

Defiance

By Emily Brueggemeier

Twilight, and the sun stained the red brick tenements outside her window. She had half an hour. Half an hour to write on a topic that felt close, felt real, felt painful. And yet had been the source of almost all other emotions as well. *Grief comes in five stages*. There was a multitude of reasons why she disagreed. For her it hadn't happened like that at all.

For her it had happened all at once. She knew what those words meant, *death, dad*. But she did not understand. Her body started to cry and wail and there was a feeling, a need to crumple to the floor, to be beneath, flat, and collapsed. Then came everything else. Like a relentless, spinning wheel; shock, gratitude, raw pain. Relief? Relief because it was the most terrible thing. The most terrible thing that nobody ever wishes to bare and yet in the moment that she did not wish to bare it, she already was. She was already, somehow withstanding this pain.

Of all of the hurt, the sharpest was the one of failure. It was irrational, but she felt it deep inside her. It took her to a place before she had language to articulate feeling. It took her to a place that existed before the knowledge of words. It was a deep feeling that only the child of a suffering parent can feel, *I could not save you*. It was with this that the darker of places arose, the bargaining. The 'if I had' and 'should I have'. *They are just thoughts*, she told herself. But the deep ache of never feeling enough because she could never do enough to save him tremored through her once more.

In the night-time she had woken up crying, multiple times, as if her pain shocked her into wakefulness like splashing water. There was a shadow on the wall next to her door, it must have been cast by the bags and coats that were hanging up, but it wasn't. It was the

shape of her Dad's face. He was there, in just as much pain as she was, longing to hold her, longing to comfort her. Each time she woke in the night, he was there. When the morning came before she looked up, she knew his face would be gone, because it was only a shadow her mind had formed. She was wrong. When she looked, his face was still there, defiantly there. She looked and looked again. The curve of his larger than average nose, taking shape in a similar way to her own. Death had taken, and death had given. It would take a long time to unpack all of this, but somehow intuitively she knew that to be defiant, to defy death itself, one must be in a constant process of creation. And writing, even if for just half an hour, was part of that.

She was enough. And in ways that she never saw, she did save him. The longing for his friendship and presence would never evaporate. But this time, while she walked wearing his old denim jacket, she knew how his love had nurtured her into existence, and in that way, they could defiantly live on together.