

“Womb. Bloom. Groom. Gloom. Rheum. Tomb.”

The leather bound, gold-embossed album rested on my lap, pinning my frail frame to the seat. As I sat, I could feel its weight pressing on me, more than just physical, it was the burden of lost memories, emerging from the hidden depths in my mind.

I opened the book; and a grainy image stared back at me. Indistinguishable shapes were a sham of a foetus, a baby’s head but a squiggle. I stopped and looked, but saw nothing she recognised.

Over the page and the filmy songraph evolved into candid Polaroids of a boy’s firsts: first tooth; first steps; first day at school; first ‘grown up’ bike, without stabilisers. His features, ever changing, gave glimpses of the man he would become as the years wore on.

Another page turned, another chapter in his life. A cornucopia of love and life leaped off the pages, faces animated and smiling, all centred around two angelic faces. The expressions on their faces were exactly mirrored: the declarations of love and promises of loyalty that had been sworn before God were sincerely spoken. The cherubic face of an innocent boy had matured over the turn of a page. I stared at the couple: “Do I know them?” I struggled to identify their faces; they seemed so familiar to me...

Overleaf, a totally different scene unfolded. The glint in their eyes had been extinguished, replaced by a weary resignation to the labour of modern life. His youthful looks has faded to a haggard and tired visage, the wrinkles that bored into his face left him transfigured – he could never return to his once happy appearance. I turned my attention to the woman... “Who was that?” She was so happy, but now her carefree spirit had been stripped from her and a bitter old woman now stood in its place.

The final page. The man was conspicuous only by his absence. The woman, dressed in black, more aged than ever before. Her limbs were as spindly as a black widow’s as she clung to the black, lead coffin. Her grief sparked my empathy, even though I could not remember grief. As I shut the book with a sigh, a small note, previously tucked behind a photograph, fluttered to the floor. It read ‘Remember me’, in scrawled italics. I wept, for I remembered nothing. And never would.

By Katherine Burdon and Josephine Paul 10W