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A Moment

Short Story by Staton McBoom

My lungs are burning and I can't seem to focus. The only thing I can hear is my blood flowing through every vein in my body. Time has never been so slow. It is so cold in this waiting room that I can almost feel it reaching my bones. My family is sobbing, and I can't manage to provide a second of comfort. Emotional comfort has never been my strong suit, but it seems it might start to be. We are all holding our breath waiting for some information to slide through the waiting room doors. These white walls only contribute to the blankness in my head. Everyone shifts as the doctor is walking up to the doors. He stops, discussing something quietly with the short blonde nurse who has tried her hardest to comfort our shaky family. He makes his way in. A very tan man has never looked so pale.

He musters up the courage and finally breathes out, "I am very sorry." Everyone looks to my mother. Have you ever witnessed someone shatter into a billion pieces? About 13 people did in that moment. It is a chain; every person begins realizing what this statement meant. I can't stop myself, only watch the room spin as I fall out of my ice-cold chair heading face down to the floor. I hit the ground with undeniable force, but I couldn't feel a thing. I could feel the space left gaping in the world from where my brother, my best friend, lived. Death feels so lonely. So... empty. What can I do but melt? I can't con-



trol anything in my head or my body. I peel myself off of the floor and crawl to my mother who is now plastered on my father's lap. I don't know how many minutes have passed. I look around and the doctor and the nurse are still standing near the doorway. I assume they're waiting on someone to give them instructions on viewings or whatever else there is to say.

"I love you," I say to my mother as she stands up and makes her way to the doctor.

She turns around, blind from her tears, and mutters "You, too." The remaining twelve of us watch her carefully as she and the doctor whisper to each another. After a minute or two, me, my father and my mother are gathering ourselves and making our way to my brother. The hallway seems so short compared to a couple hours ago. Everything seems to exist without a purpose now. Suddenly we are here, outside the door. It opens into an even colder room. We make our way in and before I could prepare myself, there he is. It is a numbness that engulfs us now. All three of us just stand completely frozen in space.

I know this is a moment that should remain silent, but I can't help myself.

"I don't understand. He looks so normal," I burst out. I'm now in tears and spitting out phrases that nobody could

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decipher. I should be comforting my mother when she has just lost a piece of herself, her only son. Instead, I am the one falling apart.

My mother responds in a raspy, almost whispering voice, "I don't know, Baylee." My father hasn't spoken a single word. His only son, the son he played sports with, fished with, shopped with, laughed and loved with, is gone. We will never see my brother go to prom, get married, graduate, go to college, and whatever else people view as major points in life. He just isn't here. He isn't anywhere. I just feel helpless, and for the first time in my life, I can't fix or bandage a problem. We have been in here twenty minutes at the least, just starrng. My mother caresses my brother's face with so much love that I feel it.

Someone lays a hand on my shoulder and politely tells me "it's time. You all need to get some sleep."

I look in the direction of the hand and ask, "But how? How do I sleep after this? What will sleep fix?"

The voice replies, "Give it a try. It helped me in ways I didn't think it could. Just don't sleep too much. You have to take care of yourself, too." I take the statement with me and gather my family. We all arrive at the waiting room to part ways with our extended family for the next couple of days. Everyone needs time to grieve. I drove my parents here in a rush earlier and now I am driving them home at the slowest rate imaginable. It is hard to leave him behind on that cold table. Does he feel alone? Is he at peace? I will never get these questions answered. Before I know it, we are home. The porch light is like a knife to our eyes.

We make our way through the once warm, cheerful living room to the stairs. I help my mother up them silently.

At the top of the stairs, my father takes over. I crack open my bedroom door, slip in and shut it immediately. I don't want to hear my mother's sobs for another second. Her pain is deafening. I crawl into the ice-cold crisp sheets and try to quiet my thoughts. I am getting drowsy, so I put it to rest for the night.

It's now Sunday. The day after my brother died. I keep thinking about how such horrific things can happen to anyone at any time. Everyone thinks, "Oh, it's not my family, so it's fine," but that's not the case. It can happen to anyone, and my family and friend community learned that very quickly yesterday. I feel even worse for not being more sympathetic to those who have experienced this. It's like being a sheet hanging outside in the wind where you can't control what goes on with yourself. My emotions are scattered and dried out. Thinking about other tragedy helps in a way. It helps me worry about others and not focus on how I feel, just how they feel. But at the same time, it is adding more grief onto what is stored in my subconscious. I wish I hadn't taken all of my time with him for granted. I always

Together
we make a
Family

thought I would see him at home every night. I ache all over as I try to maneuver my way through the valley of sheets and blankets.

Finally, I find solid ground. I shuffle to the closet and find something fitting for the day's cloudy weather. Sweats and a hoodie? Perfect. I am all set to go downstairs and wait on the couch for hours in the hopes that one of my parents will make an appearance. It is already 3 p.m.

Once I made it to the couch it isn't more than twenty minutes that my father walks into the room. Silence chews at my heart.

"Dad?" I ask shyly, "Where is mom?"

He glances at me quickly. I am sure he is hoping that I don't see the tears hanging on his eyelashes. But I do. I run and hug him before he can escape the moment. I need conversation more than ever. I can't stand another moment of hearing my own body function when my brother's cannot.

For the first time in almost a whole day, he speaks.

"Mom is in bed. Come join us," he said.

I haven't been in bed with my parents in about ten years. I was seven the last time I sought out their comfort. We make our way into the room and find warmth under the covers next to my very still mother. I feel better knowing our love will get us through this.

We all just lay there in silence, but in peace. There are many cold, empty days ahead. Especially with a funeral to come. But I don't want to think about that now. I just want to reminisce on the amazing moments our family of four, now three, had together. The memories keep me warm, and I can feel myself dazing off into sleep again. I wonder if this empty feeling will ever fade. I haven't had a chance to escape its company since the car wreck.

Artwork

by Lauren Jones

