

## The Knot of Past and Present



She doesn't need to be reminded of the date. She can feel when it is that time of year. Her body and the subtle changes in the weather collude to ring a bell to remind her—a bell of mindfulness that this is the time. The time of year that her mother passed on to that other place.

Her mother had always been such a pervasive presence. She couldn't reconcile who her mother continues to be in her memories with the wasted, frail form that had displaced her mother in the final weeks.

She stands next to the kettle, waiting for it to start bubbling, and thinks with a vacant stare: *"Time is such a trickster; it can move both quickly and slowly depending on one's perspective."*

She sighs and pours the boiling water into the teapot to "warm the pot." Her grandmother taught her to do that.

A little shard of memory flashes—she is four years old. She stands on a chair. On tiptoe, she brings the kettle to the water spout. She has to grasp the handle of the electric kettle with both hands. The kettle is too heavy for one hand, and even with two, her grip wobbles a bit with the weight as it fills. Grandma had said, *"You MUST hold with two hands or you will spill the water"*... and that would make a BIG mess. Her four-year-old eyes had seen that Grandma *always* used two hands to hold the kettle too, which was strange—Grandma could chop wood for the fire. Chopping wood *must* be harder than holding a kettle.

*"Funny, even now as a grown woman, I hold the electric kettle to the water with two hands, gripping the handle in exactly the same way,"* she thinks.

She drains the pot and measures out the tea leaves—one, two, three scoops into the warmed pot—and pours the freshly boiled water over the leaves in an even flow. She waits and allows the tea to brew.

*"Yes, time sure is a trickster. It can even fold in upon itself such that Grandma, Mother, and Myself co-exist as past in the present—as a kind of knot."*

She checks the clock. *"Yes, that's about three minutes for the tea to brew."*

She turns the pot three times. Her body remembers, without need for thought, what her Grandma had taught her.

As she pours the tea, a familiar feeling brews within her as the tea brews in the pot—a hollow, desolate, and "bad" feeling sits like an empty stone in her belly. She learned in therapy that this feeling is shame.

At the same time, there is an urgent, frantic compulsion to do something. To act. To do the "right thing"—but the "thing" is unknown. The urgency to *do* fires up her brain and tingles in her limbs. She has learned in

therapy that this feeling is panic.

She has learned in therapy that this combination of feelings are the experiences of her Wounded Little Self. The Wounded Little Self with scuffed knees and mismatched socks that is still alive in her psyche. The past in a bind with the present.

Sometimes her Wounded Little Self sleeps silently deep inside her, and at other times, something awakens her and she becomes alive and active.

During therapy, she and her therapist have met her Wounded Little Self. They have gently approached her, as she is a fearful, shy little girl. She and her therapist have beckoned her Wounded Little Self forward to express her hopes, needs, and pains.

With her therapist, she continues to learn what smells, sounds, body sensations, situations, tones of voice, or topics of discussion bring her Wounded Little Self to life. Making tea is one of those moments when time is a trickster.

Her adult self delights in a cup of tea made “just right.” At the same time, the body movements, smells, and touch sensations call her Wounded Little Self forth.

Her Wounded Little Self made tea in the way Grandma had taught her so she could “be a good girl and make tea for Mother.”

Past and present bound together in a knot.

She has come to understand, with the help of her therapist, that her Wounded Little Self at times worked very hard—but the kind of hard work varied depending on her world.

She had learned that the world of her Very Little Self was her mother, as the primary carer is *the* world for all tiny children.

At times, her mother disappeared into sleep. She would sleep through the day like Sleeping Beauty.

Her mother would be silent, still, and beautiful in a darkened room with the drapes drawn.

When her mother was Sleeping Beauty, she had to make herself BIG and GROWNUP to look after herself and her little sister. She would concentrate very hard to make skew-whiff sandwiches for the two of them. Or she tidied up the kitchen, leaving telltale signs that young hands had done the work—benches still just a little grimy, cups teetering on the edge of the shelf, and so on.

At other times, she knew that the Angry Giant had come to stay inside her mother.

The Giant was a monster and made her tummy go funny. Her Wounded Little Self worked very hard to hide from the Giant. This work was hard, but it was different from making sandwiches with little hands.

This was the work of being still like a soldier and quiet as a mouse.

When her mother was Sleeping Beauty, her Wounded Little Self had to concentrate really hard, but she could also make herself Big and Grownup and be “just like Mother,” making sandwiches or cleaning up.

**Making herself Big and Grownup felt good in a funny way.**

**But the work of being still like a soldier and quiet as a mouse was the work of making herself so small she became invisible.**

**This was scary work, because sometimes her body wouldn't do what she wanted—it couldn't be still and silent.**

**She knew that if the Giant roared, her body had done something wrong.**

**Over time, her Wounded Little Self learned special powers. These were the powers of turning "still like a soldier and quiet as a mouse" into being a statue—a statue that was silent and still and felt no pain or fear.**

**The best times were when her mother was the Good Fairy Princess.**

**Her Wounded Little Self could sometimes magic the Good Fairy Princess to appear.**

**Love would shine from the Good Fairy Princess, and she would bask in that love.**

**Oh, her Wounded Little Self felt wonderful in those moments when she could make the Good Fairy Princess appear.**

**The Good Fairy Princess was beautiful and kind.**

**She waved her wand of feeling special and safe over her Wounded Little Self.**

**But the magic wasn't forever magic. It could only be done for a little while.**

**She felt so sad and alone when the magic couldn't work anymore and the Good Fairy Princess vanished.**

**The magic that could sometimes make the Good Fairy Princess appear was the magic spell of making Mother feel special.**

**This was the spell of doing things like making Mother a cup of tea without being asked and walking so, so carefully to her so as not to slop it.**

**It was also the magic of being “cute” and “clever” and having “good manners” so others would notice and tell Mother what a good mother she was and that her daughter was a “credit” to her.**

**She sits. The autumn sun shines through the window onto her back. The dog trots over and curls at her feet, resting its head on them.**

**She sinks into the armchair. She exhales, and her gaze settles on the steam rising off her tea and curling in the air.**

**She feels the warm cup held in both hands. She thinks, *“I am here in the present moment.”***

**She considers how wonderful the warm cup feels in her hands on a cool day.**

**How soothing the sun is on her back—as if it is intentionally comforting her.**

**What a delight it is to hear the dog's soft breath and to notice the weight of its head on her feet.**

**She notices her in-breath and out-breath are synchronized with her dog's.**

***I am breathing in, the dog is breathing in. I am breathing out, the dog is breathing out.***

**She reflects on the journey she has been on with her therapist.**

**She thinks about her therapist and herself gently extending a hand out to her Wounded Little Self—and, in doing so, extending a hand also to her Grandma and her Mother.**

**All three continue to live inside of her. The past and the present united in a knot.**

**But, as therapy has gone on, she has come to know that the knot is not necessarily a knot that tethers the present to the past such that the present is always already written by the past.**

**Rather, there is now enough space within her to observe the knot, understand it, appreciate it—and be free of it.**

**She delights in making tea and holding the warm cup in her hands.**

**There is a beautiful, simple, unencumbered pleasure in this.**

**Yet, at the same time, she is aware that making tea brings her Wounded Little Self to life—and with her, her Mother and Grandmother.**

