

What We Put Behind Us

By Elena N.

When I was younger, I used to wonder why I was born a human. Like, why was I not a tree? Or a fish? I bet there was, like, 2% probability I would be a person because there were so many other things I could have been. So, what qualities did I possess to be human? Was I just made one, no questions?

My favorite memories with my dad were spent in Fairyland (Or pillow fort. Same difference, right?). Naturally, I was the Sunflower Fairy. Everything I touched would be filled with glitter and sparkles and rainbows... My dad was the fairy guardian, and he would protect me from ogres. Sometimes the ogres would chase us, and then we would have to hide in the Cave of Fairy-ness, where we would always be safe. Other times we would catch up with the ogres, and put them in jail. One day, when Dad and I were playing Fairyland, he pulled me aside.

"Elsie, you must understand that, though the world is cruel, there will always be hope. Always hope. Got that?"

I nodded furiously, though unsure how in the world this related to Fairyland. We soon got back to our game, and I almost forgot what he had just told me.

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It had been a lifetime since Mom had gone to get ready for her and Dads' dinner party, and me and Dad were giving up hope they would make it on time. But the second Mom opened the closet door, it was worth all the time she took. Her dress was a dazzling, vibrant, blue, decked with a jeweled hem. She had white heels on, and her hair was done in a simple knot. Mom's whole outfit was overall simple, cute, and effective. She was beautiful. "Wow," my dad said softly. He was gaping, like a codfish. My mom grinned. I ran over to her and buried my head into the folds of her gown, giving her a gigantic hug. At that moment I was sure my mom was a princess in disguise. "I still got it, don't I George?" She asked Daddy.

"Yep! You still got it, Mom!"

Dad, now laughing, loosened my grip from my mother and tossed me in the air. "Save me!" I yelled as he plunked me into my nannies arms. He bent over and gave me a wet, slobbery kiss.

"Be good, Elsie!"

"I will, Daddy!"

And with that, mom gave me a peck on the cheek, and left the house on dads' elbow.

It was later, when my nanny was tucking me into bed, that the phone rang. "I'll only be a second, dearie!" she called to me, rushing to pick up the phone. Everything went wrong from there. A social worker coming to our house, my nanny sobbing in a corner, and me being told what had happened. I never remembered the details, except that after the drive by shooting, my dad was found dead at the scene, and my mom found severely injured, with a bullet grazing her spinal cord. Why the killers targeted my parents, no one knew. The social worker explained that I would be staying in a foster home, only until my mom got better. But during all of this, I only really grasped three words: My father, dead.

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Coquille. Scnale. Guaske. He`j. Cochiglia. Apvalks. Kest. More then half a dozen words that really just mean one thing: shell.

They don't call me that to my face. But, I hear their whispers everywhere I go. Judging me. Asking me what happened, what made me retreat into myself. But I say nothing. I am too deep, drowning in a pool of my own sorrow, for them to ever understand me. So they ridicule me, and tease me. They tell each other that I am a shell of a body, breathing, eating, but never really alive. And I am starting to believe them.

It is my Mom and Dads' anniversary. I am in my room, silently mourning. Thinking. Tortured by my own memory. Then I hear him.

"Elsie, you must understand that, though the world is cruel, there will always be hope. Always hope. Got that?"

I remember I nodded. I remember how Dad saw that nod, and took it as a yes. I feel ashamed. Sick. I have broken my promise to Dad. I've held on to him far too long, when I knew the entire time this is not what he would want for me. I have dishonored the dead. So I cry. Curled into a ball on the floor, I wail. Tears stream down my face. I scream. People rush around me, coming to console me, and then there is silence. Shattering silence, as I become still. In my own way, that silence is my resolve to do what I should have done long ago.

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My name is Elsie Kraine. I am 14 years old. I go to Welkins Academy for girls, and I am in eighth grade. My father died when I was only six. From here on out, I pledge to be my own person. To stand up for what is right. To defend myself and others. To forget what is done. But most of all, I pledge to put my fathers' death behind me.