

You and Your Father

You are his baby girl, he adores you. Even though he may not say it and you secretly long for it—he loves you.

Your mother and father are not together. In a way they never were together. At least you never witnessed it with your own two eyes. Your mother tells you stories about when they were in love. They were introduced by a friend of your mother and a cousin of your father. They met in a night club, a perfect scenery to start an obstinate relationship. On that night they talked so deeply about the things they promised they'll never tell another soul. They danced soulfully together to a song they would always remember as theirs. And they continued this ritual until the morning's sunlight shined over the hemisphere. Your mother was fascinated by your father's charming looks and his cocky demeanor. Even more the thing she liked most about him was his age. Your mother was always interested in being with a man older than her, after all that is what enticed on her to pursue your father. Your father is an earnest man; he knows what he wants, and what he wanted was your mother and so he received. They dated erratically for three years constantly on and off. While your father and mother were dating there was another woman. The one he called his love before your mother, his wife. In the end of your mother and father's love story they did not stay together; however, they will always be connected by their creation—you.

Winter, spring, autumn: you will spend the summer with your father. You will only see him three months out of the year, but that will not affect you. You will never truly feel that your father was your father, but you call him father because you feel obligated to do so.

Your father and mother will devise a spot and plan a halfway point. This is where he will pick you up in his beige Cadillac Sedan. This is the beige Cadillac Sedan that you will find yourself looking for on random roads. On the car ride he will ask you questions about your life to cut the tension of awkward silence.

“How is school?” he will ask you.

“Good.” You will answer.

“You got all A’s?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You get that gene from me.

You will have your favorite pink Cinderella glasses in your lap.

“Do you wear glasses?”

You will smile at his recognition of your favorite glasses.

“Yes. Sir, I do.” You will want to tell him the tale on how you lied to the eye doctor to get glasses, in order to fit in with your other family members. Although, you will not tell your father because you feel as though he doesn’t *deserve* to know that tale.

He will reply with, “You get that gene from your mother, I have 20/20 vision.” You will laugh and so will he. You are too young to know what 20/20 vision means but you will be too nervous to ask him for understanding.

He will pull the beige Cadillac Sedan into a sonic parking lot and asks if you want anything. You will give him your order of a chili cheese dog and tater tots and one small blue sonic slush. He

will order the same. You both will wait five minutes in awkward silence until you will receive your food from a skinny, pale male, who has no idea that in that very moment; he is your savior. Your father will not check the bag like you are used to with your mother. He will just simply back out the sonic pit and will drive off.

Soon you will enter the countryside of the city; this is the other half of you. The half of you that don't have any knowledge of. The magnolia trees will pass over the Cadillac's roof; you will see the passing shadows as they race with the sun. Your father makes various turns and soon you will end up in a neighborhood. A neighborhood where in between each house it has a great distance of uplifting grass and springing trees in between. The neighborhood shares one quiet road to still be identified as a collection. The beige Cadillac Sedan will stop to man with a familiar face. Your father seems to know him. He rolls down your side window and speaks to the man with the familiar face. He will introduce you as his daughter, his *baby girl*. The man will never know of you, but he will know of your brother. The one your father produce with the first woman he called his love; you know before your mother. You speak to the man with the familiar face. While doing so he will reach out and shake your so small and so fragile hand. Your father and the man will say their goodbyes.

While you and your father ride in the beige Cadillac Sedan; not much talking will be done. And For what is just a five-minute car ride will feel like forever.

You finally reach the section of the neighborhood you recognize as the other half of you. On the left you see the teal blue, metal trailer with a home-built wooden deck. It is your grandmother's house – no not the one you call mama and who braids your hair. Not the one that your memory resides with love and homemade sweet potato pie. This grandmother however you will address simply as “grandma”.

On the right side of the road you will see a one story red and white, bricked house. In the front of the house it will have two asymmetrically steps welcoming you inside. That is your father's house. Your father will turn into the driveway of his house. When you exit the beige Cadillac Sedan, you will place your feet on countless rocks with dust buried underneath. Across the horizon you will see green patches of grass with a garden dividing the middle. *These are your roots.*

When you enter your father's house, you will be greeted with the living room. The living room with only one couch with four seats and a flat screen television mounted on the wall. Your father will walk into the dining room that is to the left of him. The dining room that only has a table with four chairs surrounding it. You will sit down in the chair and begin eating your food. Your father will not sit down instead he will make his way into the kitchen. When he is finished in the kitchen, he will enter the dining room table with a bottle of whiskey in his hand. He will take his blue sonic slush that he ordered and spike it with the whisky. "This is better," is what he will say to you as he takes a sip from the sonic slush. You will laugh and hope that he sits down at the table with you. He will not, instead he will take his food and go down the long hallway that you will never get to see.

After you are finished eating, your grandmother will come get you and take you across the street to her house; this is where you will rest your head at night. You will never stay the night at your father's house. You will never know why but you will not repudiate either.

The next day your grandma will wake you out of your precious sleep and ask you to go to Piggly Wiggly with her. You will feel drowsy, but you will not say no because you will feel obligated to go. At Piggly Wiggly she will pick up ingredients: vanilla abstract, coco powder, flour, milk, eggs. You will ask her what she is making with these ingredients; she will answer a

chocolate cake. She will check her grocery list that she made. Just like your other grandma does when you go shopping with her. Your grandmother will tell you to stand in the checkout line as she goes to search for her final item. She will meet you at the checkout line and pay for her groceries and you both will exit Piggly Wiggly. It will be a short car ride back to your grandma's house; she is a garrulous person.

At your grandmother's house you will see her starting to prepare the ingredients for the chocolate cake. You will feel excitement and ask her to help. Glad that you asked she will say of course. Together you and your grandmother will bake the chocolate cake. This would be the reason that chocolate cake is your favorite. Later, she will prepare you dinner: spaghetti, squash, cornbread, and chicken. She will offer you some tomatoes as you wait for dinner. That night you will go to sleep content. You will feel finally comfortable here; you'll finally know the other half of you.

That morning you will not be awoken out of your precious sleep by your grandmother. You will get out of bed and travel down the dark hall, following the light coming through the screen door. When you arrive, you will find your grandmother and father sitting on the homebuilt deck. You will hear them speak your mother's name. You will hear them mock her weight and compare it to how small she was when she was younger. They will then babble on about her past life decisions and how she was a fool to have you at such a young age. They will begin to discuss you. They will talk about how they don't understand why you are so quiet. They will ridicule your speech disability and will fault it on how your mother raised you. Most importantly they will not observe you standing in the doorway. They will not notice the tears ebbing on your virgin skin. You will not make your presence known. You will simply and inaudibly make your way to the room where you resided, and call your other grandmother; yes, that one. You will call

her and tell her that you are ready to leave. She will ask you why, but you will not give her the honest answer. You will simply say that you miss her as she will understand and come collect you. You will swear to yourself to never return to your father's house.

The summers will become hotter, the winters will become shorter, and autumn and spring will only be a thought that passes through your mind: you will have not seen your father, keeping your promise to yourself. You will no longer address him as father; you will avoid the pronoun while speaking to him. To others you will mention him by his first name or address him as your sperm donor. Once every blue moon you will wonder how your name would sound with his last name.

On Thanksgiving and Christmas your siblings will visit their fathers' house; however, you will stay with your mother. For Christmas you will receive nothing from your father, not even a phone call. On your birthday his wish will always be the last one you receive. Your mother will have to remind him every year. She will not tell you; however, you will discover the messages while searching her phone. Your mother will talk to you about your father; she will always tell you the truth about him. She will tell you that he is not perfect, but he is trying. You will never see any proof of his trying.

You and your father will hardly speak; when you do it will be only over the phone. The phone calls you do answer will be short-lived. He will ask you about school, your grades, and your other siblings and occasionally add in your mother.

“Hello it's your father.”

“Hi it's your daughter.”

“When is the next time you are out of school? Maybe you can come down and spend some time with your grandma?” He will say to you after the minute of small talk.

“I’m not really sure I will have to check the calendar, but I will see.” You will respond with no intention of checking. This will be only something you will say to accelerate the conversation.

A week, a month, a decade— you will still have not seen your father. You will feel like something is missing in your life; a hole that he can only fill. When you start searching for suitors, you will look for him in everyone. The suitors that you will choose will be distant, confine about their feelings, and will have no interest in who you truly are. You will get your heart broken frequently. You will find yourself asking the Lord why and asking yourself how. You will despise father-daughter dances. You will despise the relationship that your friends have with their father. You will despise your siblings for mocking you about not having a father. You will despise your mother for bringing him up randomly. You will despise your 20/20 vision; you know that gene that you received from him.

You will dread his birthday; you will dread the feeling of obligation to call him; you will dread wanting him in your life. You will question why he doesn’t call. You will question why he doesn’t show up at your birthday party, specifically your sixteenth birthday party. You will question why he doesn’t love you. You will develop depression for unknown reasons. You will develop trust issues. You will never know if someone truly loves you or it’s just another absurd word.

You will want to feel true happiness. You will want to trust people other than your mother. You will want to open your heart to others. You will want to be loved by someone other than your mother. You will want to feel respected by your suitors. You will want to learn things about your

family on your father's side. You will want to know if the reason why you are so tall is because of him. You will want to know if the reason why you love to write is because of him. You will want to know if he likes photography as much as you do. You will want to know if he listens to the same music as you or did, he ever play an instrument. You will want him to know your accomplishments and wonder if he would be proud; how well you are doing in school; and how you have been an honor roll student your entire life. You will wonder if he stills address you as his baby girl if the man with the familiar face asks about you. You will wonder if he has replaced you with another baby-girl. You will wonder if he thinks you're beautiful. You will wonder if he cares about you. You wonder if he loves you.

You will soon realize that this hate towards your father is a blockade of finding your happiness and you'll decide to call him. You will be hesitant; you will contemplate on should you really do this. You will realize that in order to know who *you* really are; you must know *him*. You will be frightened and anxious. You will question if he even wants to speak to you. But you will remind yourself that you are not calling your father for his validation. You are calling your father for validation from *yourself*. You are calling him for those pressing questions to be answered. For this blockade to be destroyed, and for you to find true happiness.

You will pick up the phone and search your contact list for his first name. The phone will ring for three tones and you will consider hanging up. Until the sound of a familiar voice appears, your father's voice.

"Hello?"

"Hello, I did not expect to hear from you. How are you doing?"

"Yeah, I just wanted to check on you. I'm doing fine, how are you?"

“I’m living life, just trying to make it through. It’s been a long time since we last talk.”

“Yeah, too long.”

“Well I’m at work and they’re calling me, I will have to call you later

“Oh, okay that’s fine.”

“Before I go, I just want you to know that I love you baby-girl.” Your father will say to you.

However, you will not respond, but you will call him again.