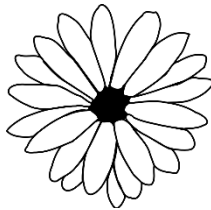


GRANDMOTHER'S GARDEN

by Wendy Brown-Baez



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& Writing Circles for Healing



In the photograph, she reaches up to pluck a flower, tearing it from the arching green tangling over the white trellis. Sunlight glints off her gold-rimmed glasses and her dark hair, graying at the temples, is crimped back from her face in waves. Her right arm reaches up as she holds a bouquet of fresh flowers in her left. Her simple cotton dress does not reveal her slender figure despite the belt into which she had tucked a handkerchief and cotton gardening gloves. The length is modestly over her knees and her practical sturdy shoes are planted firmly on the strip of sidewalk that runs through the trellis. Behind her, the garden breathes color in lush abundance, although the photograph is black and white. She does not smile. In the several dozen photographs scrambled in a box, few show Elisa smiling. Under a prominent nose her thin lips curve into a smile of pleasure only when she sits beside her daughter, her golden girl, the one she lived for, Connie's mother, Marilyn.

Connie sifts through these photographs like shuffling a deck of cards to find her fortune. Only rather than the future, it is the past she wants illuminated. How Grandma avoided scandal even though she bore a child out of wedlock. How she disguised her past by an unwavering dignity and an unyielding stubbornness, committing no further mistakes of passion. She loved Connie, gave all the tender affection a woman is capable of towards a child. Paid for her dance lessons. Took her on trips to the beach and New York City to see the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall. Watched TV late into Friday nights, allowed her to sleep in Saturday mornings. Sewed Barbie clothes, knitting coats and hats on tiny needles. Left her alone to wander and dream.