

Who Will You Call Father?

We met on a Monday. In theory, I knew you were coming and had known for some time. In reality though, I had no idea what or whose life was about to collide into mine or what it all meant. That day I saw things unfolding in a strange duality. On the one hand, everything felt like a movie, surreal, as though my life was playing on a big screen. Yet somehow, everything simultaneously felt so inescapably real and vivid. I was afraid I'd cry. I didn't want anyone to see because my father never cried. Maybe I would've, but I didn't have a chance. They took you so quickly because you weren't breathing. I had never known such helplessness. Not a single thing existed for me until I knew that you were safe.

I changed in so many ways. I learned of a love that I didn't know existed. And as an immediate, unavoidable consequence, I learned of a correlative fear. My dreams for myself, once so grandiose and even arrogant in their scope, feel smaller; they cannot compare to my dreams for you. I learned that the entire world could fit into a 2x2 crib in the NICU; and I learned the name of every nurse by the time you came home.

Despite everything I've learned, I've found even more questions; but they mostly come down to this: If I were to die today, who would I be to you? How would I exist in your memory? Would you remember the late-night bottles? The diapers, the doctor visits? Would you remember how much I'd smile every night when I came home and saw you? Or how you'd smile back, toothless but wide as an ocean? Truth be told, I doubt it. You're still too young and you wouldn't remember any of it. You would not recall my voice or how big my eyes must have gotten when I stared into yours. I know this because I can't remember my father at this age. But then again, maybe that was partly his choice. He wasn't around as much. He didn't spend a lot of time with me. No, that's not fair. He couldn't. Someone had to pay the bills and the hours were long. By the time he came home he was exhausted, worn as his tools. He tried; I know he did. At least, I know that now. It's something that you come to appreciate when you grow up. You understand the sacrifices that your parents made; but I didn't know that then. I just knew he was always somewhere else and when he was home, he wasn't, fully. He was quick to yell and slow to play. I no longer hold a grudge. That's part of becoming a man. But that doesn't really change the past, does it? Delayed gratitude is not capable of filling old holes. He must know that himself, because his own father was the same way. There wasn't much love in the home in which he grew up, so he didn't know how to show it. But he had a choice. He could've broken the cycle. He didn't though, so I will. I will tell you every single day how much I love you. I will be there to meet your teachers, when you score your first goal, when you fall and scrape your knee, and the first time your heart gets broken. Through every battle you fight. When you want me there and when you don't. When the winds of change blow you down; when the rains of fortune feel like a storm; when the sands of time feel like a desert; if I must climb a hundred mountains; if I must cross a thousand rivers; if I have to drag myself across the face of this whole wide world: I will be there.