

CIGAR SMOKE

Uvia Smith-Wood

The room is filled with a dense cloud of cigar smoke. If it weren't for the rhythmic inhale and exhale of my tired lungs, I would question if this moment were real. I'm sitting in my study staring at the same legal document for the past three hours, but I haven't broken the seal on the envelope yet. *Arthur J. Wilson*, and the date, *November 12th, 1993*, lay across the front, haunting me. If I don't break the seal, then maybe my heart won't break more. A million thoughts and memories that used to make me feel alive whiz through my head. The pearl white of Elizabeth's dress sparkling against the sunlight though the church windows used to make me smile as though it were yesterday, but now leaves me motionless. That yesterday was thirty years ago and a lot has changed, clearly, because now I'm sitting with a face full of wrinkles and divorce papers.

Elizabeth moved to Boston to be closer to our children and grandchildren, while I remained in Manhattan at my law firm. She had become restless and isolated by the lack of excitement after our children grew up and moved away. I would get home from work to find Elizabeth sitting on the couch, reading. Her reading didn't seem abnormal, she always loved to read, but she began to read fiction and fantasy novels. I could tell from the way she smiled while reading that these novels were an escape for her, a desire for freedom, a world of excitement, unlike the world she had in Manhattan with me. I thought the life we created together was one she once dreamed of, one we would romanticize about in our twenties while living in Brooklyn. Elizabeth eventually told me she needed to leave Manhattan; and therefore, leave me. Dreams of a different life had seized her curiosity. It's depressing how time changes the love you thought was timeless. But timeless only appears on the packaging of cigar boxes to make stagnate men like me feel comforted, while our wives embody the true burn of transformation. Time wrinkles more than youth out of someone. There's no sense in blaming her, nor I, for this outcome, because love is like a cigar: addicting, slow burning, and leaving you with ashes for memories. I suppose I can light another cigar, but I cannot have another love like my wife. I am too old and too bitter to love anew.

The ripping of the envelope rips my heart with it as I reach my thumb and pointer finger inside, grabbing the pearl-white papers. I grip my black pen for a few minutes before signing my name next to Elizabeth's. The elegant white is now stained with the black ink of separation. And just like that our bodies, minds, and souls are forever in the past, like cigar ash. Only memories and cigar smoke drift around me from here on out. Fermented bitterness fills my mouth once again as smoke lingers in the sliver of sunlight that has managed to slip through the curtains. If Elizabeth was here she would tell me to open the window and get some fresh air. But I do not care for my health anymore. Why should I when she is gone? Gone forever. Shaking, I grab the soft curtain, shutting out the sunlight. My only beacon is the red tip of my cigar. The room has nothing more to give my senses. My wife is gone; I do not want to feel anymore. Elizabeth was my sensation.