

ONE:

THE SURGEONS COULDN'T GET ANYWHERE NEAR THE BULLET. THE BRAIN SCANS WERE STEADY, BUT THE SWELLING AROUND THE WOUND WAS MASSIVE. IT WAS A SELF INFLICTED WOUND. AN ATTEMPTED SUICIDE THAT FELL SHORT OF DEATH. LEAVING THE SORROW TO JUST LINGER FOR DAYS.

SARA BEY'S MORNING STARTED AT DAWN AND ALREADY HAD BEEN LONG, WHEN SHE FOUND OUT ABOUT HER FATHER'S ATTEMPTED SUICIDE. NOW SHE WOULD HAVE TO SPEND MOST OF HER DAYS IN THE HOSPITAL BY HIS SIDE WAITING FOR HIM TO EITHER PULL THROUGH OR DIE.

SARA OVERHEARD THE DOCTOR DESCRIBING THE PROCEDURE TO A COLLEAGUE, BUT STOPPED ABRUPTLY WHEN HE SAW HER. SHE REALIZED HE STOPPED FOR HER BENEFIT, BUT SHE REALLY WANTED TO HEAR THE DETAILS. SARA UNDERSTOOD THAT IT ONLY TOOK SECONDS FOR THE BULLET TO ENTER THE SKULL, BUT IT'LL TAKE DAYS AND SEVERAL ATTEMPTS TO REMOVE IT. THERE WAS NOTHING DIFFICULT ABOUT THAT STATEMENT.

SARA BEY HAD BEEN THROUGH SO MUCH AND IT WAS HER FATHER WHO TOOK THE EASY WAY OUT. OR AT LEAST TRIED TO TAKE THE EASY WAY OUT. SARA WANTED HIM TO LIVE, NOT BECAUSE SHE WOULD MISS HIM, BUT SO HE COULD SUFFER LIVING JUST AS MUCH AS SHE DID.

SARA LOST HER MOTHER SEVERAL YEARS AGO TO OVARIAN CANCER, AND SHE WAS ALSO ROBBED AND RAPED IN A HOME INVASION. SHE WAS IMPREGNATED BY ONE OF THE MEN, AND ELECTED NOT TO GO THROUGH WITH THE PREGNANCY. HER HUSBAND COULDN'T LIVE WITH THE HORRIBLE IMAGES AND THE RAPE SO HE DIVORCED HER, BUT DID LEAVE HER WITH EVERYTHING.

"AND HE WANTS TO CHECK OUT?" SHE WHISPERED WITH DISGUST.

HER LIFE WAS SHATTERED AND HE TOOK THE ONLY WAY OUT. IT WAS VERY SELFISH OF HIM AND THE DISGUST GREW LIKE A FUNGUS INSIDE HER. SHE SAT IN THE WAITING AREA ALONE AND EVERYTHING AROUND HER SEEMED SO BLACK AND WHITE. NOTHING HAD SUBSTANCE AND NOTHING HAD COLOR. IT WAS AS IF SHE WERE TRAPPED IN A NIGHTMARE, A HAUNTING.

"DO YOU WANT TO PLAY?"

A SMALL CHILD WITH OLIVE SKIN AND LONG BROWN HAIR STOOD TO THE LEFT SIDE OF SARA BEY. SHE WAS WEARING A BLACK AND WHITE DRESS AND A WHITE RIBBON HOLDING HER HAIR BACK. SHE WAS ODDLY OUT OF PLACE, AND TO ASK HER IF SHE WANTED TO PLAY WAS INAPPROPRIATE.

WHAT THE HELL IS A CHILD LIKE YOU ASKING ME IF I WANT TO PLAY DOING IN THE HOSPITAL? THERE ARE SICK PEOPLE HERE AND THERE ARE DYING FAMILY

MEMBERS. YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED OF YOURSELF. WHERE THE HELL ARE YOUR

PARENTS? I THINK I NEED A FEW WORDS WITH THEM!

SARA BEY SAID NONE OF THAT, EVEN THOUGH SHE THOUGHT ABOUT IT. SHE JUST LOOKED AT THE CHILD AND A HINT OF FAMILIARITY STRUCK HER. OF COURSE SHE DIDN'T KNOW THE CHILD, BUT SHE SEEMED FAMILIAR. STRANGELY FOR A MOMENT, WHEN THEIR EYES CONNECTED EVERYTHING AROUND THEM SEEM TO JUST VANISH, AND ALL THE FOCUS THEY COULD MUSTER JUST BELONGED TO

THEM. THEIR EYES WERE ENGAGED FOR A FEW SECONDS, BUT THERE WAS A LIFE TIME DANGLING IN FRONT OF THEM. SARA COULDN'T EXPLAIN IT SO SHE HAD TO PULL HER GAZE AWAY. SHE IMMEDIATELY TOOK HER EYES OFF THE LITTLE GIRL AND STARED AT A VENDING MACHINE. SHE TOOK SEVERAL DEEP BREATHS AND SLOWLY TURNED BACK TO FACE THE YOUNG CHILD.

"HELLO?"

THE YOUNG GIRL WAS GONE. SARA BEY FELT MOMENTARILY EMPTY. SHE COULDN'T KEEP STARING INTO THE CHILD'S FACE, BUT SHE DIDN'T WANT THE CHILD TO LEAVE.

"LITTLE GIRL," SHE CALLED. "HELLO."

THERE WAS NO SIGN OF THE CHILD.

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SARA BEY COULDN'T UNDERSTAND THAT PULL THE CHILD HAD ON HER. IT WAS A DEEP PULL WITHOUT REASON NOR LOGIC, BUT NEVERTHELESS IT WAS THERE. SHE WANTED TO ASK THE CHILD WHAT HAD SHE DONE TO HER, AND MEAN IT IN SEVERAL WAYS. THE ANGER AT FIRST, AND THEN THE NEED TO LOOK AWAY FROM THE CHILD, BUT REALLY NOT WANTING TO LOOK AWAY. EVERYTHING WAS JUST ODD. TOO ODD.

SARA STOOD UP FOR A MOMENT AND LOOKED AROUND. THERE WERE VERY LITTLE PEOPLE WORKING AT THE HOSPITAL THAT DAY SO SHE DECIDED AGAINST ASKING ANYONE IF THEY HAD SEEN A YOUNG CHILD.

WHEN SHE SAT BACK DOWN SHE HAD A STRONG DESIRE TO SEE THAT CHILD AGAIN. IT WAS SO STRONG, THE DESIRE, THAT IT FELT LIKE A PHYSICAL ACHE. ALMOST LIKE WHEN YOU'RE STARVING FOR SOMETHING TO EAT AND THERE IS NOTHING AROUND SO YOUR BODY SHAKES. IT WAS EXACTLY THAT TYPE OF DESIRE.

"MY GOD," SHE WHISPERED. "I MUST BE GOING CRAZY. OR MAYBE THE STRESS OF MY FATHER'S ATTEMPTED SUICIDE HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT. GOD JUST HELP ME THROUGH THIS."

IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR SARA BEY TO GET THE IMAGE OF THAT CHILD OUT OF HER MIND, BUT SHE HAD TO. SHE COULDN'T HELP NOTICING WHEN THE CHILD'S GREEN EYES WIDENED SOMETHING INSIDE HER WANTED TO BLURT OUT INCOHERENT WORDS.

"DO I KNOW THAT CHILD?" SHE ASKED HERSELF. "DOES THAT CHILD KNOW ME?"

SHE THOUGHT ABOUT IT FOR A MOMENT AND CONCLUDED THAT THEIR MEETING WAS INDEED BY DESIGN. THE REASON WAS STILL UNAPPARENT, BUT THERE WAS NO QUESTION ABOUT IT.

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Two:

THE NEXT DAY, SARA BEY HAD TO SEE A PSYCHOLOGIST. IT WAS IN A PIECE OF MAIL SHE READ LAST NIGHT. SHE THOUGHT SHE HAD DEALT WITH THE LAST OF THEM. THEN SHE WONDERED IF SHE WAS THE PATIENT. AFTER EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED TO HER, SHE NO LONGER EXHIBITED VISIBLE SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS. MAYBE THE DOCTOR WANTED TO TALK TO HER ABOUT HER FATHER, AND WHAT LED UP TO THE SUICIDE ATTEMPT.

SHE FOLDED THE LETTER AND STUCK IT INTO HER PURSE. SHE HAD TO MAKE A DECISION. SHOULD SHE VISIT HER FATHER FIRST, OR SEE THE DOCTOR? IT DIDN'T MATTER TO HER EITHER WAY, BUT SHE DID WANT STRUCTURE, OR AT LEAST CONFORMITY.

WHEN SARA LOOKED INTO THE MIRROR IN THE HALLWAY TO CHECK HER MAKE-UP, SHE SAW HER MOTHER'S FACE. IT WAS THERE, NOT IN HER PLACE, BUT BESIDE HER. HER MOTHER WAS PHYSICAL, BECAUSE WHEN SHE GASPED AND LATCHED ONTO HER MOTHER'S SHOULDER, THERE WAS SUBSTANCE.

THEY TOOK A LOOK AT EACH OTHER AND THEN MELTED INTO EACH OTHERS ARMS LIKE LONG LOST LOVERS.

"MOTHER..." SARA SQUEEZED HER TIGHTLY. "I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S REALLY YOU. OH GOD, TELL ME I'M NOT DREAMING? MOM, IS IT REALLY YOU?"

SARA BEY COULDN'T HELP IT. SHE JUST STARTED CRYING UNCONTROLLABLY.

IT WAS A GOOD CRY, A HAPPY CRY, A DELUSIONAL CRY. HER MOTHER, WHO DIED OF OVARIAN CANCER SEVERAL YEARS AGO, THERE? IT WAS AN DELUSIONAL CRY INDEED.

"MOTHER, HOW CAN IT BE?"

SARA BEY'S MOTHER JUST PUT HER FINGERS TO HER MOUTH AND STARTED TO SOB. SHE WAS SHAKING HER HEAD SLOWLY FROM SIDE TO SIDE AS SHE JUST STARED INTO HER DAUGHTER'S LIGHT GREEN EYES.

"OH, GOD NO, THIS CAN'T BE TRUE," SARA SHUTTING HER EYES AND THEN OPENING THEM UP TO SEE IF HER MOTHER WAS STILL THERE. "HOW CAN IT BE, MOTHER?"

SARA'S MOTHER JUST CONTINUED COVERING HER MOUTH AND SLOWLY SHAKING HER HEAD. SHE TOO COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS HAPPENING, AND WHY SHE WAS ABLE TO SEE HER DAUGHTER.

"MOM, I MISSED YOU," SHE SOBBED AS SHE FOUGHT BACK THE NAUSEA THAT WAS OVER COMING HER. "I MISSED YOU SO MUCH."

AT FIRST, SARA BEY COULDN'T SEE THE RADIATION POISON THAT ONCE SCARRED HER MOTHER'S FACE. THEN IT SLOWLY BECAME VISIBLE. THE CHEMOTHERAPY

LEFT HER SO DISFIGURED. IT FELT EVEN MORE DISTURBING RELIVING WHAT SHE HAD ALREADY LIVED.

HER BRUISED AND SWOLLEN EYES WERE ALMOST ROLLED BACK INTO HER LIDS JUST LIKE THE LAST NIGHT SARA SAW HER ALIVE. BACK THEN SHE AVOIDED LOOKING INTO THOSE PAINFUL EYES, BUT NOW SHE WANTED TO. SHE REMEMBERED THE HOLES ON THE SIDE OF HER FACE AND THE DRY SKIN THAT SEEMED TO BE CHIPPING AWAY LIKE CHEAP PAINT.

SARA BEY'S EYES GREW WIDE, TRANSFIXED. SHE WANTED TO SEE HER MOTHER AGAIN AND SHE WOULD WELCOME THE CANCER RIDDLED WOMAN THAT DIED ON HER. SHE COULD SAY GOODBYE THE RIGHT WAY.

"MOTHER, I WAS WEAK THE NIGHT YOU DIED," SHE STARTED. "I COULDN'T SAY GOODBYE TO YOU THEN. BUT I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU AND I WANT TO SAY GOODBYE THE RIGHT WAY. ME HOLDING YOU AND KISSING YOU INSTEAD OF RUNNING OUT OF THAT ROOM LIKE A FRIGHTENED CHILD."

HER MOTHER SMILED THE BEST SMILE SHE COULD.

"MAYBE THAT'S WHY YOU CAME BACK," SHE SAID. "TO GIVE ME ANOTHER

CHANCE AT GOODBYE.”

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SUDDENLY THE WRINKLES WERE CLEAR AND THE PATCHY SKIN RETURNED TO HER MOTHER'S FACE. IT WAS A CLEAR REMINDER TO SARA, WHAT DEATH CAN LEAVE BEHIND. SHE LOOKED INTO HER MOTHER'S EYES AND NOTICED THE BLOOD DRAINING FROM HER FACE.

“GOD, PLEASE,” SARA WHISPERED.

HER MOTHER STEPPED A FOOT CLOSER AND SARA TURNED AWAY BRIEFLY. WHEN SHE TURNED BACK TO FACE HER MOTHER, A CRAMP OF REVULSION STARTED TO EAT AWAY AT HER STOMACH.

SARA BEY'S MOTHER SQUEEZED HER ARM AND TRIED TO FORM WORDS, BUT NOTHING CAME OUT. HER SUBSTANCE WAS TURNING INTO SMOKE AND SUDDENLY SHE JUST VANISHED.

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THREE:

WHEN HER MOTHER VANISHED THERE WAS A SLIGHT MENTAL STRUGGLE. IT DIDN'T LAST FOR TOO LONG, BUT IT WAS THERE. IT WAS THERE REMINDING HER OF INSANITY. SHE KNEW SHE SAW HER MOTHER EVEN THOUGH IT HELD ITS STRETCH OF CREDIBILITY. SARA BEY WASN'T GOING TO DOUBT IT FOR ONE MINUTE. NOT ONE SINGLE MINUTE.

SHE WALKED OUT HER FRONT DOOR DECIDING TO STOP BY THE HOSPITAL FIRST. SHE LOOKED UP AT THE GRAY SKY AND SNIFFED IT LIKE A WOLF SNIFFING THE DARK FOR A MEAL. THERE WAS A HAUNTING CHILL THAT FILLED THE MORNING SKY, AND FOR SOME STRANGE REASON, SHE WAS A PART OF IT. IN THAT THERE WAS NO DOUBT.

“FATHER, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?” SHE WHISPERED. “WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME?”

WHEN SHE GOT TO THE HOSPITAL THERE WAS AN AMBULANCE RUSHING IN A TEENAGE BOY. THE BOY WAS SHOT IN THE CHEST AND BLEEDING BADLY AND THERE WASN'T TOO MUCH THE DOCTORS COULD DO. SARA BEY LOOKED AT THE BOY AND THE BOY LOOKED BACK AT HER. THERE WAS A BRIEF MOMENT OF A MENTAL COMMUNICATION. HE WAS IN AGONY AND SHE FELT HIS PAIN.

“AM I GOING TO DIE?” THE BOY CALLED TO HER. “SARA, AM I GOING TO DIE?”

HER EYES FLICKERED INVOLUNTARILY AS IF SHE WAS HEADING FOR A STROKE EPISODE.

“WHAT?”

“AM I GOING TO DIE?”

SARA BEY RECOILED, HER EYES WIDENING, AS IF SHE HADN'T HEARD CORRECTLY. DID THE BOY CALL HER BY NAME? HOW COULD HE HAVE POSSIBLY KNOWN HER NAME?

“DID YOU SAY SARA?”

THE BOY NODDED EMPHATICALLY.

“HOW, HOW DO YOU KNOW ME?” SHE ASKED AS SHE WALKED TOWARD THE BOY IGNORING THE EMERGENCY TEAM AROUND HER. “TELL ME.”

“YOU TELL ME...” HIS VOICE TRAILED.

"I'M LOSING HIM!" SHOUTED A DOCTOR.

SARA LOOKED UP AND SAW A DARK IMAGE COMING DOWN AND REMOVING A LIGHT FROM THE BOY. IT HAD TO BE A SPIRITUAL LIGHT, BUT SHE WASN'T SURE. THE BOY OPENED HIS EYES AND LOOKED ONE MORE TIME AT HER.

"YES," SHE SAID SADLY. "YOU'RE GOING TO DIE, NOW."

AND HE DID.

ONE OF THE EMERGENCY MEDICAL TEAM MEMBER FLASHED A WICKED GRIN THAT MADE HER BODY QUIVER. IT WAS A MENTALLY DESTRUCTIVE GRIN AND IT HAD TEETH. SHE TURNED AWAY AND WALKED TOWARD THE SLIDING DOUBLE DOORS AND ENTERED. SARA RACED FOR THE ELEVATORS AND CAUGHT ONE BEFORE THE DOOR CLOSED. SHE HOPPED IN AND PRESSED THE THIRD FLOOR BUTTON.

"WHAT THE HELL IS GOING?" SHE HALF WHISPERED. "I'M SEEING THINGS, TALKING TO THE DEAD AND KNOWING WHEN A LIFE IS ABOUT TO EXPIRE. MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE CHOSEN TO SEE THE DOCTOR FIRST. MAYBE I DO NEED SOME MENTAL HELP."

SARA BEY KEPT PRESSING AWAY AT THE NUMBER THREE AND THEN REALIZED THAT HER FATHER WAS ON THE FOURTH FLOOR.

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FOUR:

IT WAS NEARLY NINE IN THE MORNING AND SARA BEY FINALLY GOT OFF THE ELEVATOR. THE FOURTH FLOOR. SHE STOPPED AT THE INFORMATION DESK TO CONFIRM THE ROOM NUMBER, BUT EVERYONE WAS JUST TOO BUSY TO PAY ANY ATTENTION TO HER. IT WAS PROBABLY BECAUSE HER FATHER WAS THE COWARD WHO TRIED TO KILL HIMSELF. HE WAS THE MAN WITH THE BULLET IN HIS BRAIN. THE MAN THE DOCTORS ARE TRYING TO KEEP ALIVE. HOPING THAT THE NEXT TIME HE TRIES IT, HE WILL SUCCEED.

SHE STOPPED AT A VENDING MACHINE FOR A CUP OF COFFEE. WHEN THE COFFEE DRIPPED SHE REALIZED SHE REALLY NEEDED IT. THE SMELL WAS FANTASTIC AND SO WELCOMING. SHE DIDN'T LET IT DRIP ALL THE WAY AS SHE TOOK THE CUP AWAY FROM THE DRIPPING SPOUT AND TOOK A LONG SIP. THE COFFEE WAS VERY HOT, BUT SARA DIDN'T MIND IT AT ALL. IN FACT, SHE RELISHED IN IT.

SARA SAT DOWN TO FINISH OFF HER COFFEE BEFORE SHE WENT IN TO SEE HER FATHER. IT WAS JUST A MOMENT OF ESCAPE FOR HER. THERE WAS NO DISRESPECT INTENDED. SHE JUST NEEDED A LITTLE TIME TO CATCH HER BREATH. SHE LOOKED TOWARD THE ELEVATOR AND SHE CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF HER EX-HUSBAND. SHE WAS ALMOST READY TO SHOUT OUT TO HIM, BUT SHE HELD IT BACK. EVEN THOUGH THEY HAD A GOOD MARRIAGE, HE LEFT HER WHEN SHE NEEDED HIM MOST.

SHE RESTED HER HEAD BACK AND SHE COULDN'T HELP BUT TO THINK ON THE GOOD DAYS OF HER MARRIAGE. THEY LOVED ONE ANOTHER AND SHE SO MISSED THAT. HER EYES CLOSED AND HER MIND DRIFTED BACK TO THOSE DAYS. IT WAS AS IF SHE WAS RELIVING THE MOMENTS.

SARA, BENT OVER THE STIR FRY THAT SHE HAD BARELY TOUCHED, RECOVERED HERSELF, NOW AWARE OF THE SCENE SHE HAD MADE AND OF THE

ATMOSPHERE ABOUT HER, REDUCED TO A CLATTER OF KNIVES AND FORKS AND THE KITCHEN SOUNDS THAT ENVELOPED THE SITUATION.

SCOTT MADE A PRETENSE OF EATING BUT REMAINED SILENT, AFRAID OF SAYING ANYTHING THAT WOULD ROUSE HER TO WORDS. HE WAS AFRAID OF A BREAKDOWN OR GOD KNOWS WHAT.

"I'M TRYING," SHE SAID.

"I SEE, AND AGREE," SCOTT QUICKLY ADDED.

"I AM 33 YEARS OLD AND NOW I FEEL LIKE AN OLD MAID," SHE CONTINUED AS SHE PUSHED HER DINNER AWAY. "I NEED A LITTLE MORE SPICE."

"SEASONING?"

"DAMN IT SCOTT," SHE BURIED HER FACE IN THE PALMS OF HER HANDS JUST FOR A FEW SECONDS. "DO I HAVE TO SPELL IT OUT?"

"SARA, OUR MARRIAGE IS GREAT, WE HAVE EVERYTHING WE NEED."

SARA'S KITCHEN WAS WARM AND SMELLED FAINTLY OF APPLES. SHE STOOD UP AND WALKED OVER TO THE SINK. SHE STARTED WASHING THE DISHES.

"SO," SHE SAID. "WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?"

"YOU GOT UP WITHOUT FINISHING DINNER?"

"NO, WE NEED EXCITEMENT."

"I TOOK YOU TO THAT ITALIAN OPERA, YOU KNOW THE ONE."

"MY GOODNESS SCOTT, WHY DON'T YOU JUST TAKE A FLYING FUCK AT A ROLLING DOUGHNUT!"

"IF IT'LL HELP, I'LL DO IT."

SHE LAUGHED.

"I SEE THAT WONDERFUL SMILE NOW," SCOTT SAID. "LISTEN SARA, SOMETIMES LIFE GETS BORING, BUT SPICE WILL COME IN TIME. WE DON'T HAVE TO FORCE IT."

"I DON'T WANT YOU TO FALL OUT OF LOVE," SHE SAID SOFTLY.

"YOU COULDN'T PUSH ME OUT OF LOVE WITH YOU," HE REPLIED JUST AS SOFT.

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SARA AND SCOTT LIVED IN A SMALL IOWA TOWN NEAR CATLIN BAY.

THERE WERE SOME SMALLER TOWNS BETTER LOOKING THAN THEIR AREA, BUT NOT BY FAR. THEY LIVED IN A VICTORIAN HOME THAT WOULD SOME DAY SUCCUMB TO SUCH A VIOLENT EVENT THAT WILL RENDER THEIR FUTURE HOPELESS. THEY HAD A LONG BLACK IRON FENCE THAT SEEM TO STAND GUARD OVER THEIR PROPERTY. GIVING THEIR HOME A DOMINANT PRESENCE. THERE WERE TREES AND SHRUBS AND FLOWER BEDS ALONG THE FRONT YARD. THEY WERE SOMBER AND WET, BUT DURING THE SUMMER DAYS THEY FROLICKED WITH GROWTH AND COLOR. THE HOME WAS WELL KEPT AND NEAT. EVEN THE DOG DROPPINGS WERE AFRAID TO STAY PUT AS THE RAIN WASHED THEM INTO THE GUTTER.

THOSE WERE THE BEST DAYS OF HER LIFE. SCOTT HAD MADE HER FEEL LIKE A SPECIAL WOMAN. DURING THOSE TIMES SHE WAS.

SHE SNAPPED UP FROM HER DAY DREAM AND SHOT TOWARD THE ELEVATOR. SHE KNEW SHE WASN'T GOING TO CATCH UP WITH HIM, BUT SHE JUST HAD TO GO THROUGH THE MOTIONS. SHE VERY MUCH MISSED HER LIFE IN CATLIN BAY, AND MISSED HER TIME WITH SCOTT.

FIVE:

HER FATHER LOOKED DEAD AS SHE HEARD THE MACHINES IN THE ROOM RUNNING LIKE FINE TUNED ENGINES. HE WAS IN THE BEST POSSIBLE CARE BUT SHE WAS STILL AFRAID. THERE WAS THAT FEAR THAT CIRCLED ABOVE HER LIKE BUZZARDS.

WHAT KEPT CAUSING THAT FEAR? IN OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES THAT QUESTION WOULD HAVE BEEN PRESENTED TO HER PSYCHOLOGIST FOR DISCUSSION. SHE WAS SITTING BY HER FATHER'S SIDE THINKING OF THE FEAR. IT WAS AN UNEXPECTED FACTOR THAT ATTACHED TO HER LIKE A TICK ON A DEER. "MY GOD," SHE WHISPERED. "WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPENING TO ME? WHY CAN'T I SHAKE OFF THIS CRAZY FEELING? WHY DOES THE WORLD SEEM SO BLACK AND WHITE?"

NO ONE ANSWERED HER QUESTIONS.

SHE KNEW IT WAS RIDICULOUS FEELING SO MUCH FEAR, AND THAT FEAR WAS DESIGNED MAINLY FOR THE IGNORANCE. SHE READ THAT SOMEWHERE AND IT STUCK.

FOR A MOMENT SHE THOUGHT SHE HEARD HER FATHER CALLING TO HER. SHE LISTENED INTENTLY FOR HIS VOICE TO PENETRATE HER MIND. SHE WAITED AND WAITED.

SARA.

SHE LISTENED.

SARA.

IT CAME AGAIN, SOFTER.

SARA.

SARA.

SARA.

"DAD?" SHE WHISPERED BACK.

HIS VOICE WAS SOFT, BUT IT CAME APPROPRIATELY IN A SOMBER TONE. IT CAME HIDING IN BLACK SHADOWS, DARK LIGHTS AND CONFUSION. IT WAS TRYING TO MASK THE FEAR.

"DAD, I'M HERE," SHE WHISPERED IN HIS EAR. "I'M BESIDE YOU PRAYING YOU COME OUT OF THIS ALIVE."

THAT STATEMENT WAS TRUE, BUT HAD THE WRONG MEANING. SHE REALLY DID LOVE HIM, BUT SHE ALSO HATED HIM FOR WHAT HE DID. HE TRIED TO KILL HIMSELF SO SHE WOULD CERTAINLY BE LEFT ALONE IN A CRUEL WORLD. HAVING TO ABSORB THE BLOWS THAT FEAR PRESENTED.

SARA BEY KNEW THAT FEAR WAS SIN, EVIL, DARK AND COMPLICATED. BUT SHE ALSO KNEW THAT IT WAS VERY REAL. FEAR WAS THE SHATTERING DISCOVERY TO HER REALITY. IT LINGERED OVER HER LIKE A BLANKET. IT COVERED HER LIKE SMOKE. SHE FEARED IT MORE THAN DEATH.

"DAD?"

SARA, I MISS YOU HONEY. I NEED YOU.

SARA?

SARA?

HER FACE FROZEN WITH FEAR. SHE LOOKED STRAIGHT AT THE WALL, BUT

HAD THE IMPERIOUS NEED TO SCREAM. SARA COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY SHE HAD THE URGE TO SCREAM, BUT SHE DID. EVERY MUSCLE IN HER BODY TIGHTENED, AND FELT CONSTRICTED WHEN SHE HEARD HER FATHER'S VOICE.

"DADDY?"

SARA....SARA...SARA...SARA...SARA!

THEN IT WAS NO LONGER HEARD.

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"DAD?"

SHE WAITED SEVERAL MINUTES AND DID NOT HEAR HIS VOICE AGAIN. SHE GLANCED AT THE MACHINES AND THEN BACK AT HER FATHER. SHE WAITED SEVERAL MORE MINUTES, AND STILL NOTHING.

"DAD, I'M HERE."

SILENCE.

"DAD, IT'S ME SARA," SHE WHISPERED. "SCOTT WAS HERE TOO."

SILENCE.

"YOU CALLED OUT TO ME DADDY," SHE STARTED SOBBING. "DADDY..."

SILENCE ENVELOPED THAT DAY AFTER HE CALLED HER NAME SEVERAL TIMES.

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