

## Beautiful Weeds

I gently run my fingertips along the tall grass. My chest rises as I inhale the fresh air. Each breath circles through my tired lungs. I've been to this pasture ten-thousand-and-one times. This time, however, is different. This time, our family pasture has a lesson to reveal.

On this mid-spring day, a gentle breeze is present that is just strong enough to brush my hair back. My nose twitches at the scent of familiar animal feed. Assisting my dad with our sheep is a repetitive and dull task, but I find the setting to be a place of admiration and beauty. The second work is done, I wander into the pasture.

On this day, as I maneuver through the prairie, a sea of color catches my eye: orange and yellow and red and purple and blue. I spot a patch of wildflowers past my normal trail. Dandelions, Indian paintbrushes, daisies, and prairie verbenas surround my ankles. Standing in their glowing stain, I watch the weeds. Like Wordsworth's daffodils, they dance in unison, happily in their space.

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At this moment, I am eleven years old — I am at the edge of becoming a teenager. Physically, however, my heart has grown weak and weary. I am relentlessly fighting a battle that no one else can see. From my very beginning moments on Earth, cystic fibrosis, an aggressive and chronic lung disease, has consumed my life. I am used to the demanding lifestyle of my unhealable war. However, this summer, the summer before my 5th grade year, the enemy has a secret weapon that captures my lungs and mind. A mycobacterium has made its grand entrance. The simple act of walking to class is an insurmountable struggle. Dark circles shadow my once bright eyes. My sunken-in cheeks reveal my sharp cheekbones. Right before middle school, I no longer recognize my reflection.

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Out here in this moment amongst these weeds, I am reminded of my struggles. I stand surrounded by nothing more than colorful weeds, admiring their beauty and charm. The wildflowers whisper to me. “We’re only weeds” they say, “but aren't we stunning?” Their confidence contradicts their purpose: all weeds do is drink the water the good plants thirst for. They have no real purpose. Weeds shouldn’t be pretty. The wildflowers represent all that I feel in this moment – alive, beautiful, grounded – even though my body tells me that I’m unadmirable and fading. The beauty radiating from the wildflowers rebuilds my perspective. The wildflowers speak serenity to my lonely mind. Like the pensive poet gazing upon the host of golden daffodils, my heart is filled with peace.

My ear perks at a sharp whistle from my dad. I glance at the flowers one more time and return to the truck with a new sense of strength