

The Phone Call

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5:00pm Elizabeth

“Drive safe Dad, I'll see you at the potluck tonight at church!” I pressed end call on my phone and continued making my famous shepherds pie recipe, hoping it would taste as comforting as last years. Along with the shepherd's pie, I was also making a cranberry punch for all the kids. The fall potluck that typically happens every year the week before Thanksgiving, was my favorite church activity. Watching everyone socialize and eat food cooked by another, each dish made with love. While preparing my dish I couldn't help but think of my kids. I missed them but I was happy they were all making a living out in the world.

5:00pm Bobby

“Love you princess I'll see you at church tonight” I hung up the phone and took another sip of whiskey. “She'll kill you if she finds out you're drinking again Bobby, you know damn well she won't let you see your grandkids either” I sat up in my chair as sticky as it was, looked up at Earl and tried to remain calm. “Stay out of it Earl, she is my daughter and this is my life. I'm leaving, I gotta clean myself up before the potluck tonight anyway” I only got in three steps before I heard “Make sure you wash the whiskey off your breath while you're at it” Earl was laughing. Instead of picking a fight I thought of my daughter, of all my grandkids I once wasn't allowed to see. I walked out the bar into the cool yet crisp autumn air, the sun had set and I started stumbling to my truck. I got in and turned on the radio to 102.9 Maine's classic rock station

6:30pm Elizabeth

“Ok Erica I gotta call you back, I have to make sure my dad is on his way to the church. I have been waiting inside for 15 minutes and haven't heard anything from him” A couple clicks later

and I'm on the phone with my Father. "Hey are you on your way?" To my surprise with slurred words he replied "No I have to get a shower and stop at the grocery store to pick up some dessert" "Ok well be here soon everybody's waiting for you" I hung up reassured that he would be fine. My father was always pushing the clock but he was always here.

6:30pm Bobby

"Will do" I sat in my truck, the radio still blasting classic rock, I can't drive anywhere it's not safe. I will not call Elizabeth because she cannot know about the drinking, I need to be able to see my grandkids. So I called Earl in from the bar, as much as I hated him he was my friend, and my only chance at a free ride. I was hoping at least some part of him was sober. Five minutes later a smiling Earl came stumbling to my truck. "So you do need me" I should've known from the slurring of his words this was a bad idea. "Look Elizabeth cannot know about me drinking just take me home" I looked at Earl as he climbed into the driver's seat and turned on the truck. Immediately I realized this was a really bad idea but it was too late now.

7:30pm Elizabeth

As the night went on small talk and laughter filled the evening air, occasionally my mind switched to thinking about my father, no matter how late my dad was he was always somewhat punctual. Suddenly in the crowd of warmth, love, and laughter I felt a pulling weight of uneasiness settling in the pit of my stomach. I have to call my father. I stepped outside into the cool autumn air and called him. "Pick up, Pick up" nothing. I got nothing, five calls and they all go to voicemail. I went inside hiding the impending anxiety that was in the process of taking over my body.

8:00pm Elizabeth

Half an hour later I received a phone call, an unknown number.

“Is this Elizabeth?” a voice I didn’t recognize was full of deep sorrow and regret.

“Yes, who is this?”

“Is your father Bobby O’Conner?”

“Yes, what’s going on?” I already knew the answer but I had to ask. Something inside of me needed to ask that vital question. As my breathing slowly started to disappear he answered me.

“I am so sorry, your father was in a car accident, he didn’t survive”

I must have left the officer on the line for what felt like forever, my whole body dropped at the news, immediately my eyes filled with tears that came racing down my face. The air in my lungs suddenly disappeared, for the first time in my life it felt like I was dying.

8:30pm Elizabeth

I watched as Erica pulled into the church parking lot, got out of her car and took the phone from me. When she saw that I hung up she proceeded to sit down on the ground next to me. “I, I just don’t understand, he was fine! He was fine!” I couldn’t help but sit there and sob. “Elizabeth, there’s something you should know,” Erica said in a firm yet gentle voice. “What?” I said, wiping the tears from my face and the snot from my nose. “The police officer called me too, and explained what had happened and sent me over to watch you. He said a guy named Earl down at the bar claimed Bobby was drinking, so he drove Bobby home, except Earl had also been drinking” She had to be lying he was 3 years sober. “Earl actually made it, he survived the crash” I couldn’t tell if Erica was trying to show me the positive or if she was simply trying to give me the facts. Either way my body pulsed with anger.

“I don’t understand, he was sober for three years, three years Erica you don’t just throw that away!” I yelled at her. I honestly couldn’t help myself. “Where is he?” “Where is who?” Erica

replied as if she genuinely didn't know what I was talking about. "EARL" "Elizabeth listen ever since your mom died a year ago Bobby has been seen at the bar"

"I don't understand, of course he was sad but why wouldn't he come to me?" I couldn't believe it. "It's simple you are his daughter he doesn't want to put that burden on you" As true as Erica's words were they still hurt. "Now let's go home I think you've shed enough tears for one night"

Erica pulled me into my car and drove me home. I was done crying. I was more or less just filled with rage, why would a drunk man drive my dad home? Why didn't he call me? Why did he have to drink?

12:00pm

Now as I lie in bed eyes wide open I think of my dad in his last moments, blurry vision, slurring of words, no control over his body. Although he wasn't driving, why didn't he just call me? I probably would've been mad but I would have gotten over it eventually and my dad would still be here. As I lie in bed I go to God and I ask him why? Why my dad? I knew it was wrong to question God and his plans but my anger overpowered my faith at the time. These questions, no matter how painful the answer is, will forever stay unanswered and the hole in my heart may never be filled again.