



The Necklace

by Laurie Chance Smith

If you've ever been with someone who's near their transition from this life to the next, you'll understand what I'm about to say: There's an aura of peace that surrounds a dying person. There's a confidence and an omniscient wisdom. "Don't forget me." Of all the words my grandmother spoke during her 91 years, I remember those three the most.

But another memory – one of her panicked phone call – makes me laugh out loud. "I dropped my necklace down the bathroom drain. Oh my heavens. What will I ever do? Heavens to Betsy. I'm just sick. I don't think I can stand it!" It wasn't funny at the time.

Imagine Mema standing at her bathroom sink, gazing at the white-haired beauty in the oval mirror and unclasping the necklace with her nervous hands. Picture the chain slipping from her shaking fingers and sliding down the porcelain sink while she tried desperately to grab it back before it reached the drain. Her breath came in short gasps as she traipsed hunch-backed across the floor with her walker, collapsed into her chair and phoned my dad.

For 70 years, she'd jealously guarded that heirloom. She either wore it or stashed it in her purse, wrapped tight in a soft, white handkerchief. But it was never out of her possession. She'd never have risked losing that necklace. Now, her vigilance had slipped for one moment, and it was gone. She couldn't bear the thought of never seeing it again.

My dad arrived at the door with toolbox in hand. "You've got to get that necklace out," Mema pleaded. "I'll see what I can do," he replied grimly and headed for the bathroom.

Ting-ting-ting. Dad tinkered with the plumbing, taking the sink apart as memories flooded Mema's mind. My Papa, Joe, had given her the necklace when she was 18, shortly before their December 1934 elopement. She'd never held a treasure such as the white-gold-plated and glass-stoned

gem contained in that small white box from the Dorothy Watt Jewelry Store.

She remembered draping the jewel around her neck before she and Joe eloped and donning it for every special event of her life – from weddings and church services to parties and fish fries. She remembered my sister Leanne and me wearing the necklace when we played dress-up with her fancy gloves. Recalling the seasons of her life made her think of how the stone seemed to change depending on what she wore – its customary, luminous purple against a snowy-white blouse, blue against her blue suit, rose against the elegant dress she wore to her 50th anniversary celebration. Purple was her favorite color, but really that transpired later in life, after both her granddaughters and one of her great-grandsons each claimed rights to purple as their favorite color.

A crashing bang sounded, then silence. Dad walked to Mema's chair with the necklace draped over his fingers, and Mema dissolved into a fit of sobbing gratitude.

"Don't forget me." I remember those poignant words, spoken near the end of Mema's earthly life, because they shocked me. How could she even think that I would forget...her stories, her laugh, her voice, her hair, her eyes? She was utterly unforgettable.

To be remembered, to know that our life counted, that we made a difference – Mema was speaking aloud a universal human wish. Some lives are forever marked upon the earth, recorded in books or music, while others are enmeshed only in loved ones' memories. But there's a solitary truth I'm sure we can count on – we are equally special. We are all equally worth remembering.

Today, a long, thick silver chain slides over my fingers, and dangling at the end – a large purple oval stone nestled in an intricate gold and silver setting. I'm holding onto the only necklace my Mema ever owned, and I'm remembering.