

The Light of Tomorrow

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In 14 years, I've seen so many types of moms. There are those athletic moms that always wake up early and wear sports clothes or the ones that look like they came out of a fancy magazine. But my mom wasn't like that - she was different. She didn't care about looking like a supermodel or having muscles. She had something even better: intellect. My mom didn't send me or my younger brother, Bruno to school - she homeschooled us. Every day, she would make us sit at the tiny blue wooden table we had in what we called "the learning room" and teach everything she knew. Rather than teaching us useless things like the weather cycle, she would teach us about poets and authors dating back to the 15th century, like Dante Alighieri or Ann Radcliffe. Everything she taught us was based on her love for literature. But when she died, a part of me died too. There were days after her funeral that I would forget about Bruno entirely, and curl up in my room and cry for hours. Of course, things were even worse for our father who sealed himself from the rest of the world, including his children.

But now, it's Bruno and my first day at school. Like a public school where the kids yell in the hallways and the teachers don't know anything about what they're teaching. I stuff the school supplies that Dad made us buy into my backpack and zip them up. I walk over to Bruno's room, which is decorated like any 9-year-olds room would be; pictures of cars and superheroes fill his bright blue walls. He's sitting on his little carpet in the middle of the room with a concentrated look on his face trying to figure out what to put in his backpack.

"Hey, what's wrong kiddo?" I ask as I make my way into his room.

He looks up at me as if suddenly realizing I exist, shakes his head, and continues stuffing packs of crayons into his backpack. I sigh. Bruno hasn't been himself since our mother died. He was only 8 when It happened. It. That's how I like to refer to what happened to Mom in my mind. I can't bear to think of the words that caused her to disappear from this world altogether. I sit down on Bruno's carpet and give him a big hug.

"It's going to be alright," I tell him. I lean back to look at his face. It's small and round, just like Mom. I blink back tears and hold out my hand to Bruno. He grabs it and we walk downstairs, where dad is waiting for us.

"Good morning!" he says, a bit too enthusiastic for the occasion as he hands us our lunch money. Dad doesn't know how to cook, so he thought it would be best for us to stand in the neverending lunch line and eat mac n' cheese that I swear is made of chemicals and preservatives. Mom knew how to cook though. She would make the best tofu casseroles and salads. I give him a forced smile and bring out some Frosted Flakes for me and Bruno. After breakfast, we head out to our car. It's old, with its paint coming off from some places, and the engine makes weird noises that Bruno and I call "huffs and puffs", but that's what makes it special. The drive to Bruno's elementary school feels like eternity. He keeps twisting and turning in his seat but stays quiet the entire way. Finally, when we reach his school, he doesn't get out.

“Bruno,” I coax, “You have to get out of the car.”

“But what if I don’t want to?” he asks, looking at me with his big round eyes. I sigh, “Come on, I’ll walk with you.”

Together, Bruno and I walk to classroom 4B. Dad stayed back in the car, so I hug Bruno, look him in the eye, and tell him, “I love you,” before walking away. If I stayed any longer, I would have burst into tears, which I didn’t particularly want to do in front of a bunch of little kids.

The drive to my school, Sunny Hills Middle School seems even longer, especially since it’s only me and Dad. At last, when we reach the school, I grab my backpack and promptly start walking towards the front office. I don’t even think of saying goodbye to Dad. He was the one who was making me go to this horrid place. I increase my pace, before I hear him say, almost in a whisper, but loud enough for me to hear, “Eliana.” I stop. It was the first time I heard him say my name in months. My mom was the only one who would say my actual name. Bruno calls me nicknames like “Lia” or “El”. I turn around and see him wiping a tear from his face. I can’t help but run towards him and let him embrace me as he used to do when I was little. We hugged for a few moments before a faraway look clouds his face. He tells me to go, and that he will pick me up at 3:00.

Sunnyhills isn’t as bad as I thought it would be. Sure, the classrooms are loud, the students are obnoxious, and the homework was easy, but there was one thing that stood out to me: the library. Our local library wasn’t very good, so mom would never take us there. I don’t even think the other students at Sunny Hills appreciate the library as much as I do, and in just a few weeks, the librarian, Ms. Cook, and I formed a friendship that I didn’t get from anyone else at the school. Ms. Cook reminded me of my mother; tall and lean with short hair that formed luxurious coils. It took me a lot of courage to go to the library at first, but the cafeteria was so bad that I gave in. Ms. Cook asked me which authors I enjoyed reading, and when I told her about Shakespeare and Leo Tolstoy she seemed taken aback. The students at Sunny Hills probably never talked to Ms. Cook, let alone tell her about the books they read.

At home, things had gotten slightly better. Dad spent most of the time in his study, while Bruno and I did our homework on the dining table. I preferred working in my room, but Bruno constantly needed my help with one thing or another. Dad even started cooking, but it was so disgusting that I think I preferred the mushy cafeteria cheeseburgers over Dad’s burnt casseroles. It was sweet that he was trying, though. I haven’t seen him act almost normal since It happened. There it is again. It.

I look forward to lunch the most now, when I can sit at the cushioned swivel chair in the library and read. It’s a way for me to escape from everything happening around me, and it feels like my Mom is with me again. That’s the best part about reading; the way you escape from your world and enter another. You experience things that you could never in real life, like exploring the Amazon Rainforest or living during World War II. Sometimes, when I’m reading a good book, I like to close my eyes and let the words create the characters’ world in my mind. They’re usually much better than my reality.

One day, during dinner, Dad asks us how our day was. Bruno talks about the painting he made in art class and his new friend. But when Dad asks me about my day, I stay silent. It wasn't good, but what else could I say? "It was okay, I guess," I reply, as I play around with the burnt piece of tuna casserole.

"Just okay?" he asked. I nod, but of course, he wants more out of me.

"Hmm, alright. Well, what did you do during lunch?" he questions.

"I went to the library," I respond. Didn't he see that I didn't want to continue this conversation?

"The library?" Dad repeats. He doesn't ask it like a question, he just states it.

"Mom never took us to the library," Bruno said.

Silence. I knew this was coming. Dad looks down at his plate, as I get up and go upstairs without asking to be excused.

The next day, I didn't go to the library. I can't make myself go to a place that feels like my Mom's ghost is everywhere. I just can't. I don't go for the rest of the week until on Friday, Ms. Cook walks into the cafeteria during lunch and finds me sitting alone. She sits down and doesn't say anything for a bit. Then she asks, "Eliana, is everything alright?" I stop chewing on my burrito and suddenly feel like crying. The world seems to be closing in on me and I can't breathe. No one ever asked me how I felt after Mom's death, and I never brought myself to think about it. How did I feel? The cafeteria becomes blurry, and the next second, I find myself sobbing like a 2-year-old and telling Ms. Cook about everything. Including It.

After my conversation with Ms. Cook, the school counselor called in Dad and made us talk. It got emotional, with me crying and Dad even shedding a few tears. The counselor told us that we need to learn to let go of the past and move on. I think it helped because suddenly it felt like a weight was lifted off my back. Dad told me that he was sorry for not acting like himself and that he was ashamed that he acted as he did. He even said that I was very brave, and handled everything better than he did. He stroked my hair, and said, "I love you. You know that, right?" I smile. He hasn't said anything like that to me in a year.

The next day, I woke up feeling better than I had in a long time. The house was completely silent since Bruno and Dad were both sleeping. I crept down the stairs, to get a glass of water when the door to "the learning room" caught my eye. I walk across the cold tiled floor and carefully open the door as if afraid of what I'd see inside. The skylight fills the room with sunlight, and I make my way to the blue wooden table. Memories flood my mind as I sit down on the small chair, and try to visualize Mom sitting there, teaching me about wonderful things. I close my eyes and let the memories take a hold of me. After her funeral, Dad told me that although we'd never be able to see her again, she'd always be with us in our hearts. I didn't believe him, because that's what everyone kept telling me. Tears run down my face; I can almost hear her voice and feel her hand on my shoulder. I try to savor the moment, realizing that what Dad said was true. Mom would always be with me in everything that I do. I take a deep breath

and wipe away my tears. It's time to move on.