

The Old Frame

by McKenna Sharrer

As I sat on the edge of my bed I could feel the mattress foam as it dipped in around my body. I stretched my arms out and gathered the comforter around me. My face was expressionless as I looked at the wall in front of me. Years of sadness had made me numb to looking at it. The wooden frame barely touched the cracked, chipped paint behind it. I could only slightly see the intricate details that were carved into the frame. They were almost completely worn out. The countless hours we had spent carving each and every line seemed pointless now. The frame had no picture because my father put it off every time I'd ask to put one in it.

"Father," I would say, "When are we going to put a picture in our frame?"

"Maybe tomorrow, Toby. I have too much to do today," he would say.

That was the conversation we had every week up until we no longer could. I would have put a picture in the frame myself, but it was the last project my dad and I had worked on together. *What we started together needed to be finished together*, I thought. That would never happen now. Ever since I was a kid, my father and I would work on projects together. We would spend weeks building chairs and boxes and anything else we could build.

“How can a frame be complete without a picture in it?” I said aloud to no one. It can’t.

It had been a few years since my father first fell ill. It was a slow process, but we all knew what it was leading to. At first he could no longer walk. Then, his voice started to get raspier. I think each breath he made got weaker and weaker as time went on. It was as if his breaths were the countdown to the end.

Even when he was ill, lying in his bed, I would say to him, “Father, you pick a picture and I’ll hang it in the frame.”

“Son, I don’t think I can do that today. Tomorrow I will.” Being optimistic, I just nodded and smiled. Eventually, his tomorrow never came. And that was it.

The frame hung on the wall to the right of his bed. He looked at it every day and now I look at it every day. In the past, I couldn’t wait to put a picture in that frame, and now, I hate the thought of it. I cannot bring myself to finish the project without my dad, and therefore, it will remain unfinished. What once was a beautifully polished, wooden frame is now a dusty old decoration. It just sits on the wall next to my bed and reminds me of the things I’ll never have and the things I’ll never do.

“Do you need anything, Honey?” My wife asked me from the doorway. She stood so confidently, as if she was sure everything would be okay. I knew it wouldn’t be and I knew she knew it wouldn’t be. Deep down at least.

“No thanks, Alice,” I said. She walked over and kissed my forehead.

“I love you, Toby.”

“I love you, Alice.”

I was only in my late thirties and the doctor said I only have less than a year left. My wife always tells me I seem to be doing remarkably well, but I know I’ll be seeing my father soon. Every day I feel myself getting weaker and weaker. The frame will sit on the wall where my father watched it as he was dying, and soon, I will do the same.

“Honey, you’re going to keep the frame up, right?” I said, “Even after I’m gone?”

“Of course, Toby. But, you’re not going anywhere.”

She didn’t believe that. I knew because right after she said it, I saw her wipe a tear from her cheek.

“Actually, can I have a cup of tea, please?” I asked.

“Yeah, I’ll go get that now.” I smiled at her as she left the room.

One day, soon, you’re not going to be able to see her, I thought. I felt a piece of my heart tear off as I thought about leaving her. I laid back in bed. The soft foam, which formed around my body, gave me a sense of comfort.

As my wife walked back in with a cup of tea, she glanced at the old frame.

“Honey, I think it’s about time we put a picture in that thing. It would really make the room look nice,” Alice said.

“I’m tired today. I’ll do it tomorrow,” I said.

She left the cup of tea on the side table. Before walking out, she squeezed my hand and smiled at me. I turned onto my side as a grin appeared on my face. I never told the story of the frame to my wife. When she first asked me about it, I said I had found it at an antique store. My

father and I were the only ones who knew about the frame. It was the one thing only the two of us had. No one else. My dad and I started the project, and so, it will end with us.

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