



Lilacs

My best friend and our special flower.

By Katie Smith



he year I turned 12, I met a girl in art class. Her name was Meagan, and she approached me at the pencil sharpener. She was a bit hyper, stood a little close, and I could barely understand what she was saying because she talked so fast.

I was immediately drawn to her.

She told me a few weeks later that as soon as she saw me, she decided we would be best friends. And we were—ever since I spent the night with her and we danced under the street light next to her house when we were supposed to be in bed. It was midnight, snow had begun to fall, and there was no music. The next morning we walked to McDonald's, ordered two cheese danishes, then drenched ourselves in cheap perfume at the local drugstore.

The following Spring, we'd each just discovered that our parents would be divorcing that year, and we sat facing each other on a hammock in my front yard next to an old lilac bush. We planned what we would wear to the semi-formal dance the following weekend. We didn't talk about *it*. But we both knew. I always felt safe with Meg. She was my soul sister before I knew what a soul was.

The lilacs were in full bloom; it was the first time I'd noticed that delicious smell. A feeling came over me that everything was going to be OK despite the fact that my life was about to become very different. I ran inside to get a pair of scissors so I could cut a few blossoms to put in my room. My mom was making tacos, and the smell of ground beef frying in the pan added to my sense of peace. Suddenly I felt a strong need to hold onto it. At 12, I was beginning to realize it was fleeting.

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hen Meagan bought her first house the year we both turned 23, I couldn't wait to visit her. Her back yard was covered with established lilacs. She had deep purple, light purple, and white. She filled up a vase for me, then another.

Before I knew it, she was on a ladder collecting huge blossoms that draped over her entire forearm. We talked about that Spring afternoon years ago when we'd sat on the hammock outside my parents' house, smelling lilacs and tacos—and suddenly we both craved Mexican. Meagan made margaritas and nachos, and we sat under her lilacs and began going over her upcoming wedding.

That was almost 20 years ago. I wore silver in her wedding, and she wore gold in mine.



ver the years, our lives filled up fast with children, work, and schedules. Our visits became few, but we always saw each other in the Spring when the lilacs were ready. Sometimes I would stop by with gardening snips and pick them in the rain. There were nights she came over to my house and would surprise me with an armload. I was always grateful: I'd tried about a dozen times to grow my own lilacs and each time I'd get wonderful foliage with no blooms.

It's just as well. Our tradition of lilac get-togethers has helped me remember the girls Meg and I used to be.

Last Spring we met for dinner at our favorite place, less than a mile from where we danced under the street light so many Decembers ago. We ate grilled chicken Caesar salad and drank wine, the entire time with a huge vase of lilacs next to us. She didn't want to leave my yearly gift in the car to wilt; it was unusually warm in Maine that night.

Our evening started out somberly as we clutched each other's arms beside the vase of lilacs, talking about our own marriages and how soon they would be ending. Maybe our parents divorcing the same year so long ago somehow prepared us for our own marriages ending simultaneously. It wasn't long until Meg and I were able to let go of our hurting hearts and enjoy an evening together talking of old times, like we had so many times before.

By the time we left, we had gotten quite a few sideways glances from other customers at the restaurant. I'm not sure if the looks were because of the flowers or our laughter, but what I do know is that for the rest of my life whenever I smell lilacs, I will think of her.

It will always be her. ❖