

Between a Lake and a Mountain

My father is eighty-two years old. He is not as strong as he once was. He used to be the strongest man I knew. When I was still very small, he'd play like a horse on the floor. When I was a teenager he'd throw a frisbee with me at the beach and could help me with any homework I couldn't understand.

That was many years ago. I am now a middle-aged woman. I try to spend the day with him at least once a week. I take him out to lunch and we play cards because he doesn't have the same energy he once had. I often worry about him. He is unsteady on his feet more often than I would like to admit. He has seen many doctors about this and they have explained the cause as old age.

He has lived by himself since my mother died fifteen years ago. She had lung cancer that metastasized to her brain. She had been coughing up blood for months but kept this to herself until the day she couldn't push her right foot on the brake pedal at a stop sign. She crashed into a tree, was taken to the emergency department and found out she had just months to live.

Ten years before that she became dependent on morphine after she was involved in a car accident. My father was driving, my mother was in the passenger seat. Another driver on a cross street ran through the red light. The other driver didn't have a license. There was a photograph of the other driver in the local paper the next day. He was sitting on a curb with his head in his hands. His face was covered by his hair. I never heard what happened to him.

At the end of her life my mother stopped eating like the hospice nurse told us she would. In the end, she stopped talking. After she went quiet I realized I waited too long to say sorry, to hear her say sorry. I can't remember the last time she told me she loved me. I last told her I loved her after she couldn't say anything back. When she died she was alone. My father says he was asleep upstairs when she took her last breath in the living room lying

on a hospital bed. I wasn't there. I was over three thousand miles away finishing school.

My father retired from practicing law a couple years ago. He mostly helped his clients with estate planning. When I was still a child he often said he decided not to be a trial lawyer because he wanted to be able to eat dinner with his family every night.

My father loves to read. He emails me articles from three national newspapers every day. When I have time I respond, but as a practicing physician and parent myself I am busy most days. Besides being a father, being an attorney made up most of his identity. I make promises to myself that I won't let this happen to me.

Last night I had a vivid dream. A sleeping child was in the back seat of my car. The moon broke itself on the windshield. My father used to call this kind a child's moon, how it was stuck in the sky just after sundown, like it's not ready to go home. There was only one child in the car, even though I have two, and she looked so small holding onto a faded plush toy. She was much smaller and younger than either of my children are now.

There was a blue lake behind me, bluer than I thought blue could be. There were no streetlights around me and the coming darkness of the early evening made it hard to clearly make out my surroundings. Even when I turned the headlights on all I could see was a black mountain at the end of the road. The mountain was very far away and as tall as the sky. In the way you know things only as you can in a dream, I knew that my father was ill and unable to get out of bed. I knew I had to get to him soon, so I started to drive on the two-lane road and tried to follow its twists and turns. I knew I didn't really know where I was going.