

# *In the Pines*

by Albatross, May 2015



Mrs. Johnson loved her yard but nothing in it as much as the tall pines that lined the old farm road. Great savage pines that reached twice as high as her house, they towered dark over the needle bed that replaced any grass long ago.

“Mr. Johnson and I planted those trees when we first moved here sixty years ago,” she told me when I stopped by to cut her lawn. My mother had set me up with my first job, doing lawn work for the Johnsons, who were both in their nineties. Throughout my teenage years, week by week, I showed up reluctantly to toil in the sun. I learned to weed her garden, to use compost, to plant and cultivate grape vines, and to trim the pines. I was there when Mr. Johnson died and left her alone in her yard under the shade of those pines.

After that we talked quite a bit. She was in Chicago during the Saint Valentine’s Day Massacre. She remembered Charles Lindbergh crossing the Atlantic. When she heard of the end of the First World War, she ran to a church near her childhood home and

swung on the church bell rope all day until her hands blistered. She wept talking of her husband.

I sat on her threadbare couch and listened, watched her weathered hands illustrate while she remembered. Family members showed up and told her to move to assisted living. They would pay for a nice place where she would be looked after.

She looked at me sitting in the background of the room and asked, "If I buy a computer can you show me how to use the internet?"

It was then that she bought her first computer. She was so excited that she chuckled every time I clicked on a icon or scrolled through an article.

"I've lived nearly a century and I finally have the world at my fingertips," she smiled.

At ninety-six years of age she left to go to France and finally see Europe and I lost my job.

I knew that she had only left for a few months but I never went back. The next summer I saw another boy cutting her grass as I drove past in the passenger seat of my mother's car.

"You should stop in to see how Mrs. Johnson is doing," my mother would say every time we drove by.

"I know, Ma. I will," responded the teenager with all the time in the world.

One day we drove by her house and those great savage pines were cut down. The ground white with mounds of sawdust that blew in gusts over the farm road and swirled as our car whooshed by.

"You should stop in to see how Mrs. Johnson is doing," my mother habitually said.

I just stared at the enormous empty space in the front yard.

“I know.”