

A small rock skips and bounces down the cobblestone road. It clicks and clops in different pitches with each strike. This is one of those times Ma would tell me to pick up my feet. It's almost as if I could still hear her voice.

"A man worth anything should always have pride in his step. Keep your feet high and push the ills of the world behind you with each step." she would say. Her thick, Scottish accent seemed to make any bit of nonsense sound scholarly. More likely, it was the fact that she was my mother, to a young lad mother could do no wrong.

I turn off of the road. I step over planks of seemingly mislaid wood into an open field of tall grass. As I walked, the grass and weeds seemed to clutch at my legs. The impact, sounding much like rain against an infirm awning, lightly thumping and thudding against the dark material of my slacks. As if to sense my pain, this feeling of abandonment, tiny seedlings cling to my legs like children climbing on their father, riding along on his shoes.

The crunching of gravel, and then the click of pavement replace the sweeping sound of grass. The world looks different when you keep your eyes on the ground. It really does look like I'm pushing the world behind me with each step. I guess she was right, I just wish that I could tell her. I guess I still could. But, what would it count for?

It's been twenty-four months since I've heard her voice. Twenty-four months since she was able to place her hand on my head and call me her, "little Phillip." All of the chances I had to talk to her that I didn't. All of the chances that I won't have from now on, overwhelm me. I'm realizing too late that we are gone much longer than we are here. For all of the love that I have for her, I've hated her for Twenty-four months. She's doing this to me; another of life's lessons learned the hard way. She always said, "The most valuable lessons, are the most painful. If it didn't hurt, what would you learn?"

I still can't believe she's making me do this. I say that I hate her but, more honestly, I hate the fact that there won't be any more lessons. I'd rather hurt on a regular basis learning a lesson from her for the rest of my life, than face the pain of her not being there.

The wind blows, opposing my stride and causing my black jacket to flail in the wind, as if trying to help me by keeping me from my destination. If I don't make it, it can't happen. Right? Nah, that'd be too easy. After all, this is Ma we're talking about. I can hear her saying, "Keep moving Phillip! Legs up, head high!" She had a last wish, and I have to keep moving so that I can honor it.

"You feeling better now Phillip?" my uncle Harvey asks.

"Yeah. I just needed a moment with my thoughts." I needed more than a moment. I needed a time machine. No matter how juvenile the thought, I'm sure I'm not the only one who could stand for a second chance.

I pass through the threshold of the hospital. Relatives, who had waited for my return, flank me as we walk together, collectively putting the world we knew behind us. I stop outside the door, looking up at the generic and bland numbers that I've looked at for the past Twenty-four months. As I open the door the rest of the family that had come, watch us as we enter. Some of them smile. Some of them cry. All of them are saddened.

The nurse steps out and calls out, "It's time Dr. Lorne." before turning back with a solemn face. The doctor enters the room, stepping around her to the left. The Episcopalian priest stands from the corner of the room and moves forward, hanging back from the cluster of people gathered at the foot of the bed. Before it's his turn to speak, a stranger stands from the opposite corner. He introduces himself as my mother's attorney and spews a bunch of legal mumbo-jumbo. None of us care what he has to say, and we all know why we're here, my mother's living will. She had decided long ago that after twenty-four months she would leave here, by my hand.

The priest starts to read off verses and quotes. He closes the book and begins to speak about life and strength. He gestures toward me, but I can scarcely focus on what he's saying; it sounds so muffled for some reason. He finishes speaking and then the nurse approaches me. She starts to point to buttons and do her own gesturing. All I can hear as she speaks is ringing, my heart is pounding so hard in my chest that I can't hear and it feels hard to stand. I hear the woman lying in the bed snap at me without moving her teeth, as she used to in church, "Straighten those knees Phillip!" and I did.

I'd gotten, from the gesturing, what had to be done next. Looking down at my mother's face, she lay there so peaceful. My face can't bear it, it contorts as I bite my bottom lip, trying to fight it as tears stream down my face. I struggle to speak, my mouth betrays me, a whisper becomes a proclamation amongst whimpers, "You were right!" My hand shakes, resting on the plug. My relatives rub my shoulders, trying to give me the strength, they themselves are lacking. I realize in that moment that Ma has left me with one last lesson as my hand steadies: This is how much you can love someone. The cord dangles in my hand as the nurse silences the machine's long tone.