

## Blueberry Scones

The recipe book was black and white and yellow. It sounded like the start of a bad joke; the kind Blythe used to hoard and tell at teatime. She was—had been—one of those people who snorted when she laughed, and the book was covered in the byproducts of her mirth. Since he had last opened it, the earl grey stains seemed to have deepened like the wrinkles in his brow, as though the paper was aging along with him.

His heart ached—his hip ached as well, in sympathy. His stomach grumbled, half-heartedly. He was quite sure that his organs were in disrepair; these days, it was difficult to muster an appetite. The fridge sat undisturbed in the corner of the room, her now-mouldy cooking in little Tupperware terrariums of grief. He couldn't bear to desecrate the shrine of her; he treated every box in it like they were precious artefacts. Blythe was there in every corner of that dirty ice box, among all those rotten scones and carefully marked dinners. Her hands had kneaded that dough, picked those berries from the grocery store, seasoned the stir-fry with veiny hands. Her jasmine perfume percolated in the crumbling white ashes of those blueberry scones.

He'd found the book the week prior, after the wake.

He hadn't been brave enough to open it past the front page then. Not while the Get-Well-Soon bouquets still wilted on the kitchen counter.

He had watched them droop long into the evening, from the tartan armchair that they'd thrifted together from the downtown op shop. The open window had stirred the windchimes hanging beside the fridge, tousled the open pages too. The book had

sat impatiently on his lap, and the incense-rich twilight had fallen upon them, the book and him, deep as a funeral dirge.

He'd almost laughed through his tears at the sight of the inscription there; "Richard" with a shaky ink heart around his name. Her favourite jasmine blossoms skipped merrily along the page's border.

"They're a symbol of new growth," she'd said, patting the newly laid soil affectionately. Richard had never understood flowers, but in that moment, baby Kira swaddled against his chest, his windswept wife as beautiful as the plucked jasmine in her hand, he thought he might learn. He would learn anything if she would be the one to teach him.

Now she would never be able to.

That last day lingered in the kitchen. The memory of it was a visitor who'd long overstayed its welcome, a silhouette in the ajar door, and unwillingly, he saw her baking those now-mouldy scones, brave for his sake. She'd wanted him to eat them fresh from the oven, but he'd abstained out of solidarity. Her jaw had forgotten how to chew.

Now her scones grew cold as her corpse did, crumbling into the soil that she'd once painstakingly dug.

Now it was his turn to be brave.

Their house was becoming a mausoleum with the weight of his grief. Kira used to come every day, but grief was grating, even on other mourners, and the visits became weekly. He knew she hated to see him so listless, an old man forgotten, sitting in that armchair, waiting for a dead woman to come through the door.

She was due to come today.

The windchimes sparkled and sung in the wind, and spurred on by something no longer tangible, he ventured past that front page into the garden of her mind, her thoughts like pressed flowers on those yellowing pages.

The recipes were quite nearly illegible. Richard always told her that her handwriting was lovely, dear, don't worry, but he was struggling to read it now. Was that '2 tablespoons of sugar' or 7? Flour or butter? Sometimes, she would forget to cross her t's and dot her i's, so reading the passages was like deciphering alien code. But he sat there patiently, squinting through cloudy lenses in the lazy afternoon sunshine. He could almost hear her laughter in the next room.

He picked blueberry scones, in the end. They had been her favourite; she adored afternoon tea, had thought it sophisticated. They had played at veranda tea parties with plastic finery well into their sixties. He used to think it was silly.

Oh, how he missed it now.

He pottered around the kitchen, looking for baking equipment. Blythe had bought a set for Kira when she was pregnant—six little spoons of increasing sizes that ended in a measuring cup. Each one was swaddled by the next one, larger, and Blythe said they looked like babies in the womb.

Now, privately, he thought the teal of the spoons looked like the hospital gown Kira had worn when she miscarried. God, he hated that hospital; Blythe always said that even *his* cooking was better than the mush they distributed there.

The spoons sat unused in the second drawer. Must have been too painful for Kira, but Blythe had always been the sentimental type.

The scone recipe wasn't too difficult, though he kept forgetting what ingredients he'd already put in. The mixture was decidedly starchier than he recalled Blythe's being, but it was satisfactory enough. He cut them into rough squares and placed them gently onto the tray, his fingerprints leaving indents and abstract patterns in the uneven tiles.

They went in to bake, and from Blythe's tartan armchair, he watched his handiwork rise in the flickering oven light. Blythe would be pleased that he was baking, even if the lumpy dough-mosaic was a far cry from her flawless cubes. She'd always had a penchant for ugly things, after all – take the couch, for example, and him! Even in his youth, he'd been big-eared and clumsy-footed, earnest in his awkward suit and wonky glasses. It was almost unfathomable that she'd even taken interest. She was too good for him.

Blythe was the light of his life, the sun of his orbit.

What was he to orbit now?

The old Christmas card looked out at him from the fridge as he waited. Her hair still carried some gold in it, and the shirt he wore was clean and festive. Kira always said that the two of them were cheesy, but he loved that photo. They really did look like a matching pair: a spoon and fork of the same make and brand.

The domesticity of the photo made his chest hurt.

The tulips from the hospital were gone now; Kira had thrown them out last Thursday. She had insisted on it; she was an unsubtle girl like her mother, and she was worried he would die from the devastation.

He'd made sure to get the finest jasmine flowers he could find—fresh picked at a farm several towns away. He'd taken a bus, then a train, and he'd returned to the funeral to rest them gently on her birdlike bones in that still, silent coffin.

The oven pinged. For a minute, he sat there aimlessly, staring at the space in the kitchen where Blythe should be, pages of the recipe book rustling in the incoming breeze. Then he picked himself up, the sofa groaning in unison with his creaking spine, and he slid the scones out with a mitted hand.

The scones were all right, if a little bit burnt. He wiped his rheumy glasses. He placed the teal measuring cup in the sink and, pausing only to look at Blythe's face beaming from the fridge, arranged them carefully on a plastic plate that resembled porcelain.

When his daughter arrived that afternoon, she found him out on the veranda, smiling softly at the picture of her mother, and surrounded by plates of blueberry scones.