

## **Faded Memory**

by Rosanne Trost

It was another bitterly cold, dreary January day. Unseasonably cold. No sun for days. My mind and spirit matched the weather. I was going through the motions as “they” say. Bugged down in grief—my husband had recently died—I was filled with fear about raising our daughters by myself.

A dry cleaner had opened near my home. Clutching a new customer coupon, I brought in a small stack of clothes. Standing at the counter, I glanced at the coupon again, and realized it was for men’s’ dress shirts. I wadded the coupon in my purse and forced myself not to cry. Men’s shirts. Oh, how I wanted to have use of that coupon.

The dry cleaners was new, but everything looked old. Dirty-looking gray walls. No warmth. Was the heat even on? The place was so gloomy it looked as if no one was behind the counter. Then off to the side, I saw a woman get up from her chair. She was sitting next to an old radio, listening to Dvorak’s Ninth Symphony. The music seemed so foreign in this austere setting.

I saw her name tag. June looked haggard and frail. She picked up my items, asked for my name. We exchanged minimal words, but no smiles. June gave me a receipt and I left.

I visited the cleaners several times over the next months. Each encounter was the same. Always classical music playing. June in the background. On sunny days, the place still remained cold and uninviting. The beautiful music provided a modicum of serenity. June’s expression was always sad. She always wore the same drab brown, frayed sweater.

Once I dreamed about her. The dream was fragmented and illusive, like a fading pencil sketch, but we were both smiling. We exchanged no words.

Eventually and surprisingly, I began experiencing some days with glimmers of hope. The number of hopeful days continued to increase. *Maybe I could survive.* Still, there were many days shadowed with sadness. I missed my husband. Over time the loss became routine. Almost ordinary.

Thoughts of June often came to my mind. Because I had moments of something almost like happiness, I wondered about her. Was she lonely? Did she have family, friends, anybody? I hoped she did.

I decided the next time I encountered June, I would greet her by name and wish her a good day. Unfortunately, on my next trip to the dry cleaner an obnoxious customer was arguing with her, yelling about a missing shirt. June calmly referred to his receipt, indicating the items were all there. I dropped off my clothes and left. The other customer continued shouting.

The following week, on my way to the cleaners, I thought about what I might say to June. I decided to ask her a question. Something that would require a response. Nothing deep. Just two people having a light conversation.

The door to the cleaners was open; loud unrecognizable music blared from it. A young girl, chewing gum, stood behind the counter.

“Is June off today?” I asked.

“Who? Oh, she doesn’t work here. I think she moved.”

Another customer walked in. I left.

I was overcome with disappointment. Why had I waited so long to show any interest in June? I could have been friendly, maybe even offered compassion.

Through the years, on occasion, I have thought of June. Sometimes I find myself listening for classical music even in the grimmest of places.

**Rosanne Trost** is a retired registered nurse. After retirement, she found the perfect creative writing class, and has realized her passion for writing. Her work has been published in a variety of online and print journals, including *Chicken Soup for The Soul*, *Commuter Lit*, *Indiana Voice Journal*, and *Learning to Heal*.