

The place where the world ended was not so strange. There was an eerie sense of serenity that blanketed the earth. I imagine this is what the Garden of Eden must have been like. Although spring was in full bloom, flowers sprinkling the earth like confetti, the leaves on trees fresh and full of life, it all seemed more vibrant than possible for the earth. Maybe this was some sort of heavenly pocket hidden on the planet. With all the vibrant colors my senses felt overloaded, one foot stumbled back and I wobbled with my hands outstretched to balance myself. To no avail I fell over, feeling like I had just played the star tripping game my friends and I all played as a child. The point of the game was to spin as fast as you could, and then have your friend randomly shine a flashlight at your eyes. Before you knew it, you were on the ground rolling in a fit of laughter because you couldn't remember the fall, feeling high on the thrill of playing a game your mother told you not to play because "you could hurt yourself" and once again you proved her wrong by being invincible.

Getting back up was difficult, the dizziness was nauseating. Managing to pull myself to my feet successfully I stood again staring off the edge of the world. I came to this heavenly place to sin. I wanted to jump. To end my life at the end of the world but the vertigo kept making me fall back. I wasn't sure I even had the courage to jump, I knew I was tired of living, I was tired of being alone. I thought of the constant hollowness that echoed inside of me on any given day. I thought of my alcoholic abusive mother, her abusive boyfriend, and my father who managed to escape but was too selfish to want me to go with him. I teetered at the edge, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Just as the vertigo was about to engulf me again, the world going black, someone whispered my name.

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## Love

Growing up there was no one I loved more than my father. I can remember the way he would sing me to sleep every night. His voice was deeper than most, sounding like something out of an old timey movie. My father would always scoop me up when it was time for bed, swing me around in his arms and plop me onto the bed making me go into a fit of giggles. I was daddy's little girl. I think my mother resented me for it. All my father's attention was no longer on her. At the time I did not know anything different. I thought all mothers were cold and harsh. Her eyes were ice blue, and her demeanor was just as frigid.

One of my favorite memories with my father, not that there are many to choose from, was when my father took me out for ice-cream after my kindergarten science project presentation. My project was showing how static cling worked. My father and I had spent nights coming up with the idea, he would surf the internet for ideas and ask me which ones sounded more fun. We ended up doing static electricity because the activity involved balloons. I picked a red balloon and blew it up all by myself. Next, my father tied a string around a cheerio and we taped it to the table. "Okay, so it says you have to rub the balloon around your hair so that it creates the static, then when you put it near the cheerio and move it slowly away the cheerio should follow it," he explained. Excited to try it out, the balloon was on my head in 2 seconds flat. My hairs clung to the balloon with the same strength that bugs had when they climbed the walls or walked on the ceiling.

My science project was not the coolest project that was shown, but my father still treated me to ice-cream. I knew exactly what I wanted, the mint kind that looked like a monster. It was

my favorite ice-cream, every other kind just looked so plain in comparison. “You know kiddo, you did a great job today. I’m very proud of you!” he told me while we waited in line.

“I know Daddy. I don’t think people saw the cheerio move,”

“They did sit far away. But I saw it move. You were so good up there,” he tickled my stomach. I went into a fit of pure laughter. I don’t think any kid had ever sounded so happy in the world than I did in that moment. When we got home my mother had left a note to my father, I wasn’t sure what it had said but it made my father cry.

### **Confusion**

I cannot pinpoint when my mother started drinking. She may have always done it, but I think there was a time that she was sober. I do remember waking up to the sound of shattering glasses and screaming. I pulled my baby blanket around my body and walked to the door. “I hate you!” my mother’s voice boomed, I swore it made the house rattle. I did not know what was going on, but I knew she was talking to my father, I did not know how it was possible for anyone to feel hate for him. Staying low in the shadows I slithered down the stairs to try and see what was going on. Fear rattled in me so much so I feared my mother may hear the rattling of my teeth. Her words were a jumbled mess, I remember thinking she was sick. That was the first time I saw my mother hit my father. When she did, I heard something so piercing it made my ears ache. It was only when they both froze did I realize it was me screaming. “You see what you did? Fucking pathetic get her in bed,” my mothers eyes were as piercing as my scream as she glared at me and instructed my father on what to do. She stormed off leaving the two of us. I didn’t know much, but I knew the weight of the world was on my father’s shoulders. He scooped me up and swung me around before pulling me close and wrapping me in his arms. We swayed

back and forth both crying. His warm tears pricked at the skin on my neck, I could feel all the heartache he felt with each tear.

“Daddy is Mommy mad at me?” I blubbered once we were in the safety of my room.

“No honey, Mommy is just... mad at the world,” he sighed.

“But why Daddy?” I noticed a cut on his arm, and poked it.

“I don’t know kiddo, I don’t know,”

“She can’t yell like that, not at you Daddy,”

“There’s a lot you don’t understand kiddo. One day you may,” he brushed my hairs back from my face. His palm warm against my cheeks. I imagined the warmth was his love for me.

“Daddy, I don’t like Mommy being mean. It makes me sad Daddy,” tears rolled down his face and he looked away. He was a hurting man, hurting for himself and the loss of love between my mother and him. He was hurting for me and how my mother was indifferent towards my existence. He was hurting in so many ways I would only one day be able to understand.

Two years later my father would leave. He left in the middle of the night without saying a word. I was eight years old. My mother was drunk on the couch. He just couldn’t take it anymore, I didn’t blame him. At eight years old I had already become an adult. Taking care of my drunk mother while father was at work. I would have to make her coffee and breakfast or else she would hit me. I had to clean the house when she passed out after I got home from school or she would scream at me for the mess she made while I was gone. By eight years old, I had taken on the weight of the world that my father once had.

When he left I wasn’t mad. I understood it. I had thought about running away too. Some nights I would write out a plan on where I would go and what I would pack, anything to escape

my mother. I felt like I was trying to escape Alcatraz, it was nearly impossible. I was confused. I didn't get why he wouldn't take me with him. I missed him so much. Without fail, my father would send me a birthday card, and a card for every holiday each year.

A week after my father left, a new man moved in. I was told I must call him Dad now. I was a volcano waiting to erupt when she told me that. My blood bubbled under my skin, enough to probably have a thermometer read that I have a fever. "He's not Dad!" I screamed at my mother for the first time in my life. The agony from the loss of my father, added to this new man who was covered from head to toe in tattoos, was too much to bear.

"You will do as you are told." my mother slurred. His cocky smile burned my retinas.

"He is not my dad." over the years I had grown bolder, I looked into her hollow eyes. It was no use trying to be strong. Trying to show my dominance was useless as every second of her life she was incoherent. In trying to be the bigger, more dominant person, I dug my own grave. Her cold ring struck my nose which instantly brought blood.

"Do as you are TOLD!" she went to swing at me again but I stepped back.

"Hey. Do not disrespect your mother!" his voice was deep and just as cold as my mother's eyes. I ran up the stairs into the bathroom and locked the door. Sliding down to the floor I finally let the tears flow. Now I could let them out without humiliation. I knew I didn't need to be the one humiliated but they would make me feel that. It was humiliating to have her as my mother, humiliating that I wasn't enough for my father to take me with him.

There was a knock at the door.

"Get out here and tell your father you're sorry!" her cackle echoed down the hall and seemed like it was never ending. For the first time I wished I was not alive.

## Anger

When I turned 12, my mother was pregnant with the new man's child. It was the only time I remember her being sober. To no avail, I was still the bane of her existence. By 17, Caiden was her entire world. Gone were her cold eyes unless they were gazed at me. The drinking started up again when the new man left. "He wasn't ready to take care of a child because you were such a brat!" she screamed at five in the morning on a Saturday. The birds had just begun to sing their morning songs, the sky was still dark and I wasn't sure if I was dreaming or not. The door swung open so fast it would have dented the wall if it hadn't been already. Groaning I rolled over, "what the fuck is your problem" I managed half asleep.

"You're the fucking problem. You're the whole reason he left me. You and your stupid father who doesn't leave you alone!" tears streamed down her face. Caiden was stomping his way up the stairs to see what was going on. I really did not want to deal with this, especially not this early in the morning.

By now the daily grind was me getting yelled at for something I had no control over. I could honestly say that I hated my mother. After years and years of abuse, both physical and emotional, I was no longer surprised by any of her behavior. Just trying to make her happy was pointless. She felt nothing towards me. I used to do so much to try and make her be happy she had me. I would show her all the 100's I got on my tests in school and she would just yell at me or throw it away. When I asked her to come to my honor society induction, she was too drunk to know what I said, and then took Caiden out for ice-cream the night of. I wasn't sure why I was trying so hard to get her love back. I didn't think I even loved her, I just wanted that acceptance that I never got from her and had only partially gotten from my father.

I think she was mad that my father never wrote to her. Sometimes I wish he didn't write to me either. I wasn't sure what to make of it, he never even put a return address on it so I could never write him back. He always sent me well wishes, and I guess through word of mouth he had heard of some things in my life, based on what he would say. It would make my mother furious if she got the mail and there was a letter for me. It resulted in many fights and lots of tears and threats. It didn't make sense to me, it was like he wanted to be part of my life, without actually being a part of it. What angered me even more, was that I had always been his little sidekick when he was around. We were like peanut butter and jelly, I had never looked up to someone so much in my life. In every letter he always said he wished it got better for me, and that he would help me in any way he could. Which didn't make sense because there was no way for me to ask for help from him. He said all the right things but his words were hollow. It took me too long to realize he probably didn't truly care about me, he was full of empty promises, and left me with someone who despised my existence.

"Go back to sleep." I demanded. She reeked of booze anyways, there was no use fighting, and I didn't have any fight left in me anyways

"Fucking bitch," she stammered and turned around. She walked right past Caiden and went to the bathroom where she would pass out with the shower on and I would let her. Caiden watched her walk into the bathroom, confused. He knew better than to ask, even though she adored him, with the new man having just left, Caiden somehow knew better. I felt bad, I knew what he would soon feel. The sadness, the confusion, the excitement hoping that one day his dad will come back. I sat up in bed and motioned him over to me. I pulled up my cover and had him

scooch into the bed with me and I held him close. I cried for him and the life he had, and prayed that it would get as bad as it had for me. For now he was safe.

### **Clarity**

When I first found the spot where the world ended I never wanted to leave. I ended up falling asleep in the overgrown grass. I eventually would do whatever I could to escape to that spot. I took my journal and wrote for hours. I plotted ways I could put an end to all. I wrote letters to my father there, I could never send them, the words were ice on paper, he didn't deserve my anger, he didn't deserve my goodbye. I didn't even write my mother one. I wrote Caiden one for each of his birthdays up until 18, and one to explain everything for when he was older. I hid the letters under a rock, part of me may have known I would never actually follow through.

The day I committed to doing it, I teetered at the edge, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Just as the vertigo was about to engulf me again, the world going black, someone whispered my name. When my eyes opened up again, Caiden's face was above mine, his chubby cheeks pulled down by gravity as he looked down at me. He whispered by name again and poked my stomach. "Yes Caiden?" my voice was just a whisper too, the fall had taken everything out of me. I figured the wind may have gotten knocked right out of me. I noticed a familiar scarring on his arm, one that looked just like ones I had. My mother had used him to put out a cigarette. I wasn't sure what caused it, but whatever it was it was not his fault. I pulled myself up, and grabbed him away from the edge. We sat in the field for a while, eventually he fell asleep to me playing with his hair. When he woke up he began to tell me about how mommy was screaming and so mad at him, he was confused at what he did wrong, how could he have done everything



right and it still was not good enough for her. I realized I never wanted Caiden to find the spot where the world ended when he was my age and had had enough. I realized although I had spent years hating him because I always believed he was everything I was not; he was wanted by my mother, he was loved by my mother, he was valued by my mother. All until he wasn't and her selfish desires were more important. Right now he would never understand why she used to love him and with the snap of a finger hated him. He wouldn't understand that she wasn't really her, she was the alcohol that coursed through her, and made her this monster. He would never understand why mommy didn't want him anymore, and maybe that is why he followed me here. I decided to call an old friend of mine, going out on a limb. I hadn't seen her in years, other than in passing. It was a weird sense of vulnerability I had never allowed myself to have, but I had to do it, not for me but for Caiden, so he would never have to know what it was like to feel how I have my entire life.

I didn't know it yet, but I had saved his life with that call. My mother had gone on a violent rampage and destroyed the entire house, setting fire to the upstairs. Had he not followed, or had he gone back home, he might not have made it, or worse he may have been taken by the state. I was only eighteen, but I began the process of figuring out how to care for him, I got a job and was able to get an apartment with a cousin I had managed to get in touch with. My life was forever changed by Caiden in ways I could have never imagined. He went on to be top of his class, and got into the college of his dreams. Life moved so much faster after leaving that house, we were never really sure what became of our mother, we didn't talk about her much, we had one another and a whole lifetime ahead of us.

