

Matchstick Match

By: Natalie Unger

All her troubles started with one simple innocuous thing...matches.

The child in her loved how the flame looked. The clear, the neon blue, the orange, and red combined together. Colors they were, and how they all fascinated her. The shape of the flame reminded her of better times.

Her church now had painted flames on the walls. It once had been accidentally burned down. The priest had painted flames around the church, using the electric, fake candles as substitutes. The flames in the church were never quite the same again.

Little did they know of her love of matches as she waited outside the church.

Her grandfather in the summers of 1970s had been the one to take her to that church every Sunday. There, they would be together every year, lighting candles for the Almighty. Her grandfather, in some ways, had been her mentor, feeding her bites and pieces of wisdom he had learned through the years. He had put wisdom into words that she could understand for a child of her age, as most people do for children.

Yet, all that changed when he went to a “better place.” She was told that she was too young to go to the funeral. She had been left outside with the other children to play behind the building of holies.

The day of the funeral, she found the Father Jonathan’s misplaced matchbox. The smoker in him could never quit. It had been hiding in the tall grass behind the community’s white church.

Quickly, the small blue matchbox lay in her hands for a few seconds. She whisked it away into one of the pockets of her dress before her younger brothers could take it away. Then

on, it was hers and hers alone. Whenever she would light a match from this particular matchbox, she would make a wish as she blew her unforgiving light away.

Her wish was always the same; to have her grandfather back. Once, when she was sixteen, she was about to wish for Christian Walker to kiss her at the homecoming dance. Yet, none of her wishes come true.

She felt lonely in the world since her grandfather's death, and thought no one would ever notice her again. Or so she had thought.

Age of sixteen comes hand in hand with stupidity. She had been hanging out with the boys of her town behind the white church. By then, she had always carried the matchbox with her, as fragile and tattered as it was. A boy by the name Christian needed a light for his cigarette. His dark blue eyes and light brown hair made her feel weak in the knees similar to how heroines felt love in the old movies. She gave her unforgiving light away more than willingly to this boy Christian.

A little too eagerly apparently. As she went to blow the light away, to make the wish for Christian's kiss, the town police came driving by.

She had thrown the light to the ground near the church in fear. She and others ran into the field behind the church. They were lost in the stalks of corn like gazelles in the African plains. A small town in Texas always has fields of something. Fields of fire tends to be not one of them.

She, as the bride now, was playing with her little matchbox now. She was lighting the last of the matches and blowing them away. She would have done the same for her worries if she could. The wish she was making over and over again was different than the one for Christian Walker or her loving grandfather. She wished she hadn't been the one to burn down the old church.

Her parents, her grandparents, her great-great grandparents, had all gotten married in that church. The little white church had been known for its small insignificant love story. The town, Marybelle-Lee, was named after the two lovers who built the church. Legend of Marybelle and Lee was once very popular tourist attraction before the church burned down to its ashes.

The bride continued to wish on her matches about the white church and its love story. If only she had been able to save them both.

“Darling, don’t be lighting matches with your beautiful dress on!” said an old Texan man in a cowboy hat and tuxedo. She blankly looked at him and continued to make her wish with her unforgiving light. This Texan man was not to be ignored.

“Now, Darling, I don’t know what’s going through your head right now. But for Goodness’ Sake! Stop lighting those matches.”

She looked up at him again, and lit another. As she stared at the colors of the flame, she said to him, “What if I told you that I was the one who burned the beautiful white church that was once here? Where you and mom got married? Would you hate me for it?” She looked up at him.

“Would you hate me, Darling, if I did it?”

“No,” she replied. She blew the light away and looked down at her matchbox. There was only one match left. The box that once had been so full was almost empty now. Where had they all gone? Where had all her dreams and wishes gone to?

“Don’t worry your pretty little head about it. I was the one who did it,” said the old Texan man proudly.

“You did what...?” she said worriedly.

“Father Jonathan needed a new church, simply put. The place was a money pit. It was so old and needed many repairs. He couldn’t keep up with the bills. I owed him a favor. Now, we’re even.”

Even, she thought. She looked down at her dress this time: the white lace, her shoes, her white gloves. She was a bride that others would be envious of. Yet, suddenly, she didn’t feel balance, or even even. She wasn’t the bride for a moment. She felt lost in her wedding dress. She was the bride, people called her the bride, yet she didn’t feel like the bride. She herself was something that wasn’t there.

The Texan man and the bride heard the wedding march begin inside.

“It’s time, Darling,” said the Texan man. She got up from the ground where she had been sitting. She took the last matchstick out.

“You want to make a wish?” she asked.

“Only if it comes true,” he said.

“Matchstick wishes never come true. I’d thought you knew,” she said in her childish tone.

“No, Darling. Only wishes we know are true will come to be. The real amazing wishes come from the heart. Now, those are the ones that count. From the heart. Not wishes from a matchstick match.”

Her father took the little matchbox from her hands. From his hand, he lit the last match. She looked down the aisle that she was about to walk on. She took a deep breath, blew away for the last time, her unforgiving light.