

Lynne bit the inside of her lip to the mechanical symphony that announced her father's death. She anticipated death would sound peaceful. This death was the squeak of cheap tennis shoes and nurses muttering about how the doctor should have listened to them.

"Miss, your father passed."

"I heard."

"Would you like us to leave so you can view the body?"

"The body?" She said, "so now that he's dead he doesn't have a name?" The nurse let out a deep sigh that smelled like stale chili.

"I've been Robert Joseph Cole's nurse for the past eight months. Never once did he mention having a daughter. Now, would you like us to leave so you can say goodbye?"

Much like her father Lynne was a coward, but her mother's aptitude for lying overtimes overshadowed it.

"Please."

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When Lynne was four years old her father held her against his chest in the fearful panic that a high fever causes. Her mother ran through the kitchen looking through thrift store baby manuals that were later used for kindling.

"We should take her to the doctor," her father said.

"We can't afford a doctor," her mother corrected.

"She's sick."

"I know."

They danced around different inexpensive solutions until Lynne's father wrapped her in an old green sweatshirt and walked to the bus station.

"St.Luke's," he said to the bus driver. "You have any idea how many more stops?"

"Sit down."

"I got a sick kid."

"I got a job to keep."

Robert was a man of few words and rash action. He pulled the yellow cord, and he and Lynne abandoned the bus.

"Pieces of shit," he said in between puffs of smoke. "That's what people are kid."

Robert never wanted to be a father. He never wanted to love one woman. He never wanted to pay for impromptu doctor's visits. His father, his namesake, told him a man is only born with so much honor. After a while it runs out, and a man become an animal. He said a man must live his life never knowing when the transformation would occur.

Robert never wanted his father to be right, but he never knew him to be wrong.

The two mile trek was met with little resistance from Lynne's aching body, but much discomfort from her father. His greatest fear was laying in his arms able to hear the rapid cadence of his

heartbeat. He tried readjusting her away from his heart for fear his cowardice could be heard, but Lynn's flushed face found it's way back every time. It was then that he heard the deep growl within him.

He set Lynne down on the grass, and began to pace up and down a small hill along the side of the road.

"I can't kid," he said shaking. "This isn't what I want. I can't be a dad. Bad dads make bad dads." Lynne, drowsy from fever became suddenly aware of her father's absence and bust into tears. "Shit," he said and the deep sigh of a father drowned out the call of the wild within him. He walked up to the hill where Lynne sat, and laid down on the grass. He rolled to the bottom of the hill and awaiting the familiar laughter of his only child. He found comfort in knowing that he could still make her life at a distance.

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This was Lynne's first memory. Her father rolling down a hill trying to make her laugh.

"Don't do this to yourself," she said. With her eyes clenched tight she stood up and starting walking until she felt herself bump into the end of his bed.

"I wrote you a letter," she said to him. "I went to school to become a writer, and I know you can't hear me, but mom thinks I should read this to you." Lynne's hands shook and she opened her eyes to see him.

He had less hair that she remembered, and a rounder face. She saw a few scars against his tan skin, and a tattoo of a lion on his left forearm. He looked like a stranger, but he did not look dead. Tired maybe, but not dead. Lynne read the letter out loud not longer out of a desire for her side of the story to be told, but out of the off chance that maybe it would bring him back.

Dear Father,

First and foremost you should know that I do not have your nose. I won the third grade spelling bee with the word "appellation", and during a seven-year-old-moment-of-spiritual-enlightenment I sold my soul to the devil in order to get closer to God. Secondly, you should know that for the first seven years of my life I thought you were God. I thought Jimmy Davis, the chubby boy across the street with too much money and not enough love was the devil. I was convinced my soul was trapped in the pink and white bike that you built me for my fifth birthday. I believed this because you loved building it so much. Also, when I was too young to understand, but just old enough to truly listen, mom said God was more concerned with our souls than our physical bodies.

After you left I made a deal with Jimmy that I would give him my bike if he would tell his dad, a local minister, that I needed you to come home. When I was little I asked you what a real man looked like, and you told me he worked with his hands. Jimmy's dad laid hands over stranger's faces and made them cry, but Mom said it was a good cry-so Jimmy's dad was a real

man. A man who knew a God that didn't leave after too many battles with uncertainty-so I took the trust I gave you and placed it in his callus free hands.

Sunday morning strangers on the television told me that God worked in mysterious ways, so I didn't expect you to come home immediately, but after I saw Sandra Middleton, the thinner richer version of me riding my bike in circles around Jimmy as he walked to school-I knew that you weren't coming home. Which, frankly I'm not too upset about. Father's have become terribly outdated, and even if I did have you I probably wouldn't talk about you. That's something else you probably don't know about me, I try desperately to fit in, but I'm so clever that everyone things I'm original.

However, that's not the reason I'm writing you. The truth is mom found God, and the doctors found cancer, and we spend most of our days here in the hospital eating tapioca pudding and watching reruns of 'Friends'. I don't mind the hospital. It's clean, and the nurses are friendly, but I've never really been brave so I spend most of my time in the parking lot. Mom has been teaching me to drive in moments of strength, but I've really only learned how to turn left-past the main entrance, the east and south towers, the giant bronze statue of Jesus inviting frozen children into his arms, and right back into parking lot 10 B. I spend most of my days turning left, and writing you this letter.

Mom talks about losing her breasts, but in her moments of weakness she confuses her breasts with her soul. So do I. I have mom's breasts. I doubt you want to hear that but it's true. I became a woman too early, and the boys noticed too soon, and none of them tell me I'm pretty but they tell me my tits are huge. I would like to think that I still have some of my soul left. Maybe, that's where my soul is, maybe I should just give it away.

I asked bronze Jesus if it would do me any good; hearing you voice, or seeing your handwriting. I asked bronze Jesus if he would search through old garages, and dumpsters and return my soul to me. Bronze Jesus never replied, there is only the echo of Mom's voice before the cancer and after the cigarettes saying gently to me that God is more concerned with with our souls than our actual bodies.

Affectionately Yours,

"She didn't die," Lynne said to her father's corpse. "Her breasts are gone though. They had to take them." She paused as if her father would reply. "They took them Dad. They took her soul." A nurse knocked on the door and briefly muttered 'nursing' before she barged in on Lynne's last memory of her father.

"They took her soul, and I gave mine away," she said with the strange nurse standing in the doorway. Lynne wiped her eyes and walked out the door. She took the familiar path to bronze Jesus where she confessed her sins just to hear them echo again his skin.