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The Body His Son

by Jeremy Light

Peter

The leaves of the magnolia tree are laughing at me. Even now, in the darkness and intermittent wind. Maybe they're just complaining or pointing. They don't know me. How could they? They've never seen me before tonight. But they'll never see me again. So I don't care.

My cigarette's dying in the gray loneliness of the tin ashtray next to this picnic table. I bet she'd like it out here. Camouflaged from the vaguely piercing light of the stars and the last quarter moon. She'd love being able to hear the pleasant hiss of this burning tip. If it weren't for her, I'd never have taken up smoking in the first place.

Hospital courtyards must all be the same. Familiar enough to put visitors at ease but just alien enough to make them want to go somewhere else. Eventually.

All those lights in the windows waiting to be snuffed out. All the dark ones wishing to be brightened. Which one is she in. I can't remember. I bet she could see me from up there, what with the happy starlight and moonlight and cigarette light. Maybe I'll have another.

She's probably sending up a prayer into this cancerous night, hoping God will hear her. Or at least me. But God probably can't hear her over all the other prayers. He didn't before so why would he now?

She probably thought I was angry or kidding when I told her I wouldn't be here for this. John and Ethel are here, why does she need me? But her parents have always been there. Except when she really needed them. And me. And God. But we weren't. How could we? Some things people just have to bear on their own.

This cigarette's fading fast. He's waiting to join his dead relatives. I'll bet they're laughing at him too. Fading lights are meant to be mocked by the darkness. I wish I could save him. But I could never save

anyone. Even her. And I love her more than cigarettes. She'll make it through. She has to.

I should've asked her to marry me. But when I found out she was pregnant I couldn't. Why couldn't she just get rid of it like I wanted? I wasn't ready for a kid. Neither was she if she'd been honest. Even though it belonged to another man, I forgave her for it. She always had to try to save others. Why'd she want it? Couldn't she tell how much it hurt me?

"He's my son, Peter." And I had no recourse. She was right. "It's not his fault who his father is." I couldn't hear her. I wouldn't. She wanted me to be the father. His father. I can't be. He's not mine. He never will be.

I don't know why I came here. I could smoke at home. I can see the lights of the city playing on Lake Haskell. Effortlessly surfing the same ripples for eternity. She'd like this too. She loves Lake Haskell. Ever since we were kids. I wonder if this magnolia tree was laughing at us then. I wonder if it always knew about tonight. I should've listened more carefully.

She's been in there so long. I hope she's not in too much pain. She's had her share this year. I accidentally called her "Gail" last month. That look in her eyes. That betrayed, defeated glance. I shifted my eyes to her protruding son. Then I looked back into her face. Then we were both betrayed. Both defeated.

Wind's picking up. Ushering off my smoke and her prayers and whatever's left of the future. It's all over now. I don't know how she stayed with me this long. Surely someone can love her. I do. I did. What's taking so long?

Here come some nurses. I wonder if they know how she's doing? Probably not. They just want to smoke. What's that look they're giving me? I wonder if they can see her in my face. I'm glad it's dark. Darkness hides so much.

Seven nurses, seven simultaneous flicks of lighters. Seven births of seven flames. Seven beginnings for the cigarettes in their parted, addicted fingers. Smoke replaces all the prayers. I hear them flying away. Cold, smoky, windy prayers.

I light another one. There. Now we're all the same. One more nail in each of our coffins. They nod hello and I do the same. My new cluster of fake friends sharing smoke. Maybe I'll ask them. No, forget it. I should just go in.

I look like a locomotive, plodding slowly up the sidewalk spewing smoke into the night air. It's so cold. My steps are powered by grief and habit. I step heavily. I'm weary.

I drop my freshly lit cigarette, step on it. It died much too young I fear. The nurses laugh behind me. Did the magnolia tell them about me? I step faster, harder, drowning out their smoky, mocking laughter. They don't know me. How could they? They've never seen me before tonight. But they'll never see me again. So I don't care.

The mouth of the hospital opens wide in mechanical love. The light enfolds me, pulls me in. She's in here somewhere. I can hear her call me. Yes I do love her. Whatever's happened I love her. I need to touch her. Hear my name on her voice. See that dimpled, scarred smile again. Maybe we're not over yet.

I can read the signs on the wall. The arrows. Pointing me where to go. They say to go this way. There they are. John and Ethel. Always together. I should be more like John. He never leaves Ethel. He wouldn't leave her to have a smoke with laughing nurses and a mocking magnolia tree. I love when he hugs Ethel like that.

He looks at me. He's crying. John never cries. Ethel's shoulders are shaking. She's heaving like she's sick or something. Why are they crying? What's happened? What did I miss? Where's Jodi?

Jodi

Peter is standing beside the lake. He bought our house precisely because of this lake. Because of me. I still like looking at the water, the endless waves, but I can't stand to walk beside its calm surface. Even this simple pleasure has painful association for me.

Peter throws his finished cigarette into the water. I can almost hear its dying hiss, shuddering to stay alive. Peter gathers his navy-blue overcoat around his frail shoulders. He looks like a disgruntled heron, unable to find peace in the broken reflections on the lake's surface. He is looking at me, if only peripherally. I try to draw his eyes to me. I fail. I've failed for months now.

Peter can't hold my eyes like he used to. He's afraid he'll see what happened projected on my irises. And he's afraid to look lower, at the son growing inside of me. His name is Jared, and it's not his fault who his father is.

Peter's not going to marry me. He touches me like a tattered butterfly, ripped by violent wind. He is an ape. He can't understand why what he once found so beautiful is now damaged beyond repair. I've seen all the I-told -you-so's written across his face, fading in and out of his countenance like the fleeting images on the lake he's pretending not to stare at. The need to be right has always danced inside of Peter's peculiar brain. I used to find this attractive.

Peter called me "Gail" yesterday. It's no wonder. He keeps reading that article in the paper, running his thumb over each line, back and forth in a smudged ink relay. He taps the picture of "Gail" and himself staring out over Lake Haskell. "Gail" rests her head on Peter's shoulder, trying to decipher the reversed, distorted images floating across the unstable surface.

I look at "Gail" in the crumpled, stained newspaper article from time to time. I'm tempted to burn it every time I have a smoke but I can't. It's all Peter has to hold on to. Peter holds her like he'll never let her go. Like he loves her precious unborn son. I hate "Gail."

That article sits on Peter's desk, a desperately revered afterthought.

The newspaper has a policy that says it never mentions the names of victims of “those crimes.” They’re protecting the innocent. The woman reporter who did the story was very friendly, touchingly sympathetic without being cloying. She had that self-consciously smooth and lowered voice like I was a child who cut herself on a thorn bush.

I wonder who came up with that name anyway. “Gail.” There are probably hundreds of “Gails” around the country. I look at myself in my full-length bedroom mirror, past all the scars and the patches of missing hair. I don’t see “Gail.” It’s just me.

Sometimes I answer the phone and say my name is “Gail.” If I recognize the voice I’ll correct myself and give my real name. But everybody’s voice has that same sympathetic swirl about the hard consonants. It’s like they’re apologizing for speaking to me. I’m no longer Jodi. I’m “Gail” and I need the quotes for security. To protect me from the sympathy of friends and the eye-avoiding Peter. Without the quotation marks I’m Jodi; Jodi with the missing hair and the awkward scars and the sterile fiancé and the marriage that will never happen and the son who will never know his father. I can’t be me without the quotation marks.

Peter is smoking another cigarette. I wish I’d never started him on that habit. He uses it now just to get out of the house. He leaves me alone with the ghost of “Gail.” She’s as annoying as that smoke pouring ridiculously out of his mouth. He doesn’t even want another one. He’s already starting to cough. He could never have more than two without sounding like a soldier dying on the battlefield. He’s slowly killing himself. He’s slowly killing me.

I don’t know why I still live here in this home of “Gails” and ghosts and scars and faded newsprint and walls yellowed from nicotine. Mom and Dad want me to move back home with them. I tell them my home is here but that’s not true. My house is here and my home is burned. The only home left is the one holding my son. Jared. I don’t know why that name had to be the one. It just came to me. Suddenly. Like an unseen attacker from behind.

I step out onto our pinewood deck. The wind chips away at my nerves, hacking mercilessly at the super-sensitive skin on my scalp and that scar on my cheek. I close the door harder than I need to. Peter looks up suddenly, sees that I'm in no danger, takes another drag. My bare feet clench the varnished planks tightly, my weight causing them to creak, like the sound of bones trying to heal. He walks toward me now. Or toward "Gail." Or whomever he sees when he looks at me.

The sun is setting, creating insane and lovely patterns through the overcast sky. Another day exhales its dying breath and all that is left is Peter's slow-smoking suicide and the burgeoning life inside me that he doesn't want. The birth he's forgiven me for.

I can hear the coyotes beginning their wild and desperate chorus. I can hear the hard footfalls of Peter's steps, his labored breathing, and the thousand-mile stare he uses to watch me when he approaches. He is coming to make dinner. Tonight is steak and asparagus.

He pecks me on the cheek, brushes my arm with his smoky fingers as he steps past me into the house. I'm just a friend he's agreed to put for the night. A friend with an unwanted guest. He looks at me as if I'm absurd when I take his coldness personally. It shakes the foundations of my soul to know how cold Peter has grown.

After that day so many months ago, Peter treated me like the last of a dying species. There was no task he wouldn't do. His touch was more urgent, his voice softer. But something in him was dying and I was so close I couldn't see it. I couldn't see the swell of vengeance pulsing beneath his delicate and damaged features. I couldn't see the onset of righteous indignation when I told him I wasn't going to have the abortion he thought I should have. I couldn't see that Peter was falling out of love with me. All he had left was what was in that picture he keeps. All he wants is "Gail."

But "Gail" wouldn't like it in this house any more than I do. She couldn't withstand the pained glances, the bed whose only purpose

is to keep us from falling during the night. She couldn't bear the morning when the fossil imprints of our bodies remained pressed into the mattress. "Gail" couldn't take the deluge of pleasant memories, decimated by the onslaught of a single event. There are a lot of things "Gail" has no idea about.

She doesn't know that I still wanted to marry Peter, even after he found out he was sterile. Something about prolonged exposure to toxic chemicals at the factory accident years ago. "Gail" will never know the relieved look on Peter's face when I stayed with him, told him we would adopt. She could never touch the fragile tapestry of feelings and memories we shared. The long and peril-fraught childhood, the tenuous years we spent dating other people, the conviction that we were never going to wind up together like we'd always planned. But we made it through. We made it through everything. Everything but that day so many months ago that Peter won't mention but can't resist visiting when he sits alone at his desk fondling that withering picture of "Gail."

Peter rattles the dishes and the utensils and turns dials and opens doors, tasks made even more meaningful through the feat of never once looking at me. I stare out the window instead, afraid to say what we both know, but won't acknowledge. I am dead to him now. He is dead to me. All that is left is the futile hope that some kind of reverse epiphany will fall into our lives and erase the deadness from us.

The sun is almost out of time. It has no choice but to die every night. The last rays seep over landscape of trees. I stare at the tree closest to our house. The pine tree. The one with the rusty dead needles. The one struck by lightning a couple of years ago. That is my tree. It knows me. I know it. I can almost hear it shedding tears. It will never grow into old age. It will stay there forever, dead to the world, at the mercy of a strong wind to blow it down. It will not live much longer.

Dinner smells good, and I feel Jared kick.

Peter

The water's getting cold. It's even colder when I move. The ripples bounce off my skin. It's hard to believe how hot and alive this water was half an hour ago.

I hear John and Ethel outside the door. Ethel's cooking some sort of casserole, a common staple provided for grieving widows. Then I remember I'm not a widow even though John and Ethel would like me to be.

John and Ethel. I can't remember ever calling them by their names individually. John. Ethel. Those two names just naturally go together. Like the chicken aroma belongs to the broccoli aroma. Two halves of the same whole. Natural.

There's no sound in here. Just the tortured drip of the faucet. The slight shudder in my breath. I'm doing my penance, basking in my own contempt. And I can't think of anything better to do on the day of Jodi's funeral. And there's no other place to do it but in the home of the natural-sounding John and Ethel. The John and Ethel that whisper with muted tongues outside the door. What are they talking about? Casseroles, funerals, or the proximity of razor blades to this tepid tub of life I'm lounging in.

The minutes pass and the water drips. Hours are wrapped inside the hurtful seconds. There's nothing to do but stare into the water. How did she do it? She used to love staring into the water. The lake. Lake Haskell. The lake behind our house. Lake Jodi, I called it.

I stare into the water, looking at nowhere, feeling everything, nothing. There's a thread at the bottom of the tub. Dark blue, a shade heavier than Jodi's eyes. It's responding to the rhythm of the water, aimlessly wandering the porcelain tub like a lost whale in a nameless ocean.

The thread rises and falls to my pained inhale, the weakening exhale. Now it stands, drawn in silent salute to my stare, pointing accusingly at me. I'm tired. I have no need to be indicted by a thread. A blue thread. A thread that...no it can't be.

"I love it Peter." Christmas. Two tears and a million memories ago. It was this house. The air smelled of cinnamon and turkey and love. Not the stale scent of casserole that was in here now. The cedar tree in the den was lovely that year. Variousy arrayed in silver tinsel and handmade ornaments and stale popcorn and red candy canes. A cashmere sweater. Dark blue, just a shade lighter than Jodi's eyes. She loved to walk around the lake. Lake Haskell.

I remember the previous November while we walked beside Lake Haskell's fickle surface. Jodi pulled her hands deep inside the sleeves of her gray sports sweater, shivering from the cold. It was colder than the water I'm sitting in. Her breath was steam, like the smoke from her lips when she casually nursed a cigarette. I made a note to myself: buy her a sweater. Something to match those eyes of hers. Something to warm her the way her eyes warmed me.

She said thank you. And kissed me. There was no mistletoe.

The thread is changing directions. Counterclockwise, at the behest of some unseen current. Time reverses. I don't want to go back there again. Not now.

She wasn't wearing it nine months ago. Not on that day. Even when it was cold. She was wearing that leather jacket. The one in the closet now with a fur collar and the memory stains. The day was colder than any other was. And yet it couldn't keep her warm. I need to get rid of that jacket. It whispers far too often.

The water's trembling more. My heart's beating faster. Pounding more desperately than in recent days. More than the day in the hospital when I saw John and Ethel crying, embracing, showing me the truth I didn't want to face. More than the day I got the first call from the hospital about Jodi's attack. More than when I heard her son's first cries on the earth. The night when his mother would cry no more.

I want to move that thread, but I dare not. I can't disturb this silent

salute to Jodi. Or is it a message she's sending me?

It's screaming my name from the silent, cold depths of this tub. I can't hear clearly with waterfalls crashing in my ears.

My leg twitches involuntarily. My skin's wrinkled and pale. Like the skin of John and Ethel. Jodi's skin was never wrinkled. And it never will be.

I get out of the tub. I forgot to wash. The sweat won't stop pouring. It's beading on my forehead. The frigid water cascades down my body like too many tears. Let the dripping stop. I pull the rubber stopper from the bottom of the tub.

The pipes are slurping, sucking out the water and my will to live as well. The water's escaping, and my soul is sure to follow. There it is. I can still see it. That midnight blue thread just a shade lighter than Jodi's eyes. It's clinging desperately to the polished porcelain tub. It's letting go. Allowing itself to be dragged down into an endless maze of water-logged blackness.

I wish I could follow. Cling to that blue thread for eternity. But it's gone now. I can't hear it scream any more. All I can hear are the whispers that are John and Ethel. And I can smell the casserole.

Jodi

I love the lake this time of morning. Peter can't understand me. He tries though, and that's why I love him so much. He never stops trying. For years all Peter's seen is water. Maybe one day he'll see something more.

Even when we were kids, when we used to neck on the banks of this lake. Lake Haskell. Named after a man that discovered a town and then died a sudden, unexpected death. That must be so horrible. To create something wonderful, give birth to a new facet of humanity, only to be ripped away by unseen and unforgiving forces.

Peter and I used to watch the magnolia trees from here. Especially that one near the hospital. It stares down at us while we watch the beauty of this world go by.

The pine trees surrounding Lake Haskell were always favorites of mine. I love walking among their hardened, bark-covered trunks like the thighs of wooden giants. I used to lie with Peter on the shore. We closed our eyes and listened to the wind whisper its secrets between the needles.

Peter forgot to kiss me goodbye on his way to work this morning. But I guess working for my father makes him forget a lot of things. When I told Daddy I loved Peter he told me that it wasn't enough. Peter had no direction and my love wasn't enough of a motivation for him. Daddy told me he'd been in my shoes before but I can't see how. So I talked to Mama instead.

She liked Peter ever since he showed up one night and asked my parents' permission to ask me out on a date. He was so nervous. After it was all over he was still trembling. He trembled the same way when we first kissed. We were lying together beside the lake. He fidgeted and talked in non sequiturs and couldn't look me in the eye for more than two seconds at a time. So I leaned closer to him and then he kissed me, slowly at first, then with more urgency. The same urgency he had when he sped away from me this morning without kissing me goodbye.

I can't be too hard on him. I meant to wear that cashmere sweater he bought for me two years ago. I'm in such a habit of wearing this leather jacket though. Peter always liked me in sweaters. He told me the dark blue reminded him of my eyes, only it was a little darker. The wind's picking up, carrying away all the leaves and pleasant memories with it. It's so loud I can't even hear the rushing footsteps behind me.

The first thing I'm aware of is the pain at the base of my neck when a hand wrenches my hair and jerks me onto the ground. For one split second I think maybe Peter was messing around with me and got

carried away. And then I see his face. It makes no sense to me. This doesn't make sense. I see the magnolia tree at the hospital in my peripheral vision before I hit the ground.

He's got me by the throat and I can't breathe. The treetops behind his head are crucified to the sky, saviors that won't come down. I try to scream, but I have no more breath.

I didn't feel the first punch. All I saw was the stab of light in my left eye after the impact. After the second punch I heard my teeth rattle, grind together. I can taste the blood pooling in my mouth and I hope that the lake will scream out to help me.

His hands rip the leather jacket off my shoulders. His head blots out the sun. I feel no warmth. Everything's cold now. The sky darkens and now I can see his face.

The long sandy-brown hair hanging over his eyes moves with the breath of the wind. His fingertips smell of cigarettes. His cheeks are sunken and his features are a cipher. He leans forward, his breath smelling of booze and three-day-old food.

Time stops. The trees stop waving and the wind stops breathing. We lock eyes. They are as blue as mine are. The silence gives way to the zip of my blue jeans. He forces them down my legs. It's very cold and I can feel the gooseflesh forming on my skin.

I push against his chest, scratch at his eyes and throat but he's too heavy. Why can't anyone see me? Can't they hear me? Where's Peter?

There's a rip and I'm naked from the waist down. The ground is so cold. I hear another zip. An eternal second later he's pressing into me. I can smell the tree sap and the lake and the booze-breath and the sweat and the cigarettes. Lake Haskell doesn't say a word. A bird sings overhead.

His hands are still on my throat. I can't breathe. He is finished with me, panting his alcoholic breath onto my face. He keeps one hand on

my throat, the other's reaching for something at my side. I try to follow his hand with my eyes. I can't see clearly. The throbbing in my temples hammers through me like an insane discordant chorus.

He lifts his right hand, the left still choking the life out of me. It is a branch. I've seen it here before. Minutes ago. I kicked it out of my way. And now it seeks to kick me back.

The sound is more unbearable than the pain. I hear a sickening thud, like a fist plunged into the wet and yielding dirt. I hear a dull crack, then I feel the sharp pain. I can't decide whether it was my jaw that cracked or that forgotten branch.

Pieces of bark settle absentmindedly in my hair, now matted with blood. I can't see. Dirt and bark and lack of air are blocking my vision.

His fingers brush aside my hair, almost lovingly. I think this is at an end. I can see his hand lift again. The branch is still clenched there. I just wanted to take a walk.

I dig my fingers into the moist black earth beside me. The same ground where flowers grow. I picture the drops of blood flowing down my face nurturing some unknown seed. What will grow here?

I hear the pounding of water. Is it Lake Haskell or the blood desperately pumping through my veins. I'm cold. Where's my jacket? Why didn't I wear that sweater Peter gave me?

I can't hear the impact of the next thousand blows. The pain drowns my mind. When will it end? I try to form a prayer in my mind. There are no words. Only pain. And the wet earth resting in my cracked fingernails.

I gasp for breath. The cigarette fingers are gone. The alcoholic breath is gone. I hear the thump of approaching footsteps. Or are they running away?

Time resumes. The trees are waving in the breeze. I wonder if they're sending me a message.

Another face blots out the sun. It is not the sunken face that breathed its venom into my lungs. There is no definition to his features. He's saying something. I can't understand. I try to will my thoughts into his head. He doesn't understand.

He lifts my head carefully. He's putting something under my fragile shattered skull. His fingers brush away my hair. Is he going to hit me too? I can taste blood and bark and earth. I feel spaces where my teeth used to be. I probably look like a piano made of broken keys. Is that Peter?

How long have I been gone? Peter is holding my hand. The sky is made of tile and white light. The air smells of iodine and artificial freshness. My head is still pounding.

I can see a tear roll down Peter's face. I wonder how he feels. I can't feel anything beyond the rushing of blood and pounding oblivion in my head. He gulps back the tears, runs his hand smoothly over my face. I try to smile but then I remember how broken I must look. Does Peter know how broken I am? Will he ever understand? He kisses my hand. I try to see if the wet earth is still sleeping beneath my fingernails. I don't see anything.

"I love you." That's what Peter whispers in my ear. Only now it doesn't sound the same. I don't think anything will sound the same anymore.

"I'm sorry." Peter sounds like a doll with a string buried in its back. Someone is pulling his string and now he speaks only in short breaths, saying things he never found necessary to speak before. I search my mind. Has Peter ever said these things before? I don't know. I'm sure he must have meant them though.

I pull away from his grasp. I dig my fingers into the starched white sheets covering my body. Why didn't the lake say anything?

Jodi

The air doesn't smell the same anymore. I still smell the oppressive, alcoholic breath of that man. Whoever he is. I try to taste the fresh air through the pain in my cracked jaw. I can't breathe through my nose anymore without an annoying whistle when I inhale.

I can hear all the sounds from that day. Especially at night. The cracking and rustling of leaves beneath the footsteps of my attacker. The rhythmic slapping of waves on the shoreline, keeping perfect time to the violence. They wrestle in silent chaos within my brain. A brain housed by a multiple-fractured skull and half of the hair that used to be there. The sounds won't stop.

And then I hear Peter. Peter's voice treads on eggshells when he speaks to me. Nothing he ever says sounds like it once did. He has the tone of man offering his condolences at a funeral to a close friend. He's not Peter anymore.

Ever since I got out of the hospital Peter stays his distance. But I don't think it's me. I think he holds himself responsible. He can't look at me with loving eyes. He sees me standing in front of him, but no recognition crosses his face. Why can't things go back to the way they were?

I've taken to gardening. I'm planting irises now. As I plant the various identical seeds, shove their lifeless bodies into the black earth, I feel the swelling in my abdomen. I think about the life growing within me. I am black dirt, nurturing my own alien seed. I dig my fingers into the moist dirt. I wonder if it will feel pain when it gives birth to the irises. Does it hurt to bear fruit that never should have been planted?

I haven't decided what his name will be. Not Peter. His name can't possibly be named after a man who regards his existence with nothing but contempt. I mentioned the possibility last night. The silence was louder than the combined horrific sounds repeating in

my head. Peter's silences are longer now. And more painful. He hurts me more than that evil man that attacked me. How can I continue loving a man who shows me such animosity? My son's name can't sound like contempt.

I can see Peter watching me from the window through the parted calico curtains. He can be so considerate at times. On the day we first got home from the hospital, he treated me tenderly. Now that he knows I can't possibly break anymore, he regards me with the same interest as a discarded pillow. He's not considerate anymore. He's hovering. Like a vulture, waiting for something to die.

Peter

Dig, plant, cover. Over and over. Why does she love to garden so much? She's creating life. She wants things to grow. She can't see that the planting of each soon-to-be colorful flower only makes her look grayer. She's a shadow now.

She's rubbing her stomach. I look away. She loves that thing inside of her. I see the look on her face when she stares out at the lake behind our house. When she looks at that dead tree. When I come up silently behind her. She gets that fearful wince about her shoulders. She has momentary gooseflesh, triggered by her attack. She fears everything. The wind, the front door. Me.

I hide my face behind these dusty calico curtains. She caught me watching her again. And then she starts to plant again. Dig, plant, cover. Over and over. I wonder if she sees me when she plants those seeds. Is that my memory she just buried?

I feel like I'm in the way. She has her flowers. She has her house. She has her bastard. I had to ask her last week why she still wanted this child. Why would she want that reminder? Why does she want to remember what killed the two of us?

I hadn't really expected an answer but she gave me one anyway.

“He can’t help who his father is, Peter.”

Which is true, except he’s never going to know that I’m not his father. And that’s not a prospect I think I can entertain. I wonder if she’s picked out a name yet.

I always thought I’d have a child of my own. But three years ago I got the news. I am sterile. Sterile and seriously considering proposing to Jodi, the object of all my love. I was planning to propose that very week. But how does half a man propose to a whole woman?

I still remember the day I told Jodi. She loved me and she did her best to don that understanding look of hers. I could tell it hurt her though. If we were ever to have children, it wouldn’t be like everyone else we knew. There would always be something different about our family. Something would always be missing.

So I put off asking Jodi to marry me. Ever once in a while I would come close and I would see that expectant look in her eye. I couldn’t figure it out. What use could she possibly have for me after this?

So I decided to wait until later this year. And I was too late. I waited until she became half a woman. I hated myself that her attack made me feel more secure. We now both had things that made us incomplete. Maybe together we could make each other whole again.

What are the names of those flowers she’s planting again? I can’t remember.

About The Author

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