

eyes • Evelyn Lillemoe

Dandelions are Beautiful, Lying Weeds

● Sonia Ross

Dandelions live two lives. First as a beautiful yellow nuisance and second as a withering grey seed-spreading wish-giver.

More than three hundred years ago, dandelions snuck aboard a ship and planted themselves into the heart of America, the backyards and boulevards of millions.

Their luminescent yellow petals tower over blades of grass, and their muscled stems are rooted deeply in dirt.

The sunny crowns that sit atop their long bodies beckon passersby and make for the most enchanting of childhood bouquets.

The word dandelion means lion's tooth, in reference to their toothy, biting petals.

Dandelions are America's most beloved weed.

The most common cause of death among dandelions is a cheap, violent, and bloody beheading. The roots, which implant themselves ten to fifteen feet into the soil, coiling towards the center of the Earth, stay.

A dandelion's death is quick and temporary.

Dandelions are the pockmarks of the American backyard.

When a dandelion approaches a natural death, it gives the last of itself to the continuation of its lineage. It grows a silky white halo, which carries and nurtures the dandelion's seeds.

A child's deep and firm blow will spread the seeds to the four corners of the country. The child's fee is simple.

I wished to become a mermaid. I pushed the air from my cheeks, squeezed my eyes shut, and repeated my wish three times. When I let my eyelids fall open, there was nothing left in my hand but the slim, soft green stalk of my wish-giver.

In 1936, my great grandfather fled Germany for the United States. The boat took him first to Cuba, where he stayed for a number of weeks before completing his journey. After arriving in the US with only a tourist visa, he stayed in New York with the affluent woman who had paid his way.

Behind him, he left his family, who had been rich in drama, nepotism, and loyalty.

He and his American wife, Ethel, raised my grandmother Jewish in Jamaica Estates, Queens, New York. She bore his surname, Glaser.

She was a part of an accelerated learning program with other kids in Jamaica Heights. Her schooling was two years shorter than most and she attended Barnard College when she was sixteen years old. Her class at Barnard was made up of other Jewish girls with stories like hers.

When my grandmother moved with her two sons to Gulfport, Mississippi, where the oppressive air is too hot and sticky to inhale, nothing is said without a theatrical drawl, and everything is fried, she made the decision to keep her Jewish roots a secret.

She announced that the three of them would identify as Unitarian. She enrolled her sons in Episcopal school. She married a Catholic man. She became a Field.

My father took communion.

My grandmother is in love with the idea of being an American. When we speak on the phone, she quizzes me about American war heroes, whose names only sound vaguely familiar to me. She grumbles about my education failing me.

At the age of twenty-five, the first thing she did after leaving my Jewish New York grandfather, who had had his bar mitzvah and knew the Chanukah blessing by heart, was get her ears pierced at Bloomingdale's and order herself a soda at a Manhattan diner on the corner of 59th and 3rd.

"I felt so grown up when I did that," she told me as I spoke to her over the phone after she had finished decorating her Christmas tree with hundreds of shimmering white lights and dozens of ornaments. There was Christmas music singing cheerily in the background.

She told me that sipping that soda in the diner on 59th and 3rd was sipping liberty. She told me, sitting there on the vinyl-covered chair at the gingham-clad table for one, drinking her soda, her ears still tingling, she felt free.

Sometimes my grandmother pretends to have a Southern accent. She drops her voice and stretches her words.

On the rare occasion that the two of us talk about religion, my grandmother always

brings up the Tom Lehrer song, "National Brotherhood Week."

"Oh, the Protestants hate the Catholics
And the Catholics hate the Protestants
And the Hindus hate the Muslims
And everybody hates the Jews."

When a dandelion's petals wilt, they wrinkle and darken. The flower becomes floppy and weak and embarrassing.

Our family story has been retold hundreds of times, though its accuracy is debated. These pieces are involved in every recounting:

My great grandfather worked at a successful brewery owned by his uncle in Berlin. One day, his uncle's portrait had been replaced by a painting of Hitler.

In his own office, my great grandfather found another man sitting at his desk.

My great grandfather had a girlfriend. He wanted her to move to the United States with him. Her parents were Nazi sympathizers. Instead of joining my great grandfather on his journey across the Atlantic, she allied herself with her parents. Later, she married an SS colonel. He stood in the way of a train. My great grandfather secretly mailed her money for most of his life.

Dandelions grow in the wake of calamity. They can be found at avalanche sites and throughout the remnants of a burnt forest. They are in love with the disturbing wake of disaster. They thrive in the perpetually mowed lawns of Americans.

My grandmother's house was completely redone after Hurricane Katrina.

The front door now has grand rounds knockers. No one uses the front door. The kitchen is filled with silver surfaces and sleek planes and baubles hang from the ceiling.

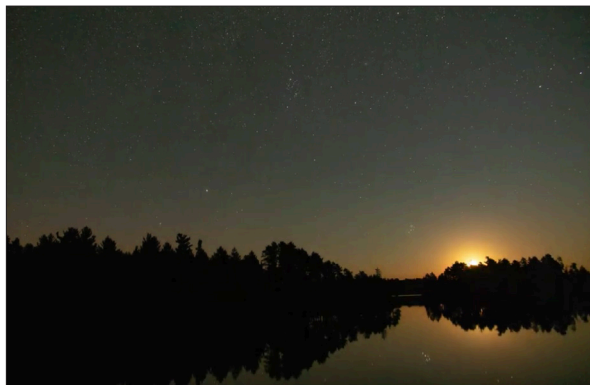
The kitchen table is glass and I can see my grandmother's dogs sleeping with their tongues hanging out of their mouths. They rest their bellies on the cold white tile floor. Sometimes they fight. Sometimes they beg for food. They mostly sleep. I can see a lot through the glass of my grandmother's kitchen table.

Her pantry is filled with food, encased in packaging that warns of delectables within. Rich brownies, creamy soups, and stacks of thick pancakes with maple syrup dripping down their tower decorate the packages in her asymmetrical pantry.

When I climbed up the old two-step stool, grabbed a package, and pulled it open, the plastic crinkled a little too loudly. Inside, I found the dry powder of her failed high protein diet attempt. Or the eight-hundred calories a day attempt. Or the failed vegan attempt.



Star Searching • John Hall



Moon Searching • John Hall



There's never anything to eat in my grandmother's pantry.

To control the spread of dandelions is close to an impossible task.

To avoid a dandelion-takeover of an American backyard, it is recommended that herbicide is applied while the dandelions are still seedlings, before they truly become lion's teeth.

Once they turn into flowers, they grow, multiply, and infest.

When my grandmother talks about her father, she does not like to talk about his time in Germany. She says things like, "When I was a little girl," and "my daddy," and "bratwurst and lard on toast."

My great grandfather read the English dictionary until he knew every word.

He was obsessed with the number five. He said it had everything. Lines, curves, edges, everything. He used clay to sculpt the number hundreds of times. Some of his sculptures are bright and vibrant. Others are dark and jagged.

One of his fives lives in my house. It sits on his old mahogany desk with red paint and golden detailings and deep drawers that line the legs and now belongs to my mother. The five is shiny golden black and a thick arrow pierces the center of its belly, pointing forward.

My great grandfather's fives are beautiful and coated in fingerprints and nail marks. They now litter my grandmother's house.


One April, we spent Passover in Gulfport. There was no seder. My sister cried. My grandmother tried to soothe her by buying her a pastel pink dress for Easter.

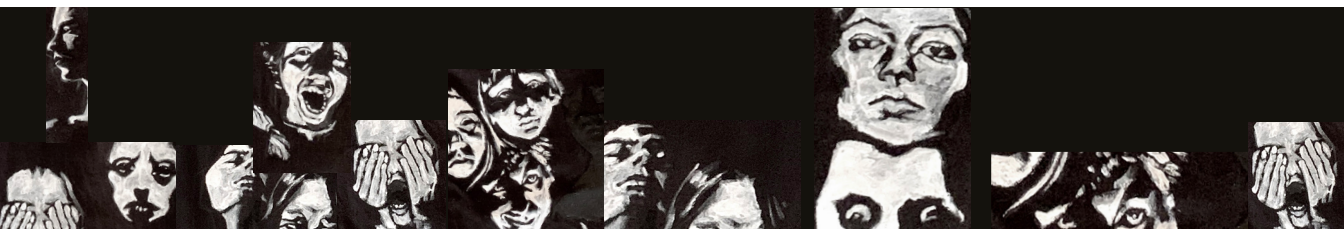
I still walk on two legs.

The dandelion's seeds have been long spread, and I never collected the wish owed to me.

A dandelion is a weed. It grows and spreads and is beautiful and won't die without leaving more wicked dandelions behind it.

The United States made promises to my great grandfather when he boarded his boat to Cuba. America swore to him he was leaving the hate and persecution of Germany behind him.

A dandelion lies and breaks promises. I'm still a human. My grandmother tells the world she is a Christian. 





Storyboard • Isobel Alm

Tanka for the Bogmen

● Eugene Tunney

I've seen the men
They've unearthed. Frail limbs
Found inert.
I've seen their skin, tanned
Black by the bog.
Corpses flattened
By centuries of sod.