

Pescadero

Rhys Collins

Essay

And I told my father about the pit in my stomach. And he listened. And he told me about his own. And I listened. And we talked in waves as we made our way towards the coast in Pescadero. The water beckoned. The ground passed beneath our feet.

On the car ride over, I told my father about losing the love of my life, how we were young and uncertain of ourselves. I told him that it wasn't just some girl, but instead a family, a future, a life. I told him that though I could never truly know, I felt like it must've been similar to what he went through with Mom. And I told him that it was the latest in a long list of things, and "That's part of why I haven't been doing so well for the past couple years in school, Dad." And I told him more. And he listened. As did the clouds, the water-starved hills, the rusted bronze statues of horses and dinosaurs we passed by.

And I told my father about the pit in my stomach, how it feels like it goes further and further down forever, how when I look into it, I feel like a boy peering down over the side of the boat, how I see the silhouette of my head, my face, and past it, something deep and forever. I told him that you can't run, because grief is as much a part of you as the heart you use till beaten, the legs you use till spent. I told him because he was running. And because it had caught up to him, and he didn't realize it yet. His body moved on its own, and we were headed not to lunch on the docks, but to a small nook overlooking the beach and the sea where my mother had been laid to rest.

And I told him that I was doing better. That the hard things in life had made way for soft and beautiful things; purpose, fulfillment, quiet, patient motivation. And he told me about how he was in a funk and he didn't know how to shake it, didn't know where it came from. And I told him that it must be some lovely fate that I want to be a teacher like mom, that I find myself so similar to her. And he didn't tell me how he'd been with his girlfriend for around a year, and it'd been so long since he was with somebody and for the moment she was away and I was there and it was just around the time for mom's anniversary and he didn't know what he was doing and it was the first time I had seen him like this, but not the first time I'd known him like this. Because I've known forever now. And I listened. And I told him. I told him that I'm going to honor her memory by helping people, by working as hard as I can to be happy, to live well, to love fast and forever. That the love of my life will be the love of my life so long as I live and further and further, no matter where she is. That I'm doing ok.

We stood there for a while, with the wind at our hair and the sun peering behind the gray clouds. He moved and sat down on a bench, and said to me and to nobody, and to the sun, the wind, the sand, the sand beneath the sand, the water, the life inside the water, to any who would listen: "I'm not ready to leave, I just have to sit." And I told him, "It's ok." And the waves softened on the rocks beneath us, as they always have. And for a long while, we sat. And we listened.