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### **The Teary-Eyed Bride**

“Your Father would say you look beautiful, honey. I wish so much that he could be here on your special day”, my Mother says as she squeezes my hand. It's apparent she's trying, but I can only muster half a smile. “Thank you Mom, me too.” My Father was a complicated man with love in his heart, but a bottle in his hand. From 9-5, he was my best friend, helping me with my math homework and dancing to the tunes of our favorite band, Queen. After that, it was like his shift was over and he'd punched out for the day. He was unrecognizable, shouting words I'd be scorned for even whispering under my breath.

One night, I overheard a conversation between my parents in the kitchen. “The excuses have gotten old, Daniel. Sarah doesn't deserve this and neither do I. Promise me you're going to get it together.” The air escaped my lungs awaiting his response. “I'll try my best Christina, I promise.” For a while, we believed him. We ate dinner at the table as a family and trusted his struggles were in the past. But then he started “working overtime.” This we later learned was code for completely plastered at some bar in town when his car was discovered on the side of the road with an oak tree through it. A classic example of why “what they don't know can't hurt them” is a fallacy. It hurt a lot and still does especially on days like today where his absence is all the more pronounced. With no father here to give me away, I'm left having to settle for Uncle Tim who smells like cigarettes instead.

Standing before the double doors, we listen for the gentle melody of my entrance song. It is no other than Love Of My Life by Queen, first introduced to me as a lullaby in the warm arms of my Father. The violinist begins and the notes greet my ears like an old friend, washing

childhood nostalgia over me. When Uncle Tim takes my arm, I imagine it looks like he's pulling me down the aisle. My feet may be taking steps, but mentally I'm in a state of delirium. My eyes don't see my fiancé, but a projected montage of memories of my Father. Hot tears trickled down my face that blind my vision, and cue me back to reality. I cannot marry, not without my Father's blessing which was buried with him after the accident. I release Uncle Tim's arm and bolt to the door. In the backroom, I find my Mothers bag and dig for her car keys.

Driving through town, everything reminds me of my Father. The parking lot he took me for my first driving lesson, The Macaroni Grill on Friday nights, and The Corner Store for a red cherry slushie on a hot summer's day. I pull into The Corner Store parking lot and find myself in a section of the store unfamiliar to me: The liquor aisle. The taste of alcohol has never stained my tongue, not since I saw firsthand what it did to my father. However, now it is the one thing that can bring me closer to him. To see what he saw every night when alcohol reeked from his breath. To feel whatever it was that made sacrificing his family so worth it.

The cashier rings me up and I plop myself onto the cool curb with the bottle in hand. Popping off the top, I take a big gulp. The alcohol may burn my throat, but nothing compares to the stinging betrayal of my father. "You broke your promise to Mom, Dad!! And to me, to all of us! I heard you that night in the kitchen, but that was just all lies wasn't it? All you did was lie when there was a god damn bottle in your hand." I take another gulp. "Today was my wedding Dad, well, it was supposed to be. Finally managed to find a man willing to take on all the emotional baggage you left me and I couldn't even find the courage to walk down the aisle." My head is spinning and my eyes, like a broken lens, cannot focus. Loneliness is no stranger to me, but never have I felt so hollow inside. My fiance? At the altar where I left him. My Mother? Could not bear to see me like this. And my Dad?--I grab my keys.

Stumbling off the pavement, I just barely make it to the car. It takes me three tries to put the key into the cylinder and then it hits me. I'm in the exact position my Dad was before there was always an empty chair at the dinner table. When I hear the rum of the engine, I place the car in gear and mutter "See you soon Dad."

Except I cannot step on the gas. "Gosh damn it! I can't even walk down an aisle and now this!" Pulling the gear stick into park, I roll down my window and chuck my keys as far from my grasp as possible. Guilt floods my already alcohol-contaminated bloodstream. All these years the grudge against my Father for getting behind the wheel has only grown. The grief from losing him scraped away pieces of my soul that left me so hollow, so greedy for his love, that I almost rode into the light the same way he did. However, his downfall was not just an accident, but a decision he chose to make and one I will not be repeating. No amount of time, no apology, or sympathy can undo the damage he caused. A fresh seed can be planted in place of the tree he killed, but I'll never forget and my Mom won't either.