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Title: Untouched

An elderly African American woman paused at her vanity pondering the muffled years that had passed by, wondering if anything today could bring back the humble memory of excitement and joy filling every available space of the life she loved. Greying wisps of hair fluttered across her sunken, brown eyes, which were filled with treasured memories of the years gone by. Her reflection stared back at her with a faded yellow dress and a turquoise sweater resting on the wrinkled lines stretching across her gentle skin, complete with a shining saxophone pendant placed daintily on her collarbone. Today was the day she had the opportunity to introduce her Americanized grandchildren to a culture which would redefine their perspective and enrapture them with significant stories and meaningful truths. Today was the day she would revisit her hometown of Harlem, New York after 50 years.

The doorbell trilled, and she stumbled to the door, welcoming a tall 12-year-old boy and a cheerful 5-year-old girl. The boy presented a stoic, nonchalant expression and mumbled, "Hi, Grandma Adair.", while the girl practically leaped inside the home with absolute joy. Adair gave him a warm smile in return, and welcomed him inside, saying "Hello, Elliot. It's quite nice to see you after such a long while.". As of now, she did not care much about how he was acting, because Adair knew that he would surely change by the end of this trip. Mustering a weak smile, Elliot immediately rushed towards his sister to keep her from shattering the China pot she was playing with. "Come on now, Brea, we really must get going." Adair hurriedly explained, as she ushered them towards the subway.

The subway was a crowded tunnel of lights, except for the music that rang out from a distant speaker in the background. Adair gazed lovingly at her grandchildren, believing that they were seeds that needed to be nurtured, and she was the one drop of rain that could urge them to grow. She didn't care if Brea and Elliot were not excited yet, because she knew that they would blossom by the end of their exploration. As a child, she had taken a similar trip to her father's hometown, and she was awed by it, regardless of her original boredom.

When they arrived at their destination, Adair simply paused to take in the fresh breeze of precious childhood memories sweeping over her mind and pointed to a gorgeous fountain in the center of the bustling town square. "There, that right there," she explained, "was my favorite place in the world when I was growing up. Back in the 1940's, when I must have been about 10 or 11, this was *the* place to be. Numerous African American musicians would play their music here. One of them was your great-grandfather, my father."

Again she paused, remembering her father constantly playing the saxophone in the street with his grey stubble set firmly on his square jaw.

"What kind of music did they play?" Elliot wondered, with a hint of eagerness creeping in to his typically bored expression.

"Blues and jazz, Elliot. Blues and jazz." A new memory began to take root in her mind. Adair could still hear it, still feel it; the music had passion and soul, with emotion pounding into every note from every coruscating instrument there was.

"Why were all of those people here, didn't they have jobs?" Brea questioned. Elliot sighed, wondering how his sister had not yet discovered something as prominent as the

Harlem Renaissance. His grandmother, staying far more patient, took the time to explain it to Brea, discussing how African Americans had been very successful in their musical endeavors back then. “What instrument was your dad successful in, Grandma?” Brea asked. This time, Elliot was interested, and he turned towards Adair for her response.

“The saxophone.”

Adair said this with a fond, loving tone, as a vivid picture was painted across her mind. A younger version of her sat on a rocking chair by the hearth and smiled, as her father played a favorite of hers on the saxophone; she remembered believing with all her heart that it was the most glorious sound in the world, and that she wouldn’t trade it for anything,

The next part of the trip was quite more eerie, and they decided to visit Saint Andrew’s Episcopal Churchyard, a large graveyard. Brea shivered as mist tickled the hairs on the back of her neck, as Elliot shuffled uncomfortably across the sidewalk. Adair took no mind of this and walked over to a locked box next to grave marked “Vincent Adair Smithson”, pulling out a heavy brass key. Next, she unlocked the box and pulled out a coruscating, golden saxophone. “Everything in this town has changed, and this same process will happen to your home as you grow older,” Adair sadly explained. “But what will stay untouched,” she continued, “are the roots that trace back there.” Elliot pondered this for a moment, and it *did* make sense. If everything changed in Chicago, he would still love it. But he wouldn’t love it because of his favorite baseball team, or even because of his favorite theater. He would love it because of the connections that drew him back there, even as time passed him by.

On the way home, Adair realized that she, too, had changed that day. She had always thought that the piece of Harlem she cared about was long gone, but it still lived on in her heart, regardless of what had changed there.

While she was getting ready for bed, she repeated this glorious truth to herself. “Harlem has changed, with its few barbershops and tall buildings, but the culture and roots tracing back there have blissfully been left untouched.”