

She's Gone

By Lori Hicks

I just shot a man, I haven't slept for three days, and I'm speeding through the streets driving a stolen car with a woman in the trunk. Unexpectedly out of nowhere comes this SUV...

BOOM! I nail it.

All I can hear is the sound of screaming, very loud screaming at a distance through the sounds of a continuous blowing horn. My vision is impaired by the airbag that is just about to suffocate me... And I smell smoke, lots of smoke. I struggle to remove the cloth material that is limp, seemingly trapping me in my seat. Instinctively I reach for the door with my left hand, noticing then that my legs are wedged under the front dash, the dash that appears to be sitting on my lap. I cannot seem to budge from this spot. All of the sudden I am trapped in the wreckage of my own life. I quickly realize the gun is still in my right hand so I lift it to my temple. Why? I ask myself. What got me to this point? I wasn't always this messed up.

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Ten years earlier, I'm thirteen years old, when I look up from my homeroom desk and without warning I see my Aunt standing in the doorway. I call her Aunt Marie even though she really isn't my Aunt. She has a very strange look on her face as she signals me toward the door. Then I see the school principle standing over her shoulder as if to gesture to my teacher that it is okay for me to leave the classroom. All very sudden, and very much unexpected, I'm getting pulled out of class by my mother's best friend. She had come to take me to the hospital to meet my father. All she would tell me is that my mother had been rushed to the hospital with an excruciating headache. A headache so bad she called an ambulance to pick her up.

“An ambulance?” I ask. That by itself sounds serious. I never knew anyone who rode in an ambulance.

“She was home alone,” Marie’s tone was one of extreme worry.

All of the sudden the world was no bigger than the tunnel I was staring into. I quickly felt nauseated..., sick to my stomach. Like always, my dad was at work, I was at school, and my mom was home alone, home doing everything for my father and me. We rode the rest of the way to the hospital in silence. What seemed like a cross-country drive that took an eternity, we finally arrived at the hospital. No more than a minute after walking into the emergency room my dad comes to meet me. It’s obvious something is terribly wrong. I have never seen my dad look this way. The distress on his face is clear. I can see his red, swollen eyes searching for words. His always perfectly combed hair is a mess. His flawless posture is slouched.

“It’s your mother,” he stared at me and I could see him take a deep breath before lowering his head.

“What is it dad?” I scream. “Where is she?”

“She’s gone,” he blurted.

His words hit me, first like a punch between the eyes, than a gut punch dropped me to the ground. And before I know it we are both in a puddle on the hospital floor, trying to hold each other together; facing our sudden loss. My thirty-three year old, loving, kind, gentle, angel of a mother was dead from a fatal cerebral aneurysm. I didn’t know you could die from a headache. She had some sort of weak or thin spot on a vessel in her brain that ballooned out and filled with blood..., some kind of rupture or something. I never heard of a cerebral anything before today.

My father and I are asked to donate her organs, her tissues, and yes her heart; we fulfill my mother's wishes. She was very compassionate, even in her passing. It was effortless to momentarily take pause of my grief while listening to the sympathetic donor representative. It must not be easy to ask for someone's life. My mother, after all is still breathing. I gaze at my father and I can see his pain. I can see he will never be the same. I am thirteen years old, my dad is thirty-five and I know right here and now we are both doomed. My father turns and leaves the room, leaving me alone with my pain..., alone with my mother.

I look at her still body as she lies on the hospital bed, all the technology keeping her alive. I watch as her chest rises and falls at the rate of the machine. The person in the bed no longer looks like my mother. Her smell, the way her brow is settled on her face, the shape of her lips, all unusually different. Even knowing this is no longer my mother, for just a moment I pretend she is still alive. I act as if she can feel me as I cup her hand into mine and I weep. I breathe in the memories of her, and of the two of us together. I imagine she can hear me while she lies comatose in the hospital bed. I cry and I apologize to her for not being able to remember kissing her today. I sob because of all the memories we will no longer be able to share. I want to crawl up onto her bed and lie beside her, but I'm too paranoid. What will people think? Here I am this young strapping jock type, crying like a baby because I want my mom. I just want my mother back.

Then my sobbing becomes uncontrollable. I am finally able to set aside my thirteen year old ego and climb onto the bed beside this woman who resembles my mother. I gently place my arm over her and hug our bodies close. She is not stiff, nor is she cold like I expect she will be. But rather, she is soft and warm..., I find comfort in that. As I snuggle close, beneath the hospital odors that linger on the surface of her skin, present is the slightest hint of my mother's

perfume. My heart melts, yet at the same time, I begin to think of every mean thing I ever said to her. All the times I didn't obey her wishes. I suddenly was feeling guilty for all the Sundays I wanted to sleep in when she wanted me to wake for church. I feel horrible for complaining about my chores, little as they were. My mother did *everything* for my father and me.

Suddenly I jump from the bed, "Dad!" I scream out. "A tear just came down mom's face. She's crying. I saw a tear."

I try to convince them she is alive..., she isn't ready to die. The doctors and nurses surround her, poke at her feet, shine a light in her eyes and reassure me my mother is gone. And then in my fog of desperation I feel the affectionate hand of my father separating me from my mother as they roll her out of the room. At that very moment I could feel my life change..., and not in a good way, in fact, in the worse way.

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Some people are messed up and they never know why. I'm one of the *lucky ones...*, I know exactly why. The day my mother died I learned how to live without a heart. I soon found out..., one cannot live without a heart. Her pain was over and mine was just beginning. Is it possible my mother was crying for me and for my father? Was there any way for her to know my dad would soon become an alcoholic and I would follow. The smoke is rushing through the car and the screams are deafening. I think back, and I remember that was the last time I cried. And..., it was also the last time I can recall feeling the tender touch of my father. I wasn't always this messed up. I was a good son once. I lift the gun to my temple. I have missed you mom.