

FATHER'S LOVE

The boots of a man who never came home. The letter came. Hand delivered by The-Man-in-Charge. The crying, the screaming. Gone forever. No going back. His wife, eight months pregnant, cries for days, weeks. A month later, a child is born into this world— fatherless.

Thirteen years later, a drunk step-dad walks in from a long day at work. Slamming his gloves down, as it was deep into winter, he throws one at his stepdaughter. She runs to her mother's room, her mother right behind her. With shaking hands, her mother locks the door, fumbles while packing her bags. One suitcase for her daughter, a brown leather one, the one with her father's name engraved.

Two things were left inside: her father's boots and a single photo, taken the day he left—he and his bride of three months. He left his wife two months pregnant. Not knowing what the future would hold. Not knowing that he wouldn't be able to raise his child. His suitcase, now packed with his daughters things. The daughter he would never know.

The house, far behind them, is left only with the woman's second husband and his scent of beer, lingering. As they flee, they see the statues of the men who have served, the ones who gave their lives for their country, for their families. In a row of statues is one, put up about four years before, of the father of the young girl who never knew him.

The courtyards all around, the homes with the gardens and pumpkins. A year had passed, and it was now late October. The girl, now fourteen, sat in one of these gardens; garden gnomes around her, like they were marching toward her. She ran, she was so easily scared. Then, she found her father. The statue was there right in front of her. She kneels, with tears streaming down her face. The man she never knew. The man that would have saved her from all the pain and torture. She runs home, straight to her room. Opening a box, she throws the items off the top: pearls and makeup. She finds the small box containing one item—a razor blade. She slices her wrist: one, and two, and three; she drops the blade.

She cries with blood streaming down. She looks up, and she sees the picture of her father with her mother, the one taken before he left them. That picture was taken with her father's camera. Her father's camera, now it was hers. She painted it green, her favorite color. When she was painting it, she carefully painted around the buttons and fixtures. Her train of thought returned to her task.

She wraps up her arm and lies down, even though sleep never comes.