do
for that lil’ boyfriend of yours.”*

“Grandma!” I shout.

³ Ecclesiastes 1:4. Cherry blossom image from Unsplash. <https://unsplash.com/photos/yRXuXvy4sQ4>

*"Oh, hush!
I am a romantic too, you know,"
Grandma says.
"You get that from me.
And - oh, feed me! Anything.
I can whip up a whole new casserole
from scraps of food and herbs."*

I place a piece of fruit at the foot of the tree.

"I am grateful for you, Grandma Nature," I whisper.
"Thank you. I love you."

Grandma Nature kisses my cheek
and I am a proud bloom.

*"I love you too baby," she says.
"If you can't reach me
wherever you are
just close your eyes
and think of me.
think of your family
feel their love in deep the earth
in a place that can't be destroyed.*

*"Now, that's enough talking.
Now I wanna see the flowers!
They always got something to say."*

and so I walk on the concrete
where children chalk colorful hieroglyphic maps
creating a colorful new kingdom.



Kesi Augustine is a writer, teacher, and scholar based in Queens, New York. She holds a Ph.D. in English from New York University. Her work has recently been published in *RESURRECTION*, *South Broadway Ghost Society*, and *Pensive: A Global Journal of Spirituality and the Arts*. In 2020, Kesi was named a finalist for The Brannan Prize. Later that year, she showcased two poems for Breonna Taylor and the community fridge movement with the Diverse Streets Initiative in Astoria and Jackson Heights. Kesi's picture book, *Faith Takes The Train*, is forthcoming (HarperCollins 2024).

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